CARRIER'S FRENCH AND ENGLISH: "YOKED BY VIOLENCE TOGETHER"

Paula K. Kamenish

Today's Anglophone reader of Québécois literature is doubtless well-acquainted with, above all, two novels depicting French-Canadian folk and their traditions: *Maria Chapdelaine* and *La Guerre, Yes Sir! The first work has come to represent, through what Nicole Deschamps describes as the marketing and mani-pulation of Louis Hémon's novel, the rustic and idyllic life of rural Quebec. Deschamps' thesis, that Maria Chapdelaine* is a "texte terrorisé par le discours du pouvoir" (15), "une idéologie réactionnaire" (142), a myth deeply rooted in the French-Canadian mentality, finds support in Pierre Vallières' *White Niggers of America: The Precocious Autobiography of a Quebec "Terrorist."* Vallières upholds that a body of literature took up the mission of "inviting the French Canadians to remember their 'glorious' past, deliberately falsifying history so as to idealize the life of the Habitants under the French regime, making the words 'rural,' 'Catholic,' and 'French' synonymous and preaching the crusade of a 'return to the land' as the sole solution to the grave social problems of the French-Canadian nation" (29). Indeed, Hémon's Lac Saint-Jean novel includes a mysterious, omnipresent voice that calls to Maria, urging her to stay in the Province, the land of her forefathers, and to live as they lived, for in the Province nothing must die, nothing must change (182-83). Because of Deschamps' analysis, Hémon's text stands accused of complicity, in that the novel readily lends itself to the manipulation of a doctrine that oppresses its followers. Hémon's depiction of French Canadians at the outset of the twentieth century as pure, simple, uneducated and hardworking, fuelled a myth that was propagated by the powerful Roman Catholic Church and was encouraged by the ruling Anglo-Canadians. These patriarchal, paternalistic forces of Church and

State then set about consolidating their control over the economic and political development of the unruly province.

Deschamps' study uncovers the propaganda surrounding Hémon's colonists, "dont une première génération de lecteurs avaient fait de glorieux *colonisateurs*," when in actuality they were nothing more than "des colonisés" (13). And the colonized are, by Albert Memmi's definition, those oppressed creatures whose development is broken and who compromise by their defeat (*The Colonizer and the Colonized* 89). Critics of established political history such as Vallières tend to define the French-Canadian in these terms. Vallières finds nothing idyllic in the desperate and harsh living conditions forced upon his kinsmen in the name of tradition. Vallières' view of Québécois history (i.e., cheap labor was imported to the New World and exploited for over three centuries by imperialists) refutes the traditional nostalgic praise of what Memmi calls "the protective values" of French-Canadian society, or those native values and traditions, once of positive use in helping the dominated group to remain unified against its oppressors, that now limit a society (*Dominated Man* 82). Once the means of their protective segregation, the French language, Catholicism, the attachment to the land combined with an agrarian, rural isolation, gradually forced French Canadians into a submissive role, as they became defined by their "difference."

The second novel to represent the history of modern Quebec for Anglophone readers, a novel that, according to Pierre Hébert, is probably the most widely-read Québécois novel by Anglo-Canadians (102), is Roch Carrier's *La Guerre, Yes Sir!* Like most writers of the "révolution tranquille," Carrier attempts to strip away the falsified, idealized and harmful stereotypes of the French Canadian in order to present what George Fournier labels an "authentic" view of Québécois history (35). Carrier claims that his motivation is not political. He retells the story of Quebec by returning, as he puts it, "vers un passé non pas pour en faire l'éloge mais plutôt pour en faire la critique, puis, sur cette critique, s'appuyer pour faire un commentaire du présent et peut-être prévoir l'avenir" ("De Sainte-Justine" 270). Carrier sets himself an ambitious goal, explaining the present and predicting the future of Quebec. His method is to establish "des structures très solides" by recording the true spirit of his people (273). Gone is the antiquated edifying literature called for by the Abbé Casgrain, a

