VOYAGEUR DISCOURSE AND THE ABSENCE OF FUR TRADE PIDGIN

George Lang

Like other cultural renegades, the *coureur de bois* or voyageur is an often neglected figure, in part because he falls between stools.[1] His transgression of civilized values, plus his willingness to adapt and/or to be adopted into native cultures, inspired both the contempt of his fellow whites and the mistrust of French and British colonial authorities. Within a generation or two the voyageur was as likely as not to be blood relative with natives. Yet his objectives remained distinct. Surviving, indeed prospering along an interface, he did not fit into either of the worlds he wedded. When the relative autonomy of those worlds ceased, the voyageur himself vanished.

In one regard, though, the voyageur is unlike other *Uberläufer* (cultural turn-coats, like the Dunbar of the recent American film, *Dances with Wolves*) : he has had the misfortune to be co-opted retrospectively into the very roles he fled. "[L]es Québécois, en quête de racines françaises, effacent dans le personnage tout ce qui peut rappeler l'amiguïté du coureur de bois, ils le transforment en pionnier d'une colonisation civilisatrice et catholique." (Jacquin 240) So sanitized, the voyageur is expunged of the function that best defined and sustained him economically for over two centuries — that as intermediary between cultures, not forerunner of a single one.

English-language writers have also tended to focus softly on the voyageur, though differently. Popular images proliferate of the sturdy but irrepressibly Gallic side-kicks of the dour Scots factors who laid the foundations of Canada, their "little French chansons . . . and quaint old ditties" (in Washington Irving's words [29]) echoing across the lakes as they paddled off into history. It is easy to disparage Irving's remarks. Canadians know this Yankee booster was a hired apologist for John Jacob Astor's Pacific Fur Trade Company, and wrote *Astoria* to buttress support for Astor's attempt to ban British trade from the U.S. Pacific Northwest. His image is nonetheless familiar to us too.

The increasing scholarly corpus of writing on the fur trade has sharpened those images, presenting the voyageur in more than two dimensions and bringing back into the picture the native and *métisse* women who were his partners and accomplices. The voyageur already knew from his Québécois background the advantages of using Indian women as more than sexual receptacles and/or the factotums they often had been. "Mixed marriages" were the rule there from the moment the French hit the ground. Yet it took a while for trading and other official institutions to follow suit, and even longer, until the last decade, for Canadian historians to force our attention upon the sexual politics of the fur trade.

Even revisionist histories of the fur trade nonetheless neglect its linguistic underpinnings. It is as if native and white cultures fell into contact and conflict without the mediation of language; as if the language in which most official fur trade records survive and in which we now write its history was the language in which it occurred; as if, in fact, language learning, in particular that of the indigenous ones which were the voyageur's stock-in-trade, were not an essential component of the "many tender ties" that bound him, his family, and the trade together.

It is in this context that I would like to address a question raised by the Dutch linguist Peter Bakker, one which perhaps sheds light on Canadian ethnohistorical research — and on certain troubling dilemmas of Canadian history itself. Why, Bakker asks, was there never a pidgin or creole associated with the Canadian fur trade, since similar conditions around the world did lead to various jargons and pidgins, and even, in the right circumstances, to creoles (1988). Why, in other words, was there no *Canadian*, only English and French? Various *Uberlaüfer* were in fact associated with the early stages of a pidgin: the Barbary pirate with the Mediterranean Lingua Franca; the *tangomau* of the West African coast with the Portuguese pidgin that became today's Cape-Verdean *crioulo*; the beachcomber with the South Seas Pidgin English which at least participated in the rise of Tok Pisin ("Talk Pidgin"), the national language of Papua-New-Guinea. Such is not the case in Canada, where our national renegade, the *coureur de bois*, instead seized the discursive territory a hypothetical fur trade pidgin might have occupied. Perhaps it is a typically Canadian tragedy that the voyageur, whose economic status was founded on his skill as a linguist, faded away once other linguistic arrangements superseded his, and the multilingual milieux in which he found his identity were consolidated into a more monolingual state.

