Epic features of "Brebeuf and His Brethren" by E. J. Pratt.

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EPIC FEATURES OF BREBEUF AND HIS BRETHREN

by E. J. Pratt

Submitted to the Department of English
of Assumption University of Windsor
in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree
of Master of Arts

by

Alix Catherine Paisley, B. A. A. R. C. T.

The Faculty of Graduate Studies
1960
Critics of the poetry of E. J. Pratt have noted, in a general way, some epic qualities of his verse. Several of his longer narratives have been called "epics of power-lust." Commentators have alluded to nature and scope of subject-matter in these poems and the heroic spirit of the characters. This heroic spirit in Pratt's poems is usually embodied in a group of men in conflict with an implacable foe in the form of hostile natural forces, or with human enemies inspired by a lust for power or animated by hatred springing from savage instincts at odds with a civilized way of life. While some of the poet's narratives have been critically discussed with reference to the heroic ideal he envisions, the poem acclaimed as his finest achievement has not been made the subject of detailed analysis. A close study of Brebeuf and His Brethren reveals that it is a historical narrative of great significance in Canadian literature. The distinctive value of the poem derives from the grandeur of the theme, the unique importance of the events recorded, the magnanimity of the characters, and the poetic art by which the author arouses and sustains interest in momentous events of the past. Since the fourteenth century poems of this kind have been known as literary epic. Examination of Pratt's poetic version of the labours and martyrdom of Jesuit missionaries in seventeenth century New France shows it has a place in the tradition of English epic poetry.
Approved for the Committee on Graduate Studies

Mary Manley

[Signature]

John F. Sullivan

[Signature]
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## BIBLIOGRAPHY
INTRODUCTION

To have the opinion of a living poet on his work, particularly when he can see it in perspective after an interval of twenty years, is, without doubt, a gratifying experience. In deep appreciation of the author's kindness in discussing with me some aspects of Brebeuf and His Brethren, I record here, as an introduction to this essay, what he had to say about the poem into which he put the best of his matured art and for which he has special affection.

On Saturday morning February 20, 1960, E. J. Pratt graciously granted me an interview at his home in Toronto. This proved to be a valuable experience as he gave me not only first-hand information regarding the poem but also redoubled my admiration for the man and his work. For an hour we discussed and read at random parts of Brebeuf and His Brethren.

It is evident that he regards the poem with special favour for he spoke at some length of the hold the subject had had on him when he first began to think of it. Dr. Pelham Edgar, a former associate of Dr. Pratt in the English Department of Victoria College, reminded him that although this subject from our history had been treated in prose, it would be, he felt, more effective in verse. While reading the Relations, Dr. Pratt became so enthusiastic that he visited Midland, Ontario, the site of the early missions. He spent a fortnight with Father T. J. Lally, S.J. at the Jesuit
residence of the Martyrs' Shrine. During the day he tramped about the site of the old fort trying to understand the loneliness of life in that far-off time. In the evening it was good to return to the pleasant company of Father Lally, to have his questions answered and to discuss the thoughts of the day.

He persuaded Dr. Wilfrid Jury, of the University of Western Ontario, to make tests of the soil at the places marked during previous excavations. He felt that if Dr. Jury could prove conclusively that here Brebeuf was burned, here Jogues tortured, and could record each spot, he would be rendering a great service to devout souls who make the annual pilgrimage to the Shrine. He said, "How wonderful it would be for the pilgrims to the Holy Land if they knew for certain that this was the actual way of the Cross, and that here Christ had suffered and died."

It took him weeks of concentrated thought to recapture sympathetically some of the fervour of the martyrs. He said, "It must have been a great unquenchable fire within them." He felt that in order to understand their indomitable efforts, we must picture them against the backdrop of their times, and so he wrote the first two books as a 'Prelude'. Climax, he believes, is essential to any long poem; and since he wished to be certain of a culminating force in his narrative, he wrote the climax and the epilogue first and tucked them away in a drawer 'to ripen' and later to be checked for approval or disapproval. He said, "You know, it is like
your child, a representative of yourself for all time, and we must be sure that it is right." Because he feels these two sections are so important, he has not permitted them to be shortened or abridged in any way during a reading.

At this point I asked about the choice of form and metre. He explained that he had written several longer poems at various times but nothing in epic form. He planned to use twelve books and chose blank verse because 'the serious dignity of the subject required a long unrhymed line.' He added that he is fond of the caesura with feminine endings, followed by a strong accent.

In answer to my question about the choice of hero from the group of eight martyrs, he assured me that from the first reading it seemed apparent that Brebeuf was a born leader, a visionary and an organizer, 'always in the centre of the picture.' He laughed when speaking of Brebeuf's commanding stature and turned to the part of the poem dealing with the first canoe trip:

Two Indians holding the canoe, Brebeuf,
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. (P. 248)

He had used the word 'buddha' at the end of the last line because of the special picture it creates in the mind, but later changed it to 'statue' feeling that the comparison was a little disrespectful.
He went on to talk of the complete dedication of the missionaries that he had tried to stress in the poem, and read aloud the part about the 'rose windows':

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 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, (P. 250)

He indicated a marked preference for this passage dwelling on the vowels, keeping the metre apparent and rolling out certain sounds, as though they gave him special pleasure.

Then he turned to some of the nature references in the poem and explained that in all cases he had used Canadian scenes and birds, in keeping with the setting. However, one critic took exception to the mention of nightingales in Canada in the lines 'To sing the Gloria while hermit thrushes/Rivalled the rapture of the nightingales.' (p. 284) Had the critic but read on in the poem, he would have discovered that Pratt intended the birds to be symbols of comparison between the two countries. Our poet quoted the passages about the wild geese and the oriole to illustrate his special reference to Canadian birds.

In answer to my question about the proposal of a pageant at the Shrine, he said that a group of friends, including Dr. Healey Willan and Sir Ernest MacMillan, thought a presentation of the poem as a pageant would be an added attraction for the pilgrims and visitors to the Shrine, but after months of consideration the scheme had to be
abandoned; the cost of production seemed formidable and the business manager of the group could not obtain sufficient backing. In the meantime, Pratt's collaborators in the project had rehearsed the poetry and musical interludes. In 1941, this material was used as part of a broadcast from Massey Hall with the Mendelssohn Choir and the Toronto Symphony Orchestra under the direction of Sir Ernest MacMillan.1

Dr. Pratt is now living in retirement as Professor Emeritus of Victoria College but keeps up a lively interest not only in the life of the University but in the progress of creative writing in Canada. He leaves the impression of great warmth and of genuine affection for people. It is easy to understand why his students held him in such veneration and why the front page of certain slim volumes bear the inscription 'To Dr. E. J. Pratt, in gratitude for his teaching, his poetry and his friendship.'2

Edwin John Pratt, our "unofficial poet laureate",3 has been acclaimed by his admirers as the dean of Canadian letters. He was born in Newfoundland in 1883, where he received his early education.

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1 Repeated efforts to trace the script of this broadcast through the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, Sir Ernest MacMillan, Dr. Healey Willan and Dr. Mazzolini of the Royal Conservatory of Music, have failed to procure a copy.

2 Desmond Pacey, Ten Canadian Poets, (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1958.)

3 This title was used by the Globe and Mail on January 2, 1960, in an account of a ceremony at Toronto when Dr. Pratt received a Civic Medal, an award given to eminent citizens.
He graduated from the University of Toronto (1911) and has been professor of English Literature in Victoria College for over thirty years. Now, at the age of seventy-seven, he has a long list of publications and many academic and literary honours to his credit. He has twice received the Governor General's award for poetry; he is a Companion of the Order of St. Michael and St. George, recipient of the Lorne Pierce Gold Medal of the Royal Canadian Society for Literature, and holds honorary degrees from several universities. Such tributes attest the esteem of Pratt's contemporaries for the man and the poet. Beginning as a poet of nature, especially of the sea and the rugged aspects of his native Newfoundland, he has become, in later poems, an interpreter of men and of heroic events of history. His fame will undoubtedly rest upon his success in narrative poetry, especially in the dramatic accounts of cataclysmic moments recounted in The Roosevelt and the Antinoe, Dunkirk and The Titanic.

Pratt's finest work to date is, in the opinion of his critics, the historical narrative Brebeuf and His Brethren. R. E. Rashley regards it as 'the high point of Pratt's effort to communicate his special message.'4 William Rose Benet speaks of it as:

A poem epic in scope, a sustained narrative of great gusto and imaginative power ..... Homeric in spirit.5

and A. J. M. Smith refers to it as Pratt's longest and most ambitious poem:


The story of the heroic French priests, martyred in their efforts to bring Christianity to the Hurons and the Iroquois, is in itself of epic quality ... Pratt fills his canvas with subdued autumn colours and presents his characters in a series of pictures that show them heroic, stoical, God-intoxicated, and yet human.  

That commentators on Pratt's poem should have noted its epic qualities is not surprising; Dr. Pratt has stated that the historical value of the subject had long interested him and that he designed Brebeuf and His Brethren as an epic. His investigation convinced him that the apostolic zeal and the heroism of the missionaries constituted a unique episode in the history of Canada that could be fittingly recorded in verse. The critics, while acclaiming the poem as a religious epic, have not examined in detail the grandeur and nobility of its subject-matter or the poet's artistry in language and versification. My purpose in this study is to offer a critical analysis of this poem, with special reference to the universal significance and unified progression of theme, the genesis, historical background, design and structure of the poem, in order to ascertain its place in the tradition of heroic poetry. Using the consensus of critical opinion on the nature of epic poetry as a point of departure, I shall scrutinize Pratt's religious narrative in order to illustrate that in theme and style it celebrates an heroic ideal which is essentially that of the literary epic. Since this comparative treatment

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6 A.J.M. Smith, The Book of Canadian Poetry, (3rd. ed.); (Toronto: W. J. Gage Ltd., 1957);
7 See above, p. iii
would involve a detailed discussion of all aspects of heroic poetry, it seems expedient, for the sake of clarity and brevity, to arrange the critics' comments on epic qualities and place beside them parallel passages from Pratt's poem which exemplify such characteristics. This material is arranged in Appendix I.

In quoting from Pratt's poems, I have used the second edition of Collected Poems, (1958). This text is referred to in the footnotes as Poems. Where emphasis occurs in a quotation it represents in every case the author's italics.
I

THE LITERARY EPIC

The epic is the form of the first recorded poem of the western world over two thousand years ago, and has been used in all languages as a suitable vehicle for serious subjects, each author adapting the mode to some special need in order to give national or supranational significance to notable events in a traditional verse form. C. M. Bowra gives the following definition of this type of heroic narrative:

An epic poem is by common consent a narrative of some length and deals with events which have a certain grandeur and importance and come from a life of action, especially of violent action such as war. It gives a special pleasure because its events and persons enhance our belief in the worth of human achievement and in the dignity and nobility of man.

Aristotle defines the epic as "a poem relating to a great and complete action which attaches itself to the fortunes of a people or to the destiny of mankind and sums up the life of a period linked with a larger movement of which the men themselves are but a part." Milton

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believed that the epic "should concern the relation of Man to God", that heroic poetry should have ethical significance, and that patience and martyrdom were more suitable subjects than chivalric jousts, and personal aggrandizement which often relies on unheroic qualities. 11 Recently E.M.W. Tillyard has expanded the definition to include various prose works which he claims are in the 'epic area', such as the Waverley Novels of Scott and Gibbon's Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire. 12

In the history of Western literature from Homer to Milton, ten poems are unreservedly described as epics by scholars of recognized authority in this field of criticism. A brief discussion of their views will reveal the nature, scope and characteristics of this type of poetry. The ten poems so designated are Homer's Iliad and Odyssey, Virgil's Aeneid, Beowulf, The Song of Roland, The Poem of the Cid, The Divine Comedy of Dante, Camoens The Lusiads, Tasso's Jerusalem Delivered and Milton's Paradise Lost. 13 On the basis of methods of composition, rather than on that of poetic values, commentators have compared these poems and classified them either as "oral" or as "literary" epics.


Bowra, commenting on the distinction frequently made between "authentic" and "literary" epic, prefers the term "oral" for the former type of composition. He argues that "authentic" is likely to suggest a finer kind of poetry, "the inspired, direct and unpremeditated song of the poet whom culture has not corrupted." He believes that this view arouses a suspicion that the epic designated by critics as "literary" is "the derivative and manufactured" type of narrative.¹⁴

By comparing passages from Beowulf and the Song of Roland on the one hand and the Aeneid and Paradise Lost on the other, Bowra points out that the division between the two kinds of epic is not due to poetical quality but rather to a difference in conditions of composition:

The two classes of epic are really distinct because their technique is different and because each owes its character to special methods of composition ... The distinction is mainly that between oral and written epic, between what is meant to be heard and what is put in a book.¹⁵

Bowra supports his contention that the distinction "is of origins and character, not of quality and worth" by citations from the Iliad and Odyssey, Beowulf and the Song of Roland in order to exemplify the kind of aesthetic enjoyment provided by oral epic, and from the Aeneid, Os Lusiadas, Gerusalemme Liberata and Paradise Lost to illustrate the merits of literary epic.


¹⁵ Ibid., p. 2
The characteristics of this form are analyzed by Bowra in order to show that the social and spiritual values embodied in literary epic further distinguish it from the merely heroic spirit of oral epic:

The whole temper of the Aeneid is far from that of the Iliad. Virgil created a poetry which was epic in its scope and nobility and sense of human worth but was unlike any other epic before it. So great was his success that other poets have followed his example, and their performance is such that we can mark a whole class of literary epic, discern its special characteristics and consider it as a whole.\(^\text{16}\)

Virgil's supreme achievement, according to Bowra, was that "he created a new type of epic in which the characters represent something outside themselves, and the events displayed have other interests than their immediate excitement in the context."\(^\text{17}\)

C. S. Lewis, finding the older critics' division of Epic into Primitive and Artificial unsatisfactory, "because no surviving ancient poetry is really primitive and all poetry is in some sense artificial", designates as Primary what Bowra calls Oral epic, and as Secondary \(^\text{18}\) what the latter terms Literary epic. Neither critic makes the distinction on the basis of poetic values, but Lewis classified the two kinds


according to chronology rather than according to a difference in methods of composition. Illustrating the Primary epic from Homer's poems and Beowulf, he states:

Primary Epic is not to be identified with "oral poetry of the heroic age," or even with "oral court poetry." It is one of the different kinds of poetry heard in a heroic court.19

After a discussion of the literary conditions described in the Homeric poems and in the old English epic, Lewis concludes:

Homer and Beowulf then, however and whenever they were actually produced, are in the tradition of Primary Epic, and inherit both its oral technique and its festal, aristocratic, public, ceremonial tone.20

Some remarks by Lewis regarding the specific differences between primary and secondary epic may be added in support of the statements to be made later in this study on the subject and characters of Pratt's poem.