literature pure and chaste as the virginal mantle of the Québécois winter (368). Carrier does not glorify or euphemize the past, he includes the bestial manners, the rough language and violent nature of "authentic" Québécois folk. While his text undoubtedly questions the traditional values represented by the Church and the colonists' blind commitment to the land, does Carrier truly refute these "protective values" that weaken the political, economic and social power of French Canadians, or does the novelist, in his depiction of Québécois history, fall victim to the "idéal chimérique" of which Deschamps writes? Whether or not *La Guerre, Yes Sir!* presents a true portrait or another deformed vision of Quebec, Carrier's own words imply an ambiguity in his dedication to the theatrical version of his novel: ". . . ce petit roman qui est et qui n'est pas le Québec" (qtd. in Hébert 105).

Carrier's *Trilogie de l'âge sombre* records three generations of Québécois revolt by focusing on selected episodes in the lives of the members of a small isolated community. *La Guerre, Yes Sir!*, the first section of the work to be published, appeared in 1968 and was adapted shortly thereafter for both stage and screen. *La Guerre,* the central panel of what Carrier refers to as his triptych of Love, Death and Work, is a modern fable set in the 1940s. It relates a series of bloody events that occur in a rural community when seven English soldiers return the body of Anthyme Corriveau's son to its French-Canadian home. Chronologically speaking, the epic begins in *Floralie, Où es-tu?* the allegorical tale of the wedding night of Anthyme and his tainted bride, Floralie. The tenebrous forests of Quebec become a place of refuge and revelation for Floralie and the husband who beats and then hunts her through the night. In the third novel, *Il est là, le soleil,* Carrier records the failure of Philibert, the abused son of the village butcher and gravedigger, to survive Montreal's urban dangers. He revolts against the tyranny of his father, but finds no redemption in his escape to freedom.

The conjunctive theme of violence is traceable throughout the trilogy, from the beating and verbal abuse of Floralie to the life-long physical suffering of Philibert. Carrier's trilogy, however, is not infested with violence for violence's sake. In all three novels violent acts and abusive language fulfill essential roles in the creation of plot, character and theme. In each novel, acts of

violence become the outward manifestations of a character's revolt against oppression.

Nowhere is this theme so systematically explored as in *La Guerre, Yes Sir!* where one witnesses the very ritualization of violence as a temporarily satisfying means of revolt. By uncovering various displays of violence imbedded in the narration and in the language of the characters, one can begin to understand the passion and fury of the French Canadians whose cultural existence is threatened by the powerful "Anglais" who surround them.

René Girard's *Violence and the Sacred* provides a fascinating point of departure for the study of violence in *La Guerre.* Girard's work is an anthropologically based study of violence as it is ritualized to restore order through sacrifice. The sacrificial victim serves the all-important role of diverting a society's violence into proper channels so as to avoid the venting of violent impulses on its own members.

Literature is one means of ritualizing violence, in that it takes the form of ritual and redirects the violent impulse. The written text distances the violent act from the reader, but, at the same time, allows participation and the resulting catharsis that only the witnessing of a blood sacrifice can offer to the human animal. This is because, as Robert Penn Warren explains in the *American Scholar* Symposium on "Violence in Literature," when one puts violence into words, it becomes an object, it becomes ritualized because it is outside the event. The author of a violent scene is "indulging his appetite for violence through ritualization, and indulging yours through the use of ritualization too. It's a way of knowing—and in the right context, of absolving" (488). Ritual absolves. Writing violence and reading violence quells the urge because the text serves as a surrogate victim.

This is not to imply that Carrier's motivation for writing *La Guerre* is to find an outlet for his impulses toward violence. In René Dionne's study of *La Guerre,* the novelist is described as "un homme doux" who confesses: "Maintenant que ce livre est fait, je m'étonne de l'avoir fait. Parce qu'il contient une violence dans le langage et dans l'action que je n'ai pas moi-même, mais qui nous appartient" (280). The unspecified "nous" leaves one to wonder if Carrier is defining a Québécois trait or a general human characteristic. Carrier's following justification of his abundant use of the

