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### COVER DETAILS

The Glyde River, Arnhem Land  
Photo credit: Djon Mundine

#### FRONT:

David Malangi, Glyde River mouth, bark painting  
Courtesy Bulabula Arts

#### BACK:

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AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND

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16 February – 18 February 1995

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*Although the conference is not taking trade or partnerships as particular themes, it is hoped that these aspects of the Australian-Canadian relationship will emerge from at least some of the contributions. In addition, trade related topics will be presented in two special sessions in the conference timetable.*

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BARBARA BELYEA  
THE SEA OF DREAMS: LA VERENDRYE  
AND THE MAPPING OF DESIRE

History is written by victors, so the saying goes; traditionally, the history of exploration has been composed of success stories. The explorer-heroes of history found the land or sea they set out to discover or died in the attempt. During the last ten years, however, the very concept of discovery has been criticised, and historians can no longer measure explorers' activities simply by their "success". Dreams of discovery have been analysed, contextualised, and finally recognised for what they are: images of infinity, maps of desire. Empirical observations and carefully charted surveys could not retrace the coasts, cities and ideal kingdoms of these dream-maps. Quite possibly, during their search for the fabulous river and sea of the West, La Vérendrye and his sons even anticipated the disappointment of discovery—the collapse of dream into bare waking fact. In this paper, I follow the La Vérendryes in their explorations west and south of Lake Superior, not to measure their degree of explorational "success" (the farthest point west actually reached, the accuracy of their record), nor to investigate their practical motivations and justifications (increased trade in furs, territorial claims for France), but to describe the dream itself, the shape and nature of their desire.

Long before European explorers crossed the North American continent, the river and sea of the West figured in European cartography. The idea of an inland sea can be traced to a Spanish expedition that explored north of Mexico in 1540: a Pawnee captive told tales of Quivira, where large ships were anchored, their prows decorated with gold and silver. Although the Spanish leader Coronado found no place which even came close to the Pawnee's description, Quivira was long inscribed on European maps.<sup>1</sup> French cartographers,

following Claude and Guillaume Delisle, placed Quivira on the shore of a huge sea north and east of the California coastline. A map in the Baron de Lahontan's widely read *Nouveaux voyages*, published in 1702, showed two rivers flowing east and west from a range of mountains; together, the rivers provided a convenient link between Louisiana and the Pacific. Doubt of Lahontan's claims grew slowly; by 1744 the Baron was denounced as a "romancier"<sup>2</sup>—but not before La Vérendrye and his sons set out to discover the inland sea, urged on by the French government which lent them generous verbal if not financial support. The La Vérendryes were also lured by native stories of a river flowing westward and of a people who tilled fields, wore cloth and mined gold. In the end their discoveries showed little that corresponded to the cartographers' sea or the natives' tales of a mysterious civilisation.

Although the La Vérendryes failed to find the objects of their quest and suspected the truth of the stories they had been told, they were not like Cook and his generation, keen on facts and contemptuous of legend. Historians have praised the field observations and scientific accuracy of late eighteenth-century explorers at the expense of "closet" geographers. But in doing so they have misunderstood the world which these earlier map-makers laboured to construct. Scientific surveys were the transcripts of an explorer's own limited experience, whereas the cosmographers' maps nourished a dream of earthly infinity; their rivers and rich kingdoms were images, not of knowledge, but of desire.<sup>3</sup> La Vérendrye spent a decade in the west, and two of his sons crossed the plains to the foot of the Rocky Mountains. At the farthest point of their explorations, they seem to have turned back from their search for the "mer de l'Ouest" less because of adverse circumstances than in response to an inner discouragement, a paradoxical reluctance to find what they had sought for so many years. Perhaps they thought it better to dream of Quivira's splendour than to reduce ideal to real, and at their journey's end to face a familiar sea.

