

(043) 1490 BUK

1600267241A

UNIVERSITAT DE LLEIDA
FACULTAT DE LLETRES
DEPARTAMENT DE FILOLOGIA
SECCIÓ D'ANGLÈS

THE CANADIAN LANDSCAPE THROUGH POETRY

VOLUM I



TESI DOCTORAL DIRIGIDA PER LA DOCTORA SUSAN BALLYN.
UNIVERSITAT DE BARCELONA

N E L A B U R E U i R A M O S

2793-54460

0222-84160

II

This western country crammed
with the ghosts of indians,
haunting the coastal stones and shores,
the forested pacific islands,
mountains, hills and plains:

beside the ocean ethlinga,
man in the moon, empties
his bucket, on
a sign from Spirit
of the Wind ethlinga
empties his bucket, refreshing
the earth, and it rains
on the white cities;

that black joker, broken-
jawed raven, most prominent
among haida and tsimshyan tribes,
is in the kwakiutl
dance masks too-
it was he who brought fire,
food and water to man,
the trickster;

and thunderbird hilunga,
little thought of
by haida for lack of thunderstorms
in their district, goes
by many names, exquisite disguises
carved in the painted wood,

he is nootka tootooch, the wings
causing thunder and the tongue
or flashing eyes engendering
rabid white lightning,
whose food was whales,
called kwunusela by the kwakiutl,
it was he who laid down the house-logs
for the people at Place
Where Kwunusela Alighted;

in full force and virtue
and terror of the law, eagle-
he is authority, the sun
assumed his form once,
the sun which used to be

a flicker's egg, success-
fully transformed;

and malevolence comes to the land,
the wild woman of the woods;
grinning, she swears
a hummingbird in her hair,
d'sonoqua, the furious one-

they are all ready
to be found, the legends
and the people, or
all their ghosts and memories,
whatever is strong enough
to be remembered.

III

But what image, bewildered
son of all men
under the hot sun,
do you worship,
what completeness
do you hope to have
from these tales,
a half-understood massiveness, mirage,
in men's minds- what
in your purpose;

with what force
will you proceed
along a line
neither straight nor short,
whose future
you cannot know
or result foretell,
whose meaning is still
obscured as the incidents
occur and accumulate?

IV

The country moves on;
there are orchards in the interior,
the mountain passes
are broken, the foothills

covered with cattle and fences,
and the fading hills covered;

but the plains are bare,
not barren, easy
for me to love their people
for me to love their people
without selection.

V

In 1787, the old cree saukamappee,
aged 75 or thereabout, speaking then
of things that had happened when he was 16,
just a man, told david thompson,
of the raids the shoshonis,
the snakes, had made on the westward-
reaching peigan, of their war-parties
sometimes sent 10 days journey to enemy camps,
the men all afoot in battle array for
the encounter, crouching
behind their giant shields;

the peigan armed with guns
drove these snakes out of the plains,
the plains where their strength had been,
where they had been settled since living
memory (though nothing is remembered
beyond a grandfather's time),
to the west of the rockies;

these people moved without rest,
backward and forward with the wind,
the seasons, the game, great herds,
in hunger and abundance-

in summer and in the bloody fall
they gathered on the killing grounds,
fat and shining with fat, amused
with the luxuries of war and death,

relieved from the steam of knowledge,
consoled by the stream of blood
and steam rising from the fresh hides
and tired horses, wheeling in their pride
on the sweating horses, their pride.

VI

Those are all stories;
the pride, the grand poem
of our land, of the earth itself,
will come, welcome, and
sought for, and found,
in a line of running verse,
sweating, our pride;

we seize on
what has happened before,
one line only
will be enough,
a single line and
then the sunlit brilliant image suddenly
floods us
with understanding, shocks our
attentions, and all desire
stops, stands alone;

we stand alone,
we are no longer lonely
but have roots,
and the rooted words
recur in the mind, mirror, so that
we dwell on nothing else, in nothing else,
touched, repeating them,
at home freely
at last, in amazement;

"the unyielding phrase
in tune with the epoch,"
the thing made up
of our desires,
not of its words, not only
of them, but of something else,
as well, that which we desire
so ardently, that which
will not come when
it is summoned alone,
but grows in us
and idles about and hides
until the moment is due-

the knowledge of
our origins, and where
we are in truth,

whose land this is
and is to be.

VII

The unyielding phrase:
when the moment is due, then
it springs upon us
out of our own mouths,
unconsidered, overwhelming
in its knowledge, complete-

not this handful
of fragments, as the indians
are not composed of
the romantic stories
about them, or of the stories
they tell only, but
still ride the soil
in us, dry bones a part
of the dust in our eyes,
needed and troubling
in the glare, in
our breath, in our
ears, in our mouths,
in our bodies entire, in our minds, until at
last we become them
in our desires, our desires,
mirages, mirrors, that are theirs, hard-
riding desires, and they
become our true forbears, moulded
by the same wind or rain,
and in this land we
are their people, come
back to life.

RIDE OFF ANY HORIZON

Ride off any horizon
and let the measure fall
where it may-

on the hot wheat,
on the dark yellow fields
of wild mustard, the fields

of bad farmers, on the river,
on the dirty river full
of boys and on the throbbing

powerhouse and the low dam
of cheap cement and rocks
boiling with white water,

and on the cows and their powerful
bulls, the heavy tracks
filling with liquid at the edge

of the narrow prairie
river running steadily away.

*

Ride off any horizon
and let the measure fall
where it may-

among the piles of bones
that dot the prairie

in vision and history
(the buffalo and deer,

dead indians, dead settlers
the frames of lost houses

left behind in the dust
of the depression,

dry and profound, that
will come again in the land

and in the spirit, the land
shifting and the minds

blown dry and empty-
I have not seen it! except

in pictures and talk-
but there is the fence

covered with dust, laden,
the wrecked house stupidly empty)_

here is a picture for your wallet,
of the beaten farmer and his wife
leaning toward each other-

sadly smiling, and emptied of desire.

*

Ride off any horizon
and let the measure fall
where it may-

off the edge
of the black prairie

as you thought you could fall,
a boy at sunset

not watching the sun
set but watching the black earth,

never-ending they said in school,
round: but you saw it ending,

finished, definite, precise-
visible only miles away.

*

Ride off any horizon
and let the measure fall
where it may-

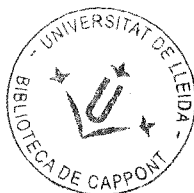
on a hot night the town
is in the streets-

the boys and girls
are practising against

each other, the men
talk and eye the girls-

the women talk and
eye each other, the indians
play pool: eye on the ball.

*



Ride off any horizon
and let the measure fall
where it may-

and damn the troops, the horsemen
are wheeling in the sunshine,
the cree, practising

for their deaths: mr poundmaker,
gentle sweet mr bigbear,
it is not unfortunately

quite enough to be innocent,
it is not enough merely
not to offend-

at times to be born
is enough, to be
in the way is too much-

some colonel otter, some
major-general middleton will
get you, you-

indian. It is no good to say,
I would rather die
at once than be in that place-

though you love that land more,
you will go where they take you.

*

Ride off any horizon
and let the measure fall-

where it may;
it doesn't have to be

the prairie. It could be
the cold soul of the cities

blown empty by commerce
and desiring commerce
to fill up emptiness.

The streets are full of people.

It is night, the lights
are on; the wind

blows as far as it may. The streets
are dark and full of people.

Their eyes are fixed as far as
they can see beyond each other-

to the concrete horizon, definite,
tall against the mountains,
stopping vision visibly.

THE SKY

Never knowing how we got there
one day we woke and saw the sky,
limitless, serene, capable
of black cloud and lightning,
the land limitless, yellow
with grain in summertime,
light green in spring, stretching
to the edge of the world
but never ending; and it made us
want to go.

 We travelled westward,
a little further every time,
venturing the hills, venturing
the spirit-inhabited mountains,
the quick-down slope, viewing at last
the sea and the sea-city.

The city was wonderful, huge;
we never heard that there were no birds.

How small all our own cities seemed,
so tiny, one street only, limited,
lacking the towers, the veritable ocean,
strange trees.

 Later we woke,
and saw the sky, crammed by mountains
as we were, open only to the sea,
westward; and could not swim.

VERIGIN, MOVING IN ALONE

(fatherless, 250 people
counting dogs and gophers
we would say, Jmaeff's grocery store,
me in grade 4, mother
principal of the two building
3-room-12-grade school,)

a boy sitting on the grass
of a small hill, the hot fall,
speaking no russian, an airgun
my sister gave me making me envied.

I tried all fall, all spring
the next ominous year, to kill
a crow with it, secretly glad
I could not, the men
in winter shooting the town's
wild dogs, casually tossing
the quick-frozen barely-bleeding
head-shot corpses onto
the street-side snowbanks,

the highway crews cutting their way
through to open the road with what
I was sure was simply
some alternate of a golden summer's
wheat-threshing machine, children
running through the hard-tossed spray,
pretending war from the monster's snout,

leaping into snowbanks from
Peter The Lordly Verigin's
palace on the edge of town in
a wild 3-dimensional
cubist game of cops and robbers,

cold spring swimming
in Dead Horse Creek and farmers'
dugouts and doomed fishing
in beastless ponds, strapped
in school for watching a fight,

coldly holding back tears
and digging for drunken father's
rum-bottle, he had finally

arrived, how I loved him,
loved him, love him, dead, still.

