A Brief Cultural Linguistic and Literary History of the French-Canadian Immigrants and Their Descendents to New England

Part One – « Qui perde sa langue, perde sa foi »

The maxim "Qui perde sa langue, perde sa foi," meaning "The one who loses his (French) language, loses his faith," was a saying among the French-Canadian immigrants to New England in the decades after the American Civil War.[1] An analogous maxim was "La langue, gardienne de la foi," meaning: "The (French) language, the guardian of the faith."[2] In 1891, the historian Rev. Edouard Hamon, S.J., published a book entitled *Les Canadiens-Français de la Nouvelle-Angleterre*, meaning "The French-Canadians of New England," and he analyzed the use and preservation of the French language among the French-Canadian immigrants in chapters nine and ten, both entitled "La Question de la Nationalité," meaning, "The Question of Nationality."[3] The kernel of his argument is taken from a source that he himself did not cite, but quoted as follows: "Donc pour garder notre Religion, nous garderons aussi fidèlement notre langue française." The translation is: "Therefore, in order to guard our [Catholic] Religion, we shall guard also faithfully to our French language." Then, Rev. Hamon S.J., asked two rhetorical questions: "Is this reasoning justifiable? Is it really necessary to bestow to the preservation of the (French) language, an influence so considerable onto the conservation of the (Catholic) faith itself?" Before he gave his reasons, he stated his point of view: "I believe it, and all those who have seriously studied this question, will be of my opinion, I am sure of it."[4]

The once-celebrated historian Robert Rumilly gave a brief synopsis of the turning point in the life of Bishop Laflèche of Trois-Riveres, Quebec in his book, *Histoire des Franco-Américains*, (1958), Franco-Americans here meaning French-Canadian-Americans. In the Fall of 1854, Rev. Louis-François Laflèche was sent out of Canada to the United States by Bishop Taché for reasons of his health. Rev. Laflèche, as Rumilly wrote: "made the voyage by cart through Saint-Paul [Minnesota], Dubuque [Iowa], Chicago [Illinois], Detroit [Michigan], Buffalo and Niagara [New York]. He saw some families who lively retained their [Catholic] faith, their [French] language, their traditions, and secretly missed their country.

Other families where the parents stayed faithful, but where the children Americanized themselves and slid into religious indifference. Still others who, having changed their surnames – Boisvert became Greenwood, Lamontagne became Mountain – abandoned their [Catholic] faith." Rumilly noted the effect of the voyage on Rev. Laflèche: "This voyage produced in the missionary a profound impression which he would never forget. Rev. Laflèche, struck by the alliance – by the solidarity – of the French language and of the Catholic religion, believed the truth of the adage that one began to use – Que perde sa langue, perde sa foi – the one who loses his (French) language, loses his faith."[5] A local example of the influence of Rev. Laflèche in Connecticut is found in the

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[1] Robert Rumilly, *Histoire des Franco-Américains*, p. 33.
[2] Rumilly, *Histoire des Franco-Américains*, p. 106.
[3] Abbé Edouard Hamon S.J., *Les Canadiens-Français de la Nouvelle-Angleterre*. N.S. Hardy, Libraire Editeur, 1891. Rpt. Editions du 45 e Parallele Nord Inc., Montréal, Manchester, N.H., 1982, pp :74-87.
[4] Hamon, p. 75.
[5] Robert Rumilly, Histoire des Franco-Americains, p. 33.

words of Rev. J.E. Cartier of New Haven, Connecticut, during the eighth convention of the Canadiens-Americains du Connecticut, held in Bridgeport from October 10 to 11, 1893, where he spoke: "car lors de la benediction de la cathedrale de Hartford, Mgr Laflèche avait dit que la conservation de la langue était pour nos compatriotes le sine qua non de la conservation de la foi. »[6] The translation is: "During the benediction of the Cathedral in Hartford, Msgr. Laflèche said that the conservation of the (French) language for our compatriots is the sine qua non for the conservation of the (Catholic) faith.".

Other Items to Discuss:

The Danielson Affair
The Sentinellist Affair
Anecdote – met a retired priest in Worcester circa 2008 who told me that when he was in parochial school in the 1950s in Worcester, they were still drilling the maxim: "Qui perde sa langue, perde sa foi."

Bibliography of Noted Works both in French and English

Franco-American Novels, 19th Century
Jeanne la Fileuse (1878) - Honore Beaugrand
Un Revenant (1884) - Remi Tremblay
Les Deux Testaments (1888) - Anna Duval-Thibault

Franco-American Novels, 20th Century:

French:
Mirbah (serialized from 1910-1012) - Emma Dumas d. 1926 Hartford, Conn.
L'Innocent Victime (serialized 1936) - Adelard Lambert d. 1946
Sanatorium (1938)
Les Enfances de Fanny (1951) posthumously published Louis Dantin d. 1945
L'Heritage (1983) - Robert Perreault

English:
Jack Kerouac, the so-called "Lowell Novels" listed here in order of character age.
Visions of Gerard (1963) – a smattering of French in the dialogue of several characters, which is immediately translated into English
Doctor Sax (1959)
Maggie Cassidy (1959)

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[6] Baribault, Dr. Arthur O., Secrétaire du comité de Rédaction, *Histoire et Statiques des Canadiens-Américains du Connecticut, 1885-1898*, (Imprimerie de L'Opinion Publique : Worcester, Massachusetts, 1899), p. 163.
Normand J. Demers, Revolution in Quebec: An American Reflects on the Dynamic but Divided Society of his Heritage," Peter E. Randall Publisher, Portsmouth, New Hampshire, 1995.

The Town and the City (1950) – a review by Yvonne LeMaitre of Lowell, Mass., in Le Travailleur of Worcester, Mass., is a brilliant analysis of the novel. In her review, she identifies at least three Franco-American families that are referenced in the novel by other surnames.
Vanity of Dulouz (1968)
Grace Metalious: *No Adam in Eden* (1963) – Noticeable French syntax in the English dialogue among some of the characters.

More Historical Sources :

Canadiens-Américains du Connecticut, 1885-1898, (Imprimerie de L'Opinion Publique : Worcester, Massachusetts, 1899), pp : 61-2. It should be noted that there is no author or editor cited as the author on the title page of the book. However, on page 22 of the book, Dr. Arthur-O. Baribault of New Haven, cited himself as the author of the introduction, and after his name is the title "Secrétaire du comité de Rédaction" which translates into English as: "Secretary of the Editing Committee."

Rev. J.E. Cartier, eighth convention, Bridgeport, October 10-11, 1893, page 163 :
"car lors de la benediction de la cathedrale de Hartford, Mgr Lafleche avait dit que la conservation de la langue était pour nos compatriotes le sine qua non de la conservation de la foi. »

Abbé Edouard Hamon S.J., Les Canadiens-Français de la Nouvelle-Angleterre. N.S. Hardy, Libraire Editeur, 1891. Rpt. Editions du 45 e Parallele Nord Inc., Montréal, Manchester, N.H., 1982

Baribault, Dr. Arthur O., Secrétaire du comité de Rédaction, Histoire et Statiques des Canadiens-Américains du Connecticut, 1885-1898, (Imprimerie de L'Opinion Publique : Worcester, Massachusetts, 1899), pp : 61-2. It should be noted that there is no author or editor cited as the author on the title page of the book. However, on page 22 of the book, Dr. Arthur-O. Baribault of New Haven, cited himself as the author of the introduction, and after his name is the title "Secrétaire du comité de Rédaction" which translates into English as: "Secretary of the Editing Committee."

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