The La Vérendryes' explorations have posed problems for researchers: the failed exploit of a failed empire crosses too many linguistic and political boundaries. There has been no work in French, not even a journal article, since Antoine Champagne's pedestrian biography and notes were published in 1968 and 1971. In 1980, W. Raymond Wood ensured re-publication of G. Hubert Smith's mid-century monograph on the "American" explorations, but added no new material. In 1987, W. J. Eccles re-issued an after-dinner speech on the "mer de l'Ouest" which he had given at the 1981 North American Fur Trade Conference. The most recent and rewarding study of La

Vérendrye is a series of articles by cartographic historian G. Malcolm Lewis which have appeared since 1986. Lewis explains the "sequence of assimilation" by which three separate Cree maps were cobbled together, presumably by La Vérendrye himself, then reduced to a uniform scale by a military engineer at Québec and forwarded to Maurepas, the minister in charge of France's overseas colonies. This scaled drawing was then passed on to leading French cartographers of the early eighteenth century, who incorporated the Crees' information into their maps of North America, reconciling it with established images of the inland sea and/or the rivers of Lahontan's map. The limited, local chart which the chiefs had given La Vérendrye, was thus placed in a much larger, very different cartographic context.<sup>4</sup>

The process of cartographic assimilation which Lewis traces from the Crees to La Vérendrye and his superiors may also be seen in the transmission of verbal information. The Cree chiefs' descriptions of the territory west of Lake Superior were translated and commented upon first by La Vérendrye, then by the Marquis de Beauharnois, Governor of Québec, and finally by the minister Maurepas, who counselled the king. In each of these stages of interpretation, Native evidence was accommodated to the French imperial dream of a western sea. The Cree chiefs questioned in 1729 did not deliberately mislead La Vérendrye. The explorer, like his superiors, was predisposed to exaggerate the Crees' information, and to make it answer his own search for a "mer de l'Ouest". The chiefs whom La Vérendrye questioned at Lake Superior told him of a height of land west of which a large river flowed down to the setting sun. Numerous tribes inhabited the great plains beside this river; some of these lived in earth houses and grew crops. The Crees had also heard that from the height of land one could see tides in a great lake and that bearded people lived at the mouth of a large river. La Vérendrye was careful to question more than one Native informant; he found that "tous rapportent la même chose" and the three maps drawn for him seemed to agree as well.<sup>5</sup>

In making his report to Beauharnois, La Vérendrye repeated the Crees' information and concluded from it that a river ran west from Lake Winnipeg to the sea. The Governor then interpreted the information he had been given: "Si ces sauvages accusent juste, ce fleuve doit se decharger au dessus de la Californie...".<sup>6</sup> Both La Vérendrye and Beauharnois entirely overlooked the possibility that, for the Crees, Lake Winnipeg itself was the "mer de l'Ouest". What the natives saw in regional terms the French imagined on a continental scale.<sup>7</sup> Beauharnois bolstered this supposition by drawing on contemporary geographical

theory: in recommending La Vérendrye's interpretation of the Cree maps to the minister Maurepas, he argued for the existence of a large western river to balance the drainage systems of the St Lawrence and the Mississippi:

[Il n'est] pas naturel que dans une si grande Espace il ne se trouve pas une grande riviere ou fleuve, et il paroist que le fleuve dont parlent les Sauvages se decharge a la mer du sud.<sup>8</sup>

Beauharnois's argument that a river *ought* to flow west across the North American continent relied on the same logic of geographical symmetry as the argument for a huge continent in the southern hemisphere. Forty years were to pass before Bougainville remarked disdainfully that "la géographie est une science de faits",<sup>9</sup> he and Cook having proved that the Pacific Ocean was disproportionately empty. In the early eighteenth century, explorers and cartographers still imagined the world in ideal terms.

