

## Andrew Potter's real crime is being an anglophone writing in English for a publication outside Quebec

DON MACPHERSON, POSTMEDIA NEWS | March 23, 2017 | Last Updated: Mar 24 12:26 AM ET  
<http://news.nationalpost.com/full-comment/don-macpherson-andrew-potters-real-crime-is-being-an-anglophone-writing-in-english-for-a-publication-outside-quebec>



Dario Ayala/Postmedia News

Quebec is going down, and nobody gives a damn. As long as convenience stores can sell beer 24 hours a day.

Look around the place.

Their old people steep in their own shit, people die asphyxiated in their cars, they can't even manage a snowstorm, and civil servants are paid to do nothing.

They give fines to motorists stuck in the snow, but they release bandits on obscure points of law.

And what do they do when they're faced with this kind of absurdity? They shrug their shoulders and laugh.

It's non-stop giggles. Quebec is the paradise of comics and caricaturists. The place is a bloody mess, but boy, do they ever laugh.

Their province is officially the country's poorest, and their debt is \$280 billion.

But so what? As long as the Canadiens make the playoffs, everything's okay.

Actually, I didn't write any of that. And it's not from the opinion piece in Maclean's magazine that on Thursday cost the writer, Andrew Potter, his position as director of the McGill Institute for the Study of Canada.

It's a collection of excerpts, translated, edited and with a few minor changes in wording ("their" for "our," and so on), from a column in French that, coincidentally, was published on Tuesday, the same day that the uproar over Potter's article began.

The column was by Richard Martineau, the star columnist of Le Journal de Montréal, the province's most-read newspaper. I'll bet that more people would have read it than Potter's piece, before Quebec commentators drew attention to the latter and helpfully provided [the web link to it](#) so that their audiences could be offended firsthand.

But Martineau's column was simply shrugged off as just more of his ranting. There were no cries of "Quebec bashing." Reporters at the National Assembly didn't swarm politicians in the corridors to get their reactions. Columnists in rival newspapers, some of whom were still piling on Potter two days after he honourably and publicly retracted his article and apologized for it, didn't appear to notice Martineau's.

Potter's piece, though not entirely unfounded, is poorly informed and argued, and betrays the authoritative ignorance of an overconfident observer who only recently moved to this place. It is so indefensible that not even he would try to defend any of it less than 24 hours later. (May I never write anything for which I apologize the next day.)

But the vehemence of the reaction to it, and the indifference to Martineau's similar column, show that Potter's real crime is not what he wrote; it's who wrote it, the language in which he wrote it, and for whom he wrote it.

That is, Potter is an anglophone, who wrote in English, for a publication from outside Quebec (whose editors were therefore unable to do their duty to protect their writer from himself by questioning such assertions as the one that restaurants here routinely offer their clients second bills for payment in cash, tax-free).

Martineau may be the cousin at family gatherings who is loudly and tediously preoccupied with the “Islamist” menace, but he is family nonetheless. We put up with things said among us, by members of our own family, that we would not tolerate from outsiders, no matter how accurate they might be.

Potter is not family, even though he speaks French well enough to have taught at the Université de Montréal. And he would not be, even if he had been born and raised and educated here, and had spent his entire life here.

For to belong to the English-speaking community in Quebec is to be excluded, or to choose to exclude oneself, from the French-speaking one, the true Québécois nation.

And every now and then, it’s useful for everybody to be reminded of that.