

NORTH ATLANTIC: THE MOST DANGEROUS WATER IN THE WORLD

Joseph Pivato*

During the twentieth century the North Atlantic became the most dangerous water on the planet. Hundreds of ships were sunk and thousands of men and women died in that cold grey water. We can begin with the *Titanic* disaster of 1912, *The Empress of Ireland* collision of 1914, the *Lusitania* torpedoed in 1915, and the *Mont Blanc* explosion of 1917. During World War II numerous ships and men were lost to the attacks of U-Boats. It is ironic then that this dangerous crossing is also the major route for the mass migration to North America and the search for a new life after World War II. One of these immigration ships, the *Andrea Doria*, collided with the MS *Stockholm* and sank in 1956. Long before the modern period of history, the North Atlantic brought disease and death to the Indigenous peoples of the New World. We will examine *The Jesuit Relations* as the record of all the interactions between the Indigenous peoples and the French colonists in the 1600s. The settlement of Quebec was founded in 1608 by the French explorer Samuel de Champlain who crossed the Atlantic approximately twenty times between France and North America. In the years 1634-1640 a major epidemic of smallpox and influenza killed thousands of Indigenous Wyandot people in New France and in the new English colonies to the south. Champlain died of an apparent stroke in 1635, but he could also have been infected with one of these diseases. In volume 13 of the *Relations* for year 1637 Père le Mercier records more than 130 references to fever, sickness, contagion, disease, epidemic, plague, dead children and bleeding. For the native populations of North America, the Atlantic Ocean brought destruction to their civilization and changed their history. What do the eyewitness accounts of the Jesuit missionaries tell us about human behaviour in crises of disease and death and possibly the search for martyrdom?

Keywords: Atlantic, Jesuits, Plagues, Martyrs, New France

Introduction

During the twentieth century the North Atlantic became the most dangerous body of water on the planet. Hundreds of ships were sunk and thousands of men and women died in that cold grey water. We can begin with the *Titanic* disaster of 1912, *The Empress of Ireland* collision of 1914, the *Lusitanian* torpedo attack of 1915, and the *Mont Blanc* explosion of 1917. During World War II hundreds of ships and men were lost at sea due to attacks by German U-Boats. One war record lists 175 warships and 2.825 merchant ships that were destroyed by

* University of Athabasca.

U-Boats. It is ironic that this dangerous crossing became the major route for the mass migration of Europeans to North America and the search for a new life after World War II. One of these immigration ships, the *Andrea Doria*, collided with the MS *Stockholm* and sank in 1956.

Long before the modern period of history, the North Atlantic was dangerous in another sense: it brought disease and death to the Indigenous peoples of the New World. Here we will focus on selected volumes of the *Jesuit Relations* as our major record of the first contact between the Indigenous peoples and the French colonists in the 1600s. These volumes have many authors and editors and were printed in France between 1632 and 1673. The first single unified edition was the English language version compiled by Reuben Gold Thwaites in 1899 and which constitutes seventy-three volumes. This is the edition which we use in this study.

The many authors of the *Jesuit Relations* went to great pains to describe the societies of the different Indigenous peoples they encountered in their several missions across New France. Early in the missions they discovered that they preferred to work with the Huron-Wyandot (Wendat) people because they lived in settled agricultural communities, unlike the Iroquois who tended to be nomadic. The Huron villages were built of longhouses inside a stockade of tall palisade walls for protection against wild animals and their enemies. Before Europeans arrived these Indigenous people were already constructing wooden forts. The French and the British colonists also adopted the fort structure, especially in isolated frontier locations. These Huron communities were remote from the main colony of Quebec and could only be reached by long and dangerous trips by canoe along fast rivers and the rough waters of great lakes.

The fort became the central image in historical novels like *Wacousta* (1832) in which the white inhabitants are all huddling together within the stockade in fear of attacks from enemies outside in the forests. In a passage that has become famous, Northrop Frye described the dominant quality of the Canadian imagination with the term «a garrison mentality». In his “Conclusion” to *The Literary History of Canada* (1965) Frye explains that settlers «confronted with a huge, unthinking, menacing, and formidable physical setting...are bound to develop what we may provisionally call a garrison mentality» (830). We can see how such a critical observation can be applied to several early works from Canadian writing such as the *Jesuit Relations*. The sad irony is that mortal danger was not outside in the forest but inside with Europeans who were spreading diseases to which the Indigenous peoples had no immunity.

