

Relational Bilingualism and the Prairie Imaginary: Rereading Martin Jérôme's *Souvenirs d'autrefois* (1916)

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.36348/sjhss.2025.v10i07.010>

| Received: 02.06.2025 | Accepted: 19.07.2025 | Published: 22.07.2025

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Abstract

This article revisits *Souvenirs d'autrefois* (1916) by Martin Jérôme, a little-known memoir written by a Métis politician and public servant in early twentieth-century Manitoba, Canada. Far from a nostalgic recollection, the text is analyzed here as a civic intervention, a political, cultural, and linguistic act that anticipates contemporary debates on multilingual coexistence and linguistic justice. To interpret Jérôme's work, the article introduces the concept of *relational bilingualism*, a framework that foregrounds language as a lived, asymmetrical, and historically embedded practice shaped by memory, place, and affect. Unlike institutional models based on legal symmetry, relational bilingualism emerges through negotiation, vulnerability, and community transmission. Through close reading and historical contextualization, the article positions Jérôme alongside other contemporaries such as Lionel Groulx, Donatien Frémont, Adrien-Gabriel Morice, and A.-H. de Trémaudan, mapping the intellectual and ideological field of francophone Western Canada. The final sections explore the enduring relevance of Jérôme's vision for present-day debates on official bilingualism, digital archives, education, and Métis media. Manitoba, often seen as peripheral, appears here as a microcosm of global struggles around memory, reconciliation, and linguistic pluralism. Comparative perspectives from postcolonial contexts such as Algeria, Lebanon, or New Zealand help frame Jérôme's narrative as part of a broader inquiry into how minoritized communities sustain language and identity in multilingual societies. By tracing the entanglements of language, land, and memory, this article argues that Jérôme's bilingual modernity is not only historically significant, but theoretically generative: it offers a grammar of relational belonging that resonates beyond Canada's borders.

Keywords: Métis Literature, Bilingualism, Manitoba, Martin Jérôme, Minority Modernity, Language Policy, Francophone Memory, Urban Geolinguistics.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Canadian Prairies are often imagined as vast, empty landscapes, silent witnesses to the nation's expansionist dreams. Yet beneath this surface lies a layered terrain of languages, memories, and struggles for recognition. At the intersection of Indigenous sovereignty, Francophone endurance, and Anglo-Canadian dominance, Manitoba in the early twentieth century offered not only a contested site of settlement, but also a crucible of cultural negotiation. Martin Jérôme's *Souvenirs d'autrefois* (1916), a memoir written by a Métis politician and public servant, captures this moment of transition with remarkable clarity and prescience.

Little known outside French-speaking scholarly circles, Jérôme's text is more than a collection of recollections. It is an act of civic authorship: part political commentary, part autobiographical reflection,

and part cultural testament. Published in Winnipeg amid debates about language rights and education, it offers a window into how memory, language, and identity were experienced and imagined by one of the key Francophone figures in early Manitoba politics. Although rarely studied in academic literature, Jérôme's contributions are acknowledged in broader historiographical works such as Jacqueline Blay's *Histoire du Manitoba français*, which situates him among the foundational voices of Francophone political culture in the province (Blay, 2016).

This article proposes the concept of relational bilingualism to interpret Jérôme's work. Unlike institutional bilingualism, often framed as the coexistence of two official languages within a neutral legal framework, relational bilingualism refers to the lived, dynamic, and often asymmetrical ways in which languages intersect in real communities. It foregrounds

bilingualism not as a state policy but as a mode of coexistence, shaped by historical violence, cultural intimacy, and political negotiation. In this view, language is not merely a tool of communication but a site of memory, resistance, and relation.

Relational bilingualism is particularly useful in analyzing *Souvenirs d'autrefois*, where the coexistence of French, English, and Indigenous presence is not imagined as harmonious or hierarchical, but as embedded within personal and collective histories. Jérôme's vision is rooted in place, in the evolving landscape of Winnipeg, the memory of Red River, the trauma of lost political battles, and the hope of a more inclusive future. His narrative offers a multilingual ethics of presence that resonates with current debates around reconciliation, immigration, and linguistic justice in Canada.

Beyond its local significance, Jérôme's text invites broader reflection on how multilingual memory operates in minoritized settings. As scholars from Assmann to Glissant have shown, memory is never neutral: it is mediated by institutions, inscribed in landscapes, and often contested. In Manitoba, memory has long been shaped by linguistic boundaries and the silences they produce. Jérôme's intervention, then, is not simply nostalgic: it is anticipatory. It gestures toward a future in which multilingual coexistence is not an accident of demography but a shared cultural horizon. While Manitoba may appear peripheral in global discussions on language policy and cultural coexistence, its unique history, rooted in Indigenous sovereignty, Francophone endurance, and Anglo-Canadian governance, offers a compelling microcosm of bilingual tension, cultural resilience, and pluralistic negotiation.

This article is divided into four parts. The first situates Martin Jérôme's life and work in the political and cultural context of early twentieth-century Manitoba, examining how his Métis identity informed his understanding of language and civic belonging. The second section analyzes *Souvenirs d'autrefois* as a form of counter-memory, offering insights into Winnipeg as an emerging metropolis shaped by immigration, conflict, and hope. The third part places Jérôme in dialogue with other contemporary thinkers—Donatien Frémont, Lionel Groulx, Adrien-Gabriel Morice, and A.-H. de Trémaudan—to map the broader intellectual field of Francophone prairie thought. The final section turns to the present moment, linking Jérôme's vision to contemporary debates around bilingualism in Manitoba, including the recent proposal to recognize the province officially as bilingual.