"Discourse" has become, if not a dirty word, then at least a slippery one. Hereafter it is intended in the neutral sense of the multilingual repertoire of rhetorical and semiotic devices which were an integral part of the fur trade — much closer to Saussure's *parole* than *langue* — that interconnected set of inherently interpretative speech strategies that had currency for over two centuries along the branching waterways of North America down which the pelt was conveyed.

At various times there were actual contact pidgins within this vast hydraulic network: the Basque-Algonkian pre-pidgin that sprang from the first white-native contacts in the New World (Bakker 1990), the Delaware jargon spoken in the seventeenth century between the Algonquian Lenape people and the Swedes, Dutch and English who came into contact with them (Holm, 601); the Mobilian Jargon spoken in the Lower Mississippi and in eastern Texas to almost this day (Crawford); and Chinook Jargon (Thomas; Thomason). This last, Chinook Jargon, haunts this study, since it was a fur trade pidgin, at least in part, and drew copiously upon voyageur discourse. One indication of its connection to the voyageurs is its high percentage of French lexical items at mid-nineteenth century (Silverstein, 617), proof that as long as the socioeconomic conditions of the fur trade prevailed, voyageur French was the operative mediative language on the ground in northern North America.

A T THE TURTLE MOUNTAIN Reservation in North Dakota and in pockets in the Canadian West, there subsists yet another example of a contact language, a very special one, Michif (*Métif* in French). The origin of Michif is lost in the mists of history, maybe those same into which our voyageurs paddled so vigorously (the weight of French in Michif suggests an origin further east than its present distribution, somewhere north of the Great Lakes and prior to Conquest). To some extent Michif is candidate for the ultimate Canadian jargon, or at least a missing link thereof. As one linguist has it, Michif is the *ne plus ultra* of contact languages. (Papen 1987) Cree rules its verbal system. French, more precisely the Québécois-related dialect of French spoken sporadically in Western Canada, controls the nouns. Michif was thus at least originally shared by speakers "perfectly bilingual in both source languages, otherwise they could not have produced without errors its Cree and French components." (Thomason and Kaufman, 232). This last claim is disputed by Peter Bakker, who observed that "[m]any ... speakers do not speak Cree or French, [though] almost all are bilingual in English and Métif." (1989: 340) His radical view supposes an even greater autonomy of Michif, since a Michif speaker would in this case be capable or producing sentence parts in either Cree or French without full knowledge of either or both of them. Whether Michif arose through the relexification of Cree, *per* Bakker, or if it came about more arbitrarily, for example as in-group game jargon a bit like pig-Latin, but on a vaster scale, it presents one of the great conundrums of contemporary creolists. One feature it does share with other North American contact languages, in particular Chinook Jargon and Mobilian Jargon, is its role as "insider's language" (Rhodes, 288), as auxiliary tongue spoken by multilinguals who recognize each others' capacities in the jargon, but who possess other shared codes.

Until his demise, I am arguing, the voyageur was the master of a discursive realm which ran strangely parallel to Michif, and which was tantamount to but never spawned a jargon like the Chinook.

There is every reason linguistics must be brought to bear against the somewhat nebulous notion of a voyageur discourse. The first *coureur de bois* was Etienne Brûlé, the young boy Champlain sent off to the Algonquin in 1610 as a future informant. A number of other apprentices soon followed: Nicolas de Vignau, Nicolas Marsolet, Jean Nicolet, Jean Godefroy. (Delisle, 52) Very soon these stalwarts began to turn coat. Hanzeli, in his *Missionary Linguistics in New France*, noted that the Quebec City Jesuits considered themselves lucky to find a *truche-ment*, an interpreter, in the person of the Nicolas Marsolet previously cited. (47) The way Bruce Trigger has it, however, this same Marsolet was so protective of the Algonquin that he refused to reveal details about their tongue, and only gave in when his pay cheque was threatened. (Trigger, 405) From the beginning, the refusal to share, or to insist on being paid to share, was part of voyageur strategy.

