

Victor Andrés Trelles Turgeon Laurence Leboeuf Dominique Quesnel

THE TORRENT

a film by Simon Lavoie
based on the novel by Anne Hébert

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Filmoption
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A FILM BY
SIMON LAVOIE

BASED ON THE BOOK BY
ANNE HÉBERT

STARRING
VICTOR ANDRÉS TRELLES TURGEON
LAURENCE LEBOEUF
DOMINIQUE QUESNEL

SYNOPSIS

Rural Québec, early 20th century. Claudine, a young woman ostracized by her mother, lives on an isolated farm, where she has raised her son François alone, in a strict religious upbringing. She dreams of this "bastard" child one day becoming a priest, through which she might restore her own reputation. Now a young man, François returns home from college, and for the first time in his life rebels against his mother's authority. In retaliation, she strikes him in the head so hard that he becomes deaf. From that point on, all he can hear is the roar of the river's torrent, which flows not far from their home ... Months later, we rediscover the young man alone on the otherwise abandoned farm. François comes to desire a woman, and buys mysterious Amica from a peddler camped on his land. Little by little, he finds himself tamed by this very special girl.

FOREWORD BY SIMON LAVOIE

WRITER AND DIRECTOR

"I considered the structured inevitability of a classical tragedy, or a poetically-linked mechanism of principles and stories chained together by the author's creative will. Once or twice, however, grace touched me. I had the perception that the tragedy or the poem depended, more than anything else, on the work of art's own core inner fatality.

These revelations affected me deeply, painfully. In a fleeting second, I glimpsed the emptiness of my own existence. I felt total despair."

*– Anne Hébert
The Torrent*

My desire to adapt Anne Hébert's "The Torrent" to film

It was during my adolescence that I initially discovered the collection of *The Torrent* stories, as well as the novel of the same title. Reading them was something of a shock for me, as this was my first encounter with Anne Hébert's distinctive poetic prose. At that time, my desire to become a film-maker hadn't yet fully formed, yet somewhere in the back of my mind, I sensed that if ever one day I made films, they would hopefully look and feel very much like *The Torrent*. Since that first encounter, I've found myself inextricably linked to this extraordinary work.

Initially, *The Torrent's* rich and incandescent writing style was what drew me to the piece, yet I quickly came to realize that my lingering, deeper fascination was based on a far stronger foundation than that. I identified completely with François, the novel's central protagonist. His indentured relationship to the Catholic religion, his guilt about money and sex, even that particular relationship that binds him to his possessive mother Claudine – everything about the character fascinated me and drew me to him. Doubtlessly, this eerie proximity to my own life was among the central reasons for my unwavering attachment to *The Torrent*. But what else? Why has this story (written back in 1945 by a young writer, whom some observers now consider to be Quebec literature's bridge to modernity) stuck with me so doggedly for over fifteen years? This question remained unanswered until very recently.

Then, in one of those fallow passages that invariably punctuate a Quebec film-maker's life, I had the time to intellectualize my craft, and found myself looking back over my career to date and assessing what, as a film-maker, I'd said in my films so far – and then pondering what I felt I still had to say. Seeking to understand what deep-down motivated me and, perhaps more importantly, what greater meanings I could yet offer the fastidious process that film-making inescapably is, I thought again of *The Torrent*. And in that very moment, I realized – it was like a true revelation – that the story was full of intricate, multi-faceted patterns, designs and neuroses that seemed to embody so many facets of our collective imagination. And then, dreaming of glorious future projects and thinking about my earlier films like *Une chapelle blanche*, *Le*

Déserteur (The Deserter), and especially *Laurentie*, I realized that my core interests were no longer limited to such horizons – that, more than anything, what now consumed me as an artist and film-maker was a burning desire to define and explore the perimeters of the condition one might most accurately describe as Being Québécois – to explore Quebec life and its unique destiny.

And, in that moment, I felt to the essence of my being that, if effectively transposed to film, *The Torrent* could perhaps lay viable claim as a dynamic and enlightening metaphor for this elusive 'Being Québécois' state. This admittedly ambitious hope became the engine driving the project from pretty much the outset – coupled with my growing desire to contribute, alongside several other much-admired fellow local filmmakers, to bringing this ethereal Québécois up onscreen – asserting his very existence to the world from which he was a mirrored projection.

About Anne Hébert

My passion for Anne Hébert grew from an admiration of her writing (particularly her poetry, but also her work as a novelist), yet – as importantly – it also grew from her own commitment and absolute dedication to all aspects of creation. This woman humbly dedicated her entire life to literature. Not belonging to any group or literary movement, she pursued her goals independently and often in relative isolation – amassing in the process a body of work that touches on almost all literary genres, with her excellence undiminished over half a century. Imagine how a young woman, only 28 years old back in 1945, living in a small village north of Quebec City was able to write a powerful masterpiece like *The Torrent* – a work in sharp contrast with the literary climate of her era – and also instinctively understanding what it meant to be a woman in Quebec at that time... and all this only four years after women were granted the right to vote at the provincial level (!). The achievement is, indeed, staggering.

About the film and its development

Even if the desire to create a film version of *The Torrent* emerged relatively early in my career, I nonetheless had the wisdom and patience to 'reserve' this special project as a later challenge – since I wasn't yet fully confident of my own abilities, sensing it would take considerable experience and maturity to successfully transpose such a complex project to the screen. Yet during all the passing years, my desire and commitment fermented, never faded. When it came time to decide on the next project after *The Deserter*, my first feature film (to which I would still devote a few years, before starting on *Laurentie*), it became increasingly clear to me that the energy, passion and commitment necessary to make a film were so great that they couldn't be "summoned up on request", switched on for the highest bidder. More than ever, I passionately wanted to make *The Torrent* yet, again, I felt we should wait.

Beyond these considerations, however, the desire remained a constant: to somehow write a filmable script from the brilliant maelstrom of bitter poetry, lyricism and passionate fervor that collectively made the novel so unforgettable. Perhaps the greatest challenge was to somehow give cinematic life to the deep, multi-layered and complex "inner world" of the François character, attributes usually most effectively dealt with on the printed page.

Early on in the process of plotting out the transposition, I realized I'd never be able to do justice to a work of such complexity by trying to force it into a 'classic' straightforward time-line. So I opted instead for a more multi-faceted structure, where temporal elements follow their own logic, unexpectedly mingle and meet. To my view, this fragmented, broken time-line faithfully mirrors the original work's eclectically-flowing narrative because this scattered, off-kilter flow of

ideas and events is, in fact, the very pattern of true reminiscence; memories jostling with one another in the mind of a tortured, feverish man looking deeper and deeper inside himself – François, *The Torrent's* central protagonist.

Also, I deliberately took a few liberties with Anne Hébert's text, and I leave it to scholars of her work to ultimately comment and pass judgement on whether my film is an adaptation or a transposition – and, of course, whether I stayed sufficiently faithful to the spirit of the original work.

It struck me as interesting to expand upon and at least partially clarify Claudine's enigmatic past. To do so, I think I've found an effective approach that achieves this primary goal while also adding an intriguing extra layer to her son François. As such, our main story is sprinkled with a loose string of short, disjointed "dream-like" sequences – showing us an unknown young woman (inferred to be Claudine) who, on finding herself pregnant, is expelled from her village by her peers. But is this *really* Claudine's true story being shown to us? What if these puzzle-piece sequences initially give us the *impression* that we're watching an actual representation of what occurred, as presented by the film's omniscient narration... yet, in the end, as the fragments multiply and start coalescing, we come to realize that these sequences are, in fact, (adult) François's imagined idea of his mother's past, his fantasy vision of the string of events that preceded his birth. As such, the protagonist himself has created a phantasmagoria of his own life story ...

As for my choice of having two different roles (Amica and young Claudine) performed by the same actress (made up to undergo some physical changes) – this grew from the premise that young Claudine before us is, in fact, the product of François's fertile imagination. In pursuing this logic one step further, it seemed an interesting approach to link Claudine more directly to Amica. In addition to its essentially poetic nature, this approach allowed us to create more layers of 'what's-real-and-what's-not' that often work very effectively in this genre of multi-faceted story – while, moreover, simultaneously remaining fully justified in terms of logic: one can easily imagine that François, having likely never seen any woman other than Amica in his life, would almost of necessity place his only model's features in re-creating these 'fantasy flashbacks' of his mother in this early period.

At a more formal technical level, I could not – nor did I want to – attempt to literally translate Anne Hébert's language into the film. Instead, I punctuated the story with short onscreen 'chapter' headings, as well as making use of what I call the protagonist's inner voice. This voice initially relates the past, but then comments on present events as well. The language of these headings and 'inner voice' remains quite faithful to the novel's prose style, sometimes even using exact transpositions of well-known passages. It struck me as disingenuous to deliberately *avoid* using these expressive and nuanced tools through a fear of being labelled "too literary" or displeasing some film purists. It was far more honest, in my opinion, to simply acknowledge and celebrate the film's literary origins, while at the same time bowing before the beauty of the source text's artistry.

Concerning the film's cinematic treatment, I wanted to marry elegance, sobriety and classicism – while simultaneously infusing modern touches, time-line breaks, as well as mystery and lyrical imagery. *The Torrent's* pace of is unreal, of course, true to its own rhythms rather than outside ones, as seemed necessary in a story that takes place over several years, with the passing seasons to further extend its grip on the audience following events at their own pace.

To play *The Torrent's* central character, I found Victor Andrés Trelles Turgeon – the perfect choice: intense and feverish. An expressive and physical actor. I chose Laurence Leboeuf as Amica, since I wanted the character to emanate a kind of grace and light, along with a mixture of candor, strength and resilience – in short, François's perfect helping hand. Dominique Quesnel was my dream Claudine: a huge, tortured, complex woman, yet one who's still human, oh-so-terribly human...

Filming *The Torrent* proved to be the most difficult and challenging experience of my young career. After a lengthy writing process, with numerous drafts of the screenplay, we finally had our script; after an equally-lengthy, meticulous period of pre-production and preparation, filming finally began – with this being no less of a marathon, spanning from April 2011 thru January 2012, with the work done in several blocks. Shooting conditions were often affected by frugal realities, as is frequently the case on Quebec productions, forcing the reconciling of certain ambitions with a more-than-modest budget. At the post-production stage, again, the footage was difficult, and editing the film was fraught with another round of unexpected challenges. All in all, it took over 20 weeks of work to arrive at the final configuration.

The film is now complete. Now – and this is hitting me with great impact – in spite of all my inclinations and thematic or metaphorical ambitions (as previously stated, all of which I still firmly stand behind), I can clearly see how a pure cinematic will guided and inspired me in making this film. This simple desire to compose shots, to film bodies, to film nature, to create impressions and feelings (through camera movement, an editing decision, or an element of sound design), was ultimately at least as important to me.

Less and less, I find myself needing to justify the very existence of the film, to find a practical, down-to-earth "relevance" for it, a timely link with some contemporary news item that would give it a "today" legitimacy. Instead, I like to think of this film as a work of art that stands by and for itself, independently, timeless and noble. And even if we endeavoured to stretch and twist the metaphors of what the film may indirectly touch on – such as, for example, religious fundamentalism – I believe this would reduce rather than expand the film's actual scope, making it something much more trivial. I am aware that in the eyes of some, the themes of "*The Torrent*" may seem somewhat out-of-step with the modern world, but if the film is indeed a work of art, –well, the greatest works are timeless and outside shifting, fleeting fashions – so, if so, is this timelessness really a problem?

In conclusion, with this film's completion, a chapter of my life quite literally ends. And though I'm undeniably very proud of "*The Torrent*", I still don't quite fully know its exact value yet. It's still too fresh. I'm still too immersed in its swirl, under its spell, from which I'm only slowly emerging. I just hope it connects with the public in a sustainable, emotional manner. And the great, profound satisfaction I now feel is undeniable – and that sensation and pride is rooted in one fact, the certain knowledge that, for better or worse, I put quite literally everything I had into this movie.

Simon Lavoie

SIMON LAVOIE

DIRECTOR AND SCREENWRITER

Born in 1979 and originally from the Quebec's Charlevoix region, Simon Lavoie moved to Montreal in 1998 to study film and screenwriting at l'Université du Québec à Montréal (UQUAM). Since 2003, he has made many well-received short- and medium-length films, such as *Corps étrangers*, *Quelques éclats d'aube*, *Une chapelle blanche* (for which he won a 2006 Jutra Award) and *À l'ombre*. In 2008, he wrote and directed his first feature film, *Le déserteur* (The Deserter), a period drama presented over forty screens across Quebec. In 2010, he co-wrote and co-directed with Mathieu Denis the fiction feature film, *Laurentie*, which was world premiered in summer 2011 at the Karlovy Vary International Film Festival in the Czech Republic, and subsequently presented in more than a dozen other festivals around the world. In 2011, Simon directed his third feature film, *The Torrent*, adapted from Anne Hébert's novel of the same name, which he also scripted.

VICTOR ANDRÉS TRELLES TURGEON FRANÇOIS

Within a few months of graduating from the National Theatre School of Canada in 2008, Victor Andrés Trelles Turgeon left Montreal to tour with the Franco-Ontarian production of Michele Riml's acclaimed play *Rage* (Théâtre la Catapulte; Joël Beddows, Director). He then participated in the creation of *Le portier de la Gare de Windsor* (The Porter Windsor Station) (Singulier Pluriel; Julie Vincent, Director). In 2010, at the théâtre du Quat'Sous, he played the role of a young poet in Catherine Vidal's adaptation of *Amuleto*.

On television, he has appeared in *Virginie*, *Les Hauts et Les Bas de Sophie Paquin*, *Mirador* and *The Phantom*. In theater, he has stayed busy, performing at l'Espace Libre in *Requiem pour un Trompettiste* (*Requiem for a Trumpet Player*) (Louise Naubert, Director). In film, he was part of the cast of *Pour l'amour de Dieu* (*For the Love of God*) (Micheline Lanctôt, Director) and *Mesnak* (Yves Sioui-Durand, Director) as well as, of course, *Le Torrent*, director Simon Lavoie's third feature.

LAURENCE LEBOEUF AMICA

One of film and television's true rising stars, Laurence Leboeuf certainly isn't resting on her laurels. This talented actress remains in high demand, with no signs of her popularity letting up. She has recently finished filming Simon Lavoie's *Le Torrent* (*The Torrent*), based on Anne Hébert's celebrated novel. She also starred with Max Thieriot, Jason Priestley and Juliette Lewis in *Foreverland*, directed by Max McGuire.

Laurence also starred in *Musée Éden* and *Trauma*, two series broadcast on Radio-Canada. In addition, she starred in *Durham County, Season 3*. On the big screen, Laurence was featured in Mariloup Wolfe's *Les Pieds dans le vide* and Kevin Tierney's *French Immersion*. In addition, Laurence plays the title role in *The Trouble with Cali*, directed by Paul Sorvino. This feature showcased her first leading role in an American movie. The film was shown at the *Sedona International Film Festival* last February.

In 2008, she was nominated for a Gemini Award as Best Actress for her role as Sadie Sweeney in the first season of *Durham County*. Laurence is also one of the stars of the first season of the CBC series, *Being Erica*. She was also cast in an episode of the popular CBS drama series, *Flashpoint*, starring Hugh Dillon.

In 2008, Laurence won the prestigious Gemini Award for Best Actress for her moving portrait of Louise Lavigueur in *Les Lavigueur, la vraie histoire*, (*The Lavigueurs, the Real Story*), a mini-series broadcast on Radio-Canada in the winter of 2008. Based on true events, *Les Lavigueur, la vraie histoire* explores the trials and heartbreak of a poor family after winning a major lottery prize.

Laurence has also shared top billing with Michel Côté and Karine Vanasse in the Quebec feature film, *Ma fille, mon ange* (*My Daughter, my Angel*), which earned her a Jutra Award for

Best Supporting Actress as well as a Genie Award nomination. In the summer of 2007, she was chosen for the title role in *Story of Jen*, a film directed by François Rotger, and also featuring Marina Hands and Tony Ward.

Brilliant and confident at 26, Laurence is the daughter of two well-known Quebec actors, Diane Lavallée and Marcel Leboeuf. Born into their world, she would soon make it her own, discovering a true passion for acting. At eleven, she had already landed her first roles on such TV series as *Virginie* and *L'ombre de l'épervier*, both broadcast on CBC/Radio-Canada. In 2002, it was also seen in *Tag*.

Surprisingly, it was only in 2004 that Laurence began to learn the language of Shakespeare, having landed a role in *15/Love* to be broadcast on the YTV channel. In 2005, she was nominated for the Gemini Award for Best Supporting Actress for her role in the series.

Laurence has quickly made her place, building a reputation in the English market as well. Immediately after *15/Love*, she was chosen to play a role in *The Secret*, a film directed by Vincent Perez and starring David Duchovny. She was next seen alongside Donald Sutherland Christian Duguay's *Human Trafficking*.

Although she devotes itself with passion and professionalism to her work as an actor, Laurence has other interests and concerns, including pressing social issues. In 2007, despite a very busy schedule, she joined a group of volunteers from *Habitat pour l'humanité /Habitat for Humanity* to take part in a development project for El Salvador. In 2011, she participated in a fundraising campaign for *Centraide/the United Way*, and has strongly backed a moratorium on the exploitation of shale gas in Quebec.

DOMINIQUE QUESNEL CLAUDINE

A graduate of the National Theatre School of Canada in 1988, Dominique Quesnel quickly found herself working in theater with some of her generation's most innovative creators and directors, such as Dominic Champagne, Wajdi Mouawad and René Richard Cyr. She has appeared in, among others, *The Odyssey*, *Le langue à langue des chiens de roche*, *Willy Protogoras enrôlé dans les toilettes*, *Cabaret Neiges-Noires*, *Lolita*, *À toi pour toujours ta Marie-Lou*, *Doldrum Bay*, *Tête première*, *Une ardente patience*, *Britanicus*, *Les points tournants*, *Hippocampe*, *Amuleto* and *Belles-soeurs*.

On television, she has appeared in *Fortier*, *Tag*, *Défect Inc*, *Providence*, *Tout sur moi* and *Les Rescapés*. In January 2013, she joined the Radio-Canada series, *Mémoires vives*.

In film, Dominique was cast in *La veuve de Saint-Pierre* (*The Widow Saint-Pierre*), *Crème glacée, chocolat et autres consolations* (*Ice Cream, Chocolate and other Consolations*), *Les Aimants* (*The Lovers*), *Que dieux bénisse l'Amérique*, *Horloge biologique* (*Biological Clock*), *Continental* (*Un film sans fusil*) and *Les sept jours du Talion*.

CAST CREDITS

François	Victor Andrés Trelles Turgeon
Amica	Laurence Leboeuf
Claudine	Dominique Quesnel
François (young)	Anthony Therrien
The Peddler	Marco Bacon

TECHNICAL CREDITS

Director	Simon Lavoie
Screenplay	Simon Lavoie
Based on the novel by	Anne Hébert
Producers	Sylvain Corbeil Jacques Blain
Associate Producers	Nancy Grant Marie-Dominique Michaud
Director of Photography	Mathieu Laverdière
Art Director	Éric Barbeau
Costumes	Francesca Chamberland
Editor	Nicolas Roy
Sound Conception	Patrice LeBlanc
Original Music	Normand Corbeil
International Sales	Filmoption International