Lewis notes other similarities in Homeric poetry and Beowulf: "the continual use of stock words, phrases, or even whole lines" as well as language "that must be familiar .... But it must not be familiar in the sense of being colloquial or commonplace." The most marked difference he finds between the Greek and the English epic is "a deeper difference of temper":

19 Ibid., p. 13.
20 Ibid., p. 18.
21 Ibid., pp. 19-21.
The objectivity of the unchanging background, which is the glory of Homer's poetry, is not equally a characteristic of Beowulf. Compared with the Iliad, Beowulf is already, in one sense, 'romantic'. Its landscapes have a spiritual quality...There is certainly not more suffering behind Beowulf than there is behind the Iliad; but there is a consciousness of good and evil which Homer lacks.22

There is an affinity in this respect between Beowulf and Brebeuf and His Brethren as we shall see in discussion of Pratt's recurring theme of the conflict between good and evil forces. The atmosphere of his poem has likewise symbolic implications.23

In his discussion of secondary, or literary epic, Lewis stresses that it differs from Primary Epic in having "greatness of subject...the large national or cosmic subject of super-personal interest" and he continues:

In my opinion the great subject...was not a mark of primary epic. It has entered the epic with Virgil...who has altered the very notion of epic; so much so that I believe we are now tempted to read the great subject into primary epic where it does not exist.24

After having pointed out and illustrated that the Odyssey "is an adventure story" and the Iliad "a purely personal study-that of Achilles' wrath, suffering, repentance, and killing of Hector", Lewis states:

22 Ibid., p. 25

23 See Chapter V of this study.

The truth is that Primary Epic neither had, nor could have, a great subject in the later sense. That kind of greatness arises only when some event can be held to effect a profound and more or less permanent change in the history of the world, as the founding of Rome did, or still more, the fall of man. Before any event can have that significance, history must have some degree or pattern, some design.25

Lewis notes that Virgil "added a new dimension to poetry", a view he shares with Bowra. (See above, p. 3). The former, however, finds in the "Virgilian sense of Vocation" an additional factor in the difference between the Greek and the Latin poet. Having pointed out that Aeneas is "an adult" when compared with Achilles, who is "little more than a passionate boy", Lewis states that Aeneas saw "something more important than happiness" in life; the Virgilian hero responded so nobly to duty:

> It is the nature of a vocation to appear to men in the double character of a duty and a desire, and Virgil does justice to both ... a vocation (is) a thing that calls or beckons, that calls inexorably, yet you must strain your ears to catch the voice, that insists on being sought, yet refuses to be found. 26

This critic concludes his chapter on the nature of secondary epic by stating that when Virgil gave a new shape and scope to heroic narrative by making his story "symbolical of Rome" he has symbolized the destiny of Man:

> The real question is whether any epic development beyond Virgil is possible...If we are to have


26 Ibid., pp. 36-37.
another epic it must go on from Virgil. Any return to the merely heroic...will now be an anachronism...The explicit religious subject for any future epic has been dictated by Virgil...

The characteristics of literary epic as analyzed by Bowra and Lewis show that it has social and spiritual values, as well as different poetic techniques, that distinguish it from oral epic. Both critics point out that Dante and the poets of the Renaissance took Virgil as their model. They sought to do for their age what their predecessor had done for his, "to celebrate the great issues and the powerful experiences of their own time, but none of them found a purely contemporary subject to suit him." Dante venerated Virgil not only as the most illustrious poet of antiquity and his master in poetic art (Inferno I, 79-87), but also, as Bowra says, as "an oracle on all earthly matters." For Camoens, Tasso and Milton, Virgil was not so much the teacher and master in earthly wisdom as the exponent of "the spiritual significance of the Roman Empire." Virgil's aim was to magnify the secular glory of the Roman Empire established by his patron Augustus whose ancestry he traced to Aeneas.

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28 Bowra, Virgil to Milton, p. 15. Cf. Lewis, Preface to Paradise Lost, p. 39, who limits his comments on comparison of Virgil and Milton to a detailed discussion of the latter's style; and of The Divine Comedy and Paradise Lost as religious poems. Ibid., p. 128.


30 Ibid., p. 15.

The Divine Comedy, in alluding to the Roman Empire as the unifying power in the Ancient World, has pointed out that Dante's theory of monarchy, "a single centre of world-government, to maintain peace and execute justice under a reign of universal law," was derived from Virgil:

Whose great epic is an apologia for and glorification of the pacifying and unifying mission of Rome. 32

Dante is guided by Virgil, typifying human reason, as far as earthly wisdom can lead man in his pilgrimage through the universe. No less than Dante, the poets of the Renaissance looked to the past for inspiration. For a subject worthy of expression in epic form, the anonymous eleventh-century author of The Song of Roland chose the expedition of Charlemagne and his peers as the historical basis of his poem, a feudal epic which "is not only Christian in subject; it is Christian to its very bones." 33 Miss Sayers remarks that "Old as he is, and bereft of his best help, Charlemagne is Christ's vassal still". As illustration, she uses the last stanza or "laisse" of the poem:

The Emperor has ended his assize
With justice done, his great wrath satisfied,
And Braminonda brought to the fold of Christ,
The day departs and evening turns to night;
The King's abed in vaulted chambers high;
St. Gabriel comes, God's courier, to his side;
"Up, Charles! assemble thy whole imperial might;
With force and arms unto Elbira ride;
Needs thou must succour King Vivien where he lies
At Imphe, his city, besieged by Paynim tribes;


There for thy help the Christians call and cry."
Small heart had Carlon to journey and to fight;
"God!" says the King, "how weary is my life!"
He weeps, he plucks his flowing beard and white. 34

She calls attention to a point which C. S. Lewis made with reference to the theme of the Iliad: the poet of the Song of Roland, like Homer, depicts a struggle between two civilisations, but she finds that,

the Christian poet is much more conscious of a serious purpose, and the mainspring of the action is something more important than the recapture of a wife or a quarrel about booty. In virtue of this greater seriousness and self-awareness, the Song of Roland, though "primitive" in form, is entitled to take rank with "secondary" epic, and to be compared (from this point of view only) with Virgil and Milton rather than with Homer. 35

The Song of Roland is a narrative of war in which a Christian army has to defend itself, in a surprise attack by a treacherous party of Basques, when returning from an expedition against the Saracens. Pratt's poem may be compared to the Old French epic in as much as it is a conflict between believers and unbelievers. The Jesuit heroes, however, undertake a work of peace in a spirit of selfless devotion. They dedicated themselves solely to the salvation of souls. Their suffering and martyrdom were largely due to the enmity of Iroquois tribes for the Hurons whom the missionaries befriended, and among whom they made many conversions. Both poems are animated by a spirit of faith, the "essential Christianity" to which Miss Sayers alludes,

34 Ibid., p. 203.
35 Ibid., p. 27, n. 1.
and are grounded on historical fact. The episode on which the Roland is based, occurred in the year 778 and was recounted by Charlemagne's chronicler, Eginhard in his Vita Caroli. In the four hundred years between the event and the time of the poem's composition in the eleventh century, the "magic of legend had been at work, and the small historic event has swollen to a vast epic of heroic proportions and strong ideological significance." As we shall see in the following chapter, Pratt has no need of legend to embellish his tale. He adheres strictly to the historical facts provided by his heroes' contemporaries, in the letters written by Jesuits in Canada to their Superiors in Europe.

36 Ibid., p. 3.
II

THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The full significance of Pratt’s achievement in *Brebeuf* and *His Brethren* can only be seen in the light of its historical setting. From the early sixteenth century a notable religious revival began in Europe. The Council of Trent (1545-1563) had issued decrees for reform within the Church of Rome: the Curia was strengthened, the College of Cardinals was filled with men of genuine ability, the monastic orders were instructed to adhere to strict discipline, and new religious orders were formed. Stemming from Italy, this resurgence found strength internationally, in the Netherlands against the Calvinists, in Spain under Philip II and the Inquisition; in Germany, Switzerland, Poland, and Hungary efforts were made to check the growth of Protestantism. Not only in Europe was this renewed energy felt; missionary activity was one of the most vigorous aspects of the constructive measures of the Counter-Reformation. Missions were dispatched to India, China, Japan and the Americas. Among the newly created religious orders was the Society of Jesus, founded by Ignatius Loyola in Paris in 1534 and authorized by papal bull in 1540. A recent historian has said:

The Society of Jesus...was not only a new order but a new kind of order, religious who
dispensed with the customary foundations of
community life and the common recitation in
choir of the Divine Office. Wherever there
was a Jesuit there was the Order. All the
individualism characteristic of the age was
seized on by the new society and brought into
the service of religion...Wherever the Holy
See needed them the Jesuits went, ready to do
whatever work lay to hand.  

All France was filled with religious zeal fostered by the re-
vitalized Church. Through the Relations published by the Jesuits,
widespread interest was focused on missionary labours in New France.
Men and women of high rank gave their time and influence to this holy
work. Nuns and lay women offered themselves for service in the wilder-
ness, and flocks of priests waited their turn to be sent abroad. The
time of waiting was spent in preparation for the task, in reading all
that was published on the new land and in trying to picture the life of
the savage, his language, customs and superstitions, in order to be
ready with plans for conversion.

At this time in New France, the priest and soldier went hand in
hand backed by Richelieu, who held in his person the religious, military,
and political strength of France. Champlain, his representative at
Quebec, believed that the saving of a soul was worth more than the conquest

38 Ibid., p. 195.
39 Thwaites, Reuben Gold, (ed.), The Jesuit Relations and Allied
Documents, (Cleveland: Burrows Brothers Company, 1896-1901), VIII-X.
of an empire. Under his protection a small band of Franciscans founded a house in Quebec, but the task before them was so formidable that they had to seek help outside their ranks. The Jesuits, who had more influence and more financial support in France, offered their assistance.

In 1626 two Jesuits, Father Jean de Brebeuf (who had been ordained at Rouen in 1623) and Father Anne de Nue arrived at Quebec. They travelled by the Ottawa route to the Huron country to carry on the work begun in 1615 by the Franciscan, Father Joseph Le Caron. However, in 1629 England seized the French colony and the missionaries were forced to return to France. When the Treaty of St. Germain-en-Laye (1632) restored to France her colonies in Canada, the Jesuits were among the first to return to America. This time Brebeuf was accompanied by Fathers Antoine Daniel and Ambrose Davost. Three years after their settlement among the Hurons, the little band had increased to twelve, all eager to "work for the Hurons, suffer every evil, and complain only to God."45

They planned to extend their efforts to wider fields. By now they had a workable knowledge of the language and from two central

\[\text{Ibid., p. 59.}\]
\[\text{Ibid., p. 57.}\]
\[\text{Ibid., p. 60.}\]
\[\text{Relations, XVII, 61.}\]

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houses they visited dozens of villages scattered throughout a
territory forty miles deep and twenty miles wide. Most of the trav­
elling was done in winter on snowshoes because whole villages moved
to the hunting grounds with the first sign of spring. In the summer
the squaws and children cultivated the corn and pumpkin crops, while
the men traded the furs collected on the hunt for supplies in Quebec.
During these journeys the priests were absent for weeks at a time,
living with the Indians, sharing their food, enduring the filth of
their houses, witnessing their orgies and superstitious practices, and
often bearing patiently their insults and even threats of death. Some­
times they had to stand by and watch an Iroquois captive frightfully
tortured, perhaps with a premonition of their own fate. We have but
to read in the Relations about Brebeuf, Chaumonot, Garnier or Jogues,
to be filled with admiration for their heroic courage and fortitude.

According to Father Jerome Lalemant, the inside of an Indian cabin was
a miniature hell: outlines were blurred by smoke from the fires mingled
with dust rising from the constantly moving bodies 'naked as a hand';
dogs and children, goods and chattels, were crowded around the many fires
placed down the middle of the cabin; 'one would prefer the blow of a
tomahawk on the head to living during whole years the life one must lead
here every day, while working for the conversion of these barbarians.'

Nevertheless, Father Lalement brought order to the hapless way
of life in Huronia when he became Superior in 1639. He ordered a census

\[\text{Relations, XVII, 61.}\]
taken of the Huron nation; every village between Lake Simcoe and Nottawasaga Bay was listed to the number of twelve thousand souls. He established a mission in each section of the country with a central residence where the priests could retire to rest in case of illness or fatigue and compare notes and gain encouragement. We are told how eagerly they anticipated these reunions, how great, after months of isolation among savages, was their joy in conversation with their educated fellow priests. Father Lalemant hoped also to have schools for the children and to put a stop to the semi-nomadic life of the Indians by gathering them in Christian families about an established church.

