

Renaissance and Reformation Renaissance et Réforme



Jean de Brébeuf and the Wendat Voices of Seventeenth-Century New France

Carolyn Podruchny and Kathryn Magee Labelle

Volume 34, Number 1-2, Winter–Spring 2011

Things Not Easily Believed: Introducing the Early Modern Relation

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1106405ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v34i1-2.16169>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

CRRS, Victoria University

ISSN

0034-429X (print)

2293-7374 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this article

Podruchny, C. & Labelle, K. (2011). Jean de Brébeuf and the Wendat Voices of Seventeenth-Century New France. *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme*, 34(1-2), 97–126. <https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v34i1-2.16169>

Article abstract

Les relations des Jésuites, datant du XVII^e siècle, sont habitées par les voix des autochtones que les Jésuites ont tenté de convertir au catholicisme. Ces voix peuvent révéler beaucoup de l'histoire des autochtones et de leur rencontre avec les européens, une fois que l'on saisit la nature du point de vue jésuite. Cet article explore la dualité de la vision du jésuite Jean de Brébeuf dans ses relations de 1635 et 1636, au sujet des hurons Wendat de Nouvelle France. Ses écrits révèlent son approche scientifique comme ethnographe, ainsi que sa nature mystique profondément engagée dans sa vocation missionnaire. Dans ses descriptions de la politique, de la religion et de la cosmologie wendate, on constate la difficulté qu'a Jean de Brébeuf à considérer les Wendats comme un peuple intelligent, et le fait qu'il les considère comme des êtres dégénérés qu'il faut sauver.

Jean de Brébeuf and the Wendat Voices of Seventeenth-Century New France

CAROLYN PODRUCHNY

York University

KATHRYN MAGEE LABELLE

York University

Les relations des Jésuites, datant du XVII^e siècle, sont habitées par les voix des autochtones que les Jésuites ont tenté de convertir au catholicisme. Ces voix peuvent révéler beaucoup de l'histoire des autochtones et de leur rencontre avec les européens, une fois que l'on saisit la nature du point de vue jésuite. Cet article explore la dualité de la vision du jésuite Jean de Brébeuf dans ses relations de 1635 et 1636, au sujet des hurons Wendat de Nouvelle France. Ses écrits révèlent son approche scientifique comme ethnographe, ainsi que sa nature mystique profondément engagée dans sa vocation missionnaire. Dans ses descriptions de la politique, de la religion et de la cosmologie wendate, on constate la difficulté qu'a Jean de Brébeuf à considérer les Wendats comme un peuple intelligent, et le fait qu'il les considère comme des êtres dégénérés qu'il faut sauver.

Europeans who travelled to the New World in the early modern period found a feast of sights, sounds, smells, tastes and experiences to report to Old World audiences. The most interesting of their discoveries were the indigenous peoples who inhabited the endless forests and travelled the continent's rough rivers and large lakes. In describing these indigenous peoples, travellers from abroad focused on the way they looked, the clothes they wore, their strange customs and everyday practices. In some cases Europeans recorded long excerpts from indigenous dialogues, orations, and stories. But many questions arise: Could European writers understand the indigenous language of the speaker they recorded? If so, how reliable was their translation? If the indigenous person spoke a European language, could the listening Europeans render their

subject's thoughts with accuracy and precision? How good were the transcribing skills of the recorders? Did they copy down what was said on the spot, did they make rough notes, or did they rely solely on memory after the fact? What were the conceptual lenses of the European recorders? How much could they really hear, believe, and think worthy of recording? What were their intentions in capturing indigenous voices on paper? Why those particular words? What genres did they have available to organize their comments? Did the recorders have plenty of paper and ink or were they preserving their supplies? Did they embellish their writings for their audiences? How might eventual editors and publishers have reworked the resulting texts for cultural or religious reasons?

This paper focuses on the way one group of Europeans, Jesuit missionaries in seventeenth-century New France, heard, recorded, and reported on the voices and beliefs of one group of indigenous people, the Wendats (Hurons) of northeastern North America. The primary means of communicating what the Jesuits learned was the "relation," a genre adopted by the Jesuits to report on their work in the mission field. These small, widely-circulated books were generally first-person reports on Jesuits' experiences with evangelization and on their observations about the subjects of their efforts: indigenous peoples from the many places to which the Jesuits sent missionaries. These reports were all acts of translation: not only did they transmit information about foreign cultures to European audiences, but they also required the technical skills of a translator of foreign languages. For the early modern period, Peter Burke has counted over 260 "professional" Jesuit translators, in addition to "amateur" translators who grappled with the languages of their intended converts. On average, amateurs produced only one or two translated texts in their missionary careers.¹ These numbers show that most Jesuits spent at least some of their time translating the elements of Catholic faith into diverse languages, many of which did not contain the vocabulary to express Catholic categories and epistemologies. They were faced with the dual task of translating both the technical meaning and the cultural context of the words they heard. Father Jean de Brébeuf (1593–1649), who spent over 20 years in New France and Wendake, was both an accomplished linguist and a cultural "translator," but even he struggled to communicate his fascination with Wendat language and cosmology, while conforming to the requirements of Jesuit narrative and the calling of his faith. How did Brébeuf's eagerness to translate the Wendat world give a particular shape to the relations he wrote? We argue that the contradictory task of communicating

both Wendat otherness and Wendat close kinship with Catholic Frenchmen persuaded the Jesuit, throughout his writing project, to interpose himself as the crucial commentator, interpreter, and mediator.