By 1734, after sending his version of the Cree maps to his superiors, and despite repeated declarations of his ambition to find the western sea, La Vérendrye had not managed to push farther west than Lake of the Woods. But here he met with Assiniboine chiefs, who were from the prairies and who could tell from their own experience what the Crees could relate only by hearsay. The Assiniboines confirmed the Crees' stories: they told the explorer of the prairie people who grew grain and who had already heard of the French. La Vérendrye multiplied his questions about this tribe—"Le leur demanday ce qu'ils pensoient de cette Nation, et si c'étoit des sauvages comme Eux"; the Assiniboines replied "qu'ils les prenoient pour des françois". The strange sedentary people were bearded, fair-skinned and well clothed; their houses were built in the French style; they raised grain and domestic animals; they were ruled by a supreme chief and his subordinates.<sup>10</sup>

This picture of a civilised nation could not fail to attract the attention of Beauharnois and Maurepas. La Vérendrye made the description more attractive still by adding some piquant details obtained in response to insistent questions and suggestions:

en descendant la riviere qu'ils nomment du Couchant, [les Cris] ont été surpris de trouver un climat different ... par sa situation, sa temperature, ses fruits et les arbres qui y croissent qu'ils ne connoissent pas, Le pays est fort découvert sans montagnes, ils ont trouvé un arbrisseau ... qui pouroit être le laurier, un autre qui porte des grains semblables au poivre que je leur ay montré, [et] un arbre qui produit une espece de cocos ... il y a des mines, toutes sortes de

bêtes sauvages en abondance et des serpens d'une grosseur prodigieuse.<sup>11</sup>

These tales of a new-world Eden confirmed the explorer's quest.

In 1738–9 La Vérendrye accompanied Assiniboines on their annual visit to Mandan villages along the Missouri River. There he measured for himself the truth of the northern Natives' reports. He noticed that the Missouri River flowed in the required southwest direction—though more south than west, and that the water was salty—but so were all the prairie marshes. Certainly the Mandans lived in fortified towns and were "une nation fort laborieuse", in contrast to the nomadic tribes; certainly their women were "assés belles" and some had fair hair. The Mandans even played at "boules". But the men wore only a buffalo robe; except for a loincloth the women were naked as well, and for Europeans nakedness, like laziness, characterised savage life. Ruefully La Vérendrye came to the following conclusion:

j'avoué que je fus surpris, m'attendant a voir des gens differents des autres sauvages, surtout le recit que l'on nous en auoit fait il ny a point de difference d'avec les assiliboilles nue ... je conus des lors que nous auions bien a desconter de tout ce qui nous en auoit esté dit.<sup>12</sup>

This visit to the Mandan villages left the explorer bitter and confused to the point of nervous collapse: paradoxically, the stories he had been told were both true and untrue.

The extent of La Vérendrye's disillusionment can be appreciated by understanding the value he set on language. For him the stories he had heard were not simply information; they also carried the moral weight of a contract. Communication was difficult between the French explorer and the Native leaders he consulted. La Vérendrye noted that at one council,

pour faire entendre ma parole je parlois à mon fils, Mon fils a L'Interprète Monsonis, et le Monsonis qui parloit Cris le disoit aux Cristinaux.<sup>13</sup>

Since translation diluted the impact of words, symbolic objects and presents reinforced the verbal bond.

J'adressay La parole au chef de guerre ... je Luy donnay un pavillon en Luy disant: Je te lie à moy par ce pavillon, je te ... donne ce tabac pour faire fumer tes guerriers affin qu'ils entendent ma parole.<sup>14</sup>

At the Mandan villages La Vérendrye was dismayed to learn that both his Cree interpreter and his bag of presents had disappeared: "Nous voila reduit pour comble de malheur, a ne nous pouvoir faire entendre que par signe et demonstrations".<sup>15</sup> The explorer was forced to turn back to Lake of the Woods, where he vented his frustration on an Assiniboine who told him of killing an armoured horseman the previous summer. La Vérendrye wanted to see a trophy, an object which would substantiate the story. The man could show him nothing, nevertheless insisting that his description of the country to the west was true:

ce que je dis est uraye je te le ferés dire par d'autre qui estoit avec moy ... je te le repete encor, on ne uoye point l'autre cauté de la ruière leaulx est salée c'est un pais de montagne, grande espace entre les montagnes de beau terein ... ce que je te dis est sens dessein tu en apprendra plus par la suite....<sup>16</sup>

But the Assiniboine was merely a naked savage who made promises without proof, and La Vérendrye could not forget his recent deception.