These plans led to the erection of Fort Ste. Marie in 1639 on the banks of the Wye river, which flows into Georgian Bay. From there, Fathers Francois Le Mercier, Pierre Pijart and Joseph Poncet erected settlements at Ste. Anne, St. Louis, St. Denys and St. Jean in the midst of Huronia. Later, Brebeuf and Chastellain went to the tribe of the Neutrals where St. Michel and St. Ignace were built. Fathers Ragueneau, Du Peron and Chaumonot visited the twelve hamlets of Ossossane, Fathers Daniel and Le Moyne built St. Jean, Ste. Elizabeth and St. Joachim; Fathers Jogues and Garnier were delegated to minister to a thousand families of the Petuns or tobacco-growing tribe. It was a time of optimism, and Pratt describes this interlude of peace as a forecast of material and spiritual progress:

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47 Although the French masculine form of abbreviation is S. the form given here is that used by Pratt in his poem.
This dream was at its brightest now, Quebec
Was building up a western citadel
In Sainte Marie. With sixty Frenchmen there,
The eastern capital itself had known
Years less auspicious. Might the fort not be
The bastion to one-half the continent,
New France expanding till the longitudes
Staggered the daring of the navigators?
The priests were breathless with another space
Beyond the measure of the astrolabe-
A different empire built upon the pulses,
Where even the sun and moon and stars revolved
Around a Life and a redemptive Death. (p. 285).

Yet in spite of the missioners' hopes, there was among the
Hurons an undercurrent of distrust of the blackrobes: the slow beat
of drums during the drought period of 1635, the whispers during the
smallpox epidemic which depleted village after village, the taunts of
the sorcerers, and the ever-growing menace of the Iroquois. Three
times the young warriors rose to destroy the missionaries and three
48
times the old chiefs voted them down. The mounting tension at this
moment is dramatically narrated:

While Ragueneau's Relations were being sent
Homeward, picturing the promise of the west,
The thunder clouds were massing in the east
Under the pounding drums. The treaty signed
Between the Iroquois and Montmagny
Was broken by the murder of Lalande
And Jogues. The news had drifted to the fort-
The prelude only to the heavier blows
And deeper treachery. The Iroquois,
Infesting lake and stream, forest and shore,
Were trapping soldiers, traders, Huron guides:

48 Cf. Francis Talbot, S.J., Saint Among the Hurons, (New York:
vivid description of the power of the Chief to restrain an outbreak
of violence by the young braves.

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The whole confederacy was on the march.
Both waterways were blocked, the quicker route—St. Lawrence, and the arduous Ottawa. (p. 286).

The dénouement, swift and sudden, came from without. Although a band of soldiers had been sent to defend Fort Ste. Marie, Quebec was insufficiently protected and could not spare more soldiers. The supply routes lay through the territory of the Iroquois whose tactics were subtle and unpredictable; they appeared apparently from nowhere and fled into the forest when pursued. Aware of the growing aggression, the Jesuits had urged the Hurons to fortify their towns, to organize for defence, but the Huron brave was easily lulled into a false sense of security, often leaving his village unprotected while he hunted, fished, or went with the traders to the French settlements. The Iroquois made a swift and sudden attack on the mission of St. Joseph on the morning of July 13th, 1618. Pratt describes the terror among the Hurons and the heroism of the priest who had spent fourteen years at St. Joseph and had just returned to the mission after a week of prayer and peace at Fort Ste. Marie:

\[\text{Mass had just been offered,}\]
\[\text{When the war yells were heard and Daniel came}\]
\[\text{Outside. Seeing the panic, fully knowing}\]
\[\text{Extinction faced the town with this invasion,}\]
\[\text{And that ten precious minutes of delay}\]
\[\text{Might give his flock the refuge of the woods,}\]
\[\text{He faced the vanguard of the Iroquois,}\]
\[\text{And walked with firm selective dignity}\]


As in the manner of a parley, Fear
And wonder checked the Indians at the sight
Of a single dark-robed, unarmed challenger
Against arrows, muskets, spears and tomahawks.
That momentary pause had saved the lives
Of hundreds as they fled into the forest,
But not the life of Daniel. (pp. 288-289). 51

Father Daniel was the first of the priests to shed his blood at Huronia. Six years earlier, Rene Goupil, one of the donnes of the mission, was the first victim of Iroquois fury against the missionaries, while travelling with Father Isaac Jogues, some Hurons and another donne, Guillaume Couture, on the St. Lawrence. Upon returning from a trading expedition to Quebec they were attacked by Mohawks, hideously tortured, and forced to march for thirteen days to a spot on the Hudson, where further cruelties were wrought on their bruised and lacerated bodies, before being placed on a scaffold to be taunted by jeering Indians. Despite pain and exhaustion, Father Jogues managed to baptize some Huron prisoners, using water from a nearby brook. Couture killed one of the enemy warriors; in admiration for his bravery, the Mohawks spared his life and adopted him into their tribe. Goupil, struck by the hatchet, died "murmuring the name of Christ" as Father Jogues gave him absolution. For the priest, enslavement and more torments were in store before he was ransomed and sent back to France by the Dutch. He arrived at the Jesuit College in Rennes in January,

51 Parkman gives a detailed and realistic account of the efforts of Daniel to baptize or absolve the terrified Hurons when the uproar began. Ibid., pp. 477-79. Cf. Relations, 1649, 3-5.

52 The donnes were French laymen "who, from a religious motive and without pay, had attached themselves to the service of the Jesuits", Parkman, Jesuits in North America, p. 309

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where he remained until the following spring. With a special dispensation from the Pope which permitted him to say Mass, notwithstanding his mutilated hands, he returned to the missions.

The story of the capture of Jogues and his companions, of the priest's rescue, journey to France and return to Quebec forms Book VII of Pratt's poem; it is a more detailed account than of any other single episode. The stark realism in the poetic version of Jogues' letter to his Superior is softened by the priest's humility and piety.

Jogues had spent two years at Montreal after his return from France, acting as "peace ambassador to hostile tribes", (p. 230), when his Superior, Father Jerome Lalemant, uncle of Gabriel Lalemant, sent him to work for the faith and for peace among the Mohawks. Advised by an Algonquin convert that he would be less unwelcome to the Mohawks if he wore a coat instead of a cassock, the priest "exchanged the uniform of Loyola for a civilian's doublet and hose" before setting out to negotiate with the Mohawks at Ossernenon:

So Jogues, accompanied by his friend Lalande
Departed for the village - his last letter

53 Parkman, Jesuits in North America, Chap. XVI. Cf. Relations, 1644 and 1647.


55 Parkman, Jesuits in North America, pp. 394 ff.

56 Ibid., pp. 396-97, Cf. Relations, 1646, 15.
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. (p. 280)

The saintly character and the valiant deeds of Father Isaac
Jogues warrant the detailed accounts of his life and death given by
historians and in Pratt's poem. Parkman's eulogy of the great
missionary is the conclusion of a chapter about his death:

Thus died Isaac Jogues, one of the purest
examples of Roman Catholic virtue which this
Western continent has seen. The priests, his
associates, praise his humility, and tell us
that it reached the point of self-contempt, a
crowning virtue in their eyes; that he regarded
himself as nothing, and lived solely to do the
will of God as uttered by the lips of his
Superiors. They add that, when left to the
guidance of his own judgment, his self-distrust
made him very slow of decision, but that when
acting under orders he knew neither hesitation
nor fear. With all his gentleness, he had a
certain warmth or vivacity of temperament;
and we have seen how, during his first captivity,
while humbly submitting to every caprice of his
tyrants and appearing to rejoice in abasement,
a derisive word against his faith would change
the lamb into the lion, and the lips that seemed
so tame would speak out in sharp, bold tones of
menace and reproof. 58

Within a year after Father Daniel had "faced the arrows and
died in front of his church" (p. 294) at St. Joseph, the four remain-
ing priests gave their lives. The Iroquois having sacked St. Ignace

57 Cf. Wrong, Rose and Fall of New France, I, 295-97; Parkman,
Jesuits in North America, pp. 307-34, 396-403; J. B. Brebner, Explorers

58 Parkman, Jesuits in North America, p. 403.
in March 1629, sped to St. Louis where they found Brebeuf and Lalemant whom they took prisoners along with the Hurons who failed to escape. They marched the captives three miles over the snow to St. Ignace, now garrisoned as an enemy stronghold. Pratt, in the last Book of the poem, gives a moving and dramatic version of the sufferings and deaths of the priests.

The end came swiftly for Garnier and Chabanel: In December, 1629, Garnier, wounded by gun-shot, dragged himself towards a dying Huron to give him absolution and was murdered by hatchet blows. Father Noel Chabanel, recalled from St. Jean by his Superior, was en route December 8th to the mission of St. Matthias when a renegade Huron, in revenge on the blackrobes, whom he blamed for the ruin of the Hurons, killed him and threw the body into the river:

Firm at his post,
Garnier suffered the fate of Daniel. And now,
Chabanel, last in the roll of the martyrs, entrapped
On his knees in the woods met death at apostate hands. (p. 297)

Of the deaths of Brebeuf and Lalemant, which occurred in March, 1629, Pratt gives a detailed account. He describes Brebeuf's vesting and prayers before the celebration of his last Mass three days before he was captured; the rude altar on which he offered the Holy Sacrifice, his premonitions of torture as he recalled the sufferings, the enslavement, and the lacerations endured by Jogues before a brutal death

59 Ibid., pp. 506-11. Parkman gives details of the life and death of this "favorite child of wealthy and noble parents...Brebeuf was the lion of the Huron missions, and Garnier was the lamb; but the lamb was as fearless as the lion." (P. 510).

mercifully released him; the fate of Jogues' companions, Goupil, Couture, Eustache the Indian convert, and the heroism of Daniel, aiding his flock to escape. Brebeuf and Lalemant are pictured as haunted by visions of life in old France—the churches, fields, gardens and pastures. Counterpointing their dreams of days gone by are the "battle-cries of triumph" celebrating Iroquois glee in the capture of "their greatest victim, Echon" (Pp. 293-294):

The Iroquois had waited long
For this event. Their hatred for the Hurons
Fused with their hatred for the French and priests
Was to be vented on this sacrifice,
And to that camp had come apostate Hurons,
United with their foes in common hate
To settle up their reckoning with Echon. (P. 295).

The two priests endured the agony of multiple torture without a sound of pain; they prayed, encouraged the converts to persevere, and defied their captors. After a mock ceremony of baptism amid taunts and blows, bound to stakes, they bore the searing pain of red-hot coals and heated hatchets. With prayerful compassion they watched each other being tormented: "Lalemant died in the morning at nine, in the flame/Of the pitch belts" (P. 296). The revolting tortures ended for Brebeuf when, having scalped him, the Indians fought for pieces of his dismembered body to find the source of such unflinching courage:

But not in these was the valour or stamina lodged;
Nor in the symbol of Richelieu's robes or the seals
Of Kazan's charters, nor in the stir of the lilies
Upon the Imperial folds; nor yet in the words
Loyola wrote on a table of lava-stone
In the cave of Manresa—not in these the source—
But in the sound of invisible trumpets blowing
Around two slabs of board, right-angled, hammered
By Roman nails and hung on a Jewish hill. (P. 296).

61
Parkman, pp. 189-193.

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A French historian describes the widespread missionary activity of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries as the most important work of the Counter-Reformation:

It spread the Catholic faith, which up till then had been practically confined to Europe, to the four corners of the world. It laid the foundations for a truly universal Church. It brought more souls to the Fold than had been lost to it through the Protestant upheaval. Nor should it be considered as important solely in the religious field. It contributed more than anything else to the progress of civilization in newly discovered countries. 62

He also notes that the establishment of Christianity in North America was "a consequence of the French Catholic renascence of the early seventeenth century." He devotes a chapter to the work of evangelization in Central and South America, in India, China, Japan and in New France, pointing out the difficulties encountered, the missioners' religious and humanitarian ideals and the special problems faced by the Jesuits in Huronia. 63 He concludes by a reference to the piety and devotion of the converts to which the missionaries so frequently testified. Quoting from the Relations, Janelle writes: "And when Father de Brebeuf was tortured by the Iroquois, the Christian Hurons who were with him replied to his exhortations: Never fear, Father, our souls will be in heaven while our bodies suffer here below."

Janelle adds: "Indeed, the beginnings of French Canada were of great spiritual beauty, and worthily close the history of the Catholic


63 Ibid., pp. 357-362.
Reformation”. The deaths of Brebeuf and Lalemant close the story of the Jesuit missions in Huronia. We shall now consider the character of the man whom Parkman calls "the founder of the Huron mission, its truest hero, and its greatest martyr." 64

64 Parkman, The Jesuits in North America, p. 491.
Pratt's choice of time and place has unique value in relation to his epic theme. His poem is above and beyond the scope of a mere chronicle; not only has the subject-matter itself epic grandeur, but in his treatment of it the poet is notably free from the digressions replete with incidental details usually found in a chronicle. A modern critic has observed:

---a chronicle is only the raw material of an epic. There is a time element in the laws governing the formation of an epic; it demands distance in memory and perspective in design; it needs more than an individual point of view. As the story passes from one generation to another, it becomes more definite, more compact; what is not apt for memory gets forgotten. What remains is the eternally significant.\(^65\)

The poet sees in the few years of the Huron Missions (1625-1649) one aspect of the cosmic struggle between the forces of good and evil, of ignorance against enlightenment, which is a recurring theme in history. In this case, the Jesuit missionaries represent the highest type of human virtue in conflict with a primitive way of life; centuries of civilization separate their respective ways of life. The subject of man's dual nature, his capacity to reach great heights on the one hand and sink to unbelievable depths on the other, is one which had long fascinated Pratt: "The snarl Neanderthal is worn/Close to the smiling lips".\(^66\)


\(^{66}\) Poems, "From Stone to Steel", p. ll.
He is interested in primitive man's response to the complex ethics of a highly organized religion. As the composer of an epic poem, he selects and presents his characters without moralising; the martyrs are not portrayed as complex individuals; they are champions of a cause for whom we feel admiration rather than pity. He has no desire to dramatize subtle human relationship; his aim is to produce a straightforward poetic narrative of a great human adventure in the manner of the author of Beowulf or of Os Lusiadas, with the difference that Pratt stresses at every point how the dedicated heroes of his poem carry on their mission ad majorem Dei Gloriam.