Jesuit relations as genre and as individual expression

Relations from the mission in New France began to appear annually in 1632, were published until 1673, and were widely read in France and circulated to other Catholic European countries. Jesuits working in the field sent detailed reports to their superior in Quebec City (the mission centre in New France), who compiled and edited them before forwarding the compilations to the Jesuit provincialate in Paris.² The reports were composed of letters to the provincial, incorporating excerpts from diaries, logs, and memoirs, all stitched together into “relations” by the original author as well as by editors and publishers. Scholars disagree about the extent of transformation imposed on these relations from the time they left the missionaries’ hands to the moment when they reached their readership, via the inspection of regional superiors, the Jesuit provincialate, and the printers. Some argue that the Jesuits’ writings maintained their integrity and can be trusted as reliable sources for reflecting the views of the missionaries on the ground, while others argue that the process of publication fundamentally changed the intentions of the original authors. Arguing for the former position, Allan Greer asserts that “all published works bear the marks of both author and editor. There is no reason to suppose that the Jesuit superiors and provincials altered the sense of the texts that passed through their hands.”³ Arguing the contrary, Lucien Campeau SJ, in his careful examination of the relation of Father Pierre Biard, found inconsistencies in the ordering of the chapters and in the chronology. He explains:

La haute qualité morale et intellectuelle des hommes qui les ont écrites [JR] justifient la confiance que l’on met en leurs dires. Ils ont pu se tromper parfois. Prêtres, ils n’ont pas voulu tout dire, de peur de scandaliser ; quand ils ont dû écrire des choses pénibles, ils l’ont fait à contre-cœur, parce qu’ils s’y croyaient forcés. Mais ils n’ont jamais voulu tromper. Aussi peut-on les croire lorsqu’ils affirment être des témoins directs. S’ils s’appuient sur le témoignage d’autrui, leurs affirmations valent ce que

valent leurs sources. Ils mettent de la conscience à s'informer, mais cette conscience doit se mesurer à l'importance du détail envisagé, par rapport au but qu'ils poursuivent.

In Campeau's view, the Jesuits never intended to be historians or scholars; they were priests concerned primarily with the welfare of souls.⁴ While the extensive training required of the Jesuits would have equipped them with the tools to become some of the most highly educated and informed intellectuals of their time, one may still question to what extent they were able to apply these skills to the task of relating, and if it helped or hindered their translation capabilities.

We fall somewhere between the views of Campeau and Greer, recognizing that some adjustments to texts took place, but believing that the intentions of the original authors can be detected through careful use of the relations. The Jesuits used their relations as a way of communicating the successes and hardships of their evangelizing mission to the Order's superiors and to European Catholic audiences, both clerical and lay, to raise support for their mission. But the relations were more complex than simple propaganda. The Society of Jesus ensured their novices had a demanding education, and all Jesuits were trained in observation, recording, and writing. Their educational system encouraged scientific inquiry, a high level of skilled communication, and a careful categorization of different types of information.⁵ They used their position as evangelists working in the far corners of the known world to engage in anthropological inquiry on a global scale, recording encyclopedic quantities of information. They were well equipped to gather this wealth of scientific, linguistic, and cultural data because their efforts to evangelize and civilize required a thorough understanding of the languages, beliefs, morals, and manners of the foreigners they hoped to convert.⁶ Marc Fumaroli explains:

The same cultural virtuosity that the Jesuits demonstrated in Europe, where they mastered the new disciplines of Renaissance and Reformation Humanism in order to win the most difficult and guarded mind, was also deployed in far-flung missions, not only to win foreign souls abroad but to enlarge and diffuse at home the wealth of Catholic knowledge of the world: they wished to make patent not so much the right of Catholic knowledge to rule, but rather its unique ability to connect and to refer human diversity to a divine unity.⁷

Their printed reports on North American missions regard the unconverted as “tainted but not obscured by sin,” and the missionaries consequently saw the indigenous people as recognizable souls that could be saved. At the same time, the Jesuits thought they could separate spiritual belief from the practice of everyday life, and hence graft Catholic principles onto local cultures. Commentary on the political and social ordering of the unconverted indigenous culture, an analysis of “pagan” religious beliefs, and then an accounting of their efforts to Christianize the local population constituted a pattern in many of the Jesuits’ relations, which sometimes included portraits of Jesuits engaged in religious and intellectual debates with the indigenous unconverted.⁸

In this setting of global evangelization and the gathering of new information, the Jesuits’ relations provided first-hand reports of specific missionary experiences with indigenous people, observing and recording aspects of diverse indigenous cultures, as well as reporting efforts to convert them to Catholicism. At the same time, the relations contributed to vast projects to explore the world and revitalize the Catholic faith. The intended audiences were fellow Jesuits, the larger Catholic public, and scientists mapping knowledge about humanity and land around the globe. Reports from the Jesuits in New France became important tools both for celebrating the difficult and important work of those spreading the Catholic faith and for providing significant data on a little known corner of the world. The relations from New France were tales of hardship while travelling in an inhospitable land, of missionary encounters with “infidels,” and of suffering, deprivation, and martyrdom; but they were also rich in ethnographic descriptions of cultures exotically different from life in Europe. Most combined exploration narrative and ethnographic description, two genres that prevailed in much colonial literature from North America.⁹

In the Jesuits’ exploitation of the relation we can see distinctive variations. Individual missionaries used their relations as personal and professional diaries, to record their experiences, to observe the strange new world around them, to celebrate successes and lament failures, to convey their disgust at the strange and pagan people to whom they ministered, and to express their wonder and appreciation for the sophistication of indigenous material culture, creativity, intellectual abilities, and spiritual fortitude. In them we find mystical musings, careful ethnographic reporting, therapeutic venting, and problem solving. Each Jesuit imbued his writings with his particular style, personality, and obsessions, and these changed over the course of the missionary’s career.

For example, the early relations of Father Paul Le Jeune (superior of the Jesuits of Quebec from 1632 to 1639, and first editor of the Jesuits' relations from New France) were written like a travel narrative, describing in great detail the land and lifeways of the Innu (Montagnais), although his later relations were almost wholly preoccupied with administrative matters.¹⁰ Alternatively, Father Jacques Marquette's writings on his expedition with Louis Joilliet to discover the Mississippi River in 1673, and Father Charles Albanel's writings about his journey from the Saint Lawrence valley overland to James Bay in 1672, read like classic exploration narratives.¹¹

But it is the remarkable recorder and major Jesuit intellectual Jean de Brébeuf we focus on here. Famous for suffering capture, torture, and death at the hands of the Five Nations Iroquois during their 1649 siege of Wendake, the formidable Brébeuf is probably the best known of all the Jesuits who evangelized in New France. He established the first mission in Wendake, later the site of much grief and failure. Before their numbers became ravaged by disease and warfare, Brébeuf became intimately familiar with many Wendat people; and in the last couple of years, while Wendake was under severe attack and crippled by epidemics, the Jesuits had some success in evangelism, baptizing many in the community. Brébeuf was a gifted writer, and his relations are recognized as containing careful, extensive, and sensitive depictions of Wendat customs and beliefs.¹²

This essay centres on Brébeuf's work with the Wendats during his early mid-career (1635 and 1636), when he had become sufficiently fluent in the Wendat language and could focus on providing detailed ethnographical descriptions. During these years he put less emphasis in his writings on the drama of converting as many souls as possible in a war-torn and disease-ridden community — the concern that dominated his writings in the 1640s, before his capture and death.¹³ In a relation composed as a long letter (42 published pages) to Father Paul Le Jeune, then superior of the Jesuits of Quebec, and titled 'Relation de ce qui s'est passé aux Hurons en l'année 1635,' Brébeuf recounted his efforts in establishing a mission in the country of the Wendats. He began by describing his 1634 journey to Wendake, highlighting 'de fatigues, de pertes & de cousts' as well as God's blessings.¹⁴ The journey began in Trois-Rivières, where Brébeuf arranged passage in several canoes with the Nipissings¹⁵ and other Algonquians (*JR* 8: 69–75).¹⁶ Once he arrived in Wendake, Brébeuf was welcomed back to a village where he had previously evangelized, this time to set up a mission.