Jesuit Letters to a Europe of Plagues

The Jesuit missionaries sent many letters back across the Atlantic to France explaining the progress of converting the local Indigenous peoples to Christianity. Every volume has references to sickness and disease and particular approaches that Indigenous groups had to illness and death. In volume ten (1638) Jean de Brébeuf spends many pages explaining the Huron society's solemn feast of the dead. This volume also includes reports on the deadly influenza epidemic of 1637. Volume fifteen describes a smallpox epidemic among the Hurons in 1639. In their study of Brébeuf, researchers Podruchny and Labelle write: «The Jesuits had some success in evangelism, baptizing many in the community. Brébeuf was a gifted writer, and his relations are recognized as containing careful, extensive and sensitive depictions of Wendat customs and beliefs» (102).

The *Relations* further our understanding and critique of conquest and colonialism experienced by Indigenous communities in early Canada. Some volumes can be read as Canada's first plague narratives which anticipate dystopian works like Emily St. John Mandel's *Station Eleven* (2017) and Saleema Nawaz's *Songs for the End of the World* (2020). Métis writer Cherie Dimaline's novel *The Marrow Thieves* (2017) is of particular note in this historical context with its naïve narrator who escapes into the northern woods, is introduced into Indigenous culture and rituals, and gradually learns about the genocide of Indigenous peoples.

During the age of exploration and international sea trade the seaports of Europe began to experience a series of contagions such as smallpox, influenza, and bubonic plague. These plagues quickly spread to the interior parts of Europe. In 1403 the Republic of Venice established an island in its lagoon to quarantine all people with any disease. Called Lazzaretto Vecchio, all arriving ships were required to stop there for inspection for disease. All ill people were taken to the hospital on the island. Those who died were buried on the island. The practice of quarantine was later adopted by some cities in Europe but ignored by most others.

When Giovanni Caboto landed on the east coast of Canada in 1497 he had left a Europe which was being devastated by plagues. There was hantavirus in 1485 and typhus in 1489. His native city of Venice was still recovering from the Bubonic plague of 1353 as were a number of other cities across Europe. When he first gazed on the newly discovered territories, he was seeing a pristine land unspoilt by plagues. We should also note that in the 1400s Venice was a major naval power involved in the white slave trade across the Mediterranean Sea, a practice which contributed to the spread of diseases.

In order to give us some context about other voyages to the new world, we should note that in 1519 Hernán Cortés de Monroy began the Spanish conquest of Mexico. With hundreds of men, horses and canons and the help of local In-

Indigenous tribes who were enemies of the Aztec, he overthrew the Aztec Empire. One of Hernán Cortés's weapons was smallpox inadvertently introduced to the territory which killed many thousands of Indigenous peoples, populations which had no immunity to European diseases. We should also note that in 1526 the Portuguese completed the first transatlantic slave voyage to Brazil. Soon England, Spain and France followed this trade in African slaves to North and South America and thus the middle passage of the Atlantic became the most dangerous stretch of water because many Africans died at sea.

When French explorer Jacques Cartier made his second voyage up the St. Lawrence River and spent the winter of 1535-36 near the site of present-day Quebec City his men became ill with scurvy and twenty-five died. The chief of the local Iroquois Domagaya told him to make a drink from the leaves of white cedar to cure the disease. This drink saved his expedition so he was able to return to France in order to organize a third voyage in 1541-1542 which was not as successful. This is an example of Indigenous medicine which would later be dismissed by Europeans. Cartier retired to his port city of Saint-Malo, France where he died in 1557 during an epidemic of typhus. Across the English Channel London would soon be ravaged by the Bubonic plague of 1563-64 and it would return in 1592-1593 and again in 1603.

The settlement of Quebec was founded in 1608 by Samuel de Champlain who was himself primarily interested in exploring the territories and so travelled as far west as the huge Lake Superior, rather than managing the new colony. He was involved in many battles with the Iroquois in order to help the local Huron-Wyandot people. Champlain made approximately twenty voyages between France and North America. In one of these trips his men inadvertently introduced diseases to the French colony. In 1634-40 a major epidemic of smallpox and influenza killed thousands of Huron-Wyandot people in New France and in the English colonies to the south. Champlain died of an apparent stroke in 1635, but he could also have been infected with one of these diseases. Champlain disrupted Indigenous communities by introducing two things: European firearms in tribal battles and European diseases.