Despite such blackmail and perhaps to some extent because of it, the call of life (and language-learning) among the "Savages" was such that numerous immigrants from Old France, where life was not particularly comfortable, "cherch[ai]ent à apprendre une langue indigène et à se lancer dans le commerce." (Jacquin, 79) Fifty years later there were at least 800 unattached men living in the woods between Ottawa and Michilimakinac. These were not language teachers, but fur traders. Yet some facility in native languages was prerequisite to accede to the profits and accrue the benefits such nomad lives conferred. (Eccles, 110) A slow spread westward ensued. By 1680 Lake Nipigon was a meeting-ground for voyageurs. Though temporarily abandoned by French authorities, who strategically fell back below Lake Superior 1695-1713, the *Pays d'en-haut* was already host to over a hundred French-speaking voyageurs. They were obviously envied by many, even in Europe. To take one example, the Ojibway vocabulary the Baron Lahontan inserted into his 1703 *Voyages*, a best-seller which quickly ran into numerous editions in various languages, attests to the European interest in native languages, though illiterate voyageurs would hardly have availed themselves of it. However and whysoever Lahontan amassed his lexicon, it remains a significant source for study of Algonkian philology. (Gille)

A hundred years after Champlain designated Etienne Brûlé as his apprentice interpreter, La Vérendrye sent two of his sons among the Cree, sowing the seeds of the Métis nation according to Marcel Giraud, and establishing the ethno-linguistic superiority of French-speakers in the West, a state of affairs which lasted more than a century and survived long after the Conquest. It was with no small jealousy that the employees of the Hudson's Bay Company complained, according to Anthony Henday, "The French speak the language of the natives with the same ease as they themselves do."

GERMAN COMPARATIST János Riesz has defined a paradigm for the cultural renegade: that he (though why not she?) accidentally enter into and embrace a radically foreign culture; that he recognize the importance of its language to his integration, and have something to exchange against that language; and that he undergo assimilation to the extent that there is no going back to his original culture, be this for economic, emotional or "cosmetic" reasons. (147) Doubtless, each of these factors applies to some extent to the sum total of voyageurs, including the irreversibility of the voyageur option. It was not easy to go back, once a man had sunk roots in native society, married and had children. The "Freeman" Gabriel Franchère wrote of those "qui ont pris femme dans l'Ouest et se sont attachés à leur famille comme n'osant regagner le Bas-Pays, où leur conduite soulèverait une vive réprobation." (Giraud, 340) Yet from the beginning, in New France at least, many *voluntarily* went over to native culture. Nor did all voyageurs necessarily stay in that camp. The constant shuttle between Amerindian and colonial societies, both of which were in transition, continued after the westward shift of the fur trade, in part due to contacts between those who wintered over in the *Pays d'en haut*, and the *mangeurs de lard* who came up from the *Bas-Pays* in the summer. A number of prominent voyageurs did remain loyal to Laurentian civilization, for example, J. B. Lagimodière, who brought the first white woman to the West and whose sincere "attachement aux habitudes et à la religion du Bas-Pays . . . le [retenait] plus près des Blancs." (Giraud, 377) It was also possible to switch allegiance several times in the course of a life. For example, having lived at length among the Indians and passing for a master in their languages, Louis Primeur (also known as Primeau, Primault and Primo [Van Kirk, 647]) wearied of the life in the wilderness and proposed his services to the Hudson's Bay Company. (Giraud, 256) This example, among many others, suggests that voyageurs did not break all connection with colonial society, nor with French, their common bond whatever the seat of their commercial allegiance. For economic reasons the majority of Canadian renegades continued to deal with the more conventional Euro-Americans whose mores they had rejected, some of whom were themselves also drawn towards the personal freedom life in the northern forest offered, despite manifest hardships. Voyageurs were no slim majority of *Canadiens.* Some estimations have it that by 1680, before the French penetrated beyond the Great Lakes, a third of the population had embraced voyageur life, and this despite the laws Colbert declared precisely in order to discourage such behaviour. (Kohl, 95)

Given the importance that interpretation played in the life and the economic activity of the voyageur, it is appropriate to open here a parenthesis treating the general history of native-white linguistic contact in northern North America, to sweep back from Michilimakinac to the Atlantic coast.