The villagers were anxious to maintain good trading relations with the French, which would be strengthened by hosting a resident Jesuit. Brébeuf reported that conversion attempts proceeded slowly because his party first had to immerse themselves in the study of the language. He explained, 'Premierement nous-nous sommes employez en l'estude de la langue, qui à cause de la diversité de ses mots composez est quasi infinie. On ne peut neantmoins rien faire sans cet estude.' (*JR* 8: 131–2) He went on to say that he planned to continue to study the language in order to perfect his knowledge, even though he understood almost all that they said: 'Pour moy qui y fair leçon à nos François, se Dieu ne m'assiste extraordinairement, encore me faudra-il aller long temps à l'escole des Sauvages, telle est la fecondité de leur langue. Cela n'empesche pas que je n'entende quasi tout ce qu'ils dissent, & que je ne leur face assez comprendre mes conceptions, mesme dans l'explication de nos plus ineffable mysteres.' (*JR* 8: 132–3) In the following year, however, he resorted to an interpreter when he worked with different tribes within the Wendat Confederacy (*JR* 10: 10–11). The last part of the letter contains detailed descriptions of various people who converted to Catholicism and were baptized, as well as the methods employed by the missionaries to teach Wendats about Catholicism.

Brébeuf's account, sent in the second year of his efforts to establish a mission, was probably written over several sittings; it is long, detailed, and eloquent. Although parts of it sound like reminiscence, and observations that have been well-digested, the letter included many direct quotations from villagers, some nameless, some named, to illustrate and punctuate his observations about them. We know that Brébeuf had limited supplies of paper and ink, so perhaps he followed his servants' practice of keeping notes on birch bark.¹⁷ Likewise, he mentioned more than once in this relation that he tried to keep his descriptions brief: 'le peu de papier & de loisir que nous avons, m'oblige à vous dire en peu de mots ce qui pourroit faire un juste volume.' (*JR* 8: 115–16, 125–26).

In the following year, it seems, Brébeuf abandoned brevity. His 1636 annual report on the Wendat mission was composed as a very long letter (this time 150 published pages) to his superior Paul Le Jeune, and published as part of Le Jeune's 1636 relation. Brébeuf divided the letter into chapters describing conversions and baptisms among the Wendat; the environmental, political, and military history affecting the Wendat over the course of the past year; advice for those wishing to join the missionary effort in Wendake (emphasizing the severe physical, spiritual, and psychological hardships); the Wendat language; Wen-

dat origin stories; the condition of the Wendat soul; cosmological beliefs and the importance of dreaming; feasts, dances and games; medicine men; Wendat government; Wendat Council proceedings; burials and mourning rituals; and the Feast of the Dead. In addition to the thorough ethnographic descriptions, the relation included abundant information on individual Wendat people, a Wendat translation of a Catholic prayer, and word of the Jesuits' progress in compiling a Wendat dictionary and grammar. Brébeuf vented his frustrations, reflected on his calling, explored the meaning of evangelizing efforts, kept track of Jesuits' relationships with various villages and leaders, and recorded his success in performing baptisms and in studying the Wendat language. The letter closed with a message of hope, expressing pride at how far the missionaries had come in their efforts to evangelize in such a wasteland of pagans. These valuable ethnographic descriptions, combined with Brébeuf's 1635 letter to Le Jeune, provide a systematic and detailed portrayal of Wendat culture. Together these two relations contain a rich diversity of Wendat voices, some in the form of direct quotations, others relaying Wendat epistemologies and beliefs, and others describing Wendat actions. We meet specific and named individuals on many occasions,¹⁸ in addition to generalized, unnamed portraits of those whom Brébeuf deemed typical Wendat people. The result is an exceptional portrait of a people, and of an unusual man.

Introducing the Wendats

The Wendat Confederacy, also called the "Huron" by the French,¹⁹ was a coalition of four or five separate nations, which included *Attignawantan* (Bear Nation), *Arendarhonon* (Nation of the Rock), *Attigeenongnahac* (People of the Cord), *Tahontaenrat* (People of the Deer) and possibly a fifth group, *Ataronchronon* (People of the Marsh). The Confederacy occupied territory around the southern half of Lake Huron's Georgian Bay. At most, the Confederacy consisted of an estimated 30,000 people. This number diminished drastically (latest estimates are at 60 per cent) after the introduction of European diseases and an increase in warfare in the 1630s and 40s.²⁰ They were culturally an Iroquoian people, speaking an Iroquoian dialect, living a sedentary lifestyle, and organizing social and political structures according to a matriarchal and matrilineal cosmology. Despite these so-called "Iroquoian" features, the Wendats

were traditional enemies of the Five Nations Iroquois proper (also known as the Haudenosaunee or Great League of Peace and Power). Thus, the Wendats generally formed alliances with their Algonquian and French neighbours — cultivating their relationship with the French through trade negotiations and missionary ventures. This close although at times conflicting alliance allowed the Jesuit priests to interact with the Wendats on a daily basis. As a result, the Jesuit relations often highlighted the varied voices of Wendat diplomats, warriors, and women, along with their views on religion, foreign relations, and domestic policies.²¹

It is no accident that Wendat voices dominate the other indigenous voices in the Jesuit relations. As lucrative trading partners and military allies, Wendats were of strategic importance to the French colonists, and the Jesuits used these connections to gain access to the Wendat villages. But Wendats were also of strategic importance to the Jesuits. Their way of life could be much more easily explained to European audiences than that of Algonquian tribes: Wendats planted crops as well as hunted, lived in villages instead of mobile camps, and built houses and fences. Furthermore, they were open to Christianity if it led to an increase in spiritual power. Yet, most of the Wendat voices we hear in the Jesuit accounts would have belonged to those who agreed to allow the Jesuits to live with them or at least who spoke with them. Those Wendats who rejected any alliance with the Jesuits and the French probably avoided the missionaries.