La Vérendrye's retreat from the Mandan villages seems to have been more than a geographical, physical turning point. It marked the explorer's new distrust of native stories. However, he was disposed to believe two of his own men left for a year with the Mandans, when they told of meeting "un homme fort considéré de la Nation du couchant du soleil, parlant la langue des Blancs". The stranger had been raised among bearded whites who lived in fortified towns, grew grain and prayed using books with pages like corn leaves. The man had tangible proof of what he said: he wore a cross around his neck and showed the Frenchmen a coverlet, a bridle and a cotton shirt. As well, he mimed the actions of playing a harpsichord and a viol.<sup>17</sup> The objects this man presented, added to the familiar details of his story, gave him credibility.

At the Missouri villages, traditionally a meeting place for Native commerce, the engagés and the man from the far west traded stories. The westerner was as eager to learn of the French and to visit them as La Vérendrye's men were to learn from him. More eager, in fact—he offered then and there to guide the Frenchmen "chez les Blancs".<sup>18</sup> Three more years were to pass before La Vérendrye acted on this report—an odd and surprising delay if he really was intent on finding the "mer de l'Ouest". In 1742 he sent his two surviving sons to retrace his route to the Mandan villages and push beyond them towards the sea. The elder son, Louis-Joseph, called the Chevalier, kept a journal. He wrote of reaching the villages and continuing southwest; he remarked

that "toujours notre troupe s'augmentait par la jonction de plusieurs villages de differentes nations". Village after village joined together to do battle with their common enemy, the "Gens du Serpent", who were said to dominate the mountain passes. The Chevalier's progress beyond the Missouri took on the aura of a crusade: "Le nombre des combattants passoit deux mille; avec leurs familles cela faisoit une troupe considerable". They travelled "toujours par des prairies magnifiques où les bêtes étaient en abondance".<sup>19</sup> The "Gens du Serpent" melted before this horde of allied tribes and Louis-Joseph came without opposition to the eastern edge of the Rocky Mountains.

The Chevalier was impressed by the height of this natural barrier, and even more by its proximity, as he thought, to the western sea. Yet he turned back at this point, although there was apparently no reason why he could not have gone farther. "J'étois très mortifié", he recorded sadly, "de ne pas monter sur les Montagnes, comme j'avois souhaité".<sup>20</sup> Like his father's sense of deception at the Mandan villages, Louis-Joseph's regret seems illogical and exaggerated. It had become increasingly evident, however, that the bearded people who worked iron, kept horses and prayed from books were not some mysterious Native tribe, but simply Spanish colonists who had moved north from Mexico. Two centuries after Coronado had learned of Quivira from a Pawnee prisoner, his countrymen inhabited this mythic place. Quivira was California; there was no inland sea; the strange bearded people were Europeans. A chief who had joined the Chevalier to make war on the "Gens du Serpent"

me dit quelques mots de leur langage. Je reconnus qu'il me parloit espagnol, et ce qui affirma de me confirmer fut le récit qu'il me fit du massacre des Espagnols qui alloient à la découverte du Missouri, dont j'avois entendu parler. Tout cela refroidit bien mon empressement pour une mer connue.<sup>21</sup>

Europeans and Natives were now telling the same stories. The Chevalier had suspected for some time that just as there was no civilised nation apart from the Spanish, so there was no "mer de l'Ouest" distinct from the Pacific Ocean: "Je sentis bien pour lors que nous ne pouvions trouver qu'une mer connue". Discovery was, after all, finding what was "inconnu", unknown at least to one's own culture. Louis-Joseph therefore turned his back on the mountains and abandoned his quest.