Peter Bakker has shown that the first instrument of communication between native and white was a Basque-Algonkian pidgin which arose out of contact between Basque fishermen and the Micmacs and Montagnais. (1990: 4) This is apparently the same contact language Marc Lescarbot referred to in 1612 and that some have incorrectly taken for a French-related pidgin. Though some words of French origin can be found in the documents, words of Basque origin abound. Known as Souriquoien, this pidgin must be distinguished from Souriquois, a name often given to Micmac. Many Micmac spoke Souriquoien, but certainly not all those who spoke Souriquoien were Micmac. Thus, a century after Cartier, Père Le Jeune collected several Basque expressions from the lips of Montagnais at Tadoussac, ignorant though he was of their Basque derivations (e.g. *ania* 'brother'); and in 1633, the Flemish writer Ioannes de Laet mentioned "Basque" words in addition to French in use in the Iroquois communities at Hochelaga — evidence that Souriquoien extended across several native language boundaries. The Huron, however, never used it, according to Bruce Trigger. (364)

This pidgin was apparently the main instrument of contact between the French and the natives they encountered until Champlain thought to establish a corps of interpreters. As is often the case in contact pidgins, those who spoke Souriquoien pidgin suffered from the illusion that they spoke the other group's actual language. Also typical of contact pidgin is the abrupt disappearance of Souriquoien as soon as more regular and better structured contacts develop. Unless it becomes the basis for a creole, that is becomes the native language of a population with no other means of communication — a pidgin lasts no longer than the tentative contacts which engender and sustain it. Neither *québécois* nor *acadien*, the two main French dialects spoken in North America, bear any trace of creolization properly speaking. (Vintila-Radulescu, 25) The same holds for the languages which came into contact with French, and later English: with the exception of the anomalous cases mentioned above (Souriquoien, Delaware, Mobilian, and Chinook jargons, and Michif), and one out of reckoning here (the Inuktituk-based Eskimo Trade Jargon spoken at the mouth of the Mackenzie), there was no pidginization or creolization of native Amerindian tongues. Plotted on a map of North America, these contact pidgins fall along the fringes of the broad area of North America which the voyageur plied, circumscribing his domain and perhaps defining his presence.

THIS MAP BRINGS US to the crux of the matter. Conditions *were* ripe for the creation of a fur trade pidgin, one which would have filled in the map, so to speak. On the one hand, there was a great diversity of native languages, which reduced the appeal of learning any particular trade language already present on the ground; on the other hand, there was a long period of sporadic economic

interaction necessitating rudimentary communication. Peter Bakker's hypothesis in 1988 was that in Canada *métissage* or racial mixing produced a bilingual population who assumed the role of interpreters, short-circuiting pidginization, an operation which required a number of multilingual natives as well. The gist of his observations seem correct, but his hypothesis needs further refining, and should be inserted more carefully into the contexts of fur trade history, that of the Métis nation, and that of Amerindian language contacts as a whole. The sensitive reader will also have understood that I am speaking about not only ethnolinguistic history, but the historical grounds for a Canada.