From among the six missionaries and the two lay assistants of the mission, Pratt selects Jean de Brebeuf as the symbol of the heroic ideal. In stature he compares him to a totem pole, thus creating a character larger than life, so that we think of Beowulf, Aeneas, or Charlemagne. This hero is described as "Lion in limb and heart", a man "whose nature is like a furnace white hot". (P. 282) To add to his prestige, he surrounds him in the beginning of the poem with the great names of his time, Francois de Sales, Vincent de Paul and Francois Xavier. Brebeuf is presented as a chivalric type, a nobleman with a shield and coat-of-arms and ancestors who had fought at Hastings. He keeps him in the centre of the action by elaborate presentation of his states of mind, how vows, prayers, vision (P. 273), as well as his initiative, daring, and presence of mind (P. 295). We are told of his

dogged determination to master the language as the first step to under-stand the Hurons:

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. (P. 250)

In time he became an accomplished orator in the Huron tongue and he
realized with sad foreboding the incalcuable power of speech:

...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. (P. 250)

His great strength on the first trip to Huronia, when on the portage,
he carried more than the others, won the furtive admiration of the
Indians, who affectionately dubbed him "Echon", carrier of heavy loads.
(p. 255). He is the embodiment of heroic qualities, such as the power to
endure great violence, to respond valiantly to appeal for help from his
fellow-priests, and to risk the swift tomahawk stroke in an effort to
bring last minute comfort to a dying Iroquois. (P. 261) He could be
both a lion at bay "thundering reproof to his foes...giving them roar
for roar" (P. 295) or a mystic rapt in a vision:

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? (P. 272)

He had the dedicated spirit and the simplicity of the ancient
Jewish prophets, an Elias or a Jeremiah, "the might of Rome ... joined
to the cause of Judea! (P. 296) The Jesuit hero served the cause of
religion, but unlike Charlemagne whose mission was somewhat similar,
Brebeuf was not an active combatant, but faced violence with gentleness and truly loved and pitied his enemies. Like the heroes of the Iliad and the Odyssey, he and his brethren fought unseen forces of evil, contending against Indian superstitions and belief in spirits in all things animate and inanimate, the oki and the demon. Brebeuf, like Roland at Roncesvalles, acted with confidence in the holiness of his cause, not however, with any desire for personal fame and glory, but with apostolic zeal to further the cause of Christ. Throughout the poem we feel that he has the qualities of dynamic leadership. He prepared a sermon urging that his brothers "sincerely love the savages", observe the "dots and commas" of their service. (P. 258) He wrote a letter to other young men seeking a way of service, a letter that was to loom in history" and "To flame on an eternal Calendar":

Wherein the gain, you ask, of this acceptance?
There is no gain but this-that what you suffer
Shall be of God. (P. 264)

Odysseus was called the 'wily', for he seemed to be at his best when nothing could save him but his wits. The heroes of our poem did not intentionally use their superior knowledge against the Indians, yet in one case Brebeuf's prediction of an eclipse of the sun filled the simple creatures with awe; and when rain came after prolonged drought in answer to prayers, the savages attributed such power to the hero himself. The owner of a magic glass that made an ant as big as a grasshopper and a ticking Captain that counted the hours could surely control the rain. A storm saved the hero's life at a time when the whole village blamed the blackrobes for the drought. Francis Talbot sums up his qualities:
He was regarded by the natives as the great chief of the French. He knew the ordinary language as well as any Huron and spoke their council language as metaphorically as their best orators. He had absorbed the Huron customs of procedures and understood their pattern of thought. He had won the respect of the strongest warriors of his own height, strength and endurance, as well as by his wisdom, his courage, his determination. To the Ouendat nations he was the tongue of the French. 68

However, the epic poem does not deal with the hero alone; in ancient epics much diversion was supplied by stories of the gods, or accounts of games and feasts that portrayed the hero's relationship with other men and the world in which he lived. 69 The hero allied himself with men who shared his ideals and his relish for adventure. The missionaries in Huronia worked in pairs, as comrades they loved and respected one another, recalling Achilles and Patroclus, Roland and Oliver, but with far loftier motives, for they were inspired by charity and the sacred fellowship of their dedicated lives. They were all men of superior gifts and of peculiar force and energy, capable of the strong loyalty that bound Charlemagne and his peers, the followers of Odysseus, or the twelve henchmen of Beowulf. As in all epic poetry, these men were united in a common cause and passed through terrifying ordeals with heroic self-sacrifice. Pratt relates the suffering of Jogues and Garnier on their fruitless visit to the Petuns, and of Father Jogues' later


69 Cf. Beowulf, 499-661: the entertainment in the royal hall, and 991-1250, the feasting after the hero's victory.
capture, enslavement and the mutilation of his hands, of the death of the kindly doctor Goupil, a lay assistant murdered by a sorcerer, or Jogues' escape to France and his return to the Mohawks with his friend Jean Lalande, knowing that he was going to his death on the banks of the Ottawa. Nor is the heroic spirit of chivalry missing, for in keeping with that great mediaeval ideal is the courage displayed by Father Daniel in presenting himself in the middle of the Fort of St. Joseph, a target for the savage arrows, while the women and children escaped to the river. ( 289) In direct and detached narrative style, Pratt has portrayed noble, valiant characters who were not only great leaders; they were heroes of epic stature, in that they assumed a truly superhuman task and attacked each problem with unflinching bravery. Their greatest quality is their unshakable endurance in suffering and deprivation, a fortitude sustained by a life of prayer and self-sacrifice. Throughout the poem, Pratt contrasts the life in France with the life in Canada, the easy as opposed to the hard way, a device that serves to heighten our admiration of their unalloyed fidelity to a great cause. Contrast is a device used effectively in earlier epics such as Ariosto's Orlando Furioso, Tasso's Gerusalemme Liberata, or Camoens' Os Lusiadas, with the difference that Pratt does not embellish or make additions to the story, but views the historic situation with imaginative insight, describes it with dramatic but even-toned realism, and with the detachment that is characteristic of writers of literary epic. 71


IV

STRUCTURE AND IMAGERY IN THE POEM

The story narrated in the poem covers events from April 26, 1625 to March 16, 1649. The chronological sequence is clearly indicated; each stirring episode is headed by the appropriate date according to the Relations, the source from which the poet drew his material. The whole poem has the value of a piece of integrated history, arranged in twelve books, with a prologue and an epilogue. By adhering to the factual basis provided by the letters of the Jesuits to their Superiors in France, Pratt maintains unity of action, one of the essentials of epic poetry. 72

As we have seen in the preceding chapter of this study, Pratt succeeds also in achieving unity of character: he keeps Brebeuf, by his qualities of leadership, intrepid valour, self-abnegation and mystic tendency the central figure of the narrative. 73 Brebeuf and his fellow-missioners form one group in the poem and with them are associated other historical persons who are involved in the action and who influence the

72 Cf. Francis B. Gummere, (trans.), The Oldest English Epic, (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1925,) p. 7: "Unity of character was no object of the old lays; vigorous narration of action was all they attempted."

73 Ibid., p. 7. Gummere notes that although unity of character was not the chief aim of the old poets, the author "strove manfully to make Beowulf a consistent character throughout the epic...and we are inclined to think that the Northern bard did his work fairly well."
course of events. With the main group in the narrative, the Huron tribe is also linked; to convert these natives and to befriend them in their struggle against the arrogant Iroquois was the task assigned to the missionaries by their Superiors. In conflict with the heroes is the enemy group, the fierce Iroquois of the Five Confederate Nations, implacable foes of the Hurons. The spiritual adventures of the Jesuits in New France, developed against this background of tribal antagonism, form an organic whole through their relation to Brebeuf, a central figure of heroic proportions in episodes which cover a quarter of a century of history. The incidental mention of other persons whose actions were peripheral to the main episodes—Champlain, Cartier, Magellan (p. 250), Richelieu, Mazarin, Condé, Turenne (p. 251), Montmagny, Governor of Quebec (p. 278)—connects the narrative with the larger pattern of history.

In Brebeuf and His Brethren the plot revolves around the efforts of the priests to make friends with the natives in order to win them to the faith. The basic theme is the hero's love of God overflowing into love of man, which finds expression in their dedicated lives of self-sacrifice. The skill of the poet lies in his ability to compose the incidents in a pattern of action and suspense, of episode, description.

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74 Cf. Poems, pp. 247, 250-253, 273, and passim. For example, we note that the Superior, Father Charles Lalemant, sends Brebeuf back to Quebec for a year for further preparation before going to the Hurons. Champlain's admiration for Brebeuf's success with the Indians, the capture of Quebec by the English, and the subsequent return of the colony to the French, Jogues, befriended by the Dutch, going to France, returning to the missions and sent as peace ambassador are other instances.

and dialogue, so as to hold the reader's interest in anticipation of the climax. These elements of narrative Pratt arranges in twelve books, the chronological sequence providing not only a reminder of the passage of time but also a heightening of suspense. The Prologue, sketches, the religious background of the poem points to the spiritual ancestry of the heroes. Books I and II deal with the first mission to Huronia and the difficulties of the task the small band of priests had to face. Our interest and sympathy are aroused by the first of many comparisons between their new life and their homes in Old France. A wealth of realistic detail is added to round out the picture of primitive conditions of life among the savages: the barter with beads, kettles, knives and hatchets in order to win Indian friendship; the method of transportation, Indian wigwams and ceremonies, travel by canoe and forest trail are recorded. Book II ends with the arrival of new missionaries who bring fresh energy and enthusiasm to the enterprise. (Pp. 246-253). Book III gives an account of the first real wave of success. Brebeuf is welcomed back to Huronia after four years in France; the first mission house is built and the priests make some headway with the language. In this book Brebeuf prepares his sermon on patience (p. 258) and is witness to a ritual slaying of an Iroquois captive. (p. 260) The incident is given considerable prominence for the feeling of foreboding, which it creates in his mind. He is inspired with even greater zeal and the book ends with his famous letter to France. (p. 262-264) Books IV, V, and VI deal with the expansion of the mission field and the construction of Fort Ste. Marie (p. 263). The fruitless journey of Fathers Jogues and Garnier to
the Petuns is related (p. 269-270) as well as a revealing account of the character of Brebeuf when he and Father Chaumonot visit the Neutral tribes:

Was not Echon Brebeuf 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 Huron taut
At the arrow feathers, and the javelin poised
And hesitant. (p. 271)

His vision of martyrdom at the end of Book VI points forward to the climax of the poem (p. 273). Books VII and VIII, minor peaks in the drama, concern the sufferings of Father Jogues and Bressani and the death of the lay assistant, Rene Goupil, first of the band to be martyred (p. 275). Most of the material in these two books is a poetic version of a letter written by Father Jean Filleau, the Provincial at Quebec, to his Superior in Rome. 76

This first person narration in several letters to Superiors by Fathers Brebeuf, Jogues, and Raguenau heighten the emotional power, add to the variety of the narration, and parallel the speeches and dialogue of older epics. Book IX is the high point of success of the mission: Brebeuf, because of a broken shoulder is forced to remain in Quebec, but returns to Huronia at the end of three years, bringing recruits who had recently come from France. Soldiers were added to the Fort as a result of rumours of Iroquois activity along the Ottawa:

76

Not only was the faith sustained by hopes
Nourished within the bosom of their home
And by the wish-engendered talk of peace,
But there outside the fort was evidence
Of tenure for the future. Acres rich
In soil extended to the forest fringe.
Each year they felled the trees and burned the stumps,
Pushing the frontier back, clearing the land,
Spading, hoeing. The stomach’s noisy protest
At sagamite and wild rice found a rest
With bread from wheat, fresh cabbages and pease,
And squashes which when roasted had the taste
Of norman apples. Strawberries in July,
... So, was this the West?

The Fort is like a bit of transported Normandy with books and
bells and neophytes "To sing the Gloria while hermit thrushes/Rivalled
the rapture of the nightingale" (p. 284). A pool shaded with silver
birches and ringed with marigolds and watercress gives an air of civilized
comfort (P. 285). Pratt, in stressing this interlude of peace and plenty,
creates suspense which heightens the dramatic nature of subsequent epi-
cisodes.

Book X recounts the martyrdom of Father Daniel at St. Joseph’s
and in Book XI Father Brebeuf and Father Gabriel Lallemant are captured
at St. Louis. Box XII opens with another pause, a slow movement in which
the thoughts of the hero are described, not expressed in soliloquy but in
meditation; it is a summing up before the climax somewhat like that of
Henry V on the eve of the battle of Agincourt (IV, i):

.... such a wretch,
Winding up days with toil, and nights with sleep,
Had the forehand and vantage of a king.
The slave, a member of the country’s peace,
Brebeuf is alone and faced with an ordeal which will strain to the utmost his strength and fortitude. He thinks sadly of those brothers who had worked with him for the past eighteen years in the mission, and he sees in their fate the pattern that lies ahead. He recalls happier days in France:

. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . 
Brebeuf, 
His mind a moment throwing back the curtain 
Of eighteen years, could see the orchard lands, 
The cidreries, the peasants at the Fairs, 
The undulating miles of wheat and barley, 
Gardens and pastures rolling like a sea 
From Lisieux to Le Havre. Just now the surf 
Was pounding on the limestone Norman beaches 
And on the reefs of Calvados. Had dawn 
This very day not flung her surplices 
Around the headlands and with golden fire 
Consumed the silken argosies that made 
For Rouen from the estuary of the Seine? (P. 294)

When after the pause, the fury of the climax breaks, the lines lengthen from iambic pentameter to lines almost entirely anapaestic:

. . . . . Speech they could stop for they girdled his lips, 
But never a moan could they get. Where was the source 
Of his strength, the home of his courage that topped the best 
Of their braves and even out-fabled the lore of their legends? (P. 296)

Hatchet blows and pitch flames put an end to the lives of Brebeuf and Ialemant. After the smoke had cleared, Father Ragueneau, the "Shepherd Priest" is faced with the decision to set the torch to the last of the Missions, their beloved Fort Ste. Marie, "Inside an hour...we saw the fruit of ten years' labour ascend in smoke" (P. 297), but "The Will and the Cause in their triumph survived" (P. 297).
Critics of the epic from Aristotle to Northrop Frye have stressed that objectivity is essential to narrative. Pratt, in this respect is singularly well disciplined in that he never once gives a personal opinion or holds up his heroes for approbation or dissects their motives. Moreover, his poetic technique is in line with that of traditional epic. Throughout the poem the episodic method is used instead of stanzas, the individual line having specific structural value. We are told that "the constant element in epic poetry is the single line and not the stanza which varies at the whim of the writer." The unrhymed line allows greater variety in narrative poetry and is closely related to ordinary speech. Normal speech rhythm is also sustained by the frequent enjambement and a predominant Anglo-Saxon vocabulary in factual narration. By contrast, in the priests' letters, meditations and prayers, the diction is more noticeably Latinized, while a primitive, realistic note enters through plentiful use of Indian dialect. Unusual effects are created by breaking or ending a sentence in the middle of the line. One of the distinctive qualities of the poem is the ease with which Pratt uses passages from the Relations, adjusting the translation to maintain the meter without alteration of meaning:

"Through the kind Providence of God,
We managed, as it were, to draw both oil
And honey from the very stones around us.