My mad old brother chased me
alone in the house with him
around and around
the small living room, airgun,
rifle in hand, silently,
our breaths coming together-

all sights and temperatures
and remembrances, as
a lost gull screams now
outside my window,
a 9-year-old's year-long
night and day in tiny
magnificent prairie Verigin:

the long grey cat we got,
the bruised knees, cut fingers,
nails in feet, far walks
to watch a horse's corpse
turn slowly and sweetly to bone,
white bone, and in late spring
too, I remember the bright
young bodies of the boys,

my friends and peers and enemies
till everything breaks down.

EDWIN JOHN PRATT

BRÉBEUF AND HIS BRETHREN

I

The winds of God were blowing over France, 1
 Kindling the hearths and altars, changing vows
 Of rote into an alphabet of flame.
 The air was charged with song beyond the range
 Of larks, with wings beyond the stretch of eagles.
 Skylines unknown to maps broke from the mists
 And there was laughter on the seas. With sound
 Of bugles from the Roman catacombs,
 The saints came back in their incarnate forms.
 Across the Alps St Francis of Assisi 10
 In his brown tunic girt with hempen cord,
 Revisited the plague-infected towns.
 The monks were summoned from their monasteries,
 Nuns from their convents; apostolic hands
 Had touched the priests, foundlings and galley slaves
 Became the charges of Vincent de Paul;
 Francis de Sales put his heroic stamp
 Upon his order of the Visitation.
 Out of Numidia by way of Rome,
 The architect of palaces, unbuilt 20
 Of hand, again was busy with his plans,
 Reshaping for the world his *city of God*.
 Out of the Netherlands was heard the call
 Of Kempis through the *Imitatio*
 To leave the dusty marts and city streets
 And stray along the shores of Galilee.
 The flame had spread across the Pyrenees-
 The visions of Theresa burning through
 The adorations of the Carmelites;
 The very clouds at night to John of the Cross 30
 Being cruciform- chancel, transept and aisle
 Blazing with light and holy oracle.
 Xavier had risen from his knees to drive
 His dreams full-sail under an ocean compass.
 Loyola, soldier-priest, staggering with wounds
 At Pampeluna, guided by a voice,

Had travelled to the Montserrata Abbey
 To leave his sword and dagger on an altar
 That he might lead the *Company of Jesus*.

The story of the frontier like a saga 40
 Sang through the cells and cloisters of the nation,
 Made silver flutes out of the parish spires,
 Troubled the ashes of the canonized
 In the cathedral crypts, soared through the nave
 To stir the foliations on the columns,
 Roll through the belfries, and give deeper tongue
 To the *Magnificat* in Notre Dame.
 It brought to earth the prophets and apostles
 Out of their static shrines in the stained glass.
 It caught the ear of Christ, reveined his hands 50
 And feet, bidding his marble saints to leave
 Their pedestals for chartless seas and coasts
 And the vast blunders of the forest glooms.
 So, in the footsteps of their patrons came
 A group of men asking the hardest tasks
 At the new outposts of the Huron bounds
 Held in the stern hand of the Jesuit Order.

And in Bayeaux a neophyte while rapt
 In contemplation saw a bleeding form 60
 Falling beneath the instrument of death,
 Rising under the quickening of the thongs,
 Stumbling along the Via Dolorosa.
 No play upon the fancy was this scene,
 But the Real Presence to the naked sense.
 The fingers of Brébeuf were at his breast,
 Closing and tightening on a crucifix,
 While voices spoke aloud unto his ear
 And to his heart- *per ignem et per aquam*.
 Forests and streams and trails thronged through his mind,
 The painted faces of the Iroquois, 70
 Nomadic bands and smoking bivouacs
 Along the shores of western inland seas,
 With forts and palisades and fiery stakes.
 The stories of Champlain, Brulé, Viel,
 Sagard and Le Caron had reached his town-
 The stories of those northern boundaries
 Where in the winter the white pines could brush
 The Pleiades, and at the equinoxes
 Under the gold and green of the auroras
 Wild geese drove wedges through the zodiac. 80
 The vows were deep he laid upon his soul.
 'I shall be broken first before I break them.'
 He knew by heart the manual that had stirred

The world- the clarion calling through the notes
 Of the Ignatian preludes. On the prayers,
 The meditations, points and colloquies,
 Was built the soldier and the martyr programme.
 This is the end of man- *Deum laudet*,
 To seek and find the will of God, to act
 Upon it for the ordering of life,
 And for the soul's beatitude. This is
 To do, this not to do. To weigh the sin;
 The interior understanding to be followed
 By the amendment of the deed through grace;
 The abnegation of the evil thought
 And act; the trampling of the body under;
 The daily practice of the *counter virtues*.
 'In time of desolation to be firm
 And constant in the soul's determination,
 Desire and sense obedient to the reason.

90

100

The oath Brébeuf was taking had its root
 Firm in his generations of descent.
 The family name was known to chivalry-
 In the Crusades; at Hastings, through the blood
 Of the English Howards; called out on the rungs
 Of the siege ladders; at the castle breaches;
 Proclaimed by heralds at the lists, and heard
 In Council Halls: - the coat-of-arms a bull
 In black with horns of gold on a silver shield.
 So on that toughened pedigree of fibre
 Were strung the pledges. From the novice stage
 To the vow-day he passed on to the priesthood,
 And on the anniversary of his birth
 He celebrated his first mass at Rouen.

110

April 26, 1625

And the first clauses of the Jesuit pledge
 Were honoured when, embarking at Dieppe,
 Brébeuf, Massé and Charles Lalemant
 Travelled three thousand miles of the Atlantic,
 And reached the citadel in seven weeks.
 A month in preparation at Notre Dame
 Des Anges, Brébeuf in company with Daillon
 Moved to Three Rivers to begin the journey.
 Taking both warning and advice from traders,
 They packed into their stores of altar-ware
 And vestments, strings of coloured beads with knives,
 Kettles and awls, domestic gifts to win
 The Hurons' favour or appease their wrath.

120

There was a touch of omen in the warning,
 For scarcely had they started when the fate
 Of the Franciscan mission was disclosed- 130
 News of Viel, delivered to Brébeuf-
 Drowned by the natives in the final league
 Of his return at Sault-au-Récollet!

Back to Quebec by Lalemant's command;
 A year's delay of which Brébeuf made use
 By hardening his body and his will,
 Learning the rudiments of the Huron tongue,
 Mastering the wood-lore, joining in the hunt
 For food, observing habits of speech, the ways
 Of thought, the moods and the long silences. 140
 Wintering with the Algonquins, he soon knew
 The life that was before him in the cabins-
 The troubled night, branches of fir covering
 The floor of snow; the martyrdom of smoke
 That hourly drove his nostrils to the ground
 To breathe, or offered him the choice of death
 Outside by frost, inside by suffocation;
 The forced companionship of dogs that ate
 From the same platters, slept upon his legs
 Or neck; the nausea from sagamite, 150
 Unsalted, gritty, and that bloated feeling,
 The February stomach touch when acorns,
 Turk's cap, bog-onion bulbs dug from the snow
 And bulrush roots flavoured with eel skin made
 The menu for his breakfast-dinner-supper.
 Added to this, the instigated taunts
 Common as daily salutations; threats
 Of murderous intent that just escaped
 The deed- the prologue to Huronia!

July 1626

Midsummer and the try again- Brébeuf, 160
 Daillon, de Nouë just arrived from France;
 Quebec up to Three Rivers; the routine
 Repeated; bargaining with the Indians,
 Axes and beads against the maize and passage;
 The natives' protest when they saw Brébeuf,
 High as a totem-pole. What if he placed
 His foot upon the gunwale, suddenly
 Shifted an ounce of those two hundred pounds
 Off centre at the rapids! They had visions
 Of bodies and bales gyrating round the rocks, 170
 Plunging like stumps and logs over the falls.

The Hurons shook their heads: the bidding grew;
 Kettles and porcelain necklaces and knives,
 Till with the last awl thrown upon the heap,
 The ratifying grunt came from the chief.
 Two Indians holding the canoe, Brébeuf,
 Barefooted, cassock pulled up to his knees,
 Planted one foot dead in the middle, then
 The other, then slowly and ticklishly
 Adjusted to the physics of his range
 And width, he grasped both sides of the canoe,
 Lowered himself and softly murmuring
 An *Ave*, sat, immobile as a statue.