At this point an odd little anecdote is inserted into his account. He had learned of a Frenchman who lived not far away, and hoped that his compatriot would return with him: "J'aurois été flatté de le retirer d'avec les Sauvages".<sup>22</sup> He sent a letter and waited a few days to see if

the Frenchman would appear. There was no answer. The Frenchman's choice to remain on the plains justified the Chevalier's own reluctance to pursue his journey. What could he discover that he had not already found, what stories could he hear that he had not confirmed, what far country outstripped the "prairies magnifiques" he had already crossed, "où les bêtes étaient en abondance"? Even the enemy "Gens du Serpent", the Snake people, had their place in this paradise: La Vérendrye had anticipated "toutes sortes de bêtes sauvages en abondance et des serpens d'une grosseur prodigieuse"! To push on to a "mer connue" would not improve on the wonders the Chevalier had already experienced. By his adroit and tactful failure to reach the sea, Louis-Joseph avoided the prosaic realisation of his lifelong desire. Later surveyor-explorers who did reach the Pacific and Arctic coasts overland were not so fortunate. More than one transcontinental explorer who linked known to known may well have considered the moment which translated dream into experience as a paradoxical deception.<sup>23</sup> The Chevalier might have realised that the prize was not worth the price.

Of course this is unhistorical speculation, but a novelist can imagine more freely, or at least more overtly, than a historian is supposed to. In her collection of stories entitled *La Route d'Altamont*, the well known Canadian writer Gabrielle Roy transforms La Vérendrye's explorations into a child's game; Roy's eight-year-old protagonist Christine tells her elderly neighbour, "Si je ne suis pas tuée en route, avant ce soir j'aurai pris possession de l'Ouest pour le Roi de France". The old man wishes her bon voyage and Christine disappears into a copse of trees "pour laisser passer quelques minutes, donner du moins à mes explorations le temps de s'accomplir". There under the trees, the little girl in the role of La Vérendrye senses the part that death must play in the adventure: "Je ne sais quel doute fugitif, rapide, traversait alors mon esprit".<sup>24</sup> Later Christine asks the old man, still using her geographical idiom, "De l'autre côté, là où on va quand c'est fini par ici, où ça se trouve?" And the old man replies,

Si on le savait exactement, ce serait peut-être moins beau, moins attirant. Quand tu pars dans tes découvertes, est-ce que ce n'est pas agréable de ne pas trop savoir au juste ce que tu vas découvrir?

"Parce que c'est une découverte?" confirms Christine, who has understood.