78 Bowra, Heroic Poetry, p. 519.
The obedience, patience of our missionaries
Excel reward-all with one heart and soul
Infused with the high spirit of our Order; (P. 239)79

The clear style and deceptive simplicity carry us along with the utmost ease through difficult Indian names such as 'Tsiquendaentaha' and 'Ossernnon' and long lists of French names with their end stress, allowing a dramatic pause at the cassura, yet never once tripping in the movement of his blank verse. Liturgical words, functionally valid, add depth and beauty to the texture of the verse:

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, (P. 258)

Pratt is said to employ great care in keeping historical facts correct to the last detail, for "I have to know what the end is before I begin." With Brebeuf he wrote the end first using the functional image of the Cross as a symbol of the total meaning of the poem.

The fire imagery recurs throughout the poem in order to symbolize hearts burning with love of God, or to illustrate as Dante does in Purgatorio, Canto XXVII, the purifying quality of flames; Pratt says that "The flame had spread across the Pyrenees" (P. 244); he quotes the Jesuit motto 'per ignem et per aquam' (P. 245), and alludes to the zeal of Father Charles Lalemant who 'was capturing souls/By thousands with the fire of the Relations' (P. 251). Later, in ironic contrast, the

79 Ragueneau, Relations, 1648.
80 Cf. Interview with Dr. Pratt, p. 11 of this study.
sufferers are made to run the gauntlet of cabin fires (P. 294); again he pictures the destructive and purifying fire that wipes out the villages but rises again on the altar of the Church at the Shrine (P. 298).

The battle symbol is also developed in the poem: the marshalling of forces in the arrival of new missionaries, the establishment of lay-brothers, the construction of forts and enlistment of soldiers from Quebec, movements that represent the spiritual and physical struggle to break through the siege of resistance set up by the natives. John Sutherland believes that Pratt is preoccupied with the symbolic implications of his work and that the Christian symbolism of Brebeuf often "surpasses his conscious intention and opens up for the reader areas of experience which he himself no more than glimpsed in the course of writing."\(^{81}\)

H. A. Guerber states that epic poetry does not rely on rhythm alone but is characterized by its "high emotional sweep, untamed passion and musical flow of utterance."\(^{82}\) Pratt relies on the sudden phrase and striking epithet to startle and to maintain interest. Such phrases as 'vast blunders of the forest glooms' (P. 245), 'the aubade of the orioles' (P. 267), 'through the embrasures of enfilading fire' (P. 257), have fine imaginative value in the juxtaposition of words and their rich connotations. One of the problems of narrative verse is to keep sufficient variety of style, and for this purpose Pratt works into the poetic

\(^{81}\) Sutherland, Poetry of E. J. Pratt, p. 1.

pattern Latin mottoes, quotations from the litany, liturgical prayers and snatches of dialogue. At times he breaks the flow of narrative, to add more significant historical detail (P. 251); elsewhere the most homely things are placed beside the highest visions, often in vigorous, even grotesque imagery:

Tailoring the man into the Jesuit coat,  
Wrapping the smiles round inward maledictions,  
And sublimating hoary Gallic oaths  
Into the Benedicite. (P. 259)

Pratt, without recourse to the stock epithets of ancient epics, uses his poetic powers to create fresh images. In describing the revival of religious enthusiasm he writes:

The story of the frontier like a sage  
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. (P. 245).

He refers to the hero's 'nimbus of authority' (P. 271) and describes the momentous incident when a moon eclipse was due:

No one knew the lair  
Or nest from which the shadow came;  
Like a crow's wing it hovered broodily  
Brushing the face-five hours from rim to rim  
While midnight darkness stood upon the land. (P. 257)

The emotional impetus and the strength of the poem are not in the language alone or in the form and structure, or the poetic devices of the narrative poet, but rather in a combination of all these features unified by the shape and vision inherent in Pratt's poetic version of historical actuality, of an event which gives meaning to life because it is true, a spiritual achievement that has power because it is rooted in reality.
SIGNIFICANT THEMES OF PRATT'S MAJOR POEMS

A recent critic of Pratt's poetry in alluding to the "contemporary significance" of his work as a whole, stresses that his achievement "is distinguished above all by the balance of his vision" author's italics):

That balance is present in every aspect of his work. In the first place, it appears in his reconciliation of the present with the distant past. Grounded as he is in the heroic, he has been able to imbue that tradition with fresh life by adapting it to current needs. Probably no other poet is so adept in the use of scientific and mechanical imagery; and certainly none can move with such ease between the world of primitive strife and the world of the machine...Pratt can suggest the heritage of violence embodied in the machine of war; and...he can make us see the machine-like destructiveness of primitive creatures. In such images, we are given a sense of the human past and of the continuity of human life with nature. 83

We shall note first that the recurring theme of conflicting powers of man against external nature, man against man, brute force against helpless innocence, is exemplified in Pratt's early lyric poems as well as in his "epics of power-lust". 84 This duality is present in several poems in Newfoundland Verse. 85 The valiant courage of sailor folk is pitted

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against the inanimate force of a cruel sea in Carlo and The Ice-Floes. Two narrative poems, published in 1925, The Cachalot, based on the struggle between a whale and a sea monster, and The Great Feud, a contest between land beasts and sea beasts, depict the primitive, ungovernable power of "Nature, red in tooth and claw." The action of the latter poem occurs in primordial Australisia "In one cool morning of the earth" (P. 151). Pratt, imaginatively reconstructing a "Titanic strife of claw and fire" (P. 180), makes one of his rare personal intrusions in a narrative when he recounts the birth of the dinosaur "Tyrannosaurus Rex!":

Now let the sceptic disbelieve
The truth I am about to state,
And urge, with curling lip, I weave
A legend that is out of date.
Let him disgorge his lie; I claim
That by a wanton twist of Fate,
(To which I am by Hera sworn)
A creature of this sounding name,
Although three million years too late,
Stood on that peak this awful morn.
It came to pass, one day, before
Mammals appeared upon the Earth,
A dinosaurian mother bore
Tyrannus in a tragic birth. (P. 166)

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86 Poems, pp. 9-12.
87 Ibid., pp. 19-23.
88 Ibid., pp. 138-150.
89 Poems, pp. 151-181.
90 Tennyson, In Memoriam, LVI, 1, 15.
91 Cf. Frye, Poems, p. xiv, on 'detachment of the poet from his surroundings' as a distinctive quality of Pratt's narrative verse.
In *The Witches' Brew* (1925), the "hero" a sea cat, "Tom the Cat from Zanzibar", is chosen to guard the brew made by the witches upon an "alcoholic base" (p. 122). Frye considers the style of this poem, "broad burlesque, with comic rhymes and anti-climaxes in the tradition of *Hudibras* and *Don Juan*." Referring to these three poems (*The Cachalot*, *The Great Feud*, *The Witches' Brew*), Sutherland notes:

... in each case the hero appears to be an animal protagonist... In deference to their central characters, the tone of these poems is often mock-heroic rather than heroic.93

Northrop Frye, commenting on Pratt's awareness of the fact that "writing narrative verse is no job for an egocentric poet", states that he tells a story well by reason of his objectivity and his "beautifully paced narrative". He calls attention to the concreteness and precision of Pratt's language, the power and range of his "flexible, unpretentious speaking style which is amazingly versatile, yet always unmistakably his."94

In Pratt's later poems, these stylistic qualities are maintained with skill and economy; but his conception of the heroic ideal has deepened. We become aware of higher values implicit in the self-sacrifice of his heroes. It is no longer the struggle of human beings against raw nature or the internecine feud of primordial creatures; a note of hope, of redemption through self-sacrifice indicates that Pratt's vision of the heroic involves more than a display of physical endurance, even more than the moral courage displayed by the group heroes in *The Roosevelt*

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92 Poems, p. xv.
93 Sutherland, *Poetry of E. J. Pratt*, pp. 4-5.
94 Poems, pp. xiv-xv.
and the Antinoe and The Titanic. The theme of Dunkirk transcends the idea of fidelity to duty, for both British and Germans are depicted as loyal and courageous; the mainspring of the action of the poem is the selfless bravery of the English fleet and air power in facing annihilation:

Stuff of the world's saga in the heavens!
Spitfires were chasing Heinkels, one to twenty.
The nation's debt unpaid, unpayable,' Was climbing up its pyramid,
As the Hurricanes took on the Messerschmitts. (P. 306)

The final section of the poem has overtones of providential preservation of the English fleet:

The blessed fog-
Ever before this day the enemy,
Leagued with the quicksands and the breakers-
Now mercifully masking the periscope lenses,
Smeating the hair-lines of the bomb-sights,
Hiding the flushed coveys.
And with it the calm on the Channel,
The power that drew the teeth from the storm,
The peace that passeth understanding. (P. 309)

We may quote here Professor Frye's comments on two poems published thirteen years apart, "The Depression Ends" (1932) and "The Truant" (1943) which he mentions as examples of Pratt's constant interest in religion:

95 Cf. Sutherland, Poetry of E. J. Pratt, pp. 10-11: "The poet finds in that action (of Dunkirk) an example of self-sacrifice that is ultimately to transcend the ties of country or of race. He distinguishes the two peoples in an image of the cross: the Stukas dive with 'their black distorted crosses', while the British have learned 'To stand hushed before the Canterbury tapers'." In the passage, from which the latter quotation is taken, Pratt outlines British racial development from Stonehenge to Canterbury, with special reference to military prowess; in the former passage, he describes metaphorically the dropping of German bombs. It is debatable whether the two passages, particularly the second, can be considered symbolic representation.
Pratt's religious views are never obtrusive, but they organize all his poetry. Considering that he has a degree in theology, it is not surprising that they should be consciously held—he can hardly have acquired his Christian archetypes in the way that a sleeping camper acquires mosquito bites, involuntarily and in the dark.

This succinct, emphatic statement by the editor of the poet's work may serve as a corrective to the assertions of another critic who had written two years earlier about Pratt:

He is deeply preoccupied with religious ideas and yet, if we consider his poetry as a whole, we must acknowledge that he is sometimes indecisive and even contradictory in his expression of them.

Sutherland goes on to analyze some of the "varying conceptions of God throughout the poetry". He begins with an excerpt from "The Truant". Frye finds that this poem and "The Depression Ends" are "two extraordinary poems" in which Pratt's religious views are most clearly brought out. Interpreting the former tale, Frye says:

"The Truant" presents us with the figure of a "Great Panjandrum", a prince of the power of the air, who talks as though he were God, who obviously thinks he is God, but who is no more God than Blake's Urizen, Shelley's Jupiter, Byron's Arimanes, or Hardy's President of the Immortals.

It would seem that Sutherland has erroneously identified the "Great Panjandrum", addressed by the Master of the Revels as "Right Reverend, most adored, / And most forcibly acknowledged Lord" with God. The Truant (representing man) is led by the Master of the Revels "Close to the foot of the

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96 Poems, pp. xxiii-xxiv

97 Sutherland, Poetry of E. J. Pratt, p. 18.

98 Ibid.

99 Poems, p. xxiv

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Almighty's throne" because he is guilty of presumption:

He has developed concepts, grins
Obscenely at your Royal bulletins,
Possesses what he calls a will
Which challenges your power to kill, (P. 101)

Defying a force that tyrannizes over human life, "little genus homo, six feet high" outlines the great achievements of man in utilizing natural resources and he proclaims the unconquerable power of human mind and will. The identity of "The Awful Presence" and the significance of the name seem to have eluded Mr. Sutherland. If we accept Frye's interpretation of the poem, and it is assuredly more in line with the trend and tenor of Pratt's poetry in general, it is impossible to agree with Sutherland that in this poem "God is conceived simply as a product of man's imagination", or to see how he can interpret the speech of "genus homo" as being addressed "to the Almighty" in a literal sense. According to Frye's interpretation, the metaphysical concept of evil is the basis of Pratt's portrayal of a malevolent power against which man pits his enlightened intellect and his will:

It infuriates him (the Panjandrum) that something in the human soul should elude him, and as he screams at man in the "shrillest tenor" which is the voice of tyranny, he gradually takes on the outlines of Satan the accuser. 102

This interpretation accords with orthodox Christian dogma and tradition, with Pratt's attitude towards religion in his poetry and with his expressed views on the subject. Frye's exegesis is also consonant

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100 "Panjandrum: a mock title of exalted personage; pompous official or pretender." OED.
102 Poems, p. xxiv.
103 Cf. "Interview with Dr. Pratt", pp. of this study.
with the ending of the poem where "genus homo" reveals the secret of human triumph over diabolical falsity and violence:

We who have learned to clench
Out fists and raise our sightless sockets
To morning skies after the midnight raids,
Yet cocked our ears to bugles on the barricades,
And in cathedral rubble found a way to quench
A dying thirst within a Galilean Valley—
No! by the Rood, we will not join your ballet. (P. 105)

The religious element in Pratt's verse functions at times as diminuendo, in order to adjust the pace of the narrative to a gentler mood or to provide a moment of suspense before reaching the climax.

