Poem of the Two Tongues
(for C. Seguin)

already in my bastardized, Anglophone poetics
apparently I've asked this comely quebecois
not to dribble on my legs

and she in similar poetic spontaneity
speaks some magnificent french phrase
which severely titillates me
but is translated she tells me as:
"Your love is like vomitted wine."

Everything, obviously, is not going well
admittedly, romantics have lead me astray—
I have heard in our union the clanging of the Canadas
the piecemeal mingling of our cultures
and i'm trying too hard, so
determined not to irritate
the situation further
i resort to simple high school french

"aaaaah la nuit descend dans m'ame!" I say
"tu es ma lune, mes etoiles, mon uh....."
and there I'm forced to stop

I want to say "You are the first red tongue of morning
licking back black curls in the thighs of night!"
but alas, I've never been a cunning linguist
and such a phrase is quite beyond my capabilities
O, I might say, 'You are the crack of dawn.'
but even here my tongue might lead me into error, and
besides, why should i stoop to such an old and worn
cliche?"
as it was I just stood there
foolishly stuttering
and, touched, I suppose
by my child-like confusion
she leant forward and kissed me
‘enfant’, she said,
no more words, Oui?"

“Oui.” I answered sheepishly
And though later that night I did come
to have two tongues in my mouth
for a time
It wasn’t until we came
to that ecstatic region known by some
as Cloud-Cuckoo Land
that I began to think for the first time
we might actually be perfect
countrymen:

— Robert Priest