The crossing of the North Atlantic was dangerous. Many ships were lost. A short list of some of the shipwrecks that were recorded include the following: in 1565 the *San Juan*, a Basque ship sank off the coast of Labrador, in 1690 the *Elizabeth and Mary*, an English ship sank in the St. Lawrence River, in 1696 the *Sapphire*, an English ship was wrecked off the coast of Nova Scotia, in 1758 the *Auguste*, a French ship sank in Aspy Bay, Nova Scotia, and in 1760 the *Machault*, a French vessel sank in the Restigouche estuary.

The first Jesuits to make the perilous Atlantic crossing to Canada in 1611 went initially to the colony of Acadia (present-day Nova Scotia), but moved to

the settlement of Quebec in 1625. They included Jean de Brébeuf and Charles Lalemant. These early missions failed because Quebec was occupied by British forces from 1629 to 1631, the result of colonial wars between England and France. European wars were injected into New France from the very beginning. Paul Le Jeune re-established the Quebec mission in 1632. Over the next decade forty-six Jesuits arrived to expand the work of the missions among the Indigenous peoples. Jean de Brébeuf went into Huron-Wyandot territory to found a new mission in 1634, which became known as Saint-Marie Among the Hurons, near what is now Georgian Bay. Attacks by the Iroquois in 1648 and 1649 killed five Jesuit missionaries; among them were Jean de Brébeuf, Gabriel Lalemant and Charles Garnier. All the buildings were burned to the ground and the French and Huron-Wyandot survivors escaped back to the Quebec settlement. This was an arduous trip by canoe over dangerous rivers. In 1642 and 1646 three other Jesuits had been killed along the Mohawk River. All eight became known as the Canadian Martyrs. They are now commemorated in Martyrs' Shrine, the Catholic Church in Midland, Ontario.

From the beginning these missionaries recorded all their activities in long letters and reports back to their supervisors in the Quebec settlement. These senior Jesuits collated the different reports and did some editing and may have changed some of the wording. They then sent them on to their superiors back in France who published them as *Relations des Jésuites de la Nouvelle-France*. Each volume was heavily edited by senior Jesuits back in Paris who put a strong emphasis on the success of the missions and on the sacrifices and the religious lives of the missionaries. Every death is reported since death is seen as a justified sacrifice for the greater good of the missions and for the salvation of the individual soul. Were these editors trying to rewrite history? Were some reports lost or omitted? Because of these editorial changes we must read all the texts very critically. Nevertheless, the original voices of the authors still manage to come through to us four hundred years later.

These publications circulated widely in Europe and were meant to raise funds for the missions. Some of these men aspired to be martyrs and so there are many details about torture and the killing of missionaries and their Indigenous converts which made the *Relations* that much more popular among readers in Europe (Greer 324-326). Sometimes these violent scenes were repeated from one volume to the next.

In contrast to these spiritual aspirations there is much information about the various plagues which disrupted the settlements in New France and destroyed the communities of Indigenous peoples. The reports from Saint-Marie Among the Hurons are found in volumes thirteen, fourteen and fifteen and written primarily by Fr. François Joseph le Mercier.

In volume thirteen of the *Relations* for year 1637 le Mercier records more than 130 references to fever, sickness, contagion, disease, epidemic, plague, dead children and bleeding. The volume begins with a long chapter that recounts in vivid detail the torture and slow killing of an Iroquois prisoner that the local Huron had captured. The subtext here seems to be that these Jesuits are all willing to become martyrs for their faith, so the chapter gives us a foreshadowing of the painful ordeals that the eight Jesuit martyrs would soon experience at the hands of the Iroquois warriors.

The rest of the volume is devoted to the epidemics in the region. In September, the mission is afflicted by illness – a fever which successively attacks every person except Jean de Brébeuf. They slowly recover and turn their attention to nursing the sick among the Hurons-Wyandot. With their simple remedies – prunes, raisins, and a little bag of senna, aided by a lance for bleeding – the Jesuits impress many of the Indigenous people in the region. This success in nursing the sick helps their work on conversion, yet many dying persons refuse to receive the faith.