language of violence suggests an answer: "Le sacré, par exemple, dont personnellement je n'use pas, que je n'ai jamais entendu dans ma famille, j'en fais grand usage dans le livre, parce qu'il m'apparaît comme la première affirmation d'une conscience individuelle. La structure syntaxique du blasphème raconte bien notre histoire, le flou de notre expression, le piétinement de la pensée et de la vie . . ." (Dionne 280 n.13). The novelist associates the violent language of abuse and blasphemy with the French-Canadian consciousness. In some ways, the syntactic mishandling of language in *La Guerre, Yes Sir!* is a form of revolt against the mother tongue, the language of the colonists' first oppressors. But, ironically, the French language is also a linguistic fact that unites them against the more recent Anglophone aggression. In this respect, it serves as a "protective value," but proves to be a dangerous suit of armour that imprisons as it protects.

Carrier's novel suggests that linguistic expressions of violence loosen the restraints imposed by those protective values represented by the French language. Judging from specific examples, the language of violence in Carrier's *La Guerre* would shake the very foundations of the Academie Française. From the mouths of the villagers it is the language of blasphemy in a Roman Catholic community. Sometimes humourous and playful, sometimes abusive, they never tire of their litanies of "ce baptême-là" (84), "cette tabernacle de guerre" (17), "calice d'hostie" (18), "hostie de mule" (84), "vieille pipe de Christ" (71), ou "merde de Christ" (118). *La Guerre, Yes Sir!* is likewise punctuated with violent threats reinforced by aggressive behaviour. The narration reveals what at first glance appears to be a world of spiteful cruelty, of the verbal and physical abuse of the weak by the powerful. But this neat division between oppressor and oppressed does not account for the complexity of the violence witnessed.

The first reference to violence in the novel is provided by the title, *La Guerre, Yes Sir!* Carrier originally entitled his text *La Nuit blanche,* but he was persuaded by Jacques Hébert to invent a more stirring title (Dorion 32). After numerous efforts he appropriately chose to emphasize the two most influential elements in his text, namely the English and their war. "Yes Sir!" confirms

the English domination, while it hammers out a reminder of military submission by the cadence of its one-syllable sharpness.

Ironically, "Yes Sir!" is not the exclamatory affirmation that it would appear. Carrier's French Canadians exhibit very strong feelings of opposition to the European war. In their view it is the war of the "big guys." An unnamed employee at the train station sums up this opinion:

> Ils sont tous semblables: les Allemands, les Anglais, les Français, les Russes, les Chinois, les Japons; ils se ressemblent tellement qu'ils doivent porter des costumes différents pour se distinguer avant de se lancer les grenades. Ils sont des gros qui veulent rester gros. . . . C'est pourquoi je pense que cette guerre, c'est la guerre des gros contre les petits. Corriveau est mort. Les petits meurent. Les gros sont éternels. (29)

The employee has unknowingly identified the colonial imperialists, who as "les gros," form one homologous mass of menace.

The British, the most immediate oppressors of the community, are held responsible for sending French-Canadian boys to die. Arthur, who takes refuge in Amélie's bed while her husband fights in Europe, refuses to obey his conscription notice: "Je ne veux pas me faire déchirer la figure dans leur maudite guerre. Est-ce qu'ils nous ont demandé si nous la voulions, cette maudite guerre? Non. Mais quand ils ont besoin de bras pour la faire, cette maudite guerre, alors là, ils nous aiment bien" (13). When Bérubé complains that his new wife, the anglophone prostitute Molly, sleeps too much, he echoes Arthur's observation: "Ces crucifix d'-Anglais dorment tout le temps. C'est pour ça qu'ils ont des petites familles. Et quand les Anglais font une guerre, ils viennent chercher les Canadiens français" (110).