In retracing these threads, the article makes the case for understanding *Souvenirs d'autrefois* not as a relic of past struggles, but as a living archive of relational bilingualism, capable of informing contemporary

conversations on identity, education, and linguistic justice, not only in Canada, but wherever multilingual coexistence is at stake.

2. Martin Jérôme, Voice of Grounded Bilingualism

Martin Jérôme (1849–1936) lived and wrote from the interstices of power and memory, navigating a political, linguistic, and cultural terrain that few dared to name and fewer still chose to preserve. Born in Pembina (Dakota Territory, United States), raised in Red River, later active in Saint-Boniface and Saint-Pierre-Jolys, he served as a Member of the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba from 1888 to 1903 and subsequently as a federal immigration inspector based in Winnipeg. Although absent from dominant national historiographies, Jérôme's life traced a dense constellation of identities: Métis and francophone, legislator and bureaucrat, rural and urban, witness and participant in the making (and unmaking) of bilingual prairie life. He was neither mythologized like Riel nor canonized like Groulx, but he offers what those figures could not: a voice of practical bilingualism, lived from within, articulated without illusion.

In 1916, Jérôme published *Souvenirs d'autrefois*, a slender yet remarkable volume that resists easy classification. The book is part memoir, part civic reflection, and part cultural meditation. Its tone is lucid yet intimate, blending anecdotal narrative with observations of political and social change. Its structure, composed of loosely connected sketches, evokes not a triumphant autobiography but a dispersed archive of memory. This stylistic modesty—fragmentary, open-ended, non-linear—mirrors the fluid nature of personal and collective memory, and the condition of minoritarian experience in transition. The bilingual Métis subject does not chart a heroic ascent; rather, he quietly testifies to the erosion of cultural markers, the rearrangement of spaces, and the recoding of social meanings in early twentieth-century Manitoba.

The city of Winnipeg, in *Souvenirs d'autrefois*, emerges not as the inevitable apex of prairie progress, but as a layered and contested bilingual memoryscape. Far from celebratory, Jérôme's reflections on urban transformation are tinged with concern. He observes the dangers of cultural dilution as francophone and Métis identities are absorbed or overwritten by the machinery of Anglo-Canadian modernity. Rather than marveling at growth, he urges vigilance: « *je me fais un devoir de prendre les intérêts de mes compatriotes et empêcher, s'il est possible, que ces erreurs se répètent à l'avenir* » (Jérôme, 1916). The rapid urbanization and demographic growth of Winnipeg displace rather than unify. What Jérôme records is not simply development, but dislocation: francophone and Métis spaces overwritten by railways, banks, courts, and bureaucratic offices, often under the sign of English dominance. His gaze is

not nostalgic, but diagnostic, revealing the symptoms of erasure rather than mourning its inevitability.

This is perhaps where Jérôme's political imagination becomes most prescient. Reflecting on Métis identity in a moment of cultural anxiety, he writes: « *s'ils ont du sang français dans les veines, ils ont aussi du sang sauvage, et ils ne doivent pas avoir honte de le dire et de l'affirmer* » (Jérôme, 1916). This sentence condenses the lived condition of hybrid cultural life. Language and identity are not simply inherited, they are negotiated, porous, and shaped by institutional and symbolic forces. What Jérôme witnesses is not an idealized bilingualism but a relational bilingualism, one formed through daily coexistence, friction, and adaptation. As he portrays it, bilingualism is not a stable identity or legal status; it is a dynamic and vulnerable mode of living with and through difference.

Education figures centrally in his reflections, not in juridical terms, but as a site of intergenerational rupture. Writing just after the definitive abolition of French-language public schools in Manitoba, Jérôme laments not a legal decision, but a cultural silencing. While he does not mourn the past per se, he implicitly critiques the erasure of collective knowledge and the political ramifications of linguistic displacement. His concern is clear: without memory, there can be no continuity; without language, no rooted future.

Jérôme's role as a federal immigration official offers him unique insights into the linguistic and cultural navigation of newcomers. His perspective is at once empathetic and critical. Speaking against the assumption that French-Canadian and Métis cultures would simply vanish under the weight of progress, he denounces both internalized shame and structural exclusion: « *quelques-uns qui auraient eu la lâcheté de rougir de leur nationalité en se faisant passer pour un blanc pur... je leur conseille de ne pas oublier qu'ils ont aussi du sang sauvage* » (Jérôme, 1916). Here again, his political language anticipates current debates on language policy: bilingualism is not simply an individual capacity but a set of institutional affordances—or constraints—shaping what can be said, by whom, and in what tongue.

This ethic of lived, embodied bilingualism contrasts sharply with the ideological positions of Jérôme's contemporaries. Lionel Groulx, writing the same year as *Souvenirs*, would famously assert the primacy of historical continuity and “la survivance” as the anchor of French Canadian identity (Groulx, 1916; 1936). Donatien Frémont, in *Impressions de l'Ouest canadien* (1925), oscillates between admiration for French missionary zeal and subtle acceptance of Anglo-dominance as inevitable. In contrast, Jérôme does not argue for purity, permanence, or supremacy. He neither idealizes nor despairs. Instead, he testifies.

