CHAPTER THREE

THE CULTURAL MATRIX: THE PIONEER LIFE

The word *voyageur*, according to the *Dictionary of Canadianisms*, is "considered fully a part of Canadian English by most persons who have occasion to use it." The *DC* consecrates a whole page to this word and its derivations; it is one of many common words listed in the *DC* that have been borrowed by Canadian English from Canadian French. The *DC* gives its primary meaning as "one of the canoemen or boatmen...who crewed the vessels of the inland fur trade", thereby paddling 3,000 pounds of trade goods in a birch bark canoe over a two to four thousand mile journey to the Canadian Northwest over lakes, streams, rivers, rapids and portages, and returning three to five months later with a load of furs.

The word has basically the same meaning in Canadian French, as may be seen, for example, by the entry in Clapin's *Dictionnaire canadien- français*, where he comments "Ce mot s'applique surtout aux explorateurs du temps jadis, c'est-à-dire à tous ceux qui, autrefois, poussés par un besoin insatiable d'aventures et de nouveautés, s'élançaient sans cesse hardiment en avant, faisant la traite avec les sauvages, nommant des sites, reconnaissant les cours des rivières."

Completing the picture he adds this quote from J.C.Taché's book *Forestiers et Voyageurs*: "*Voyageur*, dit-il, dans le sens canadien du mot, ne veut pas dire simplement un homme qui a voyagé; il ne veut pas même dire un homme qui a vu beaucoup de pays...Le *voyageur* canadien est un homme au tempérament aventureux, propre à tout, capable d'être, tantôt, successivement ou tout à la fois, découvreur, interprète, bûcheron, colon, chasseur, pêcheur, marin, guerrier."

These were all necessary qualities for the early settlers in Canada. They came to occupy a land of virgin wilderness, totally different from the fortified cities and ploughed fields they had left behind in Europe. The wilderness, especially the Canadian Shield, was a tangle of rocks, bogs and forests. The forest was the boreal forest, the northern forest predominantly of black spruce, white spruce, jack pine, tamarack (called *juniper* in Newfoundland and Nova Scotia, *larch* in Europe), balsam fir, hemlock and other conifers, but sprinkled as well with birch, poplar, black ash, rowan (or dogberry), wild cherry and other deciduous trees. This boreal forest was inhabited for the most part by peoples speaking

languages of the Algonkian family, living in a hunting and gathering culture and consequently spread out sparsely over the landscape. In what is today Southern Ontario and New York State, however, were to be found tribes of the Iroquoian stock, organized into an agricultural economy, living in fortified villages, the scourge of the more northerly Algonkians. In the far west and north west, which were yet undeveloped, lived other tribes from different linguistic and cultural groups.

The Europeans, to establish their own culture in this new country had to clear the land to establish their traditional agricultural economy. The clearing of the boreal forest of its trees, stumps and rocks with no other aid than the power of a horse is graphically portrayed in Louis Hémon's *Maria Chapdelaine*, written in Northern Québec before the First World War. In fact to clear the land — *défricher le sol* in SF — came to be called *faire de la terre* in Canada, and *les défricheurs de la terre* would sometimes develop a passion, as did the father of Maria in Hémon's novel, for clearing a plot or a farm, selling it, and moving on again into the virgin wilderness to start the back breaking work all over again.

Consequently when Taché names the roles of "découvreur, interprète, bûcheron, colon, chasseur, pêcheur, marin, guerrier" we can see that the roles of *découvreur*, *bûcheron*, *colon*, *chasseur*, *pêcheur* were necessary for the establishment of any kind of a settlement. The word *colon* also took on a different meaning: in SF it means either an inhabitant of a colony or a farmer who pays rent in the form of a percentage of his crops. In Canada it means one who develops the land and the Canadian expression *coloniser la terre* would be in SF *défricher et peupler la terre*. Similar shifts of meaning, for similar reasons, have overtaken such common French words as *habitant*, *cultivateur*, whose equivalents in modern SF would be *paysan*, *fermier*.

The roles of *découvreur*, *interprète*, *marin*, *guerrier* would be called into play whenever travel was involved. The virgin wilderness was unmapped, and the people one came into contact with were Europeans such as the Dutch in New York State or the English in Hudsons Bay, or else speakers of an Algonkian or Iroquoian language. It was only too easy to become involved in the wars of the native peoples, as did Champlain, thereby provoking the long hostilities between the Iroquois and the French that led to attacks on French settlements and the murder of Brébeuf, Lalemant and the other Jesuit martyrs of Canada. These contacts necessarily involved the roles of *interprète* and *guerrier*. And of course the fact that roads were non-existent meant that any travel automatically involved the role of *marin*: the St.Lawrence River was the main highway of Québec before the first roads, and the Indians had long before shown the early voyageurs the canoe routes through to the Great Lakes and the Mississippi.