There remains a yawning gap between the demise of Souriquoien in the east and the rise of the Métis nation in the west, a large one during which numerous commercial and other contacts occurred and a considerable sum of geographical and ecological knowledge changed hands, without most of the native population having acquired French, nor, conversely, most in the trade having learned any Amerindian tongues. Folklorists, moreover, have attested to tales of French origin across the continent, especially where voyageurs were active, which shows that cultural exchange was reciprocal. (Jacquin, 213-215) No one is likely to chart with any degree of precision the path of transmission taken by the French tale Melville Jacobs recorded in Chinook Jargon in 1932 in the Pacific Northwest. (*"Lasup"* "Soup Man"; 1936: 15) Such exchange of cultural material must be attributed to bilinguals of some kind, and have occurred before French disappeared from the Pacific Northwest with the withdrawal of the Hudson's Bay Company to Victoria. This and similar phenomena across the continent down into Missouri and as far south as the territory of Mobilian Jargon in fact suggests that the racially-mixed bilinguals in question were not strictly speaking Métis, in the national or social sense, rather the free-floating agents we call the voyageurs. In fact, the rise of a Métis distinct nation marked their demise.

It would be futile to finger the precise moment at which voyageur "society" gave way to the Métis "nation." Marcel Giraud, for one, attributes the shift from the voyageur towards the more stable culture which supplanted his to the consolidation of the Métis family — "élément d'attachement indispensable au milieu primitif" — which in turn can be measured by the extension of the fur trade into the West by the two great Companies which introduced, he says, "un personnel assez nombreux pour répandre, sur une échelle appréciable, la coutume des mariages mixtes." (365) As a historical marker, 1812 has the advantage of setting off two centuries and of coinciding with the establishment of Selkirk's Red River colony, the beginning of the end for the voyageur. This proposed date is arbitrary. French remained the language of the fur trade until the 1840s, as its testified prominence in native-white relations in the Pacific Northwest until then demonstrates. To some degree, those who spoke it were still voyageurs. 1840 is in any event the date George Simpson, Governor of the Hudson's Bay Company, lamented

that "Voyaging seems to be getting into disuse or out of fashion among the French Canadians." (Williams, 56)

There is little doubt that however far he strayed from mainstream Laurentian society, the voyageur never lost touch with his French roots. What remains a matter of some speculation is the nature of the other, native facet of his bilingualism. There is, of course, no doubt where his immediate knowledge of Amerindian languages was obtained — the native women the earliest *coureur de bois* took as country wives, and quickly had as mothers. In Sylvia Van Kirk's words: "Because of her intimate contact with the traders, the Indian woman also played an important role as an interpreter and teacher of language. As least some understanding of the languages was required to be an effective 'Indian trader'." (65) This intimate familiarity with local languages initially was of great importance, but as the fur trade spread across the continent, mastery of any given one would have been of no more use to a single voyageur than it would to a native. The linguistic map of North America is complex. It is hard to imagine that any given voyageur, for that matter the voyageurs collectively, picked up more than a smattering of the languages spoken in the immense swath at hand, in particular the Central Algonquian and Iroquoian languages which would have been of the most use. The manifold grammatical categories within even contemporary Ojibway offer grounds for skepticism about easy mastery of any of these tongues (see Pentland and Wolfart [1982] for some indications). Louis Primeur ("traiteur illettré et hâbleur, mais passé maître dans les dialectes indigènes" [Giraud 210]) was perhaps an exceptionally gifted individual, as was Toussaint Charbonneau, whom Lewis and Clark encountered in 1804 among the Sioux, and who spoke the gamut of languages along the Missouri River (Jacquin, 238). But languages and intercultural communication do not depend on gifted individuals. The polyglottism of the voyageur can therefore be best explained not by the genius of any particular one of them, but rather by their acquisition of the mutual linguistic accommodations natives themselves had always used.