This testimonial voice positions Jérôme within what François Paré (1992) would later conceptualize as *la littérature de l'exiguïté*—a literature of constraint, of reduced cultural space, but also of unexpected density. His writing resonates, too, with Édouard Glissant's (1990) *Poétique de la Relation*, in that it refuses binary thinking and embraces a mode of cultural survival grounded in co-presence rather than conflict. Unlike the nationalist tropes of either resistance or capitulation, Jérôme's bilingualism is quiet but resolute, ambivalent but persistent.

Ultimately, *Souvenirs d'autrefois* is not a nostalgic document. It is a political artefact. It functions as a counter-archive; one that preserves traces of bilingual life not as heritage, but as relation, as unfinished encounter. In doing so, Jérôme reminds us that bilingualism in Manitoba was never merely a matter of legislative accommodation or symbolic tolerance. It was, and remains, a modality of survival, an ethic of proximity, and, perhaps, a model for intercultural modernity.

3. A Minor Modernity: Language, Territory, and Transmission

What Martin Jérôme sketches in *Souvenirs d'autrefois* is not simply a memoir of personal experiences, but a quiet theory of bilingual modernity, an epistemology grounded in place, memory, and cultural negotiation. His vision is one not of monumental politics, but of what we might call *minor modernity*: lived, negotiated, unfinished, and fundamentally relational. This modernity unfolds not through rupture, but through sedimentation, through the accumulation of small losses, silences, and adaptations that shape collective identity in marginal spaces.

Jérôme's reflections on language are neither abstract nor theoretical. For him, French is not merely a medium of expression, it is an inheritance, a marker of continuity, a cultural ligament. Yet it is also a fragile one. He observes how French survives in Manitoba not through institutional strength, but through habit, oral culture, and familial intimacy. “Il y a des mots qu'on ne lit plus dans les journaux, mais qu'on entend encore dans les cuisines” (Jérôme, 1916, p. 27). This sentence encapsulates the paradox of linguistic survivance: French persists where it is least visible, behind doors, around tables, in whispered prayers and lullabies. It is a language of proximity, not of prestige.

Education, in Jérôme's view, becomes the battleground of this proximity. He returns repeatedly to the school as a site where language is either transmitted or interrupted. “L'école n'est plus chez nous; elle parle anglais avec autorité, et le français, quand il paraît, a le ton d'un visiteur” (Jérôme, 1916, p. 29). The imagery is precise: French is not outlawed, but made alien. It becomes *the guest* in its own house. This alienation of

language mirrors the broader political marginalization of francophones and Métis in post-1890 Manitoba, following the infamous abolition of public funding for French-language education (Hébert, 2006). As Gabrielle Roy would later write in *La Détesse et l'enchantement* (1984), evoking her own childhood crossings into the city: « *Winnipeg, la capitale, [...] jamais ne nous reçut tout à fait autrement qu'en étrangères* ». This intimate feeling of foreignness within one's own province encapsulates a broader condition of cultural estrangement. In her words:

“When did I first become aware that I belonged, in my own country, to a species destined to be treated as inferior? Perhaps not during those many trips mother and I made across the Provencher Bridge, leaving behind our small French town to enter Winnipeg, the capital, which never quite received us as anything but strangers. That sense of foreignness, of stepping into the distant so close to home, was strangely pleasing to me as a child. I believe it opened my eyes, stirred my imagination, led me to observe.” (Roy, 1984, pp. 31–32, trans. by the author)

Roy's introspection mirrors Jérôme's concern: that language loss is not merely a policy outcome, but a lived estrangement, a crossing over into symbolic foreignness within familiar geographies.

At the heart of this transformation is the loss of transmission, not only of words, but of worldview. Jérôme's descriptions are suffused with a sense of what Raymond Williams once called “structures of feeling”: the textures of shared life that resist codification but determine the atmosphere of a culture. Jérôme evokes family scenes, religious rituals, the passing of keepsakes, *souvenirs*, both material and emotional. Each is a thread in a fragile network of cultural persistence. When these threads are cut, not through violence but through neglect, the loss is not only linguistic but ontological.

This is particularly evident in his treatment of objects: “Un rosaire, un vieux dictionnaire, une médaille de Saint-Benoît... voilà des choses qui portent plus de mémoire que nos discours” (Jérôme, 1916, p. 36). Here, the objects are not passive relics but active agents of memory. They condense time, belief, and lineage. This phenomenology of the *souvenir* is not nostalgic: it is political. It affirms that memory is not always narrative; it can be tactile, embodied, fragmented. Jérôme's work thus participates in a poetics of the ordinary, where resistance is not declared, but carried.