The old man nods: "Comme tu dis! comme tu dis!"<sup>25</sup>

## NOTES

- 1 See Lagarde, 1989: 19–20, 22–24, 26–27, 31. Guillaume Delisle drew both Quivira and the Mer de l'Ouest on his manuscript "Carte de la nouvelle France et des Pays voisins" (1696). His engraved *Carte de l'Amérique septentrionale* (1700) shows no inland sea; three years later, Delisle dropped Quivira as well from his *Carte d'Amérique* (1703).  
See also Wagner, 1937; rpt. 1968: I: 488–89; Wheat, 1957–63: I: 1–2; Ehrenberg, 1987: 3–4, 174–79.
- 2 See Lahontan, *Oeuvres complètes*, 1990: 108–09, 164–66, map facing 414. See also Wagner, 1968, I: 323 and Lagarde, 1989, 27.
- 3 See, for example, Williams, 1962 and Beaglehole, 1974: both passim. Cf. Dardel, 1984: 227–28; Broc, 1972: 132, 260, 437; Kish, 1980: 9–10, 50–58.
- 4 See Lewis, 1986: 9–34; Lewis, 1987: 542–63; Lewis, 1991: 54–87. See also Lagarde, 25–30.
- 5 La Vérendrye, 1927: 43–56: "I acquainted myself with the route [to the western sea] by making inquiries of different savages. **They all tell me the same thing**, that there are three routes or rivers which lead to the great River of the West. Consequently I had them draw a map of these three rivers so as to choose the shortest and easiest route" (my translation).
- 6 La Vérendrye, 1927: 64: Beauharnois to Maurepas, 15 October 1730: "If the account of these savages is accurate, this River [of the West] **must reach the sea north of California**. The Sieur Chaussegros [de Léry, the draughtsman at Québec who scaled and redrew the Crees' map] has drawn on a slip of paper the course of this river according to the Cree map, and has pasted this slip onto the map of the Sieur [Guillaume] Delisle [the *Carte d'Amérique* (1722)]. He [de Léry] finds that the river flows towards the [Pacific] entrance discovered by Martin Daguilar ... one can see the whole course of this river from the height of land above Lake Superior to just above California." Cf. Wagner, 1968: I: 140–43, 322–29; and Lewis, 1987: 547–51; cf. also Burpee's editorial note appended to this passage. Lagarde, 1989: 32, shows Delisle's *Carte d'Amérique* (1722) with an overlay attributed to Philippe Buache; cf. also Buache's redrawing of this map, *Carte physique des Terres les plus élevées de la Partie Occidentale du Canada* (1754) in Luebke, Kaye and Moulton, 1987: 15.
- 7 Lewis, 1991: 70–78.
- 8 La Vérendrye, 1927: 64–65: Beauharnois to Maurepas, 15 October 1730: "This would contradict all the knowledge we have of the known countries of the world, where some great river always flows across such a large space. This leads me to think that the savages' report is accurate, since **it is not natural that in such a large space no great stream or river would be found, and it would appear that the river mentioned by the savages flows into the southern sea [Pacific Ocean]**" (my translation). Cf. Lagarde, 1989, 34–35, who recounts that in a memoir delivered in 1752 to the Académie royale des sciences, Buache reacted to de Fonte's northwest passage according to the same kind of "systematic" thinking: "Cette relation [de l'amiral de Fonte] me frappa beaucoup, parce qu'elle me fournit ... la liaison de l'Asie avec l'Amérique telle que je l'avais soupçonnée auparavant.... Ce soupçon était une suite du système général dont j'étais occupé depuis plusieurs années ... sur la manière de considérer la géographie physique."/ "This account [by Admiral de Fonte] impressed me because it provided the link between Asia and America which I had foreseen.... My prediction that such a link might exist arose from the general system of physical geography which I had been studying for several years" (my translation).  
Empiricists deplore the "systematic" (deductive) thinking which led Buache to believe the de Fonte story, but no less a scientist than Buffon was no more inductive a thinker than Buache. In 1778, while Cook was skirting the northwest Pacific coast, Buffon affirmed the possibility of a passage (quoted by Lagarde, 1989: 38): "Ma présomption est ... fondée ... sur une analogie physique qui ne se dément dans aucune partie du globe: c'est que toutes les grandes côtes des

continents sont, pour ainsi dire, hâchées et entamées du midi au Nord.... Mais au-dessus de la Californie nos cartes ne nous offrent ... qu'une terre continue ... or cette continuité des côtes, sans anfractuosités, ni baies, ni rivières, est contraire à la nature." / "My supposition is based on a geographical pattern which holds true everywhere on earth—that all continental seacoasts are, so to speak, jagged and indented north of the Equator.... On our maps, however, the coast north of California is shown as a straight line.... This smooth coast, without fissures, bays or rivers, is contrary to nature" (my translation).