180

So the flotilla started- the same route
 Champlain and Le Caron eleven years
 Before had taken to avoid the swarm
 Of hostile Iroquois on the St. Lawrence.
 Eight hundred miles- along the Ottawa
 Through the steep gorges where the river narrowed,
 Through calmer waters where the river widened,
 Skirting the island of the Allumettes,
 Thence to the Mattawa through the lakes that led
 To the blue waters of the Nipissing,
 And then southward a hundred tortuous miles
 Down the French River to the Huron shore.
 The record of that trip was for Brébeuf
 A memory several times to be re-lived;
 Of rocks and cataracts and portages,
 Of feet cut by the river stones, of mud
 And stench, of boulders, logs and tangled growths,
 Of summer heat that made him long for night,
 And when he struck his bed of rock- mosquitoes
 That made him doubt if dawn would ever break.
 'Twas thirty days to the Georgian Bay, then south
 One hundred miles threading the labyrinth
 Of islands till he reached the western shore
 That flanked the Bay of Penetanguishene.
 Soon joined by both his fellow priests he followed
 The course of a small stream and reached Toaniché,
 Where for three years he was to make his home
 And turn the first sod of the Jesuit mission.

190

200

210

'Twas ploughing only- for eight years would pass
 Before even the blades appeared. The priests
 Knew well how barren was the task should signs,
 Gestures and inarticulate sounds provide
 The basis of the converse. And the speech
 Was hard. De Nouë set himself to school,
 Unflinching as to his Breviary,

Through the long evenings of the fall and winter.
But as light never trickled through a sentence, 220
Either the Hurons' or his own, he left
With the spring's expedition to Quebec,
Where intermittently for twenty years
He was to labour with the colonists,
Travelling between the outposts, and to die
Snow-blind, caught in the circles of his tracks
Between Three Rivers and Fort Richelieu.

Daillon migrated to the south and west
To the country of the Neutrals. There he spent
The winter, fruitless. Jealousies of trade 230
Awoke resentment, fostered calumnies,
Until the priest under a constant threat
That often issued in assault, returned
Against his own persuasion to Quebec.

Brébeuf was now alone. He bent his mind
To the great end. The efficacious rites
Were hinged as much on mental apprehensions
As on the disposition of the heart.
For that the first equipment was the speech. 240
He listened to the sounds and gave them letters,
Arranged their sequences, caught the inflections,
Extracted nouns from objects, verbs from actions
And regimented rebel moods and tenses.
He saw the way the chiefs harangued the clans,
The torrent of compounded word, the art
Concealed within the pause, the look, the gesture.
Lacking all labials, the open mouth
Performed a double service with the vowels
Directed like a battery at the hearers.
With what forebodings did he watch the spell 250
Cast on the sick by the Arendiwans:

The sorcery of the Huron rhetoric
Extorting bribes for cures, for guarantees
Against the failure of the crop or hunt!
The time would come when steel would clash on steel,
And many a battle would be won or lost
With weapons from the armoury of words.
Three years of that apprenticeship had won
The praise of his Superior and no less
Evoked the admiration of Champlain. 260
That soldier, statesman, navigator, friend,
Who had combined the brain of Richelieu
With the red blood of Cartier and Magellan,
Was at this time reduced to his last keg
Of powder at the citadel. Blockade,

The piracy of Kirke on the Atlantic,
 The English occupation of Quebec,
 And famine, closed this chapter of the mission.

4

II

1629

Four years at home could not abate his zeal.
 Brébeuf, absorbed within his meditations, 270
 Made ready to complete his early vows.
 Each year in France but served to clarify
 His vision. At Rouen he gauged the height
 Of the Cathedral's central tower in terms
 Of pines and oaks around the Indian lodges.
 He went to Paris. There as a worshipper,
 His eyes were scaling transepts, but his mind,
 Straying from window patterns where the sun
 Shed rose ellipses on the marble floor,
 Rested on glassless walls of cedar bark. 280
 To Rennes- the Jesuits' intellectual home,
 Where, in the *Summa* of Aquinas, faith
 Laid hold on God's existence when the last
 Link of the Reason slipped, and where Loyola
 Enforced the high authoritarian scheme
 Of God's vicegerent on the priestly fold.
 Between the two nostalgic fires Brébeuf
 Was swung- between two homes; in one was peace
 Within the holy court, the ecstasy 290
 Of unmolested prayer before the Virgin,
 The daily and vicarious offering
 On which no hand might dare lay sacrilege:
 But in the other would be broken altars
 And broken bodies of both Host and priest.
 Then of which home, the son? From which the exile?
 With his own blood Brébeuf wrote his last vow-
 'Lord Jesus! You redeemed me with your blood;
 By your most precious death; and this is why
 I make this pledge to serve you all my life
 In the Society of Jesus- never 300
 To serve another than Thyself. Hereby
 I sign this promise in my blood, ready
 To sacrifice it all as willingly
 As now I give this drop.'- Jean de Brébeuf.

Nor did the clamour of the *Thirty Years*,
 The battle-cries at La Rochelle and Fribourg,
 Blow out the flame. Less strident than the names
 Of Richelieu and Mazarin, Condé,
 Turenne, but just as mighty, were the calls
 Of the new apostolate. A century 310
 Before had Xavier from the Indies summoned
 The world to other colours. Now appeals
 Were ringing through the history of New France.
 Le Jeune, following the example of Biard
 And Charles Lalemant, was capturing souls
 By thousands with the fire of the *Relations*:
 Noble and peasant, layman, priest and nun
 Gave of their wealth and power and personal life.

Among his new recruits were Chastellain,
 Pijart, Le Mercier, and Isaac Jogues, 320
 The Lalemants- Jerome and Gabriel-
 Jerome who was to supervise and write,
 With Ragueneau, the drama of the Mission;
 Who told of the survivors reaching France
 When the great act was closed that 'all of them
 Still hold their resolution to return
 To the combat at the first sound of the trumpets.'
 The other, Gabriel, who would share the crown
 With Jean Brébeuf, pitting the frailest body
 Against the hungers of the wilderness, 330
 The fevers of the lodges and the fires
 That slowly wreathed themselves around a stake.

Then Garnier, comrade of Jogues. The winds
 Had fanned to a white heat the hearth and placed
 Three brothers under vows- the Carmelite,
 The Capuchin, and his, the Jesuit.
 The gentlest of his stock, he had resolved
 To seek and to accept a post that would
 Transmit his nurture through a discipline
 That multiplied the living martyrdoms 340
 Before the casual incident of death.

To many a vow did Chabanel subject
 His timid nature as the evidence
 Of trial came through the Huronian records.
 He needed every safeguard of the soul
 To fortify the will, for every day
 Would find him fighting, mastering his revolt
 Against the native life and practices.
 Of all the priests he could the least endure
 The sudden transformation from the Chair 350

Of College Rhetoric to the heat and drag
 Of portages, from the monastic calm
 To the noise and smoke and vermin of the lodges,
 And the insufferable sights and stinks
 When, at the High Feast of the Dead, the bodies
 Lying for months or years upon the scaffolds
 Were taken down, stripped of their flesh, caressed,
 Strung up along the cabin poles and then
 Cast in a pit for common burial.

The day would come when in the wilderness,
 The weary hand protesting, he would write
 This final pledge- 'I, Noel Chabanel,
 Do vow, in presence of the Sacrament
 Of Thy most precious blood and body, here
 To stay forever with the Huron Mission,
 According to commands of my Superiors.
 Therefore I do beseech Thee to receive me
 As Thy perpetual servant and to make
 Me worthy of so sublime a ministry.'

360

And the same spirit breathed on Chaumonot,
 Making his restless and undisciplined soul
 At first seek channels of renunciation
 In abstinence, ill health and beggary.
 His months of pilgrimages to the shrines
 At Rome and to the Lady of Loretto,
 The static hours upon his knees had sapped
 His strength, turning an introspective mind
 Upon the weary circuit of its thoughts,
 Until one day a letter from Brébeuf
 Would come to burn the torpors of his heart
 And galvanize a raw novitiate.

370

III

1633

New France restored! Champlain, Massé, Brébeuf
 Were in Quebec, hopes riding high as ever.
 Davost and Daniel soon arrived to join
 The expedition west. Midsummer trade,
 the busiest the Colony had known,
 Was over: forty-three canoes to meet
 The hazards of return; the basic sense
 Of safety, now Champlain was on the scene;
 The joy of the Toaniché Indians
 As they beheld Brébeuf and heard him speak
 In their own tongue, was happy augury.

380

390

But as before upon the eve of starting
 The path was blocked, so now the unforeseen
 Stepped in. A trade and tribal feud long-blown
 Between the Hurons and the Allumettes
 Came to a head when the Algonquin chief
 Forbade the passage of the priests between
 His island and the shore. The Hurons knew
 The roughness of this channel, and complied.

400

In such delays which might have been construed
 By lesser wills as exits of escape,
 As providential doors on a light latch,
 The Fathers entered deeper preparation.
 They worked incessantly among the tribes
 In the environs of Quebec, took hold
 Of Huron words and beat them into order.
 Davost and Daniel gathered from the store
 Of speech, manners, and customs that Brébeuf
 Had garnered, all the subtleties to make
 The bargain for the journey. The next year
 Seven canoes instead of forty! Fear
 Of Iroquois following a recent raid
 And massacre; growing distrust of priests;
 The sense of risk in having men aboard
 Unskilled in fire-arms, helpless at the paddles
 And on the portages- all these combined
 To sharpen the terms until the treasury
 Was dry of presents and of promises.