Territory, for Jérôme, is never neutral. He walks, observes, names. The river, the school, the cemetery, the railway, all become symbols of contested space. He writes, “Le sol même change de nom, de langue, de propriétaire. Et parfois on marche sur des

souvenirs sans le savoir” (Jérôme, 1916, p. 41). This palimpsest of space—written, overwritten, and erased—becomes a metaphor for Métis and francophone history in the Prairies. The land remembers what the state forgets. This tension between presence and erasure finds a haunting echo decades later in Maurice Chaillot, a Franco-Manitoban figure portrayed in Pierre Perrault's *Un pays sans bon sens!* (1970). In the film, Chaillot recounts his shame when his mother spoke French to him on the bus, and his sense of estrangement upon returning to Winnipeg from Paris, where he had sought refuge. “Even the trees seemed hostile,” he confesses, unable to call Winnipeg home. For Chaillot as for Jérôme, the land becomes not only contested, but affectively fractured, a place where language, identity, and memory remain unsettled, both inhabited and disavowed (Trudel, 1981, p. 64).

In this, Jérôme's reflections resonate with later theorists of space and identity. His insistence on the entanglement of language and territory anticipates Glissant's conception of *poétique de la relation*, where language is never merely local but always implicated in a geography of contact and displacement (Glissant, 1990). Likewise, his emphasis on smallness, invisibility, and persistence echoes Paré's *littératures de l'exigüité*—those literatures born in constrained contexts, whose power lies not in their scale but in their density (Paré, 1992).

Jérôme's modernity is thus minor not in the sense of insignificance, but in the Deleuzian sense: it deterritorializes dominant forms, refuses totalization, and speaks from within interstices. His writing rejects the grand narrative of Western Canadian progress, yet also distances itself from the militant nationalism of his contemporaries. Groulx, for instance, framed francophone modernity in terms of Catholic solidarity and cultural homogeneity (Groulx, 1936). For him, the West was a lost battleground, a site of failure. Frémont, though less rigid, similarly cast the West as a laboratory of francophone perseverance, albeit often from a clerical and patriarchal vantage point (Frémont, 1925).

By contrast, Jérôme does not mourn the loss of dominion, but testifies to the persistence of relation. His bilingualism is not heroic; it is daily. It is not about symbolic parity, but about survival with dignity. He does not seek to restore a vanished order, but to preserve the traces that remain: “Il y a des voix qu'on entend encore dans le vent, mais il faut s'arrêter longtemps pour les comprendre” (Jérôme, 1916, p. 44).

This listening, this ethics of attention, is perhaps the most radical aspect of Jérôme's political imagination. It suggests that bilingual modernity is not something to be legislated into being, but something to be remembered, re-heard, and re-activated. It is not a promise of equilibrium, but a practice of resonance. And

that resonance, however faint, might still shape the future of a province that claims today to rediscover its bilingual heritage.

To describe this phenomenon, this article adopts the term *relational bilingualism*. Yet this concept deserves some clarification. Unlike *lived bilingualism*, which emphasizes daily language practice, or *intercomprehension*, which highlights mutual intelligibility between speakers, *relational bilingualism* insists on the uneven, situated, and affectively charged nature of bilingual experience in contexts shaped by asymmetry and historical trauma. It also departs from normative frameworks of *linguistic justice* (Van Parijs, 2011; Skutnabb-Kangas, 2021) that often frame language rights in abstract or juridical terms. Instead, *relational bilingualism* foregrounds the entanglement of memory, land, and identity—how language survives not because it is legislated, but because it is shared, carried, and sometimes whispered through generations. It is not an equilibrium to be reached, but a fragile cohabitation to be practiced. Jérôme's work, in this sense, does not simply advocate for bilingualism; it enacts its complexity.

4. Debates of the Time: Groulx, Frémont, Morice, Trémaudan

To fully appreciate Martin Jérôme's stance, we must position him among his contemporaries who articulated divergent visions of francophone presence in western Canada. These voices—Lionel Groulx, Donatien Frémont, Adrien-Gabriel Morice, and Auguste-Henri de Trémaudan—form a constellation of perspectives, enabling us to discern the distinctiveness of Jérôme's bilingual modernity.

4.1 Lionel Groulx: Centralizing Nationalism and Québec Diaspora

Lionel Groulx, a prominent Québécois priest, historian, and nationalist, played a central role in shaping the ideology of *clérico-nationalisme* in early 20th-century Quebec. In *L'enseignement français au Canada. Tome II: Les écoles des minorités* (1931), he offers a sweeping account of French-language education across Canada, reflecting deeply on how minority francophone communities—from Ontario to the West—could preserve their identity in the face of English dominance. Groulx frames the Western Francophone experience as a story of transmission rather than transformation. His concern lies primarily with preserving Québec's linguistic and moral legacy through Catholic schooling. He viewed French-Canadian identity as both spiritual and national, shaped through institutions: schools, churches, and aligned civic organizations. For him, minorities must mirror Québec's example to survive. Unlike Jérôme, who wrote from the fragile ground of bilingual lived experience, Groulx sought to export a normative Québécois bilingualism, one grounded in centralizing ideology rather than local hybridity. As

Groulx himself stated: “If there is no *volonté* to affirm the cultural and historical entity, the nation does not exist... The nation is therefore objective and subjective”—a formulation that further underscores his belief in a Québec-centered, institutionalized model of nationhood, one that contrasts starkly with Jérôme's image of relational bilingualism rooted in negotiation and local coexistence.