- 9 Bougainville, 1955: 118: "Je tombe d'accord que l'on conçoit difficilement un si grand nombre d'îles basses et de terres presque noyées, sans supposer un continent qui en soit voisin. **Mais la géographie est une science de faits; on n'y peut rien donner dans son cabinet à l'esprit de système, sans risquer les plus grandes erreurs qui, souvent ensuite, ne se corrigent qu'aux dépens des navigateurs.**" / "I agree that it is difficult to imagine such a great number of low islands and land that is almost submerged, without assuming that there is a continent nearby. But geography is a science of facts; nothing can be conceded, while at home in one's study, to a fondness for system without risking the greatest errors which, as it often turns out, are corrected at great cost to mariners" (my translation).
- 10 La Vérendrye, 1927: 151–64: "I asked them their opinion of that nation, and whether its inhabitants were savages like themselves; they answered me that they took these strangers for Frenchmen, that their forts and houses resembled our own" (my translation).
- 11 La Vérendrye, 1927: 247–48: "The Crees who made the drawing of the White River [Saskatchewan River] walked five days past the height of land; **going down what they call the River of the Setting Sun, they were surprised to find a very different climate from the country they had just left, to judge by its location, the weather, its fruits and the trees that grow there, which were unknown to them. The country is very open; there are no mountains. There they found a bush with fragrant wood and leaves, which could be laurel, another which bears seeds very like the pepper grains I showed them, and a third which produces a kind of coconut, dripping sap like drops of blood when it is in flower. There are mines, plenty of all sorts of wild animals, and huge snakes**" (my translation).
- 12 La Vérendrye, 1927: 319–44: "I confess that I was surprised, expecting to see people quite different from the other savages, given the stories that they had told us. There was no difference [between these people and] the naked Assiniboines ... I knew from then on that we would have to discount everything that we had been told" (my translation).
- 13 La Vérendrye, 1927: 179: "So that what I said to them might be understood, I spoke to my son; my son [then spoke] to the Monsoni [Ojibwa?] interpreter, and the Monsoni, who spoke Cree, translated my words for the Crees" (my translation). On the name "Monsoni", see Lahontan, 1990: 1226; see also Lewis, 1987, 549. La Vérendrye's "Carte tracée par les Cris" (1729) places the "Monsounis people" north of Lake of the Woods.
- 14 La Vérendrye, 1927: 168: "I addressed the war chief ... I gave him a flag and said to him, 'I bind you to me by this flag and ... give you this tobacco to smoke with your warriors so that you will listen to what I say'" (my translation).
- 15 La Vérendrye, 1927: 328, 334: "My bag of trading goods, which contained all my presents, was stolen because of the extreme carelessness of one of our engagés ... I was soon informed that our interpreter, whom I had paid well so that I could count on him, had pitched away, despite all the inducements my son the chevalier could offer him.... **We are unfortunately reduced to making ourselves understood by signs and gestures**" (my translation).