The Corriveau home, isolated from the world by fields of snow, becomes a microcosm of the Province of Quebec. Under the watchful eyes of Corriveau's English escorts, it becomes the perfect setting for a confrontation of two eternal enemies. The close quarters of a small house surrounded by snow allow for a heightened sense of the potential fatality in the opposition of the oppressor and the oppressed. The wake draws the community together, concentrating and distilling the tensions that will eventually explode in violent behaviour. During the course of the

night-long vigil the reader discovers that all the villagers have been mutilated by the war in some way, if not physically, then mentally or spiritually. Unable to rid themselves of the tyranny under which they must suffer, they turn against one another. Or, as in the case of Joseph and Henri, they mutilate themselves. Finally, they join forces and channel their aggression to attack the company of English soldiers guarding Corriveau's coffin.

The most moving portrayal of violence against one's brother takes place in the beating and humiliation of Arsène by the French-Canadian soldier Bérubé. Bérubé, who serves as a latrine cleaner in the English army, already exhibits his violent nature when he beats, bites and abandons his bride in the snow on their way from the train station. Bérubé's aggressive behaviour can be explained by the frustrations and humiliations he suffers at the hands of others. Unable to turn on his military leaders who degrade him, powerless against the Church that has instilled in him a fear of hell so strong that he must ask Molly to marry him before he can make love to her, he displaces his aggressive feeling to a convenient victim. Girard documents this phenomenon: "When unappeased, violence seeks and always finds a surrogate victim. The creature that excited its fury is abruptly replaced by another, chosen only because it is vulnerable and close at hand" (2). Memmi offers another motivation for this behaviour in "Are the French Canadians Colonized?" in which he professes that "any community seeking independence must also *wage war on itself*." The colonized must denounce "the structure of their own institutions, their families and their scale of values" because these native values and traditions "become limiting and have to be discarded" (*Dominated Man* 82). But, surprisingly, Bérubé incorporates what might be interpreted as deep-seated cultural traditions in his attack on his Québécois victim.

The scene in question begins and ends in bloodshed. Arsène accidently breaks a glass and, in doing so, he cuts Arthur's cheek. The villagers encircle Arthur like flies, fascinated by the sight of so much blood from such a small wound. The blood inspires Arsène to go to war:

> Il me semble qu'avoir à ses pieds un Allemand qui perd tout son sang de maudit Allemand, cela doit satisfaire un homme. Mais il paraît que nos soldats ne voient pas les Allemands quand ils perdent leur sang. Nos soldats lancent des petits

> coups de fusil, puis ils se cachent aussitôt, pissant dans leurs culottes de peur d'avoir attrapé un Allemand. . . . (76-77)

A threatening voice answers from upstairs: "Fermez vos grandes gueules" (77). Bérubé descends and grabs Arsène with such force that he rips his shirt. He repeatedly slaps his victim while he threatens: "Calice de ciboire d'hostie! Christ en bicyclette sur son Calvaire! Tu trouves qu'on s'amuse à la guerre? Gros tas de merde debout! La guerre est drôle? Je vais te faire comprendre ce qu'est la guerre. Tu vas rire" (77-78).

With kicks and well-aimed punches Bérubé brutally forces Arsène to don layers of coats and to dance with the scantily dressed Molly on his shoulders. The sweat pours down Arsène's body as he marches and sways to the rhythm of his tormentor's commands and flinches at each impact. No one can stop the prolonged, humiliating torture of the victim. When a bystander tries to intervene he is silenced by a fist in his face. More blood flows. The villagers, no longer having the courage to interfere, become accomplices: "Pour ne pas se sentir lâches, ils essayaient de s'amuser et réussissaient à rire comme jamais ils n'avaient ri dans leur vie" (87). Through its nervous laughter the entire community participates in the sacrifice, combining humour with violence. The scene takes on a festive, party-like air, suggesting a village carnival. With the complicity of the onlookers, Bérubé continues to hit his little soldier, spits in his face, boxes his ears, punches him in the stomach. The ritual fills thirteen pages of the text. Finally, at the point at which the reader's sensibilities are numbed by the proliferation of violence, Arsène is stripped naked and thrown into the snow. The ritual beating thus ends with Arsène's christening in the purity of the regenerative snow, a frozen sacramental water. Arsène undergoes a naked rebirth into the community, for he reunites with his tormentors in the subsequent snow battle with the English.