This philosophy contrasts sharply with relational bilingualism. For Groulx, bilingual education was a defensive strategy, a replication of Québec models, and a reaffirmation of cultural purity. According to his vision, minorities should resist assimilation by affirming a non-negotiable heritage, rather than engaging in intercultural dialogue.

In this light, the relationship between Jérôme and Groulx becomes clearer. Where Groulx insisted on cultural transmission and preservation from Quebec outward, Jérôme emphasized local negotiation, memory, and everyday coexistence. Groulx's schools were institutions to be built; Jérôme's bilingual world was already inhabited, albeit precariously. In one sense, Groulx's bilingual nationalism imposed norms; Jérôme's imposed an ethic of relation.

Where Groulx articulated a normative and centralizing vision of bilingualism anchored in Québec's religious and cultural institutions, Donatien Frémont offered a different, yet related, gaze: that of the traveling intellectual who sought to document the Francophone West from a position of external admiration rather than intimate inhabitation. If Groulx sought to export Québec's nationalist ideals westward, Frémont preferred to observe and narrate the region as a picturesque and moral frontier. Yet both, in distinct ways, positioned themselves as interpreters of the West—rather than as voices emerging from within its Métis and bilingual fabric.

4.2 Donatien Frémont: Missionary Gaze with Paternalist Undertones

Donatien Frémont's *Les Français dans l'Ouest canadien* (1959) offers a sweeping historical overview of French presence in the Prairies from the mid-19th century to the 1950s. While published several decades after Martin Jérôme's *Souvenirs d'autrefois* (1916), many of Frémont's reflections were originally drafted in the 1920s and 1930s, in articles and editorials for French-language newspapers. This temporal proximity allows for a partial comparative reading: both authors were contemporaries shaped by the same geopolitical landscape, though their social positions and rhetorical aims diverged sharply.

Frémont, a French-born journalist and later Conservative MP in Saskatchewan, narrates the West less as a participant than as a chronicler. His

perspective—shaped by missionary networks, Euro-Canadian nationalism, and institutional Catholicism—foregrounds the achievements of francophone settlers, clergy, and educators, often through a lens of civilizational progress. Yet in doing so, he sidelines the complexity of Métis bilingual experience and frames the West as a cultural frontier to be secured and uplifted by imported ideals.

His tone oscillates between admiration and paternalism. Where Jérôme writes from within a fragile and contested linguistic terrain, Frémont tends to project a vertical model of cultural transmission, whereby French identity in the West is measured against a normative Québécois centre. Métis histories are rarely explored in depth, and when they appear, they are frequently portrayed as vestiges of a vanishing era rather than as active interlocutors in the shaping of bilingual modernity.

The contrast is instructive: Jérôme's prose enacts relational bilingualism through hybrid syntax and situated testimony. Frémont, by contrast, offers what might be called a missionary gaze, oriented more toward documentation and affirmation than introspection or critique. In this sense, his writing contributes to the institutionalization of French identity in the West, but also reveals the ideological limits of nationalist historiography in accommodating plural and Indigenous voices.

4.3 Adrien-Gabriel Morice: A Clerical and Civilizing Narrative

Adrien-Gabriel Morice, an Oblate missionary priest and self-taught ethnographer, occupies a paradoxical place in the foundational narratives of Western Canada. His 1908 work *Aux sources de l'histoire manitobaine* is both a historical account and an ecclesiastical manifesto, aimed at affirming the central role of the Catholic Church in shaping Manitoba's political and cultural identity. Morice articulates a hierarchical and teleological vision of history, in which European settlers (guided by religious institutions) are portrayed as bringing order, civilization, and moral clarity to a land deemed incomplete without them. His narrative aligns with a broader clerical tradition where history is interpreted as salvation, and spiritual conversion is conflated with cultural modernization.

In Morice's view, Franco-Catholic identity in the West is valuable only insofar as it remains loyal to Québécois models, rooted in piety, clerical authority, and monarchical values. He laments what he perceives as the "degeneration" of the Métis francophones, whose drifting away from traditional faith and family structures represents, for him, a loss of moral grounding. The Métis are rarely granted narrative agency; rather, they are observed with a distant compassion or anthropological curiosity. Their multilingual, syncretic culture is reduced

to a transitional phase toward assimilation, rather than recognized as a distinct and legitimate expression of Indigenous and francophone entanglement.

While Morice's writings are often cited for their archival richness, they are permeated with a deep paternalism. He claims authority not only over spiritual life but over collective memory itself. Where Jérôme's Winnipeg is lived and contested (defined by rupture, translation, and spatial intimacy), Morice offers a providentialist account, wherein events unfold within a divine logic of Catholic progress. His emphasis on the Church's role in "founding" the province erases the linguistic tensions, Métis resistances, and political contradictions of the time.

In comparison to Jérôme, Morice represents an institutional historiography aligned with clerical and colonial interests. His voice is authoritative; his memory is selective. Where Jérôme writes with the fragility of the minoritized, Morice asserts with the certainty of the centre. Their contrast reveals the gap between institutional memory and lived memory: the former seeks to preserve legitimacy, the latter to articulate wounded belonging. Morice's account thus reflects not only a missionary gaze, but a project of historical enclosure, one that Jérôme implicitly contests through his grounded and relational poetics of space, loss, and language.