N EITHER IN THE *Bas-Pays* nor in the *Pays d'en-haut* was there a contact jargon similar to those attested elsewhere in North America. This does not mean there were no *native* lingua francas. In the 1600s and 1700s, those in use in the area of fur trading were sequential in time and contiguous in space: Huron, in the Ottawa Valley and on the banks of Lake Huron; Ojibway, throughout the Great Lakes; and Cree, in its variety of dialects, across the Prairies (the famous prairie Sign Language did not make it to Canada until the 1900s [Trigger, 65; Taylor, 178]). Inevitably, the use of these lingua francas was as approximate on the part of natives not born into them as it was on that of the voyageurs. Marcel

Giraud claims that the voyageur was "habitué dès l'enfance [aux] intonations [des langues amérindiennes] et en a acquis la pratique sans avoir à s'astreindre à une étude suivie." (149) Native fluency in one Amerindian tongue was doubtless a help in acquiring another, yet it was probably a behavioral model rather than a particular linguistic code learned lock-stock-and-barrel that was the voyageur's secret weapon in the language wars of the 1700s and 1800s — the direct experience of improvised language contact within the Amerindian world. In others words, the facility of the voyageur was not based on the European intellectual model of hermetic and autonomous tongues which one learns serially, but rather on the experience of a multilingual milieu in which accommodation was a matter of habit, and comprehension confirmed by trade. The voyageur inhabited a Forest of Symbols through which he moved as gracefully as in a canoe, another talent, in this case linguistic, he owed his Amerindian relatives, one crucial to mastery of his boreal, riparian environment.

To judge by the distrust the Agents of the Hudson's Bay Company held towards them, the voyageurs never broke off relations with the French-speaking employees of the North West Company: "La fréquentation inévitable de l'homme du Bas-Pays, la sympathie qui naissait de la communauté de langue exposaient bien vite les Canadiens aux intrigues de leurs compatriotes et rendaient douteuse leur fidélité envers la Compagnie britannique." (Giraud, 256) This propensity for French is further corroborated by the high percentage of French words in early nineteenth century Chinook Jargon.

We know precious few details about the French actually spoken by the voyageurs, though it is tempting to extrapolate what we do know about contemporary Métis French. Peter Bakker remarks that "the French spoken by the Métis [is] markedly different from other North American French dialects." (1989b: 339; cf. 1989b: 341) Given that Métis French is not creolized (and that the French component of Michif conforms *grosso modo* to North American French norms), his point is a matter of emphasis. Métis is less eccentric than one might think: "la plupart des mots et des expressions employés en métis sont également employés en français du Canada" (Papen 1984: 133), the rest coming, as one might expect, from English: such as *polisher, railleder* (<ride), *brîder* ('to raise animals' <to breed); or from Cree: like *tansi* 'hello,' *megwetch* 'thanks,' *awapou* instead of *nourriture, kiskapatew* for *fumée*. (Papen 1984; Bakker, p.c.) Nor is Métis French phonologically odd compared to other French dialects, though it is recognizable. This is readily confirmed by comparing it with a genuine French creole, Louisiana creole (as opposed to Acadian Cajun, which is relatively easy for a francophone). Let us note in passing that nowhere in North America did aboriginal languages effect a like transmogrification of French. The extent to which North American French remained impermeable to Amerindian linguistic influence points, I am suggesting, to some kind of buffer, one incarnate in the person of the voyageur.

As interpretation became more and more institutionalized in the Canadian West, the voyageur was reduced increasingly to the purely physical functions of trapper. By 1804 the North West Company had over sixty-eight paid interpreters, most of whom were of course francophone. (Delisle, 58) Many had been voyageurs and were of mixed-blood (as English forces us to say), but the role of interpreter and mere trapper were already diverging. Accordingly, the cultural record shows a shift from the perhaps exaggerated reputation of the voyageurs in linguistic matters (for example, Giraud, who cites York Factory factors in the 1790s [343]), to descriptions like those of Washington Irving in *Astoria*: "their language is of the same pyebald character, being a French patois, embroidered with Indian and English words and phrases." (28)