The ritualized violence of this scene exhibits some of the characteristics of what Girard describes as the "festival." In most societies the festival allows the deliberate violation of laws, such as those governing social hierarchy and sexuality (119). Julia Kristeva concurs, noting that "the carnival challenges God, authority and social law; in so far as it is dialogical, it is rebellious" (49). Furthermore, Mikhail Bakhtin's research reveals that as part of

both French and Spanish *Corpus Cristi* religious processions, certain sacrilegious aspects became consecrated by tradition. For example, there were "extremely free, grotesque images of the body," including a monster combining cosmic, animal, and human features, with "the Babylonian harlot astride the monster" (229-230). Arsène personifies the substitute king or "king of fools" in a forced dance, complete with the chanting of abusive language and crowned with the erotic English prostitute. The "king of fools" is nothing more than a victim to be sacrificed at the end of the ceremony.

Bakhtin, in his study of carnivalesque elements in Rabelais, points out that thrashing and abuse are not necessarily personal chastisement, but can be symbolic actions directed at something on a higher level, at "the king," "the oppressor:"

> In such a system the king is the clown. He is elected by all the people and is mocked by all the people. He is abused and beaten when the time of his reign is over, just as the carnival dummy of winter or the dying year is mocked, beaten, torn to pieces, burned, or drowned even in our time. They are "gay monsters." The clown was first disguised as a king, but once his reign had come to an end his costume was changed, "travestied," to turn him once more into a clown. The abuse and thrashing are equivalent to a change of costume, to a metamorphosis. Abuse reveals the other, true face of the abused, it tears off his disguise and mask. It is the king's uncrowning. . . . But in this system death is followed by regeneration, by the new year, new youth, and a new spring. (197-98)

Arsène is dressed in layers of coats, the robes of the king. Mockery and thrashing lead to his uncrowning, his disrobing, being stripped of coats.

Arsène receives the beating that Bérubé would like to give to the sergeant, or to the entire English army. The sacrificial substitution of Arsène for the intended victims implies a degree of unconscious confusion, yet the tormentor must seem to conceal the fact of this displacement of aggression without losing sight of the original object of violence. Girard points out that without that underlying awareness, the sacrifice loses all efficacy (5). Fortunately, at the conclusion of the sacrifice, the appearance of the English soldiers reminds the crowd of the true object of their

violence. This, however, only muddles Bérubé, whose urge to violence is not allowed to be satisfied. When he finally gets his chance to show "à ces Anglais ce qu'un Canadien français portait au bout du poing" (108), he is transformed into an obedient soldier with the sergeant's "Atten. . .tion!" Again, instead of venting his frustrations on the true object of his hatred, he is commanded to attack his fellow villagers, once more serving as mere substitute victims in his revolt. According to Girard, this is one of the qualities that lends violence its particular terror, "the strange propensity to seize upon the surrogate victims, to actually conspire with the enemy and at the right moment toss him a morsel. . ." (4). As a result of his obedient acquiescence, the French-Canadian community rejects Bérubé. His keen penchant for violence makes him a man of confused loyalties. The French Canadians consider him a traitor, the English refuse to mix with his kind.

Moreover, Bérubé is the key to the novel's oppressor-victim schema of displaced aggression which describes the English-French relationship and its effect on the members of the Québécois community. The pattern of subjugation takes the following form: the sergeant rules Bérubé, who in turn attacks Molly and Arsène. Arsène repeatedly abuses his son, Philibert. Thus, the English overpowers the French soldier, the male subjugates the female, the military overcomes the civilian and the parent beats the child. It is noteworthy that in the role of the male ruling the female, Bérubé also acts out his dream of the Québécois vanquishing the English, for Molly is his "English" bride. On the other hand, when Bérubé attacks Arsène, the aggressor ironically defends the (English) Canadian army, whose reputation as a valiant fighting corps is questioned by the French-Canadian gravedigger. Soon thereafter, Bérubé essentially joins forces with the English, rejecting his heritage in his assault on his kinsmen. This rejection of his heritage, however, is not the type of denunciation called for by Memmi, for the goal is not the same. Bérubé does not revolt against the values of his community with an eye to strengthening the position of his fellow colonized and overcoming their colonizers. Such ideals do not preoccupy Bérubé. His Pavlovian response to the sergeant's command is a trained reflex, an instinctual concern for his own survival.