4.4 A.-H. de Trémaudan: The Metaphysics of Linguistic Destiny

A.-H. de Trémaudan's contribution to Francophone discourse in Western Canada is marked by an almost metaphysical elevation of language. His 1916 address, *Pourquoi nous parlons français*, delivered under the auspices of the Association d'éducation des Canadiens-français du Manitoba, frames the French language not simply as a communicative tool, but as the essential bearer of cultural permanence and historical fidelity. Trémaudan insists that to speak French is to affirm one's lineage, to anchor oneself in the continuity of a nation that transcends geography. "La langue française," he proclaims, "nous relie à nos morts, à nos martyrs, à nos ancêtres." This linguistic essentialism differs markedly from Jérôme's more relational and community-embedded conception of bilingualism.

Delivered during the tumultuous years following the Manitoba Schools Question, Trémaudan's speech fuses Catholic doctrine, patriotic fervour, and linguistic identity into a unified moral imperative. French becomes the language of resistance, but also of divine mission. His rhetoric evokes the spiritual burden of cultural preservation, a burden that falls, implicitly, on the shoulders of the Franco-Catholic elite. The West, in this view, is not a space of negotiation or plurality, but of recovery and reconquest. He calls upon young

francophones to remain vigilant against assimilation, which he likens to a betrayal of both blood and belief.

In contrast to Martin Jérôme's inclusive and hybridized ethos, Trémaudan's vision is exclusionary and hierarchical. Métis identity is barely acknowledged, and bilingualism appears as a temporary compromise rather than a durable condition. Nevertheless, his writings provide critical insight into the ideological environment of 1910s Manitoba, and help delineate the

conceptual distance between institutional Catholic nationalism and grassroots Métis civic bilingualism.

These different poetic orientations do not oppose one another but coexist within a fragile ecology of cultural transmission. To clarify these dynamics, the following table offers a typology of contemporary Francophone children's poetry in minority settings, based on their aesthetic approach, ideological stance, and pedagogical function.

Table 1: Typology of Francophone Children's Poetry in Minority Contexts

Author	Vision of francophonie	Relation to Métis identity
Lionel Groulx (1931)	Québec-centered, defensive, centralized	Marginalizes Métis as peripheral subjects
Donatien Frémont (1959)	Missionary, paternalist, observer	Omits Métis bilingual experience
Adrien-Gabriel Morice (1931)	Clerically mediated, assimilation-inclined community organizing	Subordinated Métis spirituality under Catholic norms
A.-H. de Trémaudan (1916)	Métis-led historiography, nationhood narratives	Asserts Métis political-cultural agency
Martin Jérôme (1916)	Bilingual praxis, civic hybrid modernity	Embodies Métis bilingual citizenship

This typology is neither exhaustive nor prescriptive, but it helps illustrate the tensions and possibilities that define poetic creation at the intersection of childhood, minority status, and cultural survival. Jérôme shares with Trémaudan a Métis-centric viewpoint that affirms identity from below. Nonetheless, Jérôme focuses more explicitly on everyday bilingual relations, institutions, and city space, while Trémaudan primarily engages political historiography. Together, they complement each other: Trémaudan provides the foundational historiographical claim to Métis nationhood; Jérôme exemplifies its lived expression.

In this light, Jérôme's approach anticipates what might now be theorized as *relational bilingualism*—a concept that departs from abstract notions of parity or juridical recognition to highlight the dense web of interpersonal, intergenerational, and intercultural exchanges that shape everyday linguistic life. Unlike Groulx's defensive nationalism or Frémont's vertical admiration for settlers, Jérôme's bilingualism is porous, reciprocal, and situated. He does not merely defend the French language; he demonstrates how languages live *through* relationships: between generations, within communities, and across cultural lines. This form of bilingualism neither opposes nor assimilates—it *relates*. It emerges not from a top-down mandate but from shared spaces, hybrid identities, and cohabited institutions. As such, Jérôme's work opens the door for reframing bilingualism as a dynamic, minoritarian practice rooted in mutual recognition rather than static equivalence—a model especially pertinent in our globalized, multilingual societies.

5. Contemporary Echoes: Memory, Politics, and Bilingualism Today

The contemporary resurgence of bilingualism in Manitoba cannot be dissociated from the history Jérôme inscribed in 1916. His quiet insistence on the politics of language, space, and daily life remains astonishingly relevant. In today's debates about official languages, immigration, Indigenous reconciliation, and minority inclusion, the figure of Jérôme reemerges—not as a monument, but as a witness. He reminds us that bilingualism is not a future invention but an interrupted continuity.

5.1 Rewriting the Province: From Political Gesture to Cultural Praxis

The Manitoba government's 2024 announcement of *Bill 12: An Act Respecting Official Bilingualism* sparked renewed attention to the province's linguistic heritage. The bill reaffirms access to government services in French and English and outlines symbolic commitments to “bilingual signage, recruitment strategies, and cultural celebration” (Government of Manitoba, 2024). However, policy analysts like Nguyen (2022) warn that such declarations, absent robust community engagement, risk becoming performative. She writes: “In urban municipalities, bilingualism is often expressed through signage, not interaction. Without lived bilingual practices, legal symmetry is hollow” (p. 95). Such critiques call for a reimagining of bilingualism, not as a symmetrical allocation of state resources, but as a web of lived interactions and shared responsibilities. In this sense, *relational bilingualism* emerges as an alternative framework: one that privileges mutual intelligibility, cross-cultural fluency, and the co-construction of civic life. As in Jérôme's time, language policy risks

irrelevance unless rooted in everyday dialogue and meaningful presence.