How then can we discern Wendat voices in the Jesuit relations? This is a typical question for any relation — Jesuit or otherwise — in the period, as other essays in this issue demonstrate. The Jesuit relations act as a lens, constructed by the Jesuits, through which we must try to catch glimpses of Wendat voices, beliefs, and behaviours. It's a difficult problem: we can't really know the Wendats unless we understand the cultural limitations of Jesuits reporting. The Jesuits are one of our main sources of knowledge about the Wendats, and were among the earliest modern ethnographers, but they did not ask the same questions about their subjects as ethnographers do today; the information Jesuits recorded on values, beliefs, customs, practices, dress, and so on was shaped by their seventeenth-century perspective. As Paul Nelles, Marc Fumaroli, and Rivka Feldhay remind us, Renaissance rhetorical training, the birth of Enlightenment science, and of course the missionary preoccupation with saving souls shaped Jesuit approaches to gathering knowledge.

For a full understanding of how these Jesuit accounts function as relations, how they seek to both recount and persuade, we would have to compare the reports of different writers. A full study would require two kinds of triangulation, comparing one relation with another to see what data each contained, and laying all relations, as a genre, against such other sources as indigenous oral traditions, artifacts, and other European writings in order to see what the Jesuits left out. Meanwhile, we would also have to read relations closely, for internal clues to the circumstances under which the authors composed them. We could look for corroborating or similar evidence either in other parts of the relations or in the writings of the missionaries' contemporaries, and we could weigh the evidence the relations yield against knowledge accumulated about the topic from archeological remains, material culture analyses, and anthropological upstreaming (tracing present practices to the past). That is not the task of this essay, but the relations of Jean de Brébeuf provide a good place to start, for they show that, pulled in two directions, he developed a double vision. He needed to demonstrate the Wendats' suitability for conversion, yet at the same time he was deeply interested in what made them different from Europeans. He saw the Wendat people as intelligent beings with a complex and sophisticated culture capable of thriving in the environment of New France, yet at the same time he represented them as miserable and wretched souls, living outside of God's light, who needed to be rescued and shown the way to paradise.

Brébeuf as ethnographer

The genre of the relation provided Brébeuf with what today we would term an ethnographical opportunity. He gathered information on Wendats when he lived among them, relying principally on participant observation, informal interviews, and extensive conversations, and then recorded these observations in categories that he deemed expressive of the building blocks of human societies. The second part of Brébeuf's 1636 relation is solely devoted to 'la creance, des mœurs & des coustumes des Hurons,' and divided into chapters exploring their cosmological belief, spiritual practices, and self-governance (*JR* 10: 124–317). It is here that Brébeuf shines exceptionally as an ethnographer, but we do see ethnographic descriptions throughout both of the relations of 1635 and 1636. One of the first things that Brébeuf did in his 1635 narrative is to establish a personal

relationship with the Wendats in the local village, Teandeouihata, where he settled. He reported that the Wendats named him “Echom” (a Wendat rendering of Jean)²² and described his welcome after a five-year absence: ‘voilà Echom revenu, c’est ainsi qu’ils me nomment, tout le monde sortit pour me saluer & bienveigner, chacun m’appellant par mon nom, & me disant: Quoy Echom, mon nepveu, mon frère, mon cousin, es tu donc revenu?’ (*JR* 8: 92–93). He goes on to describe many Wendats coming to visit him all day long, reporting that the Wendats had wished for his return, and that they were glad his presence would secure trading relations with the French (*JR* 8: 96–9). He asserted that he had numerous occasions to develop close relationships with some Wendat people (*JR* 8: 132–3), his main source of knowledge about Wendat customs and practices. Brébeuf established himself as an expert by demonstrating his important place in the Wendat village where he first set up a mission.

The Jesuits believed that learning the indigenous language of their prospective converts was crucial to their evangelizing mission, with the side benefit that their careful study of indigenous languages enriched their understanding of the indigenous cultures.²³ Peter Dorsey argues that the Jesuits’ admiration for indigenous languages, which they believed to contain a divine imprint, was crucial to Jesuit accommodation to indigenous cultural life, and to the Jesuits’ culturally sensitive approach to their mission subjects.²⁴ Brébeuf reported that Wendake had about 30,000 souls all speaking the same tongue (*JR* 8: 114–15), and he set to work immediately compiling a dictionary and grammar of the Wendat language. This project absorbed a great deal of the time and energy of all the missionaries in Wendake, and Brébeuf commented that ‘tous les jours nous allons descovrans de nouveaux secrets en ceste science’ (*JR* 10: 54–55). In the first three years he managed to translate at least one prayer into the Wendat language (*JR* 10: 68–73). In his 1636 relation he devoted a whole chapter to describing his study of the Wendat language (*JR* 10: 116–23). It is here that Brébeuf revealed the difficulty of accurately describing Wendat culture, explaining that he could not find suitable translations for words in the areas of religion, government, or French morals (*JR* 10: 116–17). Problems with possessive pronouns complicated the translation of the Holy Trinity. The Jesuits had to add possessive pronouns to the nouns, and so the Holy Trinity in Wendat was actually expressed as ‘*nostre Pere, & de son Fils, & de leur saint Esprit*’ instead of ‘du Père et du Fils et du Saint-Esprit’ (*JR* 10: 118–19). Then there were the difficulties arising from the Wendat belief that it was an insult to speak of deceased

relatives (*JR* 10: 120–21). Despite his problems with key religious translations, he had a high regard for the Wendat language, calling it ‘tres-parfaite & tres accomplie, contre la pensée de plusieurs’ (*JR* 8: 114–16).