Carrier proves that violence is contagious. It spreads and colors all it touches as does its most obvious manifestation, blood.

The very fluidity of blood signals its ability to spill easily and diffuse the fascination and attraction that the human animal finds in an act of violence.

The interminable sequence of violence in *La Guerre* begins in the opening lines of the novel with Joseph's drastic attempt to escape the war. In order to avoid being blown to bits and "made into jam" as was young Corriveau, Joseph's fear leads him to chop off his left hand with an axe. His self-mutilation is the first blood sacrifice the reader witnesses. The first page of Carrier's novel presents the cold and determined severing of the farmer's hand in descriptive detail. As the blood drowns his hand where it falls on the snow, Joseph breaks into a fit of laughter at having finally freed himself from the fear that has haunted him for months.

A later vignette which continues the story of Joseph, describes an enthusiastic game of hockey played by a group of youngsters. Madame Joseph strolls by and remarks to herself how the children fight over the object they use as a puck, "probablement un crottin de cheval gelé" (30). Gradually, the identity of the object is revealed to her and she sets off swinging fists and sticks to beat the children away so as to retrieve her husband's hand. As soon as the reader has begun to recover from the horror of the scene, Madame Joseph returns home to scold her husband. She insists that Joseph thank her for saving his hand because the children might have broken it. To her nagging, her husband finally answers: "Que veux-tu faire de ma main? De la soupe?" (33). Even with this touch of macabre humour the violence does not end. Madame Joseph, in turn, whistles to call the dog who comes running to the door. She tosses the hand into the snow and the reader watches as the hungry animal leaps upon its supper with satisfaction. The dog concludes the ritual of the sacrifice by devouring the sacrificial victim, or rather a part of him.

Joseph's bloody act of revolt perhaps prevents him from having to serve in a foreign war, but, according to his wife, he pays for his freedom with his masculinity. She cannot accept a cowardly husband who cuts off his own hand. In her mind, the act is equated with emasculation. She laments to her friends: "Vous mariez un homme et vous vous apercevez que vous couchez avec un infirme. Dans mon lit qu'est-ce que mon Joseph fera avec son moignon?" (30). The sexual imagery is reinforced

with Joseph's declaration: "Qu'ils viennent me prendre, maintenant, pour faire leur Christ de guerre! Je leur couperai le zizoui, s'ils en ont un. Je leur couperai comme j'ai coupé ma main" (33).

Henri likewise undergoes a type of emasculation when he returns home as a deserter and agrees to take up residence in the attic. Arthur the draft-dodger has usurped Henri's role as husband to Amélie, fathering two sets of twins with another child on the way. Henri, a cowardly Agamemnon, is permitted to sleep in his wife's bed on alternate nights. He agrees to the arrangement, knowing that Amélie prefers her new "husband" Arthur. Henri's submission is a form of self-mutilation. He accepts his humiliation without a whimper. Nevertheless, as he hovers above the passionate couple, freezing in his icy attic, he nurses a powerful self-hatred, an emotion that can only lead to violence. Later, at the novel's climax, the mild-mannered Henri commits murder. Surprisingly, neither his wife nor her lover is the victim; instead, he kills one of the English soldiers, the metaphorically "proper" victim and true cause of his frustration.

While the rest of the villagers participate in the wake, Henri's nightmares lead him to believe that the coffin of Corriveau joins him in his lonely attic and an invisible hand pushes him to enter. Henri does not take up his rifle with thoughts of vengeance, but out of self-defense. In a fit of madness he rushes to the wake to escape his haunted isolation.