E XPUNGING, AS ETHNOLINGUISTS ought, any negative connotations of "patois," let us try to imagine what Irving was describing, keeping in mind that he may have been referring to the French-oriented dialect of Chinook Jargon, the main one accessible to Europeans in the 1830s. Bilingual, at the very least, the voyageur was accustomed to linguistic *bricolage* — handiwork. He did not suffer from the illusion that any tongue held a monopoly over communcation, and probably would not have understood what linguistic "contamination" might mean. In the company of fellow bilinguals he doubtless was prone to code-switching and, like some Canadian bilinguals today, could not resist the temptation. There is, however, no indication that the voyageur ever forgot which codes were which. Nor was there any, and this is my point, mediate jargon to bridge those codes. Code-switching even in today's Montreal requires good knowledge of both French and English.

The voyageur was neither a learned primitivist, nor even literate — the only voyageur "autobiography" we have is Radisson's. He had issued from the impoverished classes of Europe and, matrilineally, Amerindian societies undergoing profound and anomic transformation. In the *Pays d'en-haut* he found freedom and pleasures that would have been refused him both in distant France and along the banks of the St. Lawrence, from which he was increasingly alienated. *Patois* or not, his speech was in some sense liberating. The empty spaces to which the voyageur fled were mirrored by an unknown but ever-expanding semiotic realm fed by a surprising freedom of speech and languages, and he was paid to partake of them.

It is commonly suggested that French, in the West, has been sullied by contact with English. There have been of course numerous lexical and phonological influences, but it is sociolinguistically, not structurally, that English came to dominate from the 1840s on. Languages do not die because they are contaminated or erode

internally, but because they lose their socioeconomic power and prestige. Be it in the mouth of *francos* in the West or in that of the Métis, French in Western Canada bears only relatively minimal traces of English influence — the definitive proof of which is to ask any unilingual anglophone to understand the French he hears in passing in Edmonton, or for that matter on French TV. There was, to repeat, no creolization of French in Canada nor, even among the voyageurs, any abrupt rupture in transmission from one generation to the next, but only the shift over life-times from one language to the next. The voyageur was but the first of agents insuring that such mutations have been part and parcel of Canadian history.

Rather than a contact language which many would come to share, the voyageur established a contact discourse which he used to negotiate between cultures he shared, but which twain never met. There is no need to be romantic about the perished historic destiny of the theoretically possible syncretic culture which might have sprung from unmediated contact among the peoples *and* the invaders of northern North America. Chinook Jargon, which actually was one such synthesis, itself expired by the end of the nineteenth century, smothered by the massive arrival of Oregon settlers. We would have smothered it ourselves.

As for Michif, the other implicit term of this meditation, only subsequent research will confirm if its roots did grow out of the voyageur discourse here hypothesized. But Michif does share one telling feature of voyageur discourse, that of "asserting a social identity distinct from that of speakers of either French or Cree" (Holm, 11), though speaking at least parts of both. To this day Michif remains autonomous, though marginal.

Other examples of pidginization and creolization one might have expected in Canada were cut off by the versatile and even virtuoso bilingualism of the voyageur, who prepared his own demise.

NOTE

[1] The original French version of this text, presented at the *Avant 1860: Discours et langages au Canada* conference at Victoria College, Toronto, in April, 1990, used *coureur de bois* instead of voyageur. Though these terms are not strictly synonymous, the awkwardness of the former in English persuades me to adopt *voyageur*. A second version was presented in English at the *American Society for Ethnohistory* meeting in Toronto, November, 1990. I am indebted to consultations with Peter Bakker of the University of Amsterdam, who bears no responsibility for any errors upon which I may have insisted.

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THE VISITING WIND

Russell Thornton

The visiting wind is spinning itself
out through the shuttles of the tree branches:

spinning the living blanket of the leaves;
spinning subtle flesh — two dazzling, blissful,

lit, serene spheres, which move in a pattern
among the branches, one round the other —

bodies of turning and turning lovers.
And already the wind is distant, free:

the whole leaf-air hushes, waiting: the wind
passes and passes through, and almost sees.