

Hugh MacLennan

Hugh MacLennan was the first Canadian writer of fiction to attempt to describe the national character and experience of the nation. At the age of ten, he survived the Halifax explosion (1917) and later wrote a novel about this, [*Barometer Rising*](#), published in 1941.

His great novel [*Two Solitudes*](#) (1945) is a poignant portrayal of the tensions between the French and English in Quebec. The book's title refers to a poem by the German poet Rainer Maria Rilke, and afterward became a shorthand term for French and English Canada.

In 1959 MacLennan published [*The Watch that Ends the Night*](#), a novel based loosely on the life of another famous Montrealer, [*Dr. Norman Bethune*](#). This book portrays the intellectual culture and values of the thirties, especially through Jerome Martel, a brilliant communist doctor who leaves to serve in the Spanish civil war and then vanishes, leaving his family to pick up the pieces. His reappearance long after his supposed death has devastating consequences.

The above is by no means a complete list of MacLennan's novels, although these are probably the best known. Each of the three won the Governor-General's award.

[MacLennan](#) was not only a novelist but a respected essayist as well. In 1949 he published a collection called *Cross-Country*, and this and another essay collection, *Thirty and Three*, both won Governor-General's awards.

A [Rhodes scholar](#), Hugh MacLennan was educated first at [Dalhousie](#) in Halifax, and later at Oxford. He won international as well as national recognition. He became the first Canadian to receive the [James Madison Medal](#) from Princeton University, along with many other honours. For many years, he taught at [McGill](#) University in Montreal.

Without doubt, this literary giant has profoundly influenced Canadian literature.