Meanwhile the English soldiers have just managed to empty the Corriveau home. Disgusted by the drunkenness, belching and farting of the French Canadians, the soldiers collect coats and hats and toss them onto the snow. After gathering its clothing, the crowd, led by Joseph waving his bloody stump, retaliates by attacking the soldiers with kicks and punches, a sequential reversal of the Bérubé-Arsène scene. When the women start grabbing the genitals of the soldiers, the sergeant commands: "Let's go, boys! Let's kill'em" (107). An intense fray ensues, comparable in magnitude to the carnivalesque beating that precedes it, but different in its clear division of the traditional enemy camps.

As an English soldier rushes toward him, Henri fires. The shooting ends the violent clash of disciplined English and rowdy French Canadians, a battle that bloodies the snow. The dead soldier becomes yet another blood sacrifice in the novel. He is the scapegoat who satisfies the villagers' underlying need for a vic-

tim to revenge the death of one of their sons. This familial characteristic of the community is explained by Corriveau's mother: "Tous les gens qui étaient ici étaient un peu ses parents et les jeunes étaient ses frères ou ses soeurs. . . . Même quand il arrive un malheur dans le village, nous aimons nous retrouver ensemble, nous nous partageons le malheur . . ." (103). With the surrogate victim's death all hostility ends. According to Girard's theory, the community requires a sacrifice in order to quell violence. He describes the phenomenon thus: "If left unappeased, violence will accumulate until it overflows its confines and floods the surrounding area. The role of sacrifice is to stem this rising tide of indiscriminate substitutions and redirect violence into 'proper' channels" (8).

The proper victim for the Québécois is not his vulnerable neighbor, but the ruling English. The soldiers represent a pair of threatening enemies against which the French-Canadian characters believe themselves to be powerless: "les Anglais" et "la maudite guerre." Girard remarks that all victims "bear a certain *resemblance* to the object they replace" (11). The young man dressed in the uniform of an English soldier represents all men of his nationality and profession. Carrier uses the character as a synecdoche, signifying all "maudits Anglais," and thus, by implication, all the "gros" who wage war and force the subjugated French Canadians to serve and die for a cause that is not theirs.

In portraying the two diverse cultures and their irreconcilable separation, Carrier foregrounds the obvious differences of religion and language that have been at the root of a Euro-based xenophobia for nearly five centuries. When the battles of the Old World are transplanted to a new hemisphere, the cultural racism of European nationalism takes on new meaning. It is no longer a struggle between two parallel and equal forces who clash over the ideologies of class, religion, politics and national boundaries. Instead, within the imperialist paradigm of the New World, the colonized must take up (sometimes enthusiastically, sometimes reluctantly) the banner of the mother country, if not to defend her politics, then at least to show support in those areas that have been exported and adapted to the new society, namely in the realm of culture, language and religion.

The English Protestants are puzzled and insulted by the piglike conduct of the Canadian Catholics at the ceremonious vigil:

"Ils avaient regardé d'un oeil impassible cette fête sauvage noyée de rires épais, de cidre et de lourdes tourtières mais le dégoût leur serrait les lèvres. Quelle sorte d'animaux étaient donc ces French Canadians?" (90). The English Protestants find the carnival-like atmosphere of the wake incongruous and repulsive within the confines of their own value and belief system. They draw the conclusion that the French have the manners of pigs in a pigpen: ". . . ils étaient de vrais porcs, ces French Canadians dont la civilisation consistait à boire, manger, péter, roter" (91). Anthyme attempts to justify the generous consumption of alcohol as he offers more bottles to his guests: "—Nous savons vivre, dit-il aux soldats qui sourirent parce qu'ils ne comprenaient pas" (94). Polite smiles mask the potentially dangerous fact that the soldiers will never comprehend the simplest explanations of French-Canadian customs.

Language becomes a second barrier between the two cultures. Effective communication is not possible and misunderstandings abound. When the soldiers deliver Corriveau's coffin to his home, his mother requests that they place it on the kitchen table. The soldiers do not understand. The parents restate their wishes. The soldiers do not move. Clearly, "les soldats Anglais ne comprenaient pas ce langage que les vieux parlaient. Ils savaient que c'était du French, mais ils en avaient rarement entendu" (45). The père Corriveau becomes frustrated and shakes his fist at the sergeant "qui se demandait pourquoi tout le monde ne parlait pas English comme lui" (46). This episode well illustrates the cultural phenomenon of linguistic deficiency. That is, from the point of view of the colonizers, the colonized people are devalued by their inability to converse in the official working language of the ruling class, the language of urban affairs. Memmi reveals the all-pervasive consequences of the problem: "So linguistic deficiency . . . is not only an ideological or purely cultural problem. A kind of circular movement is set up: economic and political domination gives rise to a cultural subordination, and this cultural subordination in its turn maintains the economic and political subdomination" (*Dominated Man* 76). Difference is automatically labelled deficiency within the ruling system.

Ironically, there are rare moments when the villagers realize the porous nature of the border that separates them from their enemy. In some ways the English guards are not unlike themsel-

ves. When praying at the coffin of their fallen countryman, the English soldiers surprise Anthyme: "Vieille pipe de Christ, . . . ces maudits protestants savent prier aussi bien que les Canadiens français" (112). Arsène simplifies the comparison for Philibert who has never before seen an Anglais: "Les Anglais, mon fils, sont des gens comme tout le monde: les hommes pissent debout et les femmes assises" (24). Especially when reduced to such straightforward and primitive images, it is clear that the villagers bear resemblance to the hated objects they represent. Consequently, it is not surprising that they mistakenly turn their anger and violence toward themselves and their neighbors as accessible substitute victims.

Although Arsène proves that men are physiologically similar the world over, cultural and linguistic differences, aggravated by the oppression of colonization, can become nevertheless adequate justification for aggressive acts. Violence can often be a way of revolting against what is in actuality too powerful to defeat (English rule), or what is beyond one's control (the English war), or beyond one's comprehension (the death of a young man). Unbridled violence is often the only recourse when fighting against omnipresent and omnipotent powers.

According to Franz Fanon "decolonization is always a violent phenomenon" (35), and *La Guerre, Yes Sir!* is essentially a novel of decolonization. Carrier exposes the dangerous "protective values" of commitment to the land and to the Church, the fallacies of tradition by which the French-Canadian people have been subordinated and dominated. The novel's attempt to reject the debilitating view of a peaceful, idyllic rural life, as portrayed in *Maria Chapdelaine,* successfully brings to light the violence, both linguistic and behavioural, that characterizes a colonial revolt. Beneath the enticing humour of the characters, Carrier imbeds a sense of shame. Seeing such a portrait of one's past causes the colonized to feel ashamed of their weaknesses and their submission. Marx said that shame is a revolutionary sentiment. Feeling this shame, all the Josephs, Henris, Bérubés, Corriveaus and Arsènes of modern Quebec seek to reject the role of the colonized, a role of acquiescence and complicity.

The fictional characters in Carrier's novel feel unable to overcome the social, religious, sexual, political and economic realities that frustrate them. The French Canadians' unending

combat against these forces unites them as a culturally homologous community. But their struggle also ties them to their oppressors. Memmi remarks that "the violence of the oppressed is a mere reflection of the violence of the oppressor. . . . [F]rom the bond between oppressor and oppressed there is no escape" (*Dominated Man* 3 n.1). The colonizer owes the fact of his existence as a species to the subservient existence of the colonized. Without his subjects, the ruler has no kingdom, and thus no function. Colonizers and colonized live in a mutually dependent relationship. The Québécois are inextricably linked to "les maudits Anglais," geographically, politically and socially. Even metaphysically, the two groups are united by their human mortality. The war, that figures so prominently in Carrier's title, does not distinguish between English and French Canadians when choosing victims. As Estelle Dansereau points out: "le cercueil de Corriveau, dans lequel Henri voit tout son village pénétrer, devient symbole de la mort, de cette mort qui, un jour, unifiera les québécois et les soldats anglais" (40). Carrier appropriately labelled this episode of his trilogy "Death," for it is death that ultimately dissolves the differences by treating equally all men. Like it or not, the contrastive cultures in *La Guerre, Yes Sir!* have been, to borrow from Samuel Johnson, yoked by violence together.

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