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Véhicule Press

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Véhicule Press Announces a New Translation of Réjean Ducharme's
Debut Novel That Rocked a Generation

Montréal, May 13 2020 – Véhicule Press is thrilled to announce the forthcoming release of *Swallowed* (September 2020), a new authoritative translation of Réjean Ducharme's galvanizing 20th century masterpiece *L'avalée des avalés*. Originally published in 1966 by literary giant Gallimard, after being turned away by every publishing house in his native Québec, Ducharme's debut made an impact on Québec society like no other literary work of that generation.

Unavailable to English readers since 1968, Ducharme's novel of desperation and rebellion will finally be accessible to contemporary English Canada in vividly rendered prose by two-time Governor General's Award nominated translator Madeleine Stratford. In his introduction, Esplanade Books editor Dimitri Nasrallah calls Stratford's version "playful and lyrical and utterly timeless" and notes that the strength of her translation lies in her "proximity to the regional roots of the original French, [and] also in its rendering to a looser and more figurative, more acrobatic English."

Every aspect of bringing this brilliant work of fiction to the public has a cinematic storyline, from Ducharme's rejection within his own borders which forced him to seek success abroad, to the story of Véhicule Press acquiring the translation rights to the books—a tale that is part ambition, part luck and part fate. When Ducharme died on August 21, 2017, at the age of seventy-six, he was a legend of French letters. But, for most of Canada, he was still very much a secret. We believe *Swallowed* will change that.

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ESPLANADE
Books

Swallowed

RÉJEAN DUCHARME

Translated from the French by MADELEINE STRATFORD

Introduction by DIMITRI NASRALLAH

In 1966, Réjean Ducharme, then a 24-year-old unknown, published *L'Avalée des avalés*, this debut novel that would go on to serve as a zeitgeist for several generations of French-Canadian readers. Over the last fifty years, it has become a cornerstone for a culture, taught in high schools and universities as the foundation of modern Québécois literature. Astoundingly, an English-language edition of the book hasn't been in print since 1968, and has never before been available in Canada.

Berenice Einberg feels trapped by home, family and dogmas both real and invented. Precocious and over-intelligent, she despises her dysfunctional parents too viciously, loves her brother Christian too passionately, and follows the logical pirouettes of her imagination to conclusions too dangerous. She lives on a secluded island, where she hatches plans to run away with Christian and escape her mother's needy overtures for affection. When on the cusp of puberty Berenice becomes too wild for even her parents to control, she's sent to live in New York with her father's ultra-religious relatives where, pushed to confine her impulses, she instead forces herself forward to new extremes.

Gripping and hallucinatory, *Swallowed* is every bit as shocking and relevant today as it was upon first publication in 1966.

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INFORMATION

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RÉJEAN DUCHARME (1941-2017) published nine novels, as well as two screenplays, from 1966 to 1990. He won Canada's Governor General's Literary Award three times. Famously reclusive, he never spoke to the media or appeared in public, and only three photos of him are publicly available. Ducharme is a pioneering figure of modern Québécois fiction.



UQO | MARIE-ANDRÉE BLAIS

MADELEINE STRATFORD is a poet, a literary translator, and a professor at Université du Québec en Outaouais. In 2017, her English translation of a picture book by German author Lilli L'Arronge was shortlisted for a Kirkus Prize. Her French translations of Marianne Apostolides (*Elle nage*, 2016) and Cherie Dimaline (*Pilleurs de rêves*, 2019) were both finalists for a Governor General's Literary Award.

How We Acquired the Rights - The Story

Dimitri Nasrallah, Esplanade Books editor

I first discovered that *L'avalée des avalés* had been out-of-print in English since 1968 when *The Walrus* magazine asked me to write an appraisal in the weeks following Réjean Ducharme's death. The novel's absence struck me as a significant cultural omission. An important part of Québec's literary foundation was missing from Canadian letters. As an editor, I immediately sensed an opportunity, though I wasn't sure how realistic a pursuit it was.

On the one hand, times had changed since British academic Barbara Bray's translation of the novel had first appeared in 1968. Canada now had a publishing industry that was now half a century strong. The oft-tumultuous relationship between English and French Canada had calmed and matured over the past two decades. Generations of legislation in Québec pertaining to the French language had also groomed a wealth of homegrown translators who were better equipped to tackle Ducharme's slippery prose, complex wordplay, and multi-layered allusions.

But there were other obstacles. Gallimard is half a world away and used to selling English-language rights on a global scale, while Véhicule Press is a boutique regional independent in a country that is itself a subset of Gallimard's North American territory. Surely a half-century-old book from their back catalogue was a low priority for an organization preoccupied with international book fairs and a raft of contemporary titles to sell. They could consider our market too small for them. Would we approach the venerable institution responsible for publishing many of the twentieth century's great authors?

An exchange began with their rights department. They were initially receptive to the idea, but had little background on the linguistic particulars of our region and no prior knowledge of our modest publishing house. Would we not want to publish the existing Barbara Bray translation, they asked. Our ambition was to have the novel re-translated by someone who had a natural understanding of Québécois idiom, and who could communicate the particularities of the original French in a way they had never before been served. Without a track record in international publication deals to bolster our cause, we were concerned our publishing circles were too far apart; Gallimard probably had more pressing activities underway.

As luck would have it, in March 2018 I was invited to attend the Paris Book Fair to promote my novel *Niko*, which had just been published in France. With a trans-Atlantic visit in hand, we restarted the conversation with Gallimard, to see if I could meet with their rights director in person and articulate the unique case for bringing Ducharme back to Canada. I am grateful to Camille Cloarec, at the time the Book and Debates Officer at the Consulate General of France in Toronto, for taking up our cause and communicating our desires to Gallimard from a much more reputed vantage point than our own. A few days later, I found myself in Paris, standing outside the unassuming door of the legendary publishing house, with less than two hours' sleep after an overnight flight.

Once we were able to sit down in the same room, we were fortunate enough to hit it off and an agreement emerged quickly. It turned out that Anne-Solange Noble, the head of English rights at Gallimard, was born and raised in Montreal. She understood the underlying cultural value of what we were proposing, and saw it as part of the ongoing unique relationship between the French and English languages in Canada. We rhapsodized about the city, its street life, as well as people she remembered from Montreal's Anglo literary community of the seventies. A new English translation, she agreed, could be useful to Gallimard in brokering rights requests in other markets.

Two years have passed since that fortuitous meeting. In that time, translator Madeleine Stratford has produced this new translation of *L'avalée des avalés*. *Swallowed* differs from Barbara Bray's *The Swallower Swallowed* not only in its translator's proximity to the regional roots of the original French, but also in its rendering to a looser and more figurative, more acrobatic English. Stratford's translation of Ducharme is, to my ear, playful and lyrical and utterly timeless.

After more than half a century of languishing out of print, the book that transformed Québécois culture during the Quiet Revolution is finally available for Canadian readers to discover.