Brébeuf’s descriptions of the materiality, social practices, and beliefs of Wendat culture were careful and extensive, but peppered with negative moral judgments. Dorsey has suggested that Brébeuf’s 1635 relation ‘reveals a profound ambivalence toward native life, mingling disgust and admiration.’²⁵ For example, in his 1635 relation Brébeuf had carefully reported that Wendat houses were made out of branches and covered with the bark of cedar (the best material), ash, elm, fir or spruce. The single-story houses, a variety of sizes, each had at least one hole in the top to let smoke from interior fires escape (*JR* 8: 104–8). Brébeuf’s tone here was disparaging — he makes a point of mentioning that Wendat houses did not have cellars, chambers, garrets or chimneys, unlike superior European houses. He noted that they were very susceptible to fires, and he called the smoke hole a ‘meschant trou.’ And yet the Jesuits followed Wendat custom in their own houses at the mission, using an antechamber as a storehouse ‘à le façon des Sauvages,’ and installing along both sides of the interior walls benches, with boxes to hold clothing and other possessions (*JR* 8: 107–9). When the Jesuits set up a mill to grind maize, the Wendat villagers considered it a novelty, but the Jesuits abandoned it for the Wendat-style wooden mortar that made coarser meal, easier to cook than the finer flour ground from the mill (*JR* 8: 110–11).

Brébeuf’s 1636 relation provided a careful description of the four main types of Wendat feasts and their purposes: farewells or *Athataion*; thanksgiving and gratitude, or *Enditeuhwa*; singing and eating or *Atouront aochien*; and curing illnesses, or *Awataerohi*. Brébeuf began by attributing the Wendat love of feasts to the interference of the Devil, and asserting that feasting reinforced indigenous brutality: ‘le Diable les y tient si fort attachez, qu’il n’est pas possible de plus, sçachant bien que c’est le moyen de les rendre toujours plus brutaux & moins capables des veritez surnaturelles’ (*JR* 10: 176–77). He was horrified by the gluttony and excess of the feasts, yet he called them magnificent, and described the amount of food consumed with a wondering awe (*JR* 10–178–81, 184–85).

Brébeuf described in some detail Wendat medicine, which was central to their cosmology, focusing specifically on what he called sorcerers, or medicine men and women. After mentioning that all Wendats claimed some access to

power through spirit guides, he went on to describe the main tasks of Wendat medicine people as influencing the weather, predicting future events, finding lost things, and curing the sick (*JR* 10: 192–95). Brébeuf was particularly concerned about the influence of medicine people on the moral and spiritual health of Wendat society: ‘Ils dissent que ces Sorciers les ruinent; car si quelqu’un reüssy en quelque enterprise, si la traite, si la chasse luy a succédé; aussi-tost ces méchans l’ensorcellent, ou quelque autre de sa maison, afin qu’il consommé tout en Medecins & Medecines’ (*JR* 8: 123–4, and also see *JR* 10: 193–4). And he further argued that those who could cure diseases were the “vrays Sorciers, qui ont accez au Diable,” who tried to cure with tricks and feasts, causing great pain to the families of the ill (*JR* 8: 123–24). He felt sorry for the families and indeed all Wendat people, whom he described as the playthings of the Devil: ‘le Diable amuse de pauvre people, substituent ses impietez & superstitions, en la place de la conformité, qu’ils devroient avoir à providence de Dieu, & du culte qu’ils luy devroient rendre’ (*JR* 8: 125–26). And yet, Brébeuf saw great potential for conversion among the medicine people. When one old Wendat man chastised a false prophet who had provided unreliable predictions, and referred to a ‘*plus grande Maistre*,’ Brébeuf took this as a sign that the elder might be acknowledging the presence of God: ‘N’estoit-ce pas bien dit pour un Sauvage? & n’y a-il pas en cela dequoy esperer quelque chose de ce que nous cherchons icy’ (*JR* 10: 166–67).

Throughout the 1635 and 1636 relations Brébeuf used the standard seventeenth-century criticisms of heathen and barbarous people to describe the Wendats, terms Jesuits used frequently for the subjects of their conversion efforts: lascivious, gluttonous, lazy, thieving, vindictive, liars, and beggars.²⁶ Yet he tempered this by saying that their excessive eating took place in feasts and their excessive sexuality was expressed in their marriages. He also noted what he called ‘assez belles vertus morales,’ such as their great love in marriage, their generosity, and the way they cared for community members and strangers alike (*JR* 8: 126–8). He wondered at their exceptional hospitality (*JR* 8: 94–7) while at the same time marvelling at their greediness, calling them ‘écornifleurs’ or scroungers when they expected the Jesuits to feed them (*JR* 8: 112–13). Brébeuf did not realize this was part of the same system of sharing — both giving and taking what was needed or desired.²⁷ He recognized the intelligence of the Wendats: ‘Nos Hurons comme vous voyez ne sont pas si massifs qu’on croiroit bien, ils me semblent avoir le sens cōmun assez bon, & je recognois universelle-

ment fort dociles' (*JR* 8: 145–46). And he believed that their virtues made them excellent candidates to become good Christians: 'ils correspondront parfaitement aux graces & aux inspirations de son Fils' (*JR* 8: 128–9).

Brébeuf's experiment in ethnography thus remained shaped by a double vision. Although he recorded Wendat daily life and beliefs about cosmology and spirituality in a careful, extensive, and systematic fashion, his relations show him wrestling with his faith. His missionary project required that he see the Wendats as lost souls in need of guidance and salvation, and he genuinely grieved for their souls and wished to save them from eternal damnation.

Brébeuf and conversions

All of Brébeuf's relations contain extensive reporting on the Jesuits' progress in evangelizing among the Wendat, and they provide some surprises. When Brébeuf recorded his arrival at the village of Ithonatiria in 1634 to establish the Jesuit mission, he mentioned that on his previous visit he had baptized eight souls, seven of whom "sont allex au Ciel," that is, had died and gone to Heaven. He believed this previous instruction and conversion made this the best place to establish the formal mission, to build on the local Wendats' existing familiarity with Catholicism (*JR* 8: 100–1). He lost no time in trying to convert and baptize, reporting that in the first year he and his Jesuit companions had won thirteen souls for God and, at the start of the 1636 relation, reporting that he had baptized 86 souls, thereby amassing over 100 in the mission to date (*JR* 10: 10–11).

In both relations Brébeuf carefully described the method used for Catholic instruction: he gathered people to his cabin by ringing the bell; he instructed all to chant while on their knees; he directed everyone to recite the Wendat version of 'Pater Noster' and make the sign of the cross; he explained Christian beliefs through sermons or discussions; he gave gifts of beads to children; and then he devoted his attention to the assembled elders who wished to speak about Wendat beliefs and debate Brébeuf's teachings (*JR* 8: 142–45 and *JR* 10: 18–21). Indeed in 1636, he remarked that the Jesuits paid special attention to the old men because they held sway over the opinions of all in the village. In Brébeuf's view, any objections they made allowed the Jesuits to explain better their Catholic beliefs (*JR* 10: 14–15). But Brébeuf also reported that Jesuits had

the best success with small children, who had more open minds and were more impressionable than their parents (*JR* 10: 20–25).