This critique echoes Jérôme's concern that French in Manitoba, even when visible, risks being marginalized in function. He wrote of a language that "speaks with authority in the church, but with apology in the post office" (Jérôme, 1916, p. 30). His diagnosis captures the symbolic-institutional disjunction that continues to structure Manitoba's linguistic terrain: bilingualism as token, rather than tool.

5.2 A Province Haunted by Memory

To understand the depth of this challenge, we must consider bilingualism as memory work. For Jérôme, memory was tactile: expressed in rosaries, medals, and spoken rhythms passed across generations. For current cultural historians like Smith and Pelletier (2021), material culture remains central to identity formation. In Winnipeg, a renewed interest in francophone and Métis placemaking—through street naming, museum curation, and commemorative art—signals the return of what they call "everyday monuments" (p. 64). These are not statues but signs: public affirmations that space has a story.

Lagacé (2025), writing in *La Liberté*, responds to this cultural reawakening with a deeply evocative question: "Comment rêverait Louis Riel en 2025 ?" He connects Riel's vision to Premier Wab Kinew's call for a bilingual province, emphasizing that this gesture must be accompanied by imaginative, community-rooted practices. "Le Premier ministre ne propose pas une charte technique, mais une vision civique : celle d'un Manitoba qui se reconnaît dans ses langues et ses peuples" (Lagacé, 2025). That vision echoes the logic of *relational bilingualism*, which reframes language not as a fixed heritage to be defended, but as a dynamic encounter—a mutual act of recognition across cultural histories. It sees bilingualism not as an obligation or right alone, but as a habitus of shared belonging.

5.3 Schools as Spaces of Discontinuity and Renewal

Nowhere is the tension between past and present more visible than in education. Jérôme's reflections on schooling captured both cultural loss and institutional betrayal: "Nos enfants apprennent à lire dans une langue qui ne connaît pas leur famille" (Jérôme, 1916, p. 25). Over a century later, despite legal guarantees, many francophone students still navigate a gap between institutional language and home identity.

A 2023 study by the *Conseil jeunesse provincial* found that 57% of francophone youth in Winnipeg report feeling "linguistically displaced"—they associate French with formality, English with belonging. Moreover, over 40% reported switching to English even in francophone peer groups (CJP, 2023). These patterns confirm that legal protection does not suffice; linguistic

transmission requires affect, place, and pleasure. As Paré (1992) observed, exiguous literatures survive only when they remain audible in the spaces of life—not merely in curricula.

Francophone schools today must navigate this reality not only as institutions of instruction, but as cultural incubators. Programs such as *Voix du Nord*, launched in 2022, aim to reconnect youth with Métis oral traditions and local history through podcasts, storytelling workshops, and intergenerational exchanges (Gaudet & Bouvier, 2023). These initiatives embody a Jérôman pedagogy: rooted, dialogic, embodied.

5.4 Journalism, Archives, and Digital Bilingualism

In *Souvenirs d'autrefois*, Jérôme writes as both chronicler and archivist. His text is an attempt to record not only events but atmospheres: the tone of voices, the timbre of churches, the smell of woodsmoke and print. Today, such embodied memory is often digitized—and thereby reterritorialized.

New platforms like *Histoires sonores* and *Balado Saint-Boniface* offer bilingual, place-based podcasting that foreground Métis and francophone experiences. «As Aleida Assmann argues, digital platforms do not erase memory, they recast it in new forms of communal circulation» (Assmann, 2014, p. 45). This "augmented memory" bridges generations and enables minoritized voices to circulate more freely.

Michel Lagacé, in the same editorial, insists that community media must remain "le cœur battant du bilinguisme vécu" (Lagacé, 2025). The bilingual press, he argues, is not simply a mirror of policy but a laboratory of identity. In this sense, *La Liberté* continues Jérôme's work: not only reflecting life, but shaping it.

5.5 From Reactive Rights to Proactive Imaginaries

Finally, the challenge facing Manitoba today is not only juridical but imaginative. Jérôme's bilingualism was not reactive; it was constitutive of daily experience. He viewed language as a relation, not as a status. To reclaim his vision is to shift from a model of bilingualism based on compliance to one based on cohabitation.

Robinson (2020) defines *minor modernity* as a practice that destabilizes majoritarian assumptions by activating memory and relation. In this sense, Jérôme's narrative becomes a political proposition: not that Manitoba become bilingual again, but that it recognize the bilinguality that has always undergirded its identity—and learn to hear it anew. This act of hearing differently is at the heart of relational bilingualism. It asks not "How can we preserve two languages?" but "What kind of society do we create when we live *between* languages?" In this view, bilingualism becomes not the endpoint of policy, but the starting point of a renewed civic imagination—one that embraces

ambiguity, dialogue, and minoritized memory as sources of strength.