Chapter five has the long title “Ossosané afflicted with a contagious disease. Various journeys that we made there in the most disagreeable winter weather. Continuation of the same sickness in our village, and the assistance we rendered to the neighboring places attacked by the same disease” (144). The Indigenous peoples often accused the French of bringing the diseases to them (which is historically correct), but the missionaries denied this by seeing the plagues as the wrath of God. In volume thirteen, chapter three, le Mercier records that, «It was oftentimes said, during the evil reports that were current about us throughout the country, that if we had not been afflicted as well as the others, they would not have doubted that we were the cause of the disease» (110). The fact that several Jesuits also became ill was argued as proof to the Huron-Wyandot that the French did not bring the contagion. All the Jesuits did become ill with fever and influenza, all except Jean de Brébeuf. This account seems to suggest that Brébeuf is being protected by divine grace since his role was to become a martyr and saint of the Jesuit missions. Thirty years later, in the *Relations* of 1671-1672 (Vol. 56), Claude Dablon reports «several instances of marvellous cures wrought in sickness, by water in which certain relics of the martyr Brébeuf have been dipped» (11). In the relations from 1642 Fr. Barthelemy Vimont reports a conversation with a Huron-Wyandot woman who has been ill for a long time. She tells him, «Je suis baptisée et je prene courage. Je ne m’attriste pas. Je n’en mourrais pas» (8). She believes baptism will save her from the deadly disease, despite the evidence of many dead baptized people in the community around her (8). As with the Covid-19 pandemic of 2020-2022 there was ambiguity about the origins of the diseases among the population and the belief in miracle cures.

In volume thirteen, chapter five, le Mercier gives several examples of the Jesuits nursing Indigenous people back to health with small remedies as proof of the power of God through them and using these occasions to convert the people to Christianity. Those who they could not save they were often able to baptize before they died thus saving their souls (156-157). Brébeuf wrote that these rushed death-bed baptisms often bothered him. Parents allowed him to baptize sick children to see if it would produce a cure for their illness. He complained that many Indigenous people sought baptism as a remedy for sickness (Vol. 10-12-13). In the end he seemed to have accepted this practice and encouraged it in order to counteract the opposite impression that baptism caused disease and death. This mission of Saint-Marie Among the Hurons was successful both despite of, and because of the plagues, but it was later all destroyed by Iroquois attacks.

In 1638-1639, near the settlement of Quebec, the Jesuits established a religious school for Montagnais and Algonquin boys. By 1639 they had all died due to infections from Europe such as smallpox and influenza. In her study of the *Jesuit Relations* Mary Dunn argues that sickness and disease functioned as a missionary strategy, a good occasion for the conversion of the sick and the dying (2018: 571-573). In an earlier study Thomas Worcester explains how the Jesuits managed plagues:

Jesuits used accounts of disease in Canada as an opportunity to vindicate themselves and their closeness to God, representing sickness as an opportunity for the display of patience, disease as the occasion for virtuous charity, suffering as the stimulus of spiritual growth, epidemic as the catalyst of death-bed baptism, and miraculous cures as evidence of divine favor (3).

A significant contrast to these many narratives about disease in New France is found in volume fifty-six for the years 1671-1672. Chapter six recounts the expedition to the North Sea by land and the discovery of Hudson's Bay by the French with Fr. Albenel who knew the different languages. They encounter many different communities along the way and are always well received. Fr. Albenel tells many people about the Christian faith and baptizes a considerable number including children. The journey back to Quebec is arduous but all return safely. What is significant in this account is that there is no mention of sickness or disease. The many Indigenous peoples that they encounter in the north have had no contact with Europeans and have not been exposed to any plagues from Europe. From the later *Relations* it is not clear if these missionaries realize that it is the French who have introduced the diseases into New France. The last *Relations* were published in 1673.

Women in New France

In response to the Jesuits' call for religious women to come to the missions in order to work with the Indigenous girls and women and nurse the sick, the Ursuline order in Tours, France sent five nuns. It was unusual for women to make the dangerous Atlantic crossing to the new colony so these nuns were pioneers. Their leader was Mère Marie de l'Incarnation, who later wrote approximately 20,000 letters back to friends, relatives and superiors in France. Two of her companions were the young Sister Marie de St. Joseph and Madame de la Peltrie, whose family wealth helped to fund this Ursuline mission in New France. They all sailed together on a ship with Fr. Barthelemy Vimont, the Jesuit who was sent to replace Paul Le Jeune as the new superior of the missions. When they arrived in Quebec in 1639 their first task was to nurse the victims of a smallpox epidemic which was killing the Huron-Wyandot and other Indigenous peoples in Sillery. These religious women would continue to play an important role in the treatment of victims of the various plagues that afflicted New France.

In September 1640, in one of her first letters back to her superiors in France, Mère Marie wrote:

Meanwhile, although death caused great ravages everywhere, the Fathers did not cease throwing themselves fearlessly into perils so that they could baptize the children and those they found fit therefore. The good Joseph Chihwatenha who accompanies them everywhere, filling the office of apostle, is becoming the opprobrium of his nation for the name of Jesus Christ. The more evil is done to them, the more courageous they are (1967: 82).

The letter ends with Marie witnessing her first death in the snow when several men went out into a blizzard to rescue an old woman (85).

Since Marie de l'Incarnation sent letters to her son Claude Martin and other supports in France, her words were published without the heavy editing of Jesuit superiors. She explains that between 1639 and 1650 smallpox epidemics were killing hundreds of Indigenous people all over the territory. Some chiefs believed that the disease was spread by the French settlers and the Jesuits. As a result, they rejected religious icons like crosses, pictures, baptism, and other Christian rituals. Today we would describe these early missions as "super-spreaders" of European infectious diseases. And we can understand that the danger they posed is one reason for the Iroquois' hostility towards the French.

Despite the dangers, Mère Marie and her sisters worked with the women and girls to establish a sense of trust among the Indigenous people. The nuns were also skilled at nursing the sick and this helped them to create a relationship with the Indigenous communities around the settlement of Quebec. Marie de l'Incarnation and her group established a convent, an infirmary and a school for girls in

1640, the first school for girls in the New World. From her copious writing it is evident that she admired the leadership qualities of Indigenous women and girls and saw the school as a means of empowering them in their own communities. This proto-feminist point of view is not found in the *Jesuit Relations* but rather in Marie's published letters. Her son Claude Martin published her *Recueil de lettres* in 1681, letters which avoided the editing of the Jesuits. Mère Marie's letters were instrumental in encouraging more nuns to come to New France.

In another one of her studies of the *Jesuit Relations* Mary Dunn describes the contrasting views of Indigenous women as either good, in Christian terms, or as bad, as a species of colonial discourse that served the Jesuits' cause by demonstrating the success of the missionaries in bringing about conversions (2016: 180-181). This male European dichotomous view of Indigenous women ruptured the customary role of women as leaders in the community and eventually as valued elders. In the Iroquois nation the women had a high degree of power. They managed the longhouses and controlled the distribution of food. Kinship and place of residence were determined through the female line. When the Jesuits set up villages for their Christian converts they tried to persuade wives to be more submissive to their husbands, they humiliated independent women and condoned men beating disobedient spouses. These views of Indigenous women are presented in the context of the dedicated work and example of the Ursuline nuns in the colony. There is a sad irony in this contrast between Mère Marie and the Jesuits.

In volume fifty-six of the *Relations* Claude Dablon includes an account of the life, suffering and death of Madame de la Peltries written by Marie de l'Incarnation. It is followed by Dablon's short report on "The Blessed Death of Reverend Mother Marie de l'Incarnation", who died at age 73. Both narratives are in the genre of the lives of the saints, hagiographies which idealize the entire lives of these nuns as exceptional people specially chosen by God. The focus is on Marie's suffering and slow death from January to April, 1672. There are some details about her sickness: spitting up bile, abscesses which have to be lanced, but no clear diagnosis or any reference to the contagions circulating in New France. Both these women may have been victims of diseases which killed twenty other people during those months. But to describe them as just other plague victims would diminish the roles that their lives and deaths would play in the propagation of the missions at saving souls and creating saints.

This propaganda role of the death of missionaries is evident when we contrast the two accounts of the death of Mère Marie St. Joseph. In 1652 Mère Marie de l'Incarnation wrote a long letter to her fellow sisters at the home convent of Tours to console them and herself over the death of her companion and friend. She wrote it spontaneously pouring out her personal feelings of loss,

«Ainsi je vous laisse à penser si ce ne m'est une affliction bien sensible» (Lettre CXLVII: 497). The version of this letter that appeared in the *Relations*, volume thirty-eight, was re-written by a Jesuit editor, possibly Paul Le Jeune, so that the subjective perspective of Mère Marie has been changed to an impersonal hagiography of this popular nun as a saint. It ends with the report that a miracle is attributed to her. The original version of this letter is in *Marie de l'Incarnation, Correspondence 1634-1677* published in 1971 (Ferraro 178-182). We can describe these published letters as the first life-writing by women in Canada. In the twentieth century, life-writing became a major genre among Canadian authors.