It is not surprising, as a result, that the vocabulary of Canadian French is full of expressions that have to do with boats and travel on the water. To get in a car in Canada is *embarquer*, not the *monter* that one hears in Europe, and the word can be used for going into buildings, getting on horseback, or even figuratively getting on someone's back. *Mâter*, which means, according to Larousse, to set the mast of a ship, is used reflexively in Canada of an animal rearing on its hind legs: the Glossaire gives the example *son cheval s'est mâté*, and indicates the figurative sense of "kicking up a fuss."

Since the early settlers also had to adapt to a different climate and terrain from that of "la douce France" they borrowed names of the flora and fauna from the Indian languages that they found *in situ*, some of these names eventually finding their way into Standard French, such as carcajou *wolverine*, given as kwikatchew *blaireau* in the seventeenth century Montagnais dictionary of the Jesuit missionary Bonaventure Fabre (Montagnais is the Algonkian language spoken in Northern Québec and Labrador). The word caribou, borrowed from Micmac qalipu, originally a hunter's nickname meaning *snow-shoveller* (because the animal shovels the snow with its hooves to get at the mosses beneath) was subsequently borrowed into Canadian English and has, complete with its French spelling, become a standard English word.

Likewise the early settlers borrowed common Indian artefacts such as the snowshoe, which was strung with raw hide, called babiche from Micmac a'papi'j, with loss of initial syllable. The name of the large birch bark spoon or ladle of the Algonkians, called ēmihkwān in Cree, ēmikkwān in Ojibwa was also borrowed, again with loss of initial syllable to give CF micouenne, pronounced [mikwɐn] according to the *Glossaire*, although couenne *bacon rind* in SF is pronounced [kwan] and /a/ is the normal pronunciation for the spelling of *e* before a double nasal consonant (as in *femme*, for example). Père Potier, in fact recorded the word in his eighteenth century vocabulary as *micoine*, which shows that he heard [mikwan] and Pascal Poirier (1928:288) asserts that the word is pronounced *micouane*, indicating that the phonetic form in the Glossaire is a confusion stemming from the spelling. The Glossaire, for this item, gives "Grande cuiller en bois ou en écorce pour mettre le sucre en moule..." indicating its use in the maple sugar industry and then quite erroneously gives its etymology as "mot iroquois", a serious mistake since Iroquoian and Algonkian are two very distinct language families, with quite different cultures. Also borrowed were items of clothing such as Cree mitās *leggings*, which the Glossaire gives as Mitasse *guêtre de drap, de cuir, de peau de chevreuil*, and notes this too was recorded as early as 1743 by Père Potier. The word *mocassin*,

likewise borrowed from a language of the Algonkian family, has of course become standard in both French and English.

Since the waterways of Canada were the early highways, the movement of lumber by water was also an early occupation. In the early days the lumber would be made into a raft, called a *cage*, and this would then be loaded with cord wood or *bois de corde* so-called because it was measured by a cord. This is a SF usage, since it is listed in Larousse: corde, *ancienne mesure de bois de chauffage*, and is recorded as early as 1698 in Canada (Dulong 1957:56). The *cage*, complete with its load of firewood, would then be called a *cageux*, recorded as early as 1647 in the Archives of the Province of Québec. The term *cageu*, and its "corrected" form *cageur* was also used for the man who had the responsibility of manoeuvering the *cage* downstream, who was also known as *homme-de-cage* or *flotteur*. Later the word *raftsman* [rafman], borrowed from English, has come to be the common usage, but this is because of a cultural shift rather than a linguistic one: a *raft*, in the Canadian sense, is not the same as a *cage*.

A raft was, in fact, squared timber for the lumber trade bound together into an enormous floating surface that could be half a mile long and house up to 250 lumberjacks: it was not cord wood. This lumber trade developed in earnest during the Napoleonic wars (because of the Continental Policy that cut off Scandinavia as a source of timber for the British Isles), and most of the rafts were floated down the Ottawa River past Bytown (present day Ottawa) to Montréal, where it could be loaded on ocean going vessels which could not pass further up the Saint Lawrence River because of the Lachine Rapids. Moving such rafts, and later on loose pulpwood, by water, was called a drive, and this became *drave* in CF, and the man occupied in the trade a *draveur*, acceptable Canadianisms, especially since no such activity or trade is known in France.