410

1634

The ardours of his trip eight years before
 Fresh in his mind, Brébeuf now set his face
 To graver peril, for the native mood
 Was hostile. On the second week the corn
 Was low, a handful each a day. Sickness
 Had struck the Huron, slowing down the blades,
 And turning murmurs to menaces
 Against the Blackrobes and their French companions.
 The first blow hit Davost. Robbed of his books,
 Papers and altar linens, he was left
 At the island of the Allumettes; Martin
 Was put ashore at Nipissing; Baron
 And Daniel were deserted, made to take
 Their chances with canoes along the route;
 Yet all in turn, tattered, wasted, with feet
 Bleeding- broken though not in will- rejoined
 Their great companion after he had reached

420

430

The forest shores of the Fresh Water Sea,
 And guided by the sight of smoke had entered
 The village of Ihonatiria.

A year's success flattered the priestly hope 440
 That on this central field seed would be sown
 On which the yield would be the Huron nation
 Baptized and dedicated to the Faith;
 And that a richer harvest would be gleaned
 Of duskier grain from the same seed on more
 Forbidding ground when the arch-foes themselves
 Would be re-born under the sacred rites.
 For there was promise in the auspices.
 Ihonatiria received Brébeuf
 With joy. Three years he had been there, a friend 450
 Whose visit to the tribes could not have sprung
 From inspiration rooted in private gain.
 He had not come to stack the arquebuses
 Against the mountains of the beaver pelts.
 He had not come to kill. Between the two
 - Barter and battle- what was left to explain
 A stranger in their midst? The name *Echon*
 Had solved the riddle.

So with native help

The Fathers built their mission house- the frame 460
 Of young elm-poles set solidly in earth;
 Their supple tops bent, lashed and braced to form
 The arched roof overlaid with cedar-bark.
 'No Louvre or palace is this cabin,' wrote
 Brébeuf, 'no stories, cellar, garret, windows,
 No chimney- only at the top a hole
 To let the smoke escape. Inside, three rooms
 With doors of wood alone set it apart
 From the single long-house of the Indians.
 The first is used for storage; in the second
 Our kitchen, bedroom and refectory; 470
 Our bedstead is the earth; rushes and boughs
 For mattresses and pillows; in the third,
 Which is our chapel, we have placed the altar,
 The images and vessels of the Mass.'
 It was the middle room that drew the natives,
 Day after day, to share the sagamite
 And raisins, and to see the marvels brought
 From France- marvels on which the Fathers built
 A basis of persuasion, recognizing
 The potency of awe for natures nurtured 480
 On charms and spells, invoking kindly spirits
 And exorcising demons. So the natives

Beheld a mass of iron chips like bees
 Swarm to a lodestone: was it gum that held
 Them fast? They watched the handmill grind the corn;
 Gaped at a lens eleven faceted
 That multiplied a bead as many times
 And at a phial where a captive flea
 Looked like a beetle. But the miracle
 Of all, the clock! It showed the hours; it struck 490
 Or stopped upon command. *Le Capitaine*
Du Jour which moved its hands before its face,
 Called up the dawn, saluted noon, rang out
 The sunset, summoned with the count of twelve
 The Fathers to a meal, or sent at four
 The noisy pack of Indians to their cabins.
 'What did it say?' 'Yo eiouahaoua-
 Time to put on the cauldron.' 'And what now?'
 Time to go home at once and close the door.'
 It was alive: an *oki* dwelt inside, 500
 Peering out through that black hub on the dial.
 As great a mystery was writing- how
 A Frenchman fifteen miles away could know
 The meaning of black signs the runner brought.
 Sometimes the marks were made on peel of bark,
 Sometimes on paper- in itself a wonder!
 From what strange tree was it the inside rind?
 What charm was in the ink that transferred thought
 Across such space without a spoken word?

This growing confirmation of belief 510
 Was speeded by events wherein good fortune
 Waited upon the priestly word and act.

August 27, 1635

A moon eclipse was due- Brébeuf had known it-
 Had told the Indians of the moment when
 The shadow would be thrown across the face.
 Nor was there wastage in the prayers as night,
 Uncurtained by a single cloud, produced
 An orb most perfect. No one knew the lair
 Or nest from which the shadow came; no one
 The home to which it travelled when it passed. 520
 Only the vague uncertainties were left-
 Was it the dread invasion from the south?
 Such portent was the signal for the braves
 To mass themselves outside the towns and shoot
 Their multitudes of arrows at the sky
 And fling their curses at the Iroquois.

Like a crow's wing it hovered, broodily
 Brushing the face- five hours from rim to rim
 While midnight darkness stood upon the land.
 This was prediction baffling all their magic. 530
 Again, when weeks of drought had parched the land
 And burned the corn, when dancing sorcerers
 Brought out their tortoise shells, climbed on the roofs,
 Clanging their invocation to the Bird
 Of Thunder to return, day after day,
 Without avail, the priests formed their processions,
 Put on their surplices above their robes,
 And the Bird of Thunder came with heavy rain,
 Released by the nine masses at Saint Joseph.

Nor were the village warriors slow to see 540
 The value of the Frenchmen's strategy
 In war. Returning from the eastern towns,
 They told how soldiers had rebuilt the forts,
 And strengthened them with corner bastions
 Where through the embrasures enfilading fire
 Might flank the Iroquois bridging the ditches,
 And scaling ramparts. Here was argument
 That pierced the thickest prejudice of brain
 And heart, allying panic ever present,
 When with the first news of the hated foe 550
 From scouts and hunters, women with their young
 Fled to the dubious refuge of the forest
 From terror blacker than a pestilence.
 On such a soil tilled by those skilful hands
 Those passion flowers and lilies of the East,
 The *Aves* and the *Paternosters* bloomed.
 The *Credos* and the *Thou-shalt-nots* were turned
 By Daniel into simple Huron rhymes
 And taught to children, and when points of faith
 Were driven hard against resistant rock, 560
 The Fathers found the softer crevices
 Through deeds which readily the Indian mind
 Could grasp- where hands were never put to blows
 Nor the swift tongues used for recrimination.

Acceptance of the common lot was part
 Of the original vows. But that the priests
 Who were to come should not misread the text,
 Brébeuf prepared a sermon on the theme
 Of patience; - 'Fathers, Brothers, under call
 Of God! Take care that you foresee the perils, 570
 Labours and hardships of this Holy Mission.
 You must sincerely love the savages
 As brother ransomed by the blood of Christ.

All things must be endured. To win their hearts
 You must perform the smallest services.
 Provide a tinder-box or burning mirror
 To light their fires. Fetch wood and water for them;
 And when embarking never let them wait
 For you; tuck up your habits, keep them dry
 To avoid water and sand in their canoes. Carry 580
 Your load on portages. Always appear
 Cheerful- Their memories are good for faults.
 Constrain yourselves to eat their sagamite
 The way that they prepare it, tasteless, dirty.'

And by the priests upon the ground all dots
 And commas were obserbed. They suffered smoke
 That billowed from the back-draughts at the roof,
 Smothered the cabin, seared the eyes; the fire
 That broiled the face, while frost congealed the spine;
 The food from unwashed platters where refusal 590
 Was an offense; the rasp of speech maintained
 All day by men who never learned to talk
 In quiet tones; the drums of the Diviners
 Blasting the night- all this without complaint!
 And more- whatever sleep was possible
 To snatch from the occasional lull of cries
 Was broken by uncovenanted fleas
 That fastened on the priestly flesh like hornets.
 Carving the curves of favour on the lips,
 Tailoring the man into the Jesuit coat, 600
 Wrapping the smiles round inward maledictions,
 And sublimating hoary Gallic oaths
 Into the *Benedicite* when dogs
 And squaws and reeking children violated
 The hours of rest, were penances unnamed
 Within the iron code of good Ignatius.
 Was there a limit of obedience
 Outside the jurisdiction of this Saint?
 How often did the hand go up to lower
 The flag? How often by some ringing order 610
 Was it arrested at the halliard touch?
 How often did Brébeuf seal up his ears
 When blows and insults woke ancestral fifes
 Within his brain, blood-cells, and viscera,
 Is not explicit in the written story.

But never could the Indians infer
 Self-gain or anything but simple courage
 Inspired by a zeal beyond reproof,
 As when the smallpox spreading like a flame
 Destroying hundreds, scarifying thousands, 620

The Fathers took their chances of contagion,
 Their broad hats warped by rain, their moccasins
 Worn to the kibes, that they might reach the huts,
 Share with the sick their dwindled stock of food-
 A sup of partridge broth or raising juice,
 Inscribe the sacred sign of the cross, and place
 A touch of moisture from the Holy Water
 Upon the forehead of a dying child.

Before the year was gone the priests were shown
 The way the Hurons could prepare for death 630
 A captive foe. The warriors had surprised
 A band of Iroquois and had reserved
 The one survivor for a fiery pageant.
 No cunning of an ancient Roman triumph,
 Nor torment of a Medici confession
 Surpassed the subtle savagery of art
 Which made the dressing for the sacrifice
 A ritual of mockery for the victim.
 What visions of the past came to Brébeuf,
 And what forebodings of the days to come, 640
 As he beheld this weird compound of life
 In jest and intent taking place before
 His eyes- the crude unconscious variants
 Of reed and sceptre, robe and cross, brier
 And crown! Might not one day baptismal drops
 Be turned against him in a rain of death?
 Whatever the appeals made by the priests,
 They could not break the immemorial usage
 Or vary one detail. The prisoner
 Was made to sing his death-song, was embraced, 650
 Hailed with ironic greetings, forced to state
 His willingness to die.

'See how your hands
 Are crushed. You cannot thus desire to live.
 No.

Then be of good courage- you shall die.

True! What shall be the manner of my death?

By fire.

When shall it be?

Tonight.

What hour?

At sunset.

All is well'.

Eleven fires

Were lit along the whole length of the cabin.
 His body smeared with pitch and bound with belts
 Of bark, the Iroquois was forced to run
 The fires, stopped at each end by the young braves,
 And swiftly driven back, and when he swooned,
 They carried him outside to the night air,
 Laid him on fresh damp moss, poured cooling water
 Into his mouth, and to his burns applied
 The soothing balsams. With resuscitation
 They lavished on him all the courtesies
 Of speech and gesture, gave him food and drink,
 Compassionately spoke of his wounds and pain.
 The ordeal every hour was resumed
 And halted, but, with each recurrence, blows
 Were added to the burns and gibes gave place
 To yells until the sacrificial dawn,
 Lighting the scaffold, dimming the red glow
 Of the hatchet collar, closed the festival.

660

670

Brébeuf had seen the worst. He knew that when
 A winter pack of wolves brought down a stag
 There was no waste of time between the leap
 And the business click upon the jugular,
 Such was the forthright honesty in death
 Among the brutes. They had not learned the sport
 Of dallying around the nerves to halt
 A quick despatch. A human art was torture,
 Where reason crept into the veins, mixed tar
 With blood and brewed its own intoxicant.
 Brébeuf had pleaded for the captive's life,
 But as the night wore on, would not his heart,
 Colliding with his mind, have wished for death?
 The plea refused, he gave the Iroquois
 The only consolation in his power.
 He went back to his cabin, heavy in heart.
 To stem that viscous melanotic current
 Demanded labour, time, and sacrifice.
 Those passions were not altered over-night.
 Two plans were in his mind- the one concerned
 The seminary started in Quebec.
 The children could be sent there to be trained
 In Christian precepts, weaned from superstition
 And from the savage spectacle of death.
 He saw the way the women and their broods
 Danced round the scaffold in their exaltation.
 How much of this was habit and how much

680

690

700

Example? Curiously Brébeuf revolved
 The facets of the Indian character.
 A fighting courage equal to the French-
 It could be lifted to crusading heights
 By a battle speech. Endurance was a code
 Among the braves, and impassivity.
 Their women wailing at the Feast of Death,
 The men sat silent, heads bowed to the knees. 710
 'Never in nine years with but one exception,'
 Wrote Ragueneau, 'did I see an Indian weep
 For grief. 'Only the fires evoked the cries,
 And these like scalps were triumphs for the captors.
 But then their charity and gentleness
 To one another and to strangers gave
 A balance to the picture. Fugitives
 From villages destroyed found instant welcome
 To the last communal share of food and land.
 Brébeuf's stay at Toanché gave him proof 720
 Of how the Huron nature could respond
 To Kindness. But last night upon that scaffold!
 Could that be scoured from the heart? Why not
 Try out the nurture plan upon the children
 And send the boys east, shepherded by Daniel?

The other need was urgent- labourers!
 The villages were numerous and were spread
 Through such a vast expanse of wilderness
 And shore. Only a bell with a bronze throat
 Must summon missionaries to these fields. 730
 With the last cry of the captive in his ears,
 Brébeuf strode from his cabin to the woods
 To be alone. He found his tabernacle
 Within a grove, picked up a stone flat-faced,
 And going to the cedar-crotch, he jammed
 It in, and on this table wrote his letter.
 'Herein I show you what you have to suffer.
 I shall say nothing of the voyage- that
 You know already. If you have the courage
 To try it, that is only the beginning, 740
 For when after a month of river travel
 You reach our village, we can offer you
 The shelter of a cabin lowlier
 Than any hovel you have seen in France.
 As tired as you may be, only a mat
 Laid on the ground will be your bed. Your food
 May be for weeks a gruel of crushed corn
 That has the look and smell of mortar paste.
 This country is the breeding place of vermin.
 Sandflies, mosquitoes haunt the summer months. 750

In France you may have been a theologian,
 A scholar, master, preacher, but out here
 You must attend a savage school; for months
 Will pass before you learn even to lisp
 The language. Here barbarians shall be
 Your Aristotle and Saint Thomas. Mute
 Before those teachers you shall take your lessons.
 What of the winter? Half the year is winter.
 Inside your cabins will be smoke so thick
 You may not read your Breviary for days.
 Around your fireplace at mealtime arrive
 The uninvited guests with whom you share
 Your stint of food. And in the fall and winter,
 You tramp unbeaten trails to reach the missions,
 Carrying your luggage on your back. Your life
 Hangs by a thread. Of all calamities
 You are the cause- the scarcity of game,
 A fire, famine or an epidemic.

760

There are no natural reasons for a drought
 And for the earth's sterility. You are
 The reasons, and at any time a savage
 May burn your cabin down or split your head.
 I tell you of the enemies that live
 Among our Huron friends. I have not told
 You of the Iroquois our constant foes.
 Only a week ago in open fight
 They killed twelve of our men at Contarea,
 A day's march from the village where we live.
 Treacherous and stealthy in their ambuscades,
 They terrorize the country, for the Hurons
 Are very slothful in defence, never
 On guard and always seeking flight for safety.

770

'Wherein the gain, you ask, of this acceptance?
 There is no gain but this- that what you suffer
 Shall be of God: your loneliness in travel
 Will be relieved by angels overhead;
 Your silence will be sweet for you will learn
 How to commune with God; rapids and rocks
 are easier than the steeps of Calvary.
 There is a consolation in your hunger
 And in abandonment upon the road,
 For once there was a greater loneliness
 And deeper hunger. As regards the soul
 There are no dangers here, with means of grace
 At every turn, for if we go outside
 Our cabin, is not heaven over us?
 No buildings block the clouds. We say our prayers
 Freely before a noble oratory.

780

790

Here is the place to practise faith and hope
 And charity where human art has brought 800
 No comforts, where we strive to bring to God
 A race so unlike men that we must live
 Daily expecting murder at their hands,
 Did we not open up the skies or close
 Them at command, giving them sun or rain.
 So if despite these trials you are ready
 To share our labours, come; for you will find
 A consolation in the cross that far outweighs
 Its burdens. Though in many an hour your soul
 Will echo- "Why hast Thou forsaken me," 810
 Yet evening will descend upon you when,
 Your heart too full of holy exultation,
 You call like Xavier- "Enough, O Lord!"

This letter was to loom in history,
 For like a bulletin it would be read
 In France, and men whose bones were bound for dust
 Would find that on those jagged characters
 Their names would rise from their oblivion
 To flame on an eternal Calendar.
 Already to the field two young recruits 820
 Had come- Pijart, Le Mercier; on their way
 Were Chastellain with Garnier and Jogues
 Followed by Ragueneau and Du Peron.

On many a night in lonely intervals,
 The priest would wander to the pines and build
 His oratory where celestial visions
 Sustained his soul. As unto Paul and John
 Of Patmos and the martyr multitude
 The signs were given- voices from the clouds,
 Forms that illumined darkness, stabbed despair, 830
 Turned dungeons into temples and a brand
 Of shame into the ultimate boast of time-
 So to Brébeuf had Christ appeared and Mary.
 One night at prayer he heard a voice command-
 'Rise, Read!' Opening the *Imitatio Christi*,
 His eyes 'without design' fell on the chapter,
Concerning the royal way of the Holy Cross,
 Which placed upon his spirit 'a great peace'.
 And then, day having come, he wrote his vow-
 'My God, my Saviour, I take from thy hand 840
 The cup of thy sufferings. I invoke thy name;
 I vow never to fail thee in the grace
 Of martyrdom, if by thy mercy, Thou
 Dost offer it to me. I bind myself,
 And when I have received the stroke of death,

I will accept it from thy gracious hand
 With all pleasure and with joy in my heart;
 To Thee my blood, my body and my life.'

IV

The labourers were soon put at their tasks-
 The speech, the founding of new posts, the sick: 850
 Ihonatiria, a phantom town,
 Through plague and flight abandoned as a base,
 The Fathers chose the site- Teanaostayé,
 To be the second mission of St. Joseph.
 But the prime hope was on Ossossané,
 A central town of fifty cabins built
 On the east shore of Nottawasaga Bay.
 The native council had approved the plans.
 The presence of the priests with their lay help
 Would be defence against the Iroquois. 860
 Under the supervision of Pijart
 The place was fortified, ramparts were strengthened,
 And towers of heavy posts set at the angles.
 And in the following year the artisans
 And labourers from Quebec with Du Peron,
 Using broad-axe and whipsaw built a church,
 The first one in the whole Huronian venture
 To be of wood. Close to their lodge, the priests
 Dug up the soil and harrowed it to plant
 A mere handful of wheat from which they raised 870
 A half a bushel for the altar bread.
 From the wild grapes they made a cask of wine
 For the Holy Sacrifice. But of all work
 The hardest was instruction. It was easy
 To strike the Huron sense with sound and colour-
 The ringing of a bell; the litanies
 And chants; the surplices worn on the cassocks;
 The burnished ornaments around the altar;
 The pageant of the ceremonial.
 But to drive home the ethics taxed the brain 880
 To the limit of its ingenuity.
 Brébeuf had felt the need to vivify
 His three main themes of God and Paradise
 And hell. The Indian mind had let the cold
 Abstractions fall: the allegories failed
 To quicken up the logic. Garnier
 Proposed the colours for the homilies.
 The closest student of the Huron mind,
 He had observed the fears and prejudices
 Haunting the shadows of their racial past; 890

Had seen the flaws in Brébeuf's *points*; had heard
 The Indian comments on the moral law
 And on the Christian scheme of Paradise.
 Would Iroquois be there? yes, if baptized.
 Would there be hunting of the deer and beaver?
 No. Then starvation. War? And feasts? Tobacco?
 No. Garnier saw disgust upon their faces,
 And sent appeals to France for pictures- one
Only of souls in bliss: of *âmes damnées* 900
 Many and various- the horned Satan,
 His mastiff jaws champing the head of Judas;
 The plummet fall of the unbaptized pursued
 By demons with their fiery forks; the lick
 Of flames upon a naked Saracen;
 Dragons with scarlet tongues and writhing serpents
 In ambush by the charcoal avenues
 Just ready at the Judgement word to wreak
 Vengeance upon the unregenerate.
 The negative unapprehended forms 910
 Of Heaven lost in the dim canvas oils
 Gave way to glows from brazier pitch that lit
 The visual affirmatives of Hell.

Despite the sorcerers who laid the blame
 Upon the French for all their ills- the plague,
 The drought, the Iroquois- the Fathers counted
 Baptisms by the hundreds, infants, children
 And aged at the point of death. Adults
 In health were more intractable, but there
 The spade had entered soil in the conversion 920
 Of a Huron in full bloom and high in power
 And counsel, Tsiouendaentaha
 Whose Christian name- to aid the tongue- was Peter.
 Being the first, he was the Rock on which
 The priests would build their Church. He was baptized
 With all the pomp transferable from France
 Across four thousands miles combined with what
 A sky and lake could offer, and a forest
 Strung to the *aubade* of the orioles.
 The wooden chapel was their Rheims Cathedral. 930
 In stole and surplice Lalemant intoned-
 'If therefore thou wilt enter into life,
 Keep the commandments. Thou shalt love the Lord
 Thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul,
 With all thy might, and thy neighbour as thyself.'
 With salt and water and the holy chrism,
 And through the signs made on his breast and forehead
 The Huron was exorcised, sanctified,
 And made the temple of the Living God.

The holy rite was followed by the Mass 940
 Before the motliest auditory known
 In the annals of worship. Oblates from Quebec,
 Blackrobes, mechanics, soldiers, labourers,
 With almost half the village packed inside,
 Or jammed with craning necks outside the door.
 The warriors lean, lithe, and elemental,
 'As naked as your hand' but for a skin
 Thrown loosely on their shoulders, with their hair
 Erect, boar-brushed, matted, glued with the oil
 Of sunflower larded thickly with bear's grease; 950
 Papooses yowling on their mothers' backs,
 The squatting hags, suspicion in their eyes,
 Their nebulous minds relating in some way
 The smoke and aromatics of the censer,
 The candles, crucifix and Latin murmurs
 With vapours, sounds and colours of the Judgement.

V

(The founding of Fort Sainte Marie)

1639

The migrant habits of the Indians
 With their desertion of the villages
 Through pressure of attack or want of food
 Called for a central site where undisturbed 960
 The priests with their attendants might pursue
 Their culture, gather strength from their devotions,
 Map out the territory, plot the routes,
 Collate their weekly notes and write their letters.
 The roll was growing- priests and colonists,
 Lay brothers offering services for life.
 For on the ground or on their way to place
 Themselves at the command of Lalemant,
 Superior, were Claude Pijart, Poncet,
 Le Moyne, Charles Raymbault, René Menard 970
 And Joseph Chaumonot: as oblates came
 Le Coq, Christophe Reynaut, Charles Boivin,
 Couture and Jean Guérin. And so to house
 Them all the Residence- Fort Saint Marie!
 Strategic as a base for trade or war
 The site received the approval of Quebec,
 Was ratified by Richelieu who saw
 Commerce and exploration pushing west,
 Fulfilling the long vision of Champlain-
 'Greater New France beyond those inland seas.' 980

The fort was built, two hundred feet by ninety,
Upon the right bank of the River Wye:
Its north and eastern sides of masonry,
Its south and west of double palisades,
And skirted by a moat, ran parallel
To stream and lake. Square bastions at the corners,
Watch-towers with magazines and sleeping posts,
Commanded forest edges and canoes
That furtively came up the Matchedash,
And on each bastion was placed a cross. 990
Inside, the Fathers built their dwelling house,
No longer the bark cabin with the smoke
Ill-trained to work its exit through the roof,
But plank and timber- at each end a chimney
Of lime and granite field-stone. Rude it was
But clean, capacious, full of twilight calm.
Across the south canal fed by the river,
Ringed by another palisade were buildings
Offering retreat to Indian fugitives
Whenever war and famine scourged the land. 1000

The plans were supervised by Lalemant,
Assigning zones of work to every priest.
He made a census of the Huron nation;
Some thirty villages- twelve thousand persons.
Nor was this all: the horizon opened out
On larger fields. To south and west were spread
The unknown tribes- the Petuns and the Neutrals.

VI

(The mission to the Petuns and Neutrals)

1640-1641

In late November Jogues and Garnier
Set out on snow-obliterated trails
Towards the Blue Hills south of the Nottawasaga, 1010
A thirty mile journey through a forest
Without a guide. They carried on their backs
A blanket with the burden of the altar.
All day confronting swamps with fallen logs,
Tangles of tamarack and juniper,
They made detours to avoid the deep ravines
And swollen creeks. Retreating and advancing,
Ever in hope their tread was towards the south,
Until, 'surprised by night in a fir grove',
They took an hour with flint and steel to nurse 1020

A fire from twigs, birch rind and needles of pine;
 And flinging down some branches on the snow,
 They offered thanks to God, lay down and slept.
 Morning- the packs reshouldered and the tramp
 Resumed, the stumble over mouldering trunks
 Of pine and oak, the hopeless search for trails,
 Till after dusk with cassocks torn and 'nothing
 To eat all day save each a morsel of bread,'
 They saw the smoke of the first Indian village.

And now began a labour which for faith 1030
 And triumph of the spirit over failure
 Was unsurpassed in records of the mission.
 Famine and pest had struck the Neutral tribes,
 And fleeing squaws and children had invaded
 The Petun villages for bread and refuge,
 Inflicting on the cabins further pest
 And further famine. When the priests arrived,
 They found that their black cassocks had become
 The symbols of the scourge. Children exclaimed-
 'Disease and famine are outside.' The women 1040
 Called to their young and fled to forest shelters,
 Or hid them in the shadows of the cabins.
 The men broke through a never-broken custom,
 Denying the strangers right to food and rest.
 Observing the two priests at prayer, the chief
 Called out in *council voice*- 'What are these demons
 Who take such unknown postures, what are they
 But spells to make us die- to finish those
 Disease had failed to kill inside our cabins?'
 Driven from town to town with all doors barred, 1050
 Pursued by storms of threats and flying hatchets,
 The priests sought refuge through the forest darkness
 Back to the palisades of Sainte Marie.

As bleak an outlook faced Brébeuf when he
 And Chaumonot took their November tramp-
 Five forest days- to the north shores of Erie,
 Where the most savage of the tribes- the Neutrals
 Packed their twelve thousand into forty towns.
 Evil report had reached the settlements
 By faster routes, for when upon the eve 1060
 Of the new mission Chaumonot had stated
 The purpose of the journey, Huron chiefs,
 Convinced by their own sorcerers that Brébeuf
 Had laid the epidemic on the land,
 Resolved to make the Neutral leaders agents
 Of their revenge: for it was on Brébeuf,
 The chieftain of the robes, that hate was centred.

They had the reason why the drums had failed
 The hunt, why moose and deer had left the forest,
 And why the Manitou who sends the sun 1070
 And rain upon the corn, lures to the trap
 The beaver, trains the arrow on the goose,
 Had not responded to the chants and cries.
 The magic of the 'breathings' had not cured
 The sick and dying. Was it not the prayers
 To the new God which cast malignant spells?
 The rosary against the amulet?
 The Blackrobes with that water-rite performed
 Upon their children- with that new sign
 Of wood or iron held up before the eyes 1080
 Of the stricken? Did the Indian not behold
 Death following hard upon the offered Host?
 Was not *Echon Brébeuf* the evil one?
 Still, all attempts to kill him were forestalled,
 For awe and fear had mitigated fury:
 His massive stature, courage never questioned,
 His steady glance, the firmness of his voice,
 And that strange nimbus of authority,
 In some dim way related to their gods,
 Had kept the bowstrings of the Hurons taut 1090
 At the arrow feathers, and the javelin poised
 And hesitant. But now cunning might do
 What fear forbade. A brace of Huron runners
 Were sped to the Neutral country with rich bribes
 To put the priests to death. And so Brébeuf
 And his companion entered the first town
 With famine in their cheeks only to find
 Worse than the Petun greetings- corn refused,
 Whispers of death and screams of panic, flight
 From incarnated plague, and while the chiefs 1100
 In closest council on the Huron terms
 Voted for life or death, the younger men
 Outside drew nearer to the priests, cursed them,
 Spat at them while convulsive hands were clutching
 At hatchet helms, waiting impatiently
 The issue of that strident rhetoric
 Shaking the cabin bark. The council ended,
 The feeling strong for death but ruled by fears,
 For if those foreign spirits had the power
 To spread the blight upon the land, what could 1110
 Their further vengeance not exact? Besides,
 What lay behind those regimental colours
 And those new drums reported from Quebec?
 The older men had qualified the sentence-
 The priests at once must leave the Neutral land,
 All cabins to be barred against admission,

No food, no shelter, and return immediate.
 Defying threats, the Fathers spent four months,
 Four winter months, besieging half the towns
 In their pursuit of souls, for days their food 1120
 Boiled lichens, ground-nuts, star-grass bulbs and roots
 Of the wild columbine. Met at the doors
 By screams and blows, they would betake themselves
 To the evergreens for shelter over-night.
 And often, when the body strength was sapped
 By the day's toil and there were streaks of blood
 Inside the moccasins, when the last lodge
 Rejected them as lepers and the welts
 Hung on their shoulders, then the Fathers sought 1130
 The balm that never failed. Under the stars,
 Along the incandescent avenue
 The visions trembled, tender, placid, pure,
 More beautiful than the doorway of Rheims
 And sweeter than the Galilean fields.
 For what was hunger and the burn of wounds
 In those assuaging healing moments when
 The clearing mists revealed the face of Mary
 And the lips of Jesus breathing benedictions?

At dawn they came back to the huts to get 1140
 The same rebuff of speech and club. A brave
 Repulsed them at the palisade with axe
 Uplifted- 'I have had enough', he said,
 'Of the dark flesh of my enemies. I mean
 To kill and eat the white flesh of the priests.'
 So close to death starvation and assault
 Had let them and so meagre of result
 Were all their ministrations that they thought
 This was the finish of the enterprise.
 The winter ended in futility.

And on their journey home the Fathers took 1150
 A final blow when March leagued with the natives
 Unleashed a northern storm, piled up the snow-drifts,
 Broke on the ice the shoulder of Brébeuf,
 And stumbled them for weeks before she sent
 Them limping through the postern of the fort.
 Upon his bed that night Brébeuf related
 A vision he had seen- a moving cross,
 Its upright beam arising from the south-
 The country of the Iroquois: the shape 1160
 Advanced along the sky until its arms
 Cast shadows on the Huron territory,
 'And huge enough to crucify us all.'

VII

(The Story of Jogues)

Bad days had fallen on Huronia.
 A blight of harvest, followed by a winter
 In which unusual snowfall had thinned out
 The hunting and reduced the settlements
 To destitution, struck its hardest blow
 At Sainte Marie. The last recourse in need,
 The fort had been a common granary
 And now the beans were empty. Altar-ware, 1170
 Vessels, linens, pictures lost or damaged;
 Vestments were ragged, writing paper spent.
 The Eucharist requiring bread and wine,
 Quebec eight hundred miles away, a war
 Freshly renewed- the Iroquois (Dutch-armed
 And seething with the memories of Champlain)
 Arrayed against the French and Huron allies.

1642

The priests assessed the perils of the journey,
 And the lot fell on Jogues to lead it. He,
 Next to Brébeuf, had borne the heaviest brunt- 1180
 The Petun mission, then the following year,
 The Ojibway where, after a hundred leagues,
 Canoe and trail, accompanied by Raymbault,
 He reached the shores of Lake Superior,
 'And planted a great cross, facing it west.'
 The soundest of them all in legs, he gathered
 A band of Huron traders and set out,
 His task made double by the care of Raymbault
 Whose health had broken mortally. He reached 1190
 Quebec with every day of the five weeks
 A miracle of escape. A few days there,
 With churches, hospitals, the Indian school
 At Sillery, pageant and ritual,
 Making their due impression on the minds
 Of the Huron guides, Jogues with his band of forty
 Packed the canoes and started back. Mohawks,
 Enraged that on the east-bound trip the party
 Had slipped their hands, awaited them, ambushed
 Within the grass and reeds along the shore.

*(The account of Jogues' capture and slavement by the Mohawks
 as taken from his letter to his Provincial, Jean Filleau,
 dated August 5, 1643.)*

'Unskilled in speech, in knowledge and not knowing 1200
 The precious hour of my visitation,
 I beg you, if this letter chance to come
 Unto your hands that in your charity
 You aid me with your Holy Sacrifices
 And with the earnest prayers of the whole Province,
 As being among a people barbarous
 In birth and manners, for I know that when
 You will have heard this story you will see
 The obligation under which I am
 To God and my deep need of spiritual help. 1210
 Our business finished at Quebec, the feast
 Of St. Ignatius celebrated, we
 Embarked for the Hurons. On the second day
 Our men discovered on the shore fresh tracks
 Thought by Eustache, experienced in war,
 To be the footprints of our enemies.
 A mile beyond we met them, twelve canoes
 And seventy men. Abandoning the boats,
 Most of the Hurons fled to the thick wood,
 Leaving but twelve to put up the best front 1220
 We could, but seeing further Iroquois
 Paddling so swiftly from the other shore,
 We ceased from our defence and fled to cover
 Of tree and bulrush. Watching from my shelter
 The capture of Goupil and Indian converts,
 I could not find it in my mind to leave them;
 But as I was their comrade on the journey,
 And should be made their comrade in their perils,
 I gave myself as prisoner to the guard.
 Likewise Eustache, always devoted, valiant, 1230
 Returned, exclaiming "I praise God that He
 Has granted me my prayer- that I should live
 And die with you." And then Guillaume Couture
 Who, young and fleet, having outstripped his foe,
 But finding flight intolerable came back
 Of his free will, saying "I cannot leave
 My Father in the hands of enemies."
 On him the Iroquois let loose their first
 Assault for in the skirmish he had slain
 A chief. They stripped him naked; with their teeth 1240
 They macerated his finger tips, tore off
 The nails and pierced his right hand with a spear,
 Couture taking the pain without a cry.
 Then turning on Goupil and me they beat
 Us to the ground under a flurry of fists
 And knotted clubs, dragging us up half-dead
 To agonize us with the finger torture.
 And this was just the foretaste of our trials:

Dividing up as spoils of war our food,
 Our clothes and books and vessels for the church, 1250
 They led or drove us on our six weeks' journey,
 Our wounds festering under the summer sun.
 At night we were the objects of their sport-
 They mocked us by the plucking of our hair
 From head to beard. And on the eighth day meeting
 A band of warriors from the tribe on march
 To attack the Richelieu fort, they celebrated
 By disembarking all the captives, making
 Us run the line beneath a rain of clubs.
 And following that they placed us on the scaffolds, 1260
 Dancing around us hurling jests and insults.
 Each one of us attempted to sustain
 The other in his courage by no cry
 Or sign of our infirmities. Eustache,
 His thumbs wrenched off, withstood unconquerably
 The probing of a stick which like a skewer
 beginning with the freshness of a wound
 On the left hand was pushed up to the elbow.
 And yet next day they put us on the route
 Again- three days on foot and without food. 1270
 Through village after village we were led
 In triumph with our backs shedding the skin
 Under the sun- by day upon the scaffolds,
 By night brought to the cabins where, cord-bound,
 We lay on the bare earth while fiery coals
 Were thrown upon our bodies. A long time
 Indeed and cruelly have the wicked wrought
 Upon my back with sticks and iron rods.
 But though at times when left alone I wept,
 Yet I thanked Him who always giveth strenght 1280
 To the weary (I will glory in the things
 Concerning my infirmity, being made
 A spectacle to God and to the angels,
 A sport and a contempt to the barbarians)
 That I was thus permitted to console
 And animate the French and Huron converts,
 Placing before their minds the thought of Him
 Who bore against Himself the contradiction
 Of sinners. Weak through hanging by my wrists
 Between two poles, my feet not touching ground, 1290
 I managed through His help to reach the stage,
 And with the dew from leaves of Turkish corn
 Two of the prisoners I baptized. I called
 To them that in their torment they should fix
 Their eyes on me as I bestowed the sign
 Of the last absolution. With the spirit
 Of Christ, Eustache then in the fire entreated

His Huron friends to let no thought of vengeance
 Arising from this anguish at the stake
 Injure the French hope for an Iroquois peace. 1300
 Onnonhoaraton, a youthful captive,
 They killed- the one who seeing me prepared
 For torture interposed, offering himself
 A sacrifice for me who had in bonds
 Begotten him for Christ. Couture was seized
 And dragged off as a slave. René Goupil,
 While placing on a child's forehead the sign
 Of the Cross was murdered by a sorcerer,
 And then, a rope tied to his neck, was dragged
 Through the whole village and flung in the River.' 1310

(The later account)

A family of the Wolf Clan having lost
 A son in battle, Jogues as substitute
 Was taken in, half-son, half-slave, his work
 The drudgery of the village, bearing water,
 Lighting the fires, and clad in tatters made
 To join in winter hunt, bear heavy packs
 On scarred and naked shoulders in the trade
 Between the villages. His readiness
 To execute his tasks, un murmuring,
 His courage when he plunged into a river 1320
 To save a woman and a child who stumbled
 Crossing a bridge made by a fallen tree,
 Had softened for a time his master's harshness.
 It gained him scattered hours of leisure when
 He set his mind to work upon the language
 To make concrete the articles of Faith.

At intervals he stole into the woods
 To pray and meditate and carve the Name
 Upon the bark. Out of the Mohawk spoils
 At the first battle he had found and hid 1330
 Two books- *The Following of Christ* and one
 Of Paul's *Epistles*, and with these when 'weary
 Even of life and pressed beyond all measure
 Above his strength' he followed the 'running waters'
 To quench his thirst. But often would the hate
 Of the Mohawk foes flame out anew when Jogues
 Was on his knees muttering the magic words,
 And when a hunting party empty-handed
 Returned or some reverse was met in battle,
 Here was the victim ready at their door. 1340
 Believing that a band of warriors
 Had been destroyed, they seized the priest and set

His day of death, but at the eleventh hour,
With the arrival of a group of captives,
The larger festival of torture gave
His momentary reprieve. Yet when he saw
The holocaust and rushed into the flames
To save a child, a heavy weight laid hold
Upon his spirit lasting many days-
'My life wasted with grief, my years with sighs; 1350
Oh wherefore was I born that I should see
The ruin of my people! Woe is me!
But by His favour I shall overcome
Until my change is made and He appear.'

This story of enslavement had been brought
To Montmagny, the Governor of Quebec,
And to the outpost of the Dutch, Fort Orange.
Quebec was far away and, short of men,
Could never cope with the massed Iroquois;
Besides, Jogues' letter begged the Governor 1360
That no measures 'to save a single life'
Should hurt the cause of France. To the Provincial
He wrote- 'Who in my absence would console
The captives? Who absolve the penitent?
Encourage them in torments? Who baptize
The dying? On this cross to which our Lord
Has nailed me with Himself am I resolved
To live and die.'

And when the commandant
Of the Dutch fort sent notice that a ship
At anchor in the Hudson would provide 1370
Asylum, Jogues delayed that he might seek
Let some intruding self-preserving thought
Conflict with duty. Death was certain soon.
He knew it- for that mounting tide of hate
Could not be checked: it had engulfed his friends;
'Twould take him next. How close to suicide
Would be refusal? Not as if escape
Meant dereliction: no, his early vows 1380
Were still inviolate- he would return.
He pledged himself to God there on his knees
Before two bark-strips fashioned as a cross
Under the forest trees- his oratory.
And so, one night, the Indians asleep,
Jogues left the house, fumbling his darkened way,
Half-walk, half-crawl, a lacerated leg
Making the journey of one-half a mile
The toil of half a night. By dawn he found
The shore, and, single-handed, pushed a boat,

Stranded by ebb-tide, down the slope of sand 1390
 To the river's edge and rowed out to the ship,
 Where he was lifted up the side by sailors
 Who, fearful of the risk of harbouring
 A fugitive, carried him to the hatch
 And hid him with the cargo in the hold.

The outcry in the morning could be heard
 Aboard the ship as Indians combed the cabins,
 Threatened the guards and scoured the neighbouring woods,
 And then with strong suspicion of the vessel.
 Demanded of the officers their captive. 1400
 After two days Jogues with his own consent
 Was taken to the fort and hid again
 Behind the barrels of a store. For weeks
 He saw and heard the Mohawks as they passed,
 Examining cordage, prying into casks,
 At times touching his clothes, but missing him
 As he lay crouched in darkness motionless.
 With evidence that he was in the fort,
 The Dutch abetting the escape, the chiefs
 Approached the commandant- 'The prisoner 1410
 Is ours. He is not of your race or speech.
 The Dutch are friends: the Frenchmen are our foes.
 Deliver up this priest into our hands.'
 The cries were countered by the officer-
 'He is like us in blood if not in tongue .
 The Frenchman here is under our protection.
 He is our guest. We treat him as you treat
 The strangers in your cabins, for you feed
 And shelter them. That is also our law,
 The custom of our nation.' Argument 1420
 Of no avail, a ransom price was offered,
 Refused, but running up the bargain scale,
 It caught the Mohawks at three hundred livres,
 And Jogues at last was safely on the Hudson.

The tale of Jogues' first mission to the Hurons
 Ends on a sequel briefly sung but keyed
 To the tune of the story, for the stretch
 Home was across a wilderness, his bed
 A coil of rope on a ship's open deck
 Swept by December surge. The voyage closed 1430
 At Falmouth where, robbed by a pirate gang,
 he wandered destitute until picked up
 By a French crew who offered him a tramp fare.
 He landed on the shore of Brittany
 On Christmas Eve, and by New Year he reached
 The Jesuit establishment at Rennes.

The trumpets blew once more, and Jogues returned
 With the spring expedition to Quebec.
 Honoured by Montmagny, he took the post
 Of peace ambassador to hostile tribes, 1440
 And then the orders came from Lalemant
 That he should open up again the cause
 Among the Mohawks at Ossernenon.
 Jogues knew that he was travelling to his death,
 And though each hour of that former mission
 Burned at his finger stumps, the wayward flesh
 Obeyed the summons. Lalemant as well
 Had known the peril- had he not re-named
 Ossernenon, the mission of the martyrs?
 So Jogues, accompanied by his friend Lalonde 1450
 Departed for the village- his last letter
 To his Superior read: 'I will return
 Cost it a thousand lives. I know full well
 That I shall not survive, but He who helped
 Me by His grace before will never fail me
 Now when I go to do His holy will.'
 And to the final consonant the vow
 Was kept, for two days after they had struck
 The town, their heads were on the palisades,
 And their dragged bodies flung into the Mohawk. 1460

VIII

(Bressani)

1646

The western missions waiting Jogues' return
 Were held together by a scarlet thread.
 The forays of the Iroquois had sent
 The fugitive survivors to the fort.
 Three years had passed- and where was Jogues? The scant
 Supplies of sagamite could never feed
 The inflow from the stricken villages.
 The sparse reports had filtered to Quebec,
 And the command was given to Bressani
 To lead the rescue band to Sainte Marie. 1470
 Leaving Three Rivers in the spring when ice
 Was on the current, he was caught like Jogues,
 With his six Hurons and a French oblate,
 A boy of twelve; transferred to Iroquois'
 Canoes and carried up the Richelieu;
 Disbarked and driven through the forest trails
 To Lake Champlain; across it; and from there

Around the rocks and marshes to the Hudson.
 And every time a camp was built and fires
 Were laid the torment was renewed; in all 1480
 The towns the squaws and children were regaled
 With evening festivals upon the scaffolds.
 Bressani wrote one day when vigilance
 Relaxed and his split hand was partly healed-
 'I do not know if your Paternity
 Will recognize this writing for the letter
 Is soiled. Only one finger of the hand
 Is left unburned. The blood has stained the paper.
 My writing table is the earth; the ink
 Gunpowder mixed with water.' And again- 1490
 This time to his superior- 'I could
 Not have believed it to be possible
 That a man's body was so hard to kill.'
 The earlier fate of Jogues was his- enslaved,
 But ransomed at fort Orange by the Dutch;
 Restored to partial health; sent to Rochelle
 In the Autumn, but in April back again
 And under orders for the Huron mission,
 Where he arrived this time unscathed to take
 A loyal welcome from his priestly comrades. 1500

Bressani's presence stimulated faith
 Within the souls of priests and neophytes.
 The stories burned like fuel of the faggots-
 Jogues' capture and his rock stability,
 And the no less triumphant stand Eustache
 Had made showing the world that native metal
 Could take the test as nobly as the French.
 And Ragueneau's letter to his General stated-
 'Bressani ill-equipped to speak the Huron
 Has speech more eloquent to capture souls: 1510
 It is his scars, his mutilated hands.
 "Only show us," the neophytes exclaim,
 "The wounds, for they teach better than our tongues
 Your faith, for you have come again to face
 The dangers. Only thus we know that you
 Believe the truth and would have us believe it".'

IX

In those three years since Jogues' departure doubts
 Though unexpressed had visited the mission.
 For death had come to several in the fold-
 Raymbault, Goupil, Eustache, and worse than death 1520
 To Jogues, and winter nights were bleaker, darker