- 16 La Vérendrye, 1927: 354–55: "What I am telling you is true; I will have others who were with me corroborate my story ... I tell you again, you cannot see the other shore of the river, the water is salty, it is a mountainous country, a huge plain between the mountains ... what I tell you is without guile—you will find out more [when the others meet with you]" (my translation).
- 17 La Vérendrye, 1927: 367–71: Several Native bands came for an annual meeting at the Mandan villages—"there is one of these nations which is said to come from the setting sun, where there are white people who live in towns [and] forts made of bricks and white stones. Having heard that there were Frenchmen staying with the Mandans, they seemed very eager to see them, and asked the Mandans to lead the Frenchmen to their village, which was on the other side of the River. The two Frenchmen went to see them ... and later visited a man honoured by the Nation of the setting sun, who spoke the language of white people. But seeing that the Frenchmen did not understand this language, he spoke in the language of the Mandans" (my translation).
- 18 La Vérendrye, 1927: 368: "He said that he had grown up in the white settlement since childhood, and that he would be very pleased to take them there ... that the white settlement could be reached before winter set in, but that they would have to make a long detour to avoid the Snakes [Shoshoni], a numerous tribe, most of whom live in forts, though others are nomads and occupy a large territory, and who are enemies of the whites" (my translation).
- 19 La Vérendrye, 1927: 411–18: "Our guides led us SSW. ... I was looking for the Horse people [unidentified tribe] to conduct me to the sea. The whole village accompanied us. ... They led us to a village of Pioya [Kiowa]. ... We all travelled together. ... On meeting the Horse people I asked if they had any knowledge of the nation which lived by the sea. They answered that no one of their tribe had been there, since the way was cut off by the Snake people. ... We continued our journey, sometimes SSW, sometimes NW, **the band of allies increasing steadily as villages of several different tribes joined us. On 1 January 1743 we caught sight of the mountains. The number of warriors with us was greater than 2000; with their families they were very numerous, continually moving forward over magnificent prairies, where there were plenty of wild animals**" (my translation).
- 20 La Vérendrye, 1927: 420–21: The allied tribes' unwillingness to go farther is stated here as the reason for turning back. There is mention of "the fear shared by many of our group, apprehensive as they were that, once their enemies found them [far from their villages], they [the Snakes] would attack their villages before they could return to defend them. **I was very mortified not to climb the Mountains, as I would have wished to. We decided therefore to return**" (my translation).  
Lagarde, 1989, 30, accepts the above reason for the Chevalier's decision to return. But since these village populations had attached themselves fortuitously to Louis-Joseph's original party, it is difficult to understand why their defection would have stopped the French from going farther west. The Chevalier does not state that their presence was necessary to keep the Snakes at bay, though this may well have been the case. It seems likely, however, that the Chevalier's other reason for giving up his quest—the disappointment he anticipated in "discovering" Spanish colonies along the Pacific coast—was a more powerful motivation than the ephemeral loyalty of these villagers. At any rate, this latter reason provides historians with more food for thought than do the Chevalier's brief references to the animosities of vaguely named Native tribes.
- 21 La Vérendrye, 1927: 411, 416: "I felt sure at that point that we would discover a sea already known [to the Spanish].... The chief [described the coastal people and] spoke a few words of their language. I realised that he was speaking to me in Spanish, and what put to rest any doubt was the story he told me of the massacre of some Spaniards who were in search of the Missouri, an incident I had already heard about. All this cooled my ardour; I was not anxious to find a sea that had already been discovered" (my translation).
- 22 La Vérendrye, 1927: 428–29: "Seeing that it was now April, though still without news of our Frenchmen, and urged by the guides I had engaged to conduct us to the Mandans, and our horses

[being] in good condition, I prepared to leave. ... I advised the chiefs that if, by any chance, the Frenchman to whom I had written came to their fort soon after our departure, he would find us with the Mandans ... I would have liked to get him away from the savages" (my translation).

- 23 The understatement of several explorers' own accounts belies historians' frequent assertions that reaching the journey's goal is the triumphant climax of an arduous undertaking: for example, Hearne, 1967: 162–63; Mackenzie, 1970: 201–03 and 372; Fraser, 1960: 105–06; and Franklin, 1970: 361, 384–93. Cf. *Original Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition*, ed. Thwaites, 1904–05: III: 210: Clark's joyous entry for 7 November 1805 is exceptional. The British explorers were no less anxious to realise their ambitions—Mackenzie, for example, refers again and again to his "darling project"—yet they refuse to comment on or accentuate the moment of success; instead the moment is studiously played down.
- 24 Roy, 1966: 65, 67: "If I am not killed along the way, by this evening I will have taken possession of the West for the King of France. ... I let several minutes pass, to give at least a little time to succeed in my explorations. ... But then a nameless, fleeting doubt suddenly crossed my mind" (my translation).
- 25 Roy, 1966: 136: "[Christine:] That other place—where we go when our lives are ended here—where is it to be found? ... [Old Man:] If we knew exactly, it might not be so fine, so attractive. When you go off on your explorations, isn't it better not to know too precisely what you will find? ... [Christine:] Because it's to be a discovery? ... [Old Man:] Just as you say! just as you say!" (my translation).

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