An Italian Jesuit

In 1642 one of the new missionaries who sailed across the chilly Atlantic to New France with Paul Le Jeune was the Italian Jesuit Francesco Giuseppe Bressani. A year after he arrived he was working in Trois Riviere, was captured by Iroquois warriors, was tortured and had his hands mutilated. He was rescued by Dutch settlers at Fort Orange, New Amsterdam, where in 1644 he wrote a long letter to his superiors. He returned to France to heal his wounds only to sail back to the missions in Canada. He later escaped the Iroquois attacks in Saint-Marie Among the Hurons. By 1650 he was back in France and then returned to Italy where he published the account of his experiences in Canada. His *Breve Relatione* (1653) was in Italian and meant for an audience beyond that of the French volumes from Paris. It is clear that it was not edited by the Jesuits in Paris and was not among the volumes that they published. It was first included as part of the *Jesuit Relations* by Reuben Thwaites in the edition of 1899. The Italian text is translated into English of facing pages.

By seeing himself as a living martyr of the Canadian missions Bressani is not afraid to express his own personal views on the Indigenous peoples and the missions. In part one of his book Bressani describes the Huron people: their healthy physical condition, their social, dress and marriage customs, their sense of justice, of music and of direction and memory, as well as their food, eloquence, and spirituality. As a man raised and educated in the Rome of the high Renaissance Bressani has a keen eye for the beauty of the Indigenous peoples he meets. He gives us an image of the noble savage many years before Jean Jacques Rousseau in 1778. This positive picture of the local Indigenous peoples is in contrast to the accounts of sickness and death in other volumes of the *Jesuit Relations*. Bressani gives us many examples of the visual splendor of Canada, even in winter, all meant to encourage more support for the missions both with money but also with more missionaries to New France.

In part two of his book Bressani documents the many obstacles of the missions: the dangers inherent in travelling, such as river rapids, Iroquois attacks, the different languages, the resistance of the medicine men, and the circulation of plagues in the Indigenous communities. We find one example of death in the snow. Unlike other authors of the *Jesuit Relations*, he does not see the diseases afflicting Indigenous peoples as an opportunity to convert them to Christianity. Bressani does not identify with the colonial ambitions of the French crown. The link between Jesuits and the building of the French colonial empire is closely examined by the American historian Bronwen McShea in her book, *Apostles of Empire: The Jesuits and New France* (2019).

In part two of the volume Bressani includes a long letter of twenty pages from a Jesuit who had been captured and tortured by the Iroquois. The details give us a graphic eye-witness account. It is only at the end of the letter signed “F.G.B.” that we realize that it is Bressani’s own letter from Fort Orange. It is a humble presentation of his own suffering, but it is clear that he sees himself as a living martyr of the Canadian missions.

In part three of *Breve Relatione* Bressani records several graphic accounts of torture and martyrdom with the deaths of Father Isaac Jogues, Father Charles Garnier and Noel Chabonel. These are all found in the French volumes, but Bressani reproduces them in Italian for his audience. In Italy he spent the rest of his life preaching about the values of the missions in Canada.

In the treatment of the Indigenous converts Bressani brings a different point of view from the French Jesuits. An example is captured in this passage:

I would like to warn those who apply themselves to the conversion of new countries not to believe easily, or without a diligent examination, even those very things which are, by the common approbation of centuries, believed to be beyond any doubt. It is easy to condemn, on the ground of superstition, many frivolities, and to prohibit them as such; but it is not easy to recant, or to avoid contempt from the most sensible who knew the secret. We were somewhat severe on this point, and obliged our first Christians who found superstition everywhere, to deny themselves not only lawful recreations, but also intercourse with others, and more than half of the social life, until time, examination, and experience assured us of the contrary (Vol. 39: 27-29).

This is a criticism of the abuses of colonialism which Bressani was observing in the 1600s and it seems to foreshadow the isolation and sickness found in the residential school system of our own century. He also notes that in the Indigenous communities it was often the elders who were the first to die from disease, thus losing the leaders and teachers of the cultural traditions and rituals.

The smallpox and influenza epidemics that killed Indigenous people and the settlers in 1634-1640 were not the last to strike this general area. In 1677-78 the Massachusetts Bay Colony experienced a smallpox epidemic, which spread to

the St. Lawrence River valley in 1702-1703. A very severe measles epidemic hit New France in 1713-1715, then smallpox in 1733. Measles returned in 1739-1740, then 1747 and 1759. These contagious diseases spread easily due to poor hygiene in the colonies and no quarantine practices. The *Relations* also reveal how the diseases brought out the best and the worst in human behaviour. And we are reliving these experiences centuries later because of Covid-19.

In this brief survey of the depiction of disease and death in the *Jesuit Relations* it becomes clear that this seventy-three-volume collection of documents deserves further close critical study and research. The saga of the Jesuit missions is a good example of the devastating effects of colonialism: erasure of a culture through disease, suppression and a biased re-writing of history. With the many epidemics of smallpox, influenza and measles the pristine land that Caboto gazed upon in 1497 was changed forever. And the North Atlantic began its long history as the most dangerous body of water in the world.

Works Cited

- Bressani, F.G. (1899): *Breve Relazione d'Alcune Missioni dei PP della Compagnia di Giesu nella Nuova Francia*. M. Sifton Pepper (Trans.). In R.G. Thwaites (Ed.), *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents* (38, 39, 40). Cleveland: The Burrows Brothers.
- Cro, S. (1980-1981): The Original Letter of Father Bressani Written from Fort Orange in 1644. *Canadian Journal of Italian Studies*, 4, 1-2, pp. 26-67.
- De l'Incarnation, M. (1967): *Word from New France: The Selected Letters of Marie de l'Incarnation*. J. Marshall (Trans. & Ed.). Toronto: Oxford University Press.
- De l'Incarnation, M. (1971): *Correspondence 1639-1671*. Dom Guy-Marie Oury (Nouvelle Éd.). Sarthe, France: Abbaye Saint-Pierre de Salesmes.
- Dimaline, C. (2017): *The Marrow Thieves*. Toronto: Cormorant Books.
- Dunn, M. (2016): Neither One Thing nor the Other: Discursive Polyvalence and the Representation of Amerindian Women in the Jesuit Relations. *Journal of Jesuit Studies*, 3, pp. 179-196.
- Dunn, M. (2018): Bedside Manners: Sickness and the Jesuit Mission in Early Modern New France. *Journal of Jesuit Studies*, 5, pp. 567-585.
- Ferraro, A. (2014): Les Récits personnels de Marie de l'Incarnation ou de l'écriture autobiographique détournée. *Francofonia: Studi e ricerche sulle letterature di lingua francese*, 66, pp. 177-191.
- Frye, N. (1971): *The Bush Garden: Essays on the Canadian Imagination*. Toronto: House of Anansi.
- Goddard, P.A. (1998): Converting the *Savage*: Jesuit and Montagnais in Seventeenth-Century New France. *The Catholic Historical Review*, 84, 2, pp. 219-239.
- Greer, A. (2000): Colonial Saints: Gender, Race and Hagiography in New France. *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series, 57, 2, pp. 323-348.
- Mazan, R.M. (2011): Analyzing Epidemics in New France: The Measles Epidemic of 1714-1715. Electronic Thesis and Dissertation Repository, 141. Ph.D. Thesis in Sociology. The University of Western Ontario, Canada.
- McShea, B. (2019): *Apostles of Empire: The Jesuits and New France*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.

- Pivato, J. (2009): An Italian Jesuit in Canada: Faith and Imagination in Bressani's *Breve Relatione of 1653*. In O. Zorzi Pugliese & E.M. Kavalier (Eds.), *Faith and Fantasy in the Renaissance* (pp.161-169). Toronto: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies.
- Podruchny, C. & Labelle, L.M. (2011): Jean de Brébeuf and the Wendat Voices of Seventeenth-Century New France. *Renaissance and Reformation*, 34, 1-2, pp. 97-126.
- Richardson, J. (1991): *Wacousta, or A Tale of Canada*. Toronto: New Canadian Library.
- Vimont, B. Ed. (1858): *Relations des Jésuites contenant ce qui s'est passé de plus remarquable dans les missions des pères de la Compagnie de Jésus dans la Nouvelle France (1642-45)*. Quebec: Augustin Côté.
- Worcester, T. (2005): Defensive Discourse: Jesuits on Disease in Seventeenth-Century New France. *French Colonial History*, 6, pp. 1-15.