In baptizing elderly people, we can see hints of Wendat decisions in allowing themselves to be baptized. Brébeuf recorded his conversation with an old man named *Martin Tsicok*:

Je commençay à l'instruire par cette verité : que nos ames apres la mort alloient toutes en Enfer ou en Paradis : Que le Paradis estoit un lieu remply de delices & de contentemens : & au contraire, l'enfer, un lieu de feux, de peines & de tourmens eternels. Qu'au reste, il avisast, tandis qu'il estoit encore en vie, auquel de ces deux lieux il vouloit aller, & demeurer pour jamais. Alors ce bon vieillard se tournant vers sa femme, Ma femme, luy dit-il, ne vaut-il pas bien mieux aller au Ciel? J'ay peur de ces effroyables feux d'enfer : sa femme fut de mesme advis : & ainsi il presta volontiers l'oreille aux instructions qu'on luy donna. (*JR* 8: 138–39)

Brébeuf represented the Wendats' consideration not as a repudiation of Wendat beliefs, but rather as a choice between paradise and hell. In 1635 he related that in his efforts to evangelize :

Je leur dis que tous les homes ayant l'ame immortelle alloient finalement après ceste vie en l'un de ces deux lieux, sçavoir en Paradis ou en Enfer, & ce pour un jamais : mais que ces lieux estoient grandement differents, car le Paradis estoit un lieu remply de toutes sortes de biens, & exempt de toutes de maux ; & l'Enfer estoit un estat destitute de tout bien, & remply de toutes sortes de maux, que c'estoit une fournaise tres-ardente au milieu de laquelle les damnez seroient à jamais tourmentez & brule sans estre consommez, qu'ils avaisaient maintenant auquel de ces deux lieux ils desiroient un jour aller pour un jamais, & ce pendant qu'ils estoient encor en vie. (*JR* 10: 28–29)

We can see the simplicity of conversions at this stage of the mission: he asked the Wendats if they would rather go to a wonderful paradise or a horrible hell when they died. In the same relation he later described one old man saying “Aille qui voudra dans les feux d'Enfer, pour moy je desire aller au Ciel. Tous les autres le suivirent, & usans de la mesme response, nous prierent de leur en

monstrer le chemin” (*JR* 8: 144–46). In other cases, rather than choosing for themselves between heaven and hell, some people wished to be baptized so that they could follow their kin in the afterlife (*JR* 8: 140–41, 147–48 and *JR* 10: 30–31).

Despite all the ceremony, ritual, and conversations surrounding the Jesuits’ teaching and converting, Brébeuf admitted to rushing through the baptisms of people on the verge of death (see *JR* 8: 132–35; *JR* 10: 60–63, 66–67, 72–73). For those who were healthy, ‘nous les avons reservez pour une plus grande instruction’ (*JR* 8: 141–43). Parents allowed Brébeuf to baptize children to see if it would produce a cure for their children’s illness. He complained in 1636 that most Wendats sought baptism as a remedy for sickness (*JR* 10: 12–13). Yet he seems to have embraced this belief and encouraged it to counteract the impression that baptism caused death. In 1636 he wrote:

Il y a en nostre village une petite fille Chrestienne nommée Louyse, laquelle à six mois a commencé à marcher toute seule : les parens assurent n’avoir encor rien veu de semblable, & l’attribuent à l’efficace du S. Baptesme. Un autre nous disent un jour avec beaucoup de joye, que son petit garçon, qui estoit Presque tousjours malade, & comme tout etique avant le Baptesme, s’estoit du depuis parfaitement bien porté. Cecy suffira pour monstrier comme Nostre Seigneur va leur imprimant une grande opinion de ce divin Sacrement : laquelle se fortifie par la bonne & entiere santé que Dieu nous donne, & qu’il a toujours donnée à tous les François qui ont esté en ce pays. (*JR* 10: 12–15, also see *JR* 10: 66–67)

We see here Brébeuf showing flexibility in altering his preaching to fit Wendat beliefs and showing cultural sensitivity and insight into Wendat society. He recognized that for the Wendat, spirituality was intimately tied to health.

What is remarkable in Brébeuf’s writing on evangelization, conversions, and baptisms is the amount of detailed information about specific Wendat converts and their stories. In these sections we see Wendats as individual people with distinct histories more frequently than in any other part of his relations. Here, in the most critical part of Brébeuf’s work, he remembered and represented Wendat words, actions, attitudes, and names clearly and vividly. We suspect he kept careful records of his evangelizing work as a matter of course, and so he must have noted the names and dates of conversions and baptisms,

but his reports also incorporated detailed descriptions of the experiences of specific people. Sometimes he described people without naming them, such as the Wendat mothers who asked the Jesuits to make the sign of the cross (which must have seemed like some kind of game of gesture) to their infants to distract them while they were crying (*JR* 10: 20–23). In other cases he mentioned individuals repeatedly, such as Louys de sainte Foy.²⁸ Brébeuf enthused about him: ‘il est vray qu’il nous a autant edifiez & contentez dans le devoir de Chrestien, qu’il y avoit manqué par le passé’ (*JR* 10: 30–31). After describing his studying and practicing of the sacraments, Brébeuf reported that Louys de sainte Foy served as a general interpreter and translated several passages into Wendat (*JR* 10: 30–33). Thus, Brébeuf’s report on conversions encompassed much more than a mere catalogue of the baptized. His narrative included wide-ranging observations on individual and communal interaction, as well as on Wendat perceptions of faith and Catholicism.

Observations on Wendat Politics

Large parts of Brébeuf’s ethnological descriptions concerned self-governance, and he was especially impressed by the behaviour of individual Wendat political actors. That Brébeuf heard Wendat voices and deemed them worthy of recording is evident in his quotations from the speeches of prominent Wendat leaders.²⁹ In Brébeuf’s writings we meet the civil headman and diplomat for the Bear Nation, Aenon, who shaped Wendat dealings with the French in the 1630s. His pro-French policies and mediations showed how much Wendat leaders tried to solidify their alliances with the French. He was a major player in the developing fur trade economy; and, according to Brébeuf, Aenon’s ability to persuade was recognized across Wendake (*JR* 10: 235–9, 309; 8: 139).