The slower tempo occurs twice in The Roosevelt and the Antinoe, a straightforward, realistic narrative commemorating the physical stamina and heroic spirit that enabled the crew of the Roosevelt to brace a North Atlantic gale in 1926 in order to rescue all hands of the sinking Antinoe. An epic of the sea, comparable in scope and emotional power to Conrad's prose epics, it has at times a vigorous, dynamic, elliptical quality that recalls Browning. Midway in the poem, the action slows after some of the Roosevelt crew were lost from a lifeboat:

At ten o'clock the Roosevelt bugle sounding
From the saloon stairway a call to prayer;
With separated phrase and smothered word
An immemorial psalm became a blurred
Bulwark under erosion by the sea.
Beneath the maddening crashes of the wind
Crumbled the grammar of the liturgy. (P. 197)

The sailors' prayers are followed by tributes to their drowned mates in a moment of quiet before the storm "echoing the ritual" summons the men back to battle with the raging sea. The "wild antiphonal/ Of shriek and whistle" and "The irregular pulse and cough of the engine
strain" are unheeded during the hushed ceremony of burial at sea:

Within this hour a priest clothed with the whole
Habiliment and dignity of office-
Black cassock, surplice white and purple stole-
Feeling that from an older faith would come
The virtue of a rubric yet unspoken
For the transition of a soul, a crumb
Of favour from a cupboard not bereft
Of all by the night's intercession, left
His room; climbed up the stairs; pushed through a door
Storm-wedged, and balancing along the floor
Of the deck to where a davit stood, he placed
His grip securely on a guy rope there.
Lifting up a crucifix, he faced
The starboard quarter, looking down the waste
Of the waters casting back the flickering light
Of the steamer, where two bodies without wrap
Of shroud, deprived of their deck funeral rite,
Swung to the rune of the sea's stern foster-lap

Ego vos absolvo ............... ab omnibus
Peccatis et censuris ...........
................................. in nomine
Patris et Filii et Spiritus .......
Sancti ................. Attendes Domine
............................... et miserere
Hear .... O Stella maris .... Mary.

But no Gennesaret of Galilee
Conjured to its level by the sway
Of a hand or a word's magic was this sea,
Contesting with its iron-alien mood,
Its pagan face, its own primordial way,
The pale heroic suasion of a rood.
And the absolving Father, when the ship
Righted her keel between two giant rolls,
Recrossed himself, and letting go his hold,
Returned to berth, murmuring God rest their souls, (Pp. 198-199)

Pratt frequently counterpoints a wild drama in nature by an

104 episode of solemn or tender quality. He does so in The Titanic (1935),

104 Cf. Sutherland, Poetry of E. J. Pratt, pp. 7-10, concerning the
difference of opinion among critics as to the identity of the hero of this
poem.
a widely acclaimed poem and perhaps his greatest sea epic. The casual, sophisticated gaiety of the cabin passengers is shattered when word goes around that the ship has collided with a "field of ice" during what was to have been a record six-day voyage. At first, all was well:

No wave could sweep those upper decks-unthinkable!
No storm could hurt that hull-the papers said so.
The perfect ship at last-the first unsinkable,
Proved in advance-had not the folders read so? (P. 212)

Just after midnight of the fifth day, Sunday, April 14th, 1912, tragedy struck. The peripety occurs while passengers dine sumptuously, play poker for high stakes, or make love:

First act to fifth act in a tragic plan,
Stage time, real time-a woman and a man,
Entering a play within a play, dismiss
The pageant on the ocean with a kiss,
Eleven-twenty curtain! Whether true
Or false the pantomimic vows they make
Will not be known till at the fifth they take
Their mutual exit twenty after two. (Pp. 224-225).

In addition to a powerful presentation of the stunned reaction of the officers when collision occurred and the consternation of the crew and passengers when the extent of the damage became known, Pratt tells of the heroism of passengers:

The men filled up the vacant seats: the falls
Were slipping through the sailors' hands,
When a steerage group of women, having fought
Their way over five flights of stairs, were brought
Bewildered to the rails. Without commands
Barked from the lips of officers; without
A protest registered in voice or face,
The boat was drawn up and the men stepped out
Back to the crowded stations with that free
Barter of life for life done with the grace
And air of a Castilian courtesy. (P. 237)

At the sixteenth-a woman wrapped her coat

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Around her maid and placed her in the boat;  
Was ordered in but seen to hesitate  
At the gunwale, and more conscious of her pride  
Than of her danger swiftly took her fate  
With open hands, and without show of tears  
Returned unmurmuring to her husband's side;  
"We've been together now for forty years,  
Whither you go, I go"

A boy of ten,  
Ranking himself within the class of men,  
Though given a seat, made up his mind to waive  
The privilege of his youth and size, and piled  
The inches on his stature as he gave  
Place to a Magyar woman and her child. (Pp. 237-238)  

Men came to Guggenheim as he stood there  
In evening suit, coming this time to borrow  
Nothing but courage from his calm, cool face. (P. 238)

Commenting on this poem, Frye, noting that "Pratt's moral standards have few surprises: he is much more of a spokesman than a critic of public opinion and generally accepted social reactions", goes on to remark:

The conception of heroism in Pratt is of the kind that belongs to our age, and to an industrial democracy...  
His chief interest (in The Titanic) is in the society of the first-class lounge, with the luxurious food, the music, the gossip, and the brilliantly described poker game. It is a brittle society, without much human point to it - until disaster strikes. Then it becomes the beleaguered group that the poet so well understands, and its genuine humanity suddenly becomes the focus of the poem, and the key to its meaning. 105

Although concerned with the reactions of the group, Pratt stresses too the capacity of the individual to rise to great heights of sacrifice and service. This aspect of character is presented also in Gerard Manley Hopkins' The Wreck of the Deutschland, written in 1875. 106

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105 Poems, pp. xvii-xviii.

106 Hopkins' poems were first published in 1918 by Robert Bridges.
nun's calm strength is a steadying force in Hopkins' poem, so in *The Titanic*, the society matron and the ten-year old boy offset by their nobility the ugly rioting and brutish selfishness of some of the other passengers. In his concern with man's struggle against inanimate foes, Pratt, especially in his later poems, never loses sight of the tender, human emotions or of the courage that can unexpectedly show itself.

The Promethean struggle of man against obdurate nature is also exemplified in the last poem of the second edition of Pratt's poetry. *Towards the Last Spike* could be called a poetic chronicle of the building of the transcontinental railway. Names of statesmen, financiers and engineers involved in the project, as well as those of explorers, adventurers and traders of earlier periods, are copiously used to make this national enterprise come alive in the poem as it seldom does in history books. Dates and parenthetical notes on some of the momentous incidents also vivify the poem; a geographical sweep from coast to coast has a panoramic effect. The danger that "The Lady of British Columbia" might yield to the blandishments of a rival from the South is one of many humorous passages:

For California like a sailor-lover
was wooing over-time. He knew the ports.
His speech was as persuasive as his arms,
As sinuous as Spanish arias-
Tamales, Cazadero, Mendecino,
Curling their baritones around the Lady.
Then Santa Rosa, Santa Monica,
Held absolution in their syllables.
But when he saw her stock of British temper
Starch at ironic sainthood in the whispers-

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107 Poems, PP. 346-388.
"Rio de neustra senora de buena guia,"
He had the tact to gutturalize the liquids,
Steeping the tunes to drinking songs, then take
Her on a holiday where she could watch
A roving sea-born Californian pound
A downy chest and swear by San Diego. (Pp. 351-352)

Sir John A. Macdonald was haunted by fear of failure to keep
his pledge of providing a railway across Canada, when "the Pacific lass"
vacillated about joining the Confederation. He wins her over in a "long-
distance proposal" to "Begin the Road in two years, and in ten" (P. 352).
Having spent many sleepless nights "revolving round the Terms of Union with
British Columbia" (P. 348), the Premier of the newly formed Dominion, was
victor in the first incident of the campaign:

He had pledged
His word the Line should run from sea to sea.
"From sea to sea", a hallowed phrase. Music
Was in that text if the right key were struck,
Ane he must strike it first, for, as he fingered
The clauses of the pledge, rough notes were rasping-
"No road, No Union", and the converse true. (P. 351)

In this epic drama of national unity, frequent use of metaphor,
rarely a feature of Pratt's verse, is notable. The effect is to give
an imaginative value, and often an element of ironic humour, to the
factual account. Pratt has made the construction of "The all-Canadian
route" (P. 358) stand out as one of the most critical events in the
history of the Dominion. Almost one half of the poem concerns the pre-
liminaries to the central episode—the attack on "Laurentian rock" (P. 364).

108 "River of Our Lady of Safe Conduct". Author's note.

of Canada from the Search for a Northwest Passage to the Triumph of the

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In order to show the political and economic issues involved, he depicts the "marriage contract" with British Columbia—"Union required the Line"—as a moment of crisis:

The theme was current at the banquet tables,
And arguments profane and sacred rent
God-fearing families into partisans.
Pulpit, platform and floor were sounding-boards;
Cushions beneath the pounding fists assumed
The hues of western sunsets; nostrils sniffed
The prairie tang; the tongue rolled over text;
Even St. Paul was being invoked to wring
the neck of Thomas in this war of faith
With unbelief. Was ever an adventure
Without its cost? Analogies were found
On every page of history or science. (Pp. 346-347)

The characters were vividly portrayed, particularly of the principals concerned in the debate over construction of the line: Sir John A. Macdonald and his great political opponent, the Honourable George Blake, in the matter of the "Pacific Scandal". The sketches of engineers, working furiously under George Stephen and William Van Horne, to complete the railway according to the terms of the charter granted to the Canadian Pacific Railway in 1881, have equally realistic details. The appearance and character of each person are etched, not in acid, but in admiration for the sagacity that was instrumental in uniting Canada, politically and materially, from coast to coast.

Pratt's poem is not only a blend of historical fact, pioneer life in the West, and human skill in a vast engineering feat; it also

110 See author's note, p. 353, and his poetic version of the affair, Poems, pp. 353-55.

describes with fine emotional power the "internecine strife" of natural forces; peaks and ranges, weather and evergreens, "rock versus forest with the rock prevailing." (P. 373):

Or with the summer warmth it was the ice,
In treaty with the rock to hold a line
As stubborn as a Balkan boundary,

One enemy alone had battled rock
And triumphed: searching levels like lost broods,
Keen on their ocean scent, the rivers cut
The quartzite, licked the slate and softened it,
Till mud solidified was mud again,
And then, digesting it like earthworms, squirmed
Along the furrows with one steering urge-
To navigate the mountains in due time
Back to their home in worm-casts on the tides.

Into this scrimmage came the fighting men,
And all but rivers were their enemies. (P. 374)

The battle of human forces against the Laurentian Shield began when bush and ice resisted the attacks of man-made weapons, and "Even the rivers had betraying tricks" and "Though natively in conflict with the rock" are now "leagued against invasion" to fight the men who are "Demanding from this route their bread and steel." (P. 374) The Rockies are depicted as a sleeping reptile (P. 369), "The lizard was in sanguinary mood" (P. 373), angered by the intrusion of an unknown force, "And this consistent punching at her belly/With fine and thunder slapped her like an insult" P. 379):

She might stir in her sleep and far below
The reach of steel and dynamite,
She'd claim their bones as her possessive right
And wrap them cold in her pre-Cambrian folds. (P. 379)

In the battle of human strength and skill against a primeval foe of solid rock, the hero is a group of men engaged in the mighty enterprise,
"'Twas more than navigation: ... The adventure was not sailing; it was climbing" - (PP. 374-375) of forging a pass through the mountains for an all-land route from sea to sea, with the engineering tools of a century ago. Describing the difficulties of the feat of getting the "Skuzzy" up the mountain, Pratt uses nautical terms capstan, hawsers, "Two hundred Chinese tugging at shore ropes/To keep her bow-on from the broadside drift." (P. 375) To scale the precipices, the surveyors employed "marine manoeuvres":

Out of a hundred men they drafted sailors
Whose toes as supple as their fingers knew
The wash of reeling decks, whose knees were hardened
Through tying gaskets at the royal yards:
They lowered them with knotted ropes and drew them
Along the face until the lines were strung
Between the juts. Barefooted, dynamite
Strapped to their waists, the sappers followed, treading
The spider films and chipping holes for blasts,
Until the cliffs delivered up their features
Under the civil discipline of roads. (P. 375)

When the cliffs had been taken by assault, the action halts for a moment; a simple threnody, stark in language, stoical in mood, commemorates the deaths of Canadian, Indian and Chinese workers:

Ring, ring the bells but not the engine bells:
Today only that universal toll,
For granite, mixing dust with human lime,
Had so compounded bodies into boulders
As to untype the blood, and, then, the Fraser,
Catching the fragments from the dynamite,
Had bleached all birthmarks from her swirling dead. (PP. 375-376)

Before the "last spike" can be driven, the Government had to reckon with a new outburst, the Riel Rebellion, to which Pratt alludes

briefly and dramatically as a "Satanic game" to cheat Sir John A. Macdonald at a moment when he was in a state of fear of losing his sight. When this crisis had passed and the financial problem settled by the Government and the Directors of the Railway, the actors appear for the last scene in the drama of circumventing nature:

The air was taut
With silences as rigid as the spruces
Forming the background in November mist.
More casual than camera-wise, the men
Could have been properties upon a stage,
Except for road maps furrowing their faces. (P. 386)

With touches of Chaucerian humour, in the description of the physiognomy and the garb of some of the eminent men gathered for the occasion, Pratt gives an ironic twist to the incident of Donald Alexander Smith's failure, in driving the last spike, to hit the nail on the head with the first stroke of the hammer. "Outwitted by an idiotic nail":

Wrenched out, it was replaced. This time the hammer Gave a first tap as with apology, Another one, another, till the spike Was safely stationed in the tie and then The Scot, invoking his ancestral clan, Using the hammer like a battle-axe, His eyes bloodshot with memories of Flodden, Descended on it, rammed it to its home. (P. 387)

This epic celebrates the victory of physical strength and mental acumen over a stronghold of nature. In The Titanic, the field of ice triumphed by its stealth and power to defeat men in their moment of pride and false sense of security. But "the last blow on the spike" is the symbol of the summoning of a nation to a great destiny:


114 Pratt took the title of the poem from a telegram sent to Ottawa on Nov. 7, 1885, "...the last spike was driven this morning by Honourable Donald Smith", Brebner, Canada, p. 310, quotes the telegram in full.
Like a gavel it would close
Debate, making Macdonald's "sea to sea"
Pour through two oceanic megaphones-
Three thousand miles of Hail from port to port;
And somewhere in the middle of the line
Of steel, even the lizard heard the stroke.
The breed had triumphed after all. To drown
The traffic chorus, she must blend the sound
With those inaugural, narcotic notes
Of storm and thunder which would send her back
Deeper than ever in Laurentian sleep. (P. 388)

It is evident that this theme of conflict between opposing
powers fascinates Pratt. In the Titanic, human beings are victims of
an impregnable force of nature: "The grey shape with paleolthic face/
Was still the master of the longitudes" (P. 242). The Panzer divisions
in Dunkirk take on the horrifying aspect of a Frankenstein monster as
they advance against the common British soldier who is risking his life
to rescue his fellow-men. The valiant efforts of leaders and workmen
in Towards the Last Spike are almost defeated as they struggle against
the massive dimensions of the Laurentian Shield. This leitmotif of
conflict, sublimated through the spirit of man to an ultimate harmony,
runs like a note of triumph through Pratt's poetry; in the story of
Jesuit valour, it has a new dimension.

