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he Canadian Observer: An Introduction to Hugh MacLennan

A classroom adaptation of a longer film, this gentle documentary is a portrait of writer Hugh MacLennan: his private life, his career, his character. Aware of the need to create a rich contextual background that would make Canadian writing more accessible to British and American markets, he chose Halifax as the "hero" of his first published novel, **Barometer Rising**.



It was a city he knew intimately, and the gamble to break with tradition and set his story in Canada paid off. Released in 1941, the novel was acclaimed by critics and immediately became a best seller. It marked the birth of a contemporary Canadian literary movement of which MacLennan, five times winner of the coveted Governor General's award, was for many years at the forefront.

The film features a selection of readings from six of MacLennan's seven novels. These excerpts reveal a serious, principled writer dedicated to exploring the meaning of events and intent on communicating his perceptions of Canada and its people. A mosaic of stills and live-action scenes of daily life plays behind the readings, illustrating the ordinary details from which MacLennan wove his thoughtful tapestries. Intercuts of interviews with MacLennan talking about the major events of his life and the changes he witnessed in Canadian society over half a century afford further insight into his character and his writings.

The Canadian Observer pays tribute to the author who set a precedent by defining and interpreting our country and, in doing so, convinced publishers, academics, critics and readers that writing about Canadian subjects was not only worthwhile but vital to the cultural development of the nation. (This is a short version of **Hugh MacLennan: Portrait of a Writer**.)

FOR CANADIAN LITERATURE STUDIES

Grade 10 through university

Some questions for discussion:

1. Which scenes or details in the film had the greatest impact on you? Why?
2. Does the information on MacLennan's background, life and writing career help in understanding his novels? In what way(s)?
3. View the film again, then write an essay outlining its visual structure. How does the film maintain the audience's interest? What contrasts have been used? How are the shots of MacLennan himself varied? Which shots and sequences are most powerful, interesting or memorable? How is variety achieved in the sound track? How do the sound and visual components enhance each other?
4. "The entire world is screaming for freedom and is sincere about it. But they don't understand what freedom is. The most violent screamers are really screaming for release from freedom's discipline, which means they are screaming for somebody to return them to slavery." (From **Voices in Time**.) Choose two of MacLennan's novels. Extract his thoughts on the meaning of freedom. Add your own reflections on what freedom is.
5. The narrator states that **Voices in Time** "takes place between times." Compare MacLennan's handling of time in this novel to that in one of his other novels.
6. Can you account for the "almost universal" objections, in Canada, to **The Return of the Sphinx**, published in 1967? Do you agree that the underlying problems of the crisis predicted in this book were psychological rather than economic?

Director and Writer
Robert Duncan
Photography
Vic Sarrin
Film Editor
Janice Brown
Narrator
Robert Duncan
Sound Editor
Michel B. Bordeleau
Music Editor
Diane Le Floc'h
Re-recording
Hans Peter Strobl
Unit Administrator
Marie Tonto-Donati
Post-production
Grace Avrith
Producer
Dennis Sawyer
Executive Producer
Andy Thomson

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3/4": 116C 0185 018
VHS: 113C 0185 018
Beta: 114C 0185 018



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