In the chapter devoted to Wendat government (chapter VI in part II of Brébeuf’s 1636 letter to Le Jeune), Brébeuf quoted Aenon extensively to demonstrate the intelligence of Wendat leaders and to emphasize Brébeuf’s role as a reporter. Brébeuf recognized Aenon as a forceful statesman and rhetorician and glossed the speech so that his readers would equate it with a classical oration. The artifice of affected humility, common among early modern writers, was missing from Aenon’s speech, so Brébeuf added his own apology to set up the speech appropriately. He apologized for his shortcomings as a recorder

and translator, lamenting that the quoted speech was a rough approximation of Aenon's words, because he did not have enough skill with translation to capture Aenon's eloquence: 'Il me fit ce discours: mais je luy feray tort de le mettre icy, car je ne luy donneray pas la grace qu'il avoit en la bouche de ce Capitaine; n'importe, on verra toujours ses pensées, que j'ay rangées à mon advis à peu près dans leur ordre' (*JR* 10: 236–7).

Aenon had apparently been lobbying Brébeuf for six months. On this occasion he sent a messenger to summon Brébeuf to his cabin to hear his speech. And so Brébeuf recorded:

'*Echon*,³⁰ je vous ay mandé pour sçavoir au vray vostre derniere resolution : je ne vous eusse pas donné la peine de venir jusques icy, n'eust esté que je craignois de ne pas trouver chez vous la commodité de vous parler : vostre Cabane est toujours pleine de tant de personnes qui vous visitent, qu'il est quasi impossible de vous y communiquer quelque chose en particulier : & puis maintenant que nous sommes sur le point de nous assembler pour deliberer touchant l'establissement d'un nouveau Village, cette entreveuë eust peü estre suspecte à ceux qui desirent vous retenir.

Les François ont toujours esté attachez à moy, & m'ont aymé, je les ay aussi toujours assisté en tout ce que j'ay peu, & n'ont pas trouvé en toutes ces terres de meilleur amy que moy : ce n'a pas esté sans encourir l'envie de tout le Païs, qui m'en regarde il y a long temps de mauvais œil, & a fait tout ce qu'il a peu pour me mettre mal aupres de vous : Quoy qu'on dise, j'aimeray & obligeray toute me vie les François en tout ce que je pourray.' (*JR* 10: 236–9)

The speech runs to seven paragraphs in total, covering over four and a half published pages (*JR* 10: 236–44). Brébeuf reported in a straightforward manner that Aenon was formally requesting the Jesuits relocate to his village, demonstrating the growing desire by some Wendats to have the French live with them. Five Wendat leaders were on the point of uniting their separate communities into one large village to defend themselves against the Five Nations Iroquois. They desired the weapons and goods provided by French traders to those who hosted the missionaries and accepted Christianity. In exchange, Aenon offered to provide shelter, food, and protection to the missionaries, and assist them in their endeavors, including accepting the missionaries' ministrations. Aenon

even agreed to be baptized to serve as an example for the rest of the village, and offered the Jesuits his own cabin for their lodgings (*JR* 10: 244–6).³¹

Brébeuf represented this long speech as a direct and detailed plea for the Jesuits to move their mission to Aenon's new village, one that demanded an immediate response, and one that perceived this move as an obligation. At the end Brébeuf called it persuasive and reported that it reminded him of Titus Livius (59 BC — AD 17), who authored a monumental history of Rome and Roman people, high praise from a prolific and eloquent writer such as Brébeuf. Despite the nobility with which Brébeuf endowed the speech, it was chiding and insistent in tone, indeed, almost desperate. And yet it was also haughty and proud, as Aenon described the great affection his village and the French had for one another, which had made his village an object of envy throughout the Wendat Confederacy. In Brébeuf's account, Aenon emphasized his superior oratorical skills, the courage and physical prowess of the men in his village in protecting it against enemies, and the wealth of the village, which could provide ample food and secure shelter to the Jesuits. In the middle of the speech, Brébeuf paused to report that the chief told Brébeuf to translate what he had said to Brébeuf's Jesuit companions. Brébeuf presented the speech as a dynamic and interactive exchange, placing himself between Aenon and the reading public. By inserting himself into the speech he drew attention to his role as the highly qualified witness, and stressed the centrality of his reporting, without which the readers would never know the story.

Brébeuf's featuring of Aenon in his 1636 relation, and especially the extensive quotation of his long speech, reveals the Jesuit's respect for this Wendat leader and in general for Wendat oratory. Brébeuf was educated entirely within a late-Renaissance framework, and, like most men educated in this period, would have been taught that rhetorical expertise was an important aspect of an educated man's life. Brébeuf was deeply impressed with the Wendat custom of speaking in metaphor, especially in political councils: 'Les metaphores sont grandement en usage parmy ces Peuples; si vous ne vous y faites, vous n'entendez rien dans leurs conseils, où ils ne parlent quasi que par métaphores' (*JR* 10: 218–19; also see *JR* 10: 256–7). Francis Jennings explains: "the basic principle of Iroquois metaphor [was] the projection of words about familiar objects and relations into fields of politics and diplomacy."³² For Brébeuf and other non-Iroquoian observers, the complicated meanings behind words such as "bush," "chain," and "brother" not only forced them to go beyond the most apparent use

of the word, but to dig deeper into Wendat culture and cosmology to understand the speeches in their full context.³³ Brébeuf saw this rhetorical complexity as a clear indication of Wendat intelligence, and reserved particular praise for Council speeches. Despite this admiration, Brébeuf's recounting of Aenon's speech strangely did not include any of the dazzling metaphors he may have heard. He reported: 'c'est en ces lieux où ils relevent leur stile, & taschent de bien dire. Quasi tous ces esprits sont naturellement d'une assez bonne trempe, ratiocinent fort bien, & ne bronchent point en leurs discours; aussi font-ils estat de se mocquer de ceux qui bronchent: quelques uns semblent estre nés à l'éloquence' (*JR* 10: 258–9). Brébeuf may have felt embarrassed by his lack of grace in speaking Wendat compared to these distinguished orators. Yet, he must have felt inspired by the Wendat to develop his own skills in observing, reporting, and analyzing, although his relations were distinctly lacking in metaphors. He seems to have stuck to the style of witnessing and declarative reporting, and his reflections focused mainly on how to transform Wendats into Christians.