Brebeuf and His Brethren is a sublime expression of the clash of
ideas. This time the cruel force lies in wait until man has almost
succeeded in his venture. The efforts of the missionaries had brought
some degree of reward in the number of converts and in the order estab­
lished by the Jesuits in the Huronian villages. At one time Father
Bressani estimated eight thousand converts, but the savages, led by demon­
guided sorcerers, relentlessly destroyed what had been so painstakingly

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achieved. Pratt alludes to the success of the missioners during an
interlude of prosperity and peace when the "dream was at its brightest":

The native register was rich in name
And number. Earlier years had shown results
Mainly among the young and sick and aged,
Where little proof was given of the root
Of faith, but now the Fathers told of deeds
That flowered from the stems. Had not Eustache
Bequeathed his record like a Testament?
The sturdiest warriors and chiefs had vied
Among themselves within the martyr ranks:-
Stories of captives led to sacrifice,
Accepting scaffold fires under the rites,
Enduring to the end, had taken grip
Of towns and clans. (P. 284)

Pratt gives idyllic picture of this lull in the storm; it was
an interval of quiet when rumours were spreading of treaties between
French and the Mohawks and other Iroquois tribes. The bright hopes of
priests and Hurons were fostered also by material and spiritual blessings:
115
a rich harvest from nature and a marked increase in conversions. The
labourers in the vineyard could for a brief period, enjoy "Uninterrupted
visits . . . to their beloved home, both fort and residence" (P. 283).
Conversation, reading, unbroken hours of prayer and meditation, "These
were hours/That put the bandages upon their hurts" (P. 283). With renewed
strength of body, mind and spirit, they founded more missions among the
Algonquins, Ottawa and Ojibways, spreading north and west, dreaming that
Fort Ste. Marie might become a "Western citadel", as solid in power as
Quebec was in the east":

115
Talbot, Saint Among the Hurons, p. 277, on the authority of
Father Ragueneau, states that 1300 were baptized in one year and, that
before Brebeuf died, "he had the consolation of seeing nearly 7000
baptized. Cf. Poems, "Baptisms by the hundreds (p. 267); 'In one year/
Twelve hundred converts!'" (P. 286).
The priests were breathless with another space
Beyond the measure of the astrolabe-
A different empire built upon the pulses,
Where even the sun and moon and stars revolved
Around a Life and a redemptive Death. (p. 285)

While prospects were so bright, Father Ragueneau, the Superior,
was sending to Europe glowing accounts of the successful missionary work,
and the priests could relish something of the joys of life as they had
known it in Old France:

The bell each morning called the neophytes
to Mass, again at evening, and the tones
Lured back the memories across the seas.
And often in the summer hours of twilight
When Norman chimes were ringing, would the priests
Forsake the fort and wander to the shore
To sing the Gloria while hermit thrushes
Rivalled the rapture of the nightingales. (p. 284)

But signs of treachery came close upon the letters; the "Peace, union and
tranquility" of which Brebeuf too had written, were shattered by an attack
of the whole Iroquois confederacy against French soldiers and traders as
well as Huron guides. As we have seen, villages were sacked and burned,
Indian victims were slaughtered or fled in panic, and one by one, the
priests were tortured and killed: "Chabanel, last in the roll of the
martyrs, entrapped/On his knees in the woods met death at apostate hands"
(p. 297).

The violence and treachery in Brebeuf and His Brethren are the work
of human enemies. In this respect, it has affinity with Dunkirk. The
heroic British soldiers, sailors and aviators were animated not only
by patriotism but also by a spirit of self-sacrifice and love for fellow-
men. The Jesuit heroes, inspired by love of God, the supernatural virtue
of charity, dedicated their lives to the salvation of souls and were tortured and martyred by those whom they had befriended against the Iroquois, to whom they had taught the Christian faith, and over whom they had poured the saving waters of baptism. In his recent history of Canada, Brebner refers to the Jesuits who "had embarked wholeheartedly on their great and tragic adventure of the Huron Mission", and he goes on to say:

The hideous deaths of the Jesuits constitute one of the great epics of Christendom. The Canadian poet, E. J. Pratt, has commemorated them unforgettable in Brebeuf and His Brethren ... by telling how the Iroquois ..... "multiplied the living martyrdoms ..... Before the casual incident of death." 116

We shall now consider briefly how Pratt achieves "a balance ... a reconciliation of the present with the distant past." This equilibrium is apparent in all the poems we have discussed in this chapter; it is evident in The Titanic: the inscrutable power of nature presiding in serene majesty over her realm after she had sent the proud liner on "Her thousand fathoms journey to her grave" (P. 242). The equilibrium that is attained is more than a "reconciliation of the present with the distant past"; it is an "equilibrium in the poet's own mind." 117 Pratt achieves this equipoise by maintaining the dominant ideas of size, strength and pride in the ship, the image of hubris with which the poem began; but at the end, these qualities are ironically attributed to the iceberg. The structure of the poem lies in holding together the relationship between the two forces endowed with similar qualities. The internal forces


of human mind and skill in the construction of the "perfect ship", and human effort and bravery in facing disaster are annulled by the external force of primeval energy. An irresistible power, silent and unconquerable, reigns beneath the stars:

And out there in the starlight, with no trace
Upon it of its deed but the last wave
From the Titanic fretting at its base,
Silent, composed, ringed by its icy broods,
The grey shape with the paleolithic face
Was still the master of the longitudes. (P. 242)

In Dunkirk the relationship of the dominant ideas at the beginning and the end of the poem is also clearly organized by the likeness of imagery. At first, we see the countryside of England as maimed, bleeding, deprived of its usual beauty and charm:

The English May was slipping into June
With heralds that the spring had never known,
Black cavalry were astride the air;
The Downs awoke to find their faces slashed;
There was blood on the hawthorn,
And song had died in the nightingales' throats. (P. 300)

As the order in nature has been disrupted, so is disorder rife in the world of men, "Set to a pattern of chaos" (P. 300). The movement of the poem is through the utter confusion of strife and horror—the mountains of smoke, the leap of flame, the roar of bombs and the avalanche of weapons from air and sea. At last, the Navy comes to rescue men "in those hours ...when Death was sweating at his lathe" (P. 308). At the end of the poem, Nature has her revenge when "The blessed fog" is a merciful intervention, bringing "The peace that passed understanding". The opening image of maimed and bleeding nature is counterpoised by the closing image of wounded, crippled and war-weary men returning on an unruffled sea:
Out of the range of guns of Nieuport,
Away from the immolating blasts of the oil-tanks,
The flotillas of ships met by flotillas of gulls
Whiter than the cliffs of Forsland; (P. 309)

The external force of human enmity has been overcome by the heroic sacrifice of soldiers, aviators and sailors in order that their fellow men might return "To stand hushed before the Canterbury tapers" (P. 302).

Such imagery is suggestive of the Phoenix-symbol, traditional in English literature since the early 9th century. Pratt, using it effectively in *Brebeuf and His Brethren* to symbolize the perennial new life in nature through the cycle of the seasons, enriches it with the connotation of a renewal of spiritual life on the scene where martyrs had shed their blood. The structure of the passage of the epilogue is interesting in the balancing of ideas and images: the first eight lines depict a wasteland and a Fresh Water Sea over which the winds of God blow and the stars shine; these alone have preserved their identity in the stretch of time since the days of Jogues and Brebeuf. The next seven lines, referring to the hidden, providential work wrought through martyrdom, unite past and present:

The years as they turned have ripened the martyrs' seed,
And the ashes of St. Ignace are glowing afresh.
The trails, having frayed the threads of the cassocks, sank
Under the mould of the centuries, under fern
And brier and fungus-there in due time to blossom
Into the highways that lead to the crest of the hill
Which havened both shepherd and flock in the days of their trial (pp. 297-298).

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In the last eight lines, the revived supernatural life comes into focus and the Phoenix-symbol has its full, traditional significance of spiritual rebirth:

For out of the torch of Ragueneau's ruins the candles Are burning today in the chancel of Sainte Marie. The Mission sites have returned to the fold of the Order. Near to the ground where the cross broke under the hatchet, And went with it into the soil to come back at the turn Of the spade with the carbon and calcium char of the bodies, The shrine and altars are built anew; the Aves And prayers ascend, and the Holy Bread is broken. (P. 298)

The vertical movement of the epilogue, in thought-structure and in image clusters, is itself a symbol of the infusion of grace in the daily renewal of the Sacrifice of Calvary on the consecrated altars. The winds of God, symbolizing the action of the Holy Spirit, are blowing over the created universe, reanimating mankind on the scene of the martyrs' immolation, on the hill where they laboured and died; on new altars the Sacrifice of the Mass perpetuates the Sacrifice of the Cross.

Ending on this apocalyptic note, Pratt's poetic universe has an equilibrium analogous to that in the world of experience. Elizabeth Sewell has suggested that poetry, laughter and religion are things that "hold the balance in the mind between order and disorder." In describing Brebeuf's martyrdom, the poet says:

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119 Cf. Williams: "The Phoenix easily passed into Christian art as the symbol of the Resurrection of Christ and of the final resurrection of man at the last day ..." Ibid., p. 251.

120 Cf. Sewell, Structure and Poetry, p. 182, on the four ways in which balance is maintained in The Ancient Mariner; she notes that Coleridge achieves a final balance as the poem "ends, surprisingly ... with a moral...with its introduction of prayer and the love of God."
The wheel had come full circle with the visions
In France of Brebeuf poured through the mould of St. Ignace.

(P. 296)

The allusion is to the first appearance in the poem of Brebeuf as "a neophyte...rapt in contemplation" as he had a vision of Christ carrying the Cross on the way to Calvary (P. 245). The movement of the whole poem has the same pattern; the circle, a symbol of eternity, can be traced in the world of the poem from the pattern of heroic virtue in the saints of old, through the Christlike lives and martyrdom of the group of men who followed in their footsteps on the"Via Dolorosa", to the spiritual descendants of Brebeuf and his brethren who daily offer the Holy Sacrifice in the chancel of Sainte Marie.

This study may fittingly conclude with a quotation from an author who has recently put Pratt's achievement in the perspective of the literary history of Canada. Commenting upon the materialistic standards prevailing in English-speaking Canada during the period 1919-1929, J. B. Brebner states that "aesthetic and intellectual developments were curiously uneven." After some observations on the rapid growth of universities and colleges during this period, and on the recognition of the discovery of insulin which won for Canada its first Nobel prize, Brebner continues:

There was a curious fallow period in literature, a kind of pause to search for new and native soundings which was to be rewarded during the next decade by a notable outburst of poetry. The one great exception at this time (1919-1929) was the rapid revelation of the gifts in narrative, fantasy, and imagination of E. J. Pratt, whose five volumes of poetry between 1923 and 1930, devoted to non-Canadian subjects for the most part, won him an international audience.
His sense of the sea, of human energy and heroism, of man's technology, and of extravagant fun made him a unique figure". 121

121
Brebner, Canada, p.435.
APPENDIX I

CONSPECTUS OF EPIC FEATURES
in
Brebeuf and His Brethren

I The Epic Poem:

C. M. Bowra, From Virgil to Milton: An epic poem is a narrative of some length and deals with events which have a certain grandeur and importance and come from a life of action, especially violent action such as war. (p.1) There are two classes of epic poetry: authentic, the characteristics of which are exemplified in the Iliad and the Odyssey include dealing with primitive people, episodic method of narration, regard for individual prowess and the ideal of personal honour. Literary epic carefully constructed with a whole design in mind, each word being significant and the story written in retrospect with emphasis on truth. The poet sets himself a stern, moral task, asserting his belief in human greatness, e.g. Aeneid and Paradise Lost.(p. 21) *

Brebeuf is a long narrative poem based on the missionary activities of the Jesuit priests. It deals with love of God and man, faith, zeal and courage against hatred, violence and treachery, as well as inter-tribal warfare. It is not an 'authentic' epic because it is not 'oral' and does not place honour above morality, but represents the secondary or 'literary' epic. The episodes are arranged chronologically according to special plan with fidelity to the Relations. The story is re-told after three hundred years, bringing history up to date with mention of the excavations and the erection of the Martyrs' Shrine on the site of Fort. Ste. Marie.**

C. M. Bowra, Heroic Poetry: The episodes are short and the characters not too prominent but an heroic air is given to them by their participation in a great cause and reckless defiance for a common end. (p. 136)

* Each critical comment in this Appendix is a quotation from or a paraphrase of a passage in a text which is included in the bibliography.

** Each indented paragraph is my application of the critic's comment to Pratt's poem.
Voyages, summer heat, winter cold, smallpox epidemic, prayers in the wood and heroic death scenes are all recounted in Brebeuf. These small incidents add to the mounting tension when the enemy advances step by step in a gradual isolation of the Huron tribe.

C. M. Bowra, Heroic Poetry: The narrative is made to conform to life as the author sees it. He must give the hero's background. Description is not for its own sake but to make the story more real. (P. 132) Accounts of fearful tortures (p. 57). The story passes from generation to generation (P. 445).

Brebeuf is an impersonal account based on factual details of life in the Indian cabins; Jogues' enslavement with a family of the Wolf Clan, description of their hunting expeditions, and an account of Brebeuf's journey, 'Five forest days to the north shores of Erie' where the most savage of the tribes, the Neutrals, packed their 12,000 people into 40 towns. Fiendish tortures of Jogues, Bressani, Gabriel Lalemant, Brebeuf and others are vividly described.

The actual eye-witness accounts given in the Relations have been carefully preserved for three hundred years. They have been the chief source material for Dr. Pratt.

Henry W. Wells; Edwin J. Pratt The Man and His Poetry: The epic has a universal appeal and is a great contribution to national spirit. The crucial years wherein a new land is settled and a new society established invariably call forth peculiar heroism. This is a supremely epic chapter in Canadian history when missionaries and pioneers opened a continent and blazed the trail of a nation. (p. 90)

Pratt's reputation extends beyond Canada and his poem Brebeuf is considered to be his finest work. The missionaries were not so much colonizing Frenchmen as Christian apostles, yet French and English Canadians, Catholics and Protestants are united in pride of an historical heritage.

John Sutherland, Poetry of E. J. Pratt: Epic poetry introduces supernatural forces, stresses self-sacrifice and concentrates on description of action and physical combat. (Introd. p. 2)

Brebeuf deals with Christian faith and zeal against demoniacal power of the Indian sorcerers. The Jesuits suffered from isolation and deprivation,
living with the natives, eating Indian food, going without when food was scarce; travelling great distances in winter to visit all the villages of Huronia. Voyages by canoe, feasts, battles and ritual torture are described.

E. M. W. Tillyard, *The English Epic and its Background*: An epic must be founded on those concerns that an age takes most seriously (P. 135). It must communicate the feeling of what it was like to be alive at that time (P. 12). English criticism has equated epic with history. (P. 257)

In 1940 when Pratt wrote the poem, the world was turned to a greater religious awareness by World War II. He sought to recapture the missionary ardour of the 17th century revival of spiritual life which was one source of the martyrs' great strength. Throughout the poem he contrasts the regular domestic life in France of that time with the disorder and uncertainty in the new land; crop failures, drought and inter-tribal warfare. Even the inventions known to such cultured men as the Jesuits of that day were marvels to the Indian: writing was to them unbelievable, the magnifying glass, pictures, paper, watch, hand-mill and the magnet were pure magic.

II The Epic Hero:

C. M. Bowra, *From Virgil to Milton*: Epic heroes are great organizers and leaders of men and endowed with great force and energy. e.g., Vasco de Gama in *Os Lusiadas*, Charlemagne in the *Song of Roland*, and Aeneas. (P. 16)

Brebeuf, a man of great strength and stature, called Echon (he who pulls the heavy load). The Jesuits achieved miracles of order in numbering the Hurons and establishing forts in each division of territory. In a few years they created a miniature Normandy in the wilderness. The smallest necessities had to be brought by canoe a thousand miles.

Henry W. Wells, Edwin J. Pratt: *The Man and His Poetry*: The epic hero dedicates his actions under spiritual or religious sanctions. (P. 107)

Allusions to vows, prayers and celebrations of Mass are frequent throughout the poem.
C. M. Bowra, Heroic Poetry: If heroic poetry has a central principle, it is that the great man must pass through an ordeal to prove his worth—to show to what lengths he is prepared to go in pursuit of honour. (P. 48)

The climax of Brebeuf is the ordeal by fire, with this difference, that the missionaries were not animated by desire for personal honour.

C. M. Bowra, Heroic Poetry: The hero is sometime caught, often through his own decisions, in a web of disaster from which there is no honourable escape but death. Even though the enterprise seems to be a failure, their deaths are somehow an occasion for pride and satisfaction, e.g., Hector, Beowulf and Roland. (P. 75)

Jogues' decision to go as ambassador to the Mohawks in an effort to make peace, knowing that the outcome would be his death, was truly heroic. In reality, the whole Huron mission was an apparent failure; only later developments proved it to be otherwise.

John Sutherland, Poetry of E. J. Pratt: As an epic poet, Pratt has little interest in character development. There is no dramatization of personal relationship. (Introd. p. 2)

The character of the heroes of Brebeuf and His Brethren emerges through action. It is assumed in the poem that the missionaries have close spiritual bonds. Their attitude toward the savages is one of pity and desire to help.

III Some techniques of Composition:

Henry W. Wells, Edwin J. Pratt The Man and His Poetry: Traditional blank verse is suitable vehicle for a sober theme. (P. 100)

Pratt has shown great skill in the movement of the unrhymed line to give effortless progress in the narrative.

C, M. Bowra, Heroic Poetry: Brief words are used to denote the passage of time. (P. 136)

'a year's success flattered the priestly hopes.'
'Four years at home could not abate his zeal'
'bad days had fallen on Huronia'
'a blight of harvest, followed by a winter in which unusual snowfall had thinned out hunting
and reduced the settlements to destitution' "And so the seasons passed. Then the wild ducks forsook the Huron marshes for the south,"

Devices are used to avoid monotony: (P. 254)

1 Quotations from litany, vows, psalms, letters, Relations.
2 Augury, Flight of birds 'wild geese drove wedges through the zodiac.'
3 Vows: 'The vows were deep he laid upon his soul' sealed with his own blood.
4 Persons arriving with fresh tidings, 'New France restored! Champlain, Masse, Brebeuf were in Quebec, hopes riding high as ever.'
5 Brebeuf's letter, 'herein I show you what you have to suffer', and another long letter describing Jogues' trials. (100 lines)
6 Visions, 'One night at prayer he heard a command. 'Rise, Read'
Important Dates in the Historical Background of Brebeuf and His Brethren

1497 Jean Cabot's first voyage; his discovery of the mainland of the New World.

1534 Jacques Cartier's voyage.

1542 Sieur de Roberval, Governor of New France.

1593 Jean de Brebeuf born March 25, in Conde-sur-Vire.

1604 Samuel de Champlain arrives as Governor of New France.

1615 The Recollet Father Joseph Le Caron and the Jesuit Paul LeJeune, write letters to France from Huronia.

1617 Brebeuf joins the Society of Jesus at Rouen.

1620 Pilgrim colony reach Plymouth; two Dutch colonies settle on Manhattan Island.

1622 Brebeuf ordained at Rouen on February 19.

1625 Father Jean de Brebeuf arrives in New France.

1626 Fathers Brebeuf, de Noue, and the Recollet Father D'Aillon visit Huronia.

1627 Father de Noue returns to Quebec.

1628 Father Brebeuf recalled to France during the English occupation.

1632 In Huronia, Fathers Brebeuf, LeMercier, Pijart, Garnier, Chastellain and Jogues establish mission at Ihonateria.

1635 Death of Champlain.

1639 The Ursuline nun, Mère Marie de l'Incarnation and Mme. de la Peltrie arrive at Quebec.

Father Jerome Lalemant divides the territory of Huronia into Mission fields with Fort Ste. Marie as the Central residence.

I Father LeMercier) Missions at Ste. Anne, St. Louis, Father Pijart ) St. Denys and St. Jean with 1400 Father Poncet ) Hurons in their care.

II Father Brebeuf ) Mission at St. Michael, St. Ignace. Father Chastellain)

III Father Ragueneau) Father DuPeron ) Missions at Ossossane. Father Chaumonot)


V Father Jogues ) Mission to the Petuns-1000 families. Father Garnier)

Order of Martyrdom:

1642 Rene Goupil, doctor and lay assistant, first to be martyred, killed Sept. 29, while travelling with Father Jogues to the Huron country.

1646 Father Isaac Jogues martyred October 16, by Mohawks at Ossernenon.

1646 Jean LaLande, layman, killed the day after Father Jogues at same place.

1648 Father Antoine Daniel martyred on July 4, in the fire at St. Joseph.

1649 Father Brebeuf martyred at St. Ignace on March 16.

Father Gabriel Lalemant died at the same place after torture by Iroquois, March 17.

Father Charles Garnier killed by Iroquois at Etitarita in Petun country, December 7.

Father Noel Chabanel was martyred on the banks of the Nottawasaga on December 9.

1650 Destruction of Fort Ste. Marie by Father Ragueneau after loading valuables on a raft; remnants of band of the Christian

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Hurons moved to St. Joseph Island; finally starvation forced them to go to Sillery, Quebec.

1793 Lieutenant Governor of Upper Canada, John Graves Simcoe, mentioned the ruins of Ste. Marie and marked the site of Fort Ste. Marie on a map.

1830 Pierre Rondeau, first French settler on the site, named it Bruneauville.

1844 Father Peter Chazelle, S.J., tried to establish the site of Fort Ste. Marie; reported that farmers had scattered stones in clearing the land.

1850 Rev. George Hallen, Rector of St. James Garrison Church at Penetanguishene, made accurate maps and charts of the district of Huronia.

1853 Father Felix Martin, S.J., St. Mary's College, Montreal, made water colour sketches which are now in the Archives at Ottawa.

1890 A. F. Hunter, author of The History of Simcoe County, discovered 140 ossuaries.


1925 Pope Pius XI issued the Decree of Beatification of Canadian Jesuit Martyrs, June 21.

1930 Pope Pius XI issued the Decree of Canonization of the Martyrs, June 29.

1940 The site of Fort St. Marie was returned to the Jesuits; the Royal Ontario Museum was requested to assist; Dr. Kenneth Kidd completed the work of excavations in 1943.

1947 Through neglect, overgrowth left only the mounds discernible; while laying the foundation for a stone wall around the site, workers discovered blackened timber. Dr. Wilfrid Jury of the University of Western Ontario was called in as consultant.

1948 Excavations of the North Court of Fort Ste. Marie.

1949 Canal and Water system, used in the days of the martyrs for loading and unloading canoes, was discovered at Fort Ste. Marie.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>Excavations of the South Court of Fort Ste. Marie led to the discovery of pottery casks for wine in cellars under what must have been the chapel.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>Discovery of an Indian compound south of the cemetery at Fort Ste. Marie. The work of excavation by Dr. Jury and students is carried on each summer at the site.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
D'azur, au bœuf furieux de noble, accorné et ongle d'or.

(Blason, Nobiliaire de Normandie, 1731)

DRESLOF (Jean de), né à Conde-sur-Vire, le 26 mars 1593, il entra dans la Compagnie de Jesus en 1617 et fut ordonné le 25 mars 1623. Venue au Canada en 1645, les Iroquois le martyrèrent le 10 mars 1649.
APPENDIX 5

Chronology of the Career of E. J. Pratt

1883 Born February 4, at Western Bay, Newfoundland, son of a clergyman.

1898 Left school to work in a shop.

1901 Attended the Methodist College in St. John’s and obtained matriculation.

1903 Teacher and preacher in the fishing villages. Three years of preparation required before admission to theological college.

1907 Victoria College, University of Toronto; sold dictionaries and worked as a farm hand in Western Canada during vacations.

1911 B.A. degree from the University of Toronto.

1912 M.A. degree from the University of Toronto.

1913 Bachelor of Divinity degree and winner of a gold medal from the University of Toronto.

1917 Doctor of Philosophy, University of Toronto, presenting a dissertation in “Pauline Eschatology”. First poems, Rachel and Clay.

1919 Professor in the Department of English, Victoria College; marriage to Viola Whitney of Atherley, Ontario.

1923 Newfoundland Verse, 49 short poems including The Ice-Floes; lectured on modern poetry, drama and Shakespeare.

1925 The Witches’ Brew.

1926 Titans, “The Cachalot”, “The Great Feud”.

1927 The Iron Door: an Ode, commemorating the death of his mother.

1930 The Roosevelt and the Antinoe.


1935 The Titanic.
1936  Editor of Canadian Poetry.

1937  The Fable of the Goats and Other Poems.

1940  Brebeuf and His Brethren; awarded the Lorne Pierce Medal of the Royal Society.

1941  Dunkirk.

1943  C.B.C. broadcast, a narration of Brebeuf and His Brethren on September 26, the feast day of Saints Jean de Brebeuf, Isaac Jogues and Their Companions.

1944  Performance of Brebeuf and His Brethren with music, on January 18. Awarded the Governor General's Gold Medal for The Fable of the Goats.


On July 1, Dominion Day, named Companion of St. Michael and St. George by the Governor General of Canada, Earl Alexander of Tunis.

1948  C.B.C. performance on March 27 of Brebeuf and His Brethren with music, Dr. Ettore Mazzolini conducting.

1952  Awarded the medal of the Province of Alberta for the recently published narrative poem, Toward the Last Spike.


1960  January 2, Dr. Pratt was the recipient of the Civic Medal from Mayor Phillips of Toronto, awarded for distinguished citizenship.

Dr. Pratt's latest poem, commemorating the visit of Queen Elizabeth II to Canada in July, 1959:

It is not easy to define what stirs the heart
But this we know -
Whatever it is that so becomes a Queen,
Whatever it is that so becomes a Prince,
Was there at its full blossoming.
And now we offer love and cry Godspeed!
Wishing a happy journey home through untroubled skies
Nor yet is it too late to pledge their health-
The golden vintage of our Commonwealth.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Books and Pamphlets


Read, Herbert. The Nature of Literature, New York: Grove Press, Inc.


Shaw, J. G. The Shoemaker's Story. (Christopher Regnault), Midland, Ontario: The Martyrs' Shrine, 1949.


VITA AUCTORIS


1926  Graduated from a four year Arts Course with English and History options.

1950  Associate degree in Music from the University of Toronto.

1960  Completed requirements for degree of Master of Arts at Assumption University of Windsor.