The French revolution of 1789 led to all kinds of cultural changes which did not affect Canada, leaving ancient systems and customs intact in Canada, so that many words have survived which have become archaisms in France.

One of the most notable of these systems is that of weights and measures. In 1790 the French Assembly ordered the *Académie des Sciences* to organize a more coherent system, the result being the metric system. This change did not affect Canada, where the old measures and their names survived: *pinte* and *chopine* for liquids; *once* and *livre* for weights; *arpent*, *mille*, *verge*, *pied* and *pouce* for linear measures.

Remnants of the ancient seigneurial system also survived in Canada long after it had died out in France. The farmland of Québec, when viewed from the air, can be seen to be divided into strips just as in the medieval village. The

alignment of houses along these strips or *terres* is called a *rang*. Each *paroisse* (Canadian equivalent of the *commune*) contains one *rang* or more, and will normally have, clustered about a crossroads, a church, school and shops, and other services, which comprise the *village*. It can can be seen that all these words, for cultural reasons, have somewhat different senses from their counterparts in France.

Cultural developments, such as popular education, have also brought about differences of usage. As in English Canada and the U.S., *Première année* (= Grade One) is the beginning of schooling, not the end, as it is in France. The Industrial Revolution also turned Québec into a typical North American society from a material point of view, which nevertheless still enjoys institutions and traditions that go back to the Ancien Régime. As France becomes more Americanized, it begins to adopt words that had long been familiar in Canada, but sometimes with strange results. The word *gang*, which long predates gangster movies in Canada, and is listed in the *Glossaire* (1930), is feminine in Canada, but masculine in France; it had been used, of course, in the construction of the railways in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. And *cafétéria*, a Canadianism in use since the First World War, was masculine in Canada, but became feminine in France, where it has only been adopted since the Second World War. The difference here stems from the fact that the French borrowed the word directly from Spanish, with its Spanish gender, whereas it was borrowed into Quebecois from Mexican Spanish through the medium of American English.

EXERCISES

1. From the *Larousse Etymologique*, the *Glossaire*, the *OED*, or any other source, determine if possible the origin of the following Canadian measurements. Give the English meaning of each term.

   Weight: once, livre,
   Capacity: demiard, chopine, pinte, gallon, boisseau
   Linear: pouce, pied, verge, mille

2. The standard dictionaries of French mention only the Roman mile and the nautical mile under the heading *mille*, but they show a separate word *mile*. How is this pronounced in SF? Is this preferable to the Canadian use of *mille* for English *mile*? Would you consider the Canadian word *millage* (spelled *mileage* in the Glossaire) to be a gross anglicism? Look up *yard* in a SF dictionary: how is it pronounced? Would it be appropriate to insist that this word shold replace *verge* in Canada, since *verge* in the Canadian sense is not to be found in the normal SF dictionary? What are Rousseau's "six principles" (1971:00) and how far do your judgments correlate with them?

3. See if you can determine, from dictionaries, informants or other sources (a) what insects correspond to the names *moustique*, *maringouin*, *brûlot* and *mouche noire*, and (b) whether the SF word *cousin* is used for such *bestioles* in Canada. Why would such variegated vocabulary for flies develop among *les défricheurs de la terre* in Canada?

4. Determine the extended use in Canada of the following SF terms: *débarquer*, *greyer*, *amarrer*, *hâler*, *chavirer*, *capot*, *bord*. What do all these words have in common?

5. In France today one moves a *canoë* through the water by means of a *pagaie*, whereas in Canada a *canot* is propelled by an *aviron*. Champlain (1603 *Des Sauvages*...) and all the early writers in Canada use *canot* or *Canau* for the Indian birch bark canoe. What is the immediate origin of SF *canoë*? How is it pronounced, and why is it pronounced this way? What is the ultimate etymology? Should *canoë* be adopted in Canada as the "correct" word? Give the etymologies and SF meanings of *aviron* n.m., *rame* n.f.and *pagaie* n.f. From the *Glossaire* find the difference between French and Canadian usages.

6. What do the following *Canadianismes de bon aloi* mean: *abatis* n.m., *batture* n.f., *bordages* n.m., *bouscueil* n.m., *frasil* n.m. These words are all derivations: from what SF words are they derived? What realities of Canadian life do they relate to?