Brébeuf's recording of Aenon's words, and the relations' editors' decision to publish them, helped the Jesuits position themselves as central to the French Crown's alliance with the Wendats. The Jesuits remained key in the Wendat/French relationship throughout the rest of the century, and secured their central position by acting as middlemen in political and trade agreements between the French and Wendats. The Jesuits' relations were deployed as proof of their expertise on all things Wendat, especially since so many missionaries could function in the Wendat language.

Notwithstanding Aenon's dedication to the French, he was first and foremost a representative of the Wendat people, particularly his own village within the Bear Nation. Although Brébeuf used Aenon strategically, as a case study for the growing alliance between Wendat leaders and missionaries, in recording his speech Brébeuf becomes a window through which clues about the circumstances of Wendake during this period become apparent. Five Nations Iroquois attacks, for instance, were becoming more and more prevalent at the time of Aenon's meeting with Brébeuf, yet the French still refused to give guns to non-converted Wendats. Thus, Aenon's invitation for the French to join him can be seen as an attempt to bring more guns into the settlement, even if many Wendats would not actually possess them.

By focusing on material aspects of Aenon's plea for a Jesuit mission in his village, we do not discount the possibility of spiritual dimensions in the

readiness of some Wendats to follow Jesuit teachings. Because spiritual beliefs were not restricted to specific realms of social practice, but imbued all aspects of Wendat life, no doubt Wendat supporters of alliance with the French considered the spiritual power they might gain through baptism and other Christian rites, even if their primary motivation was obtaining weapons. The desire for spiritual power was surely one cause of the dramatic rise in conversions in the 1630s and 40s, when the Wendats began to feel the serious weight of epidemics and wars against the Five Nations Iroquois.³⁴

Brébeuf on Wendat cosmology

Some of the best evidence that Brébeuf was able to listen to and hear Wendat voices were his descriptions of Wendat spirituality and cosmology. Although Jesuits customarily paid attention to and recorded the religious beliefs and practices of their subjects for conversion, Brébeuf was remarkable for his careful observations. He attempted to describe Wendat beliefs in terms relevant, or at least recognizable, to his Catholic audiences, trying to strike a delicate balance in representing Wendat beliefs and practices, at once underscoring the danger to their souls because they were ignorant about God and Catholic teachings, and showing that they might be saved.

The central origin story in Wendat cosmology involved Aataentsic, or Sky Woman, which Brébeuf recorded in both his 1635 and 1636 relations. He learned the story of Aataentsic from conversations with the Wendats about their spiritual beliefs and cosmology. He noted in his descriptions of instructing the Wendats in Catholicism that the old men in the tribe would frequently reciprocate with their own beliefs: ‘des Anciens... quelquesfois me sont escouter à mon tour le narré de leur creance’ (*JR* 8: 144–45). Brébeuf set the stage for these descriptions by asserting that the Wendats lacked temples, priests, or ceremonies (even though he recorded many Wendat spiritual rituals), but God had reached the Wendats even though ‘les yeux de l’esprit sort obscurcis des tenebres d’une longue ignorance, de leurs vices & pechez’ (*JR* 8: 116–18) Brébeuf then related:

Ils dissent qu’une certaine femme nommé *Eataentsic*, est celle qui a fait la terre & les homes. Ils luy baillent pour adjoint un certain appellé *Jouskeha*, qu’ils dissent estre son petit fils, avec lequel elle gouverne le

monde ; cest *Jouskeha* a soin des vivans & des choses qui concernent la vie,
& par consequent ils dissent qu'il est bon : *Eataentsic* a soin des ames, &
parce qu'ils croyent qu'elle fait mourir les hommes, ils dissent qu'elle est
meschante. (*JR* 8: 117–119)

Brébeuf's use of the rhetorical phrases "they say" and "they believe" underscored his reporting of what he and his readers considered strange beliefs. And yet, he worked hard to single out what he thought should comprise a religion. Brébeuf obviously struggled to understand Wendat views of spirits and divinity. He tried to convey the intellectual and spiritual trials he faced in teaching the Wendats about the Word of God and encouraging them to convert. Although he highlighted the extremity of differences between Wendat and Catholic beliefs, he attempted to render Wendat beliefs understandable to a European audience, and to build bridges between European and Wendat cosmologies. In doing so, he ignored the large complex of traffic with the sacred, imbued in the material culture and daily practices of work, hunt, and social dealings. Wendat sacred practices then sank from view.

But they floated up to the surface where his bridges became thin and shaky. For instance, Wendats of today have criticized Brébeuf's portrayal of Sky Woman. Georges Sioui has argued that the Jesuits misunderstood her role by continuously attaching concepts of "evil" or "wicked" to their descriptions of her character.³⁵ While this dichotomy did convey to Brébeuf's Christian readers the often destructive nature of Sky Woman, it obscured cosmology. For Wendats, good and evil were not so easily divisible and distinct.

Brébeuf continued his explanation: "Et ce sont parmy eux des mysteres si cachez, qu'il n'y a que les vieillards qui en puissent parler avec credit & autorité, pour estre creus.... Quelques uns me dissent que la maison de ces deux Divinitez est au bout du monde vers l'Orient. Or chez eux le monde ne passe point leur Pays, c'est à dire l'Amerique, d'autres les logent au milieu" (*JR* 8:117–119). He cited elders as the authorities of Wendat religion, and positioned himself as a reporter of their "faith" as he conceived it. After locating their version of paradise, he turned to the nature of the creators: "Ce Dieu & cette Deesse vivent comme eux, mais sans disette; font des festins comme eux, sont lascifs aussi bien qu'eux: bref ils se les figurent tous tels qu'ils sont eux memes. Et encor qu'il[s] les facent hommes & corporels, ils semblent neantmoins leur attribuer une certaine immensité en tous lieux" (*JR* 8: 117–19). Unfortunately, Brébeuf

did not tell his readers when and where he learned this origin story. Storytellers always shape their narrations and performances for their audience. Brébeuf's Wendat teachers may have been trying to find common ground with him to help him understand their beliefs, and stressed themes similar to Brébeuf's own creation myths, such as the dichotomy between good and evil. Brébeuf equated Aataentsic with Eve in the Garden of Eden, who fell from grace and invited evil into the world. In the following year's relation, which also described the story of Aataentsic, Brébeuf called her husband Adam and compared her twin grandsons to Cain and Abel (*JR* 10: 126–7, 128–31). In the 1635 relation, Brébeuf continued:

Ils disent que cette *Eataