

The following poem was written by a Quebecois living in Montreal. The lines written in bold were in English in the original; the other lines were written in French, the language of the Quebecois.

SPEAK WHITE

Speak White

it's so lovely to hear you
talk about Paradise Lost
and the charming but nameless figure moving
through Shakespeare's sonnets

We are an uncultured stammering people
yet we are not deaf to the uniqueness of a tongue
speak with the accent of Milton and Byron and
Shelley and Keats

speak white

speak of this and that
tell us about the Magna Carta
or about Lincoln's Monument
or about the grey charm of the Thames
or about the pink waters of the Potomac
tell us about your traditions
We are a people of little brilliance
yet we are quite able to appreciate
the full import of crumpets
or the Boston Tea

But you really **speak white**
when you get down to **brass tacks**

To speak of **gracious living**
and of the standard of living
and the Great Society
speak white a little louder
raise your foremen's voices
we are a little hard of hearing
living too close to the machines
we hear only our sighs above the tools.

speak white and loud

let yourselves be heard
from Saint-Henri to Santo Domingo
yes what a splendid tongue
for hiring
giving orders
deciding the hour death joins the job
and the pause that refreshes
and the dollar that effervesces

Speak white

tell us that **God is a great big shot**
and that we're paid to trust him
speak white
talk production profits and percentages
speak white
yours is a rich tongue
for buying
but as for selling oneself
but as for selling one's life blood
but as for selling oneself

Ah!

speak white

big deal

but as for explaining to you
the eternity of a day on strike
recounting
the life of a janitor-people
but as for going home at night
when the sun comes bursting above our alleyways
but as for telling you that yes the sun sets yes
each day of our lives in the east of your empires
Nothing can match a language of curses
our somewhat unkempt jargon
spattered with axle-grease and oil.

Speak white

enjoy what you say
We are a rancorous people
yet reproach no one
for having a monopoly
on speech correction

In the sweet tongue of Shakespeare
with the accent of Longfellow
speak a pure and gruesome white French
as in Vietnam, in the Congo
speak an Impeccable German
gnashing a Star of David in your teeth
speak order speak repression

speak white

it's a universal language
we were born to understand it
with its tear-gas words
with its black-jack words

Speak white

tell us again about **Freedom and Democracy**
We know that liberty is a black word
just as misery is Negroid
and as blood mingles with dust in the streets of
Algiers or Little Rock

Speak white

take turns from Westminster to Washington
speak white as they do on Wall Street
white as in Watts
Be civilized
and in the circumstances understand our speech
when you politely ask us
how do you do
and you hear us reply
we're doing all right
we're doing fine
we
are not alone

We know
that we are not alone.

— Michele Lalonde