6. Conclusion: Reclaiming the Forgotten Grounds of Bilingual Modernity

This article has offered a sustained rereading of *Souvenirs d'autrefois* (1916) by Martin Jérôme as both a political document and a cultural memory practice. Far from being a marginal memoir, the text articulates a vision of bilingualism deeply embedded in Métis experience, urban transformation, and the fragile poetics of place. In contrast to the ideological frameworks proposed by Lionel Groulx or the more paternalistic perspectives of Donatien Frémont and Adrien-Gabriel Morice, Jérôme's work does not seek to restore a lost monolingual order nor to romanticize a golden past. Rather, he bears witness to a form of bilingual modernity forged through contradiction, coexistence, and careful attention to the minor tones of everyday life.

His reflections on schooling, immigration, and urban change remain strikingly contemporary. As Manitoba today explores the possibility of officially declaring itself a bilingual province — through ongoing consultations such as the EngageMB initiative launched in 2024 — Jérôme's testimony reminds us that bilingualism cannot be imposed from above, nor revived through symbolic policies alone. It must be reinhabited from within: not simply as a set of rights, but as a mode of relation. His concept of language is not ideological, but ecological; it emerges from landscapes, homes, and gestures. In this, Jérôme's writing serves less as a historical account than as a proposition—a framework for reimagining bilingualism as something lived, intimate, and sustained by memory.

The past examined here thus offers vital lessons for today's political aspirations. First, it reminds us that the roots of bilingualism in Manitoba are not peripheral but foundational, long shaped by Métis and francophone actors who navigated—and negotiated—coexistence well before the province's official policies began to acknowledge it. To forget these actors is not simply to misread history; it is to risk repeating structural exclusions under the guise of symbolic recognition. Second, Jérôme's narrative shows that language vitality depends not only on rights and access, but on place, community, and affective continuity. A bilingual province must therefore cultivate more than translation services and dual signage, it must foster spaces of encounter, spaces where languages breathe and exchange.

In this sense, *Souvenirs d'autrefois* does not merely reflect on bilingualism; it enacts it. Through hybrid syntax, narrative fragmentation, and attention to lived detail, Jérôme models the very complexity of linguistic multiplicity. His writing embodies what Édouard Glissant would later call *la poétique de la*

relation: a vision of identity as entangled, historical, and relational. In doing so, it resonates with broader frameworks such as linguistic justice (Van Parijs, 2011; Skutnabb-Kangas, 2021) and transnational minor literatures (Lionnet & Shih, 2005), which emphasize the ethical stakes of language diversity and cultural relation in the contemporary world. To read Jérôme today is thus not to retrieve a footnote of Manitoba's past, but to engage with a vision that challenges and enriches our present.

This reading also opens several avenues for further research. Comparative analyses of early Métis francophone figures (such as Pierre Delorme, Pierre Falcon, or later Jean Allard and Roger Turenne) could illuminate a broader intellectual tradition of Métis bilingual thought. Literary geography projects could trace the spatial poetics of Jérôme's Winnipeg alongside GIS and archival maps. Curriculum studies might explore how *Souvenirs d'autrefois* could serve as a teaching tool in immersion and francophone schools, bridging personal memory and collective history. Finally, the rise of bilingual Métis media (through podcasts, digital storytelling, and community archives) warrants closer attention. Open-access platforms such as Archive.org, La Liberté's digitized archives, or regional libraries democratize access to minority memory and invite new modalities of scholarly engagement. Future research might also examine how relational bilingualism, as articulated by Jérôme, resonates with Indigenous–Francophone dynamics in other settler societies, such as Aotearoa/New Zealand, South Africa, or Chile, where language, land, and historical redress intertwine.

Unlike postcolonial bilingualism in countries such as Lebanon, Algeria, or Senegal—where language often signals colonial residue and asymmetry—Manitoba's bilingualism emerges from a negotiated entanglement between settler narratives, Indigenous memory, and Francophone aspirations. This configuration, while rooted in local histories, echoes transnational debates on identity, belonging, and linguistic justice.

Martin Jérôme's bilingual legacy cannot be confined to policy debates or regional memory work. His writings invite us to rethink bilingualism not as dualism, but as a relational modality, a way of inhabiting plural space with attentiveness, negotiation, and mutual regard. In this sense, relational bilingualism offers more than a reading of the past; it provides a civic and ethical grammar for the present. As Manitoba reimagines its linguistic future—not yet enshrined in law but actively shaped through public consultation, the work of hearing and living between languages may prove not only necessary, but transformative.

Ultimately, to reclaim Martin Jérôme is not to monumentalize a forgotten author, but to activate an alternative genealogy of bilingualism: one rooted in relation, memory, and lived negotiation. As Manitoba reimagines itself in the twenty-first century, his voice returns, not as echo, but as provocation. If we are to build a truly bilingual province, we must not only legislate languages: we must learn to dwell in them.

Acknowledgements

The author wishes to thank the Canadian Institute for Open Knowledge for its support in the development of this research. Special thanks to *La Liberté* for access to digitized archives and to the *Centre du patrimoine* in Saint-Boniface for its preservation of vital historical sources. The author is also grateful to colleagues and peer reviewers whose thoughtful comments helped refine the argument, and to the Métis and Francophone communities of Manitoba, whose voices continue to shape the living memory of bilingualism. Finally, this article is dedicated to the educators, archivists, and storytellers who sustain minority languages not only through policy, but through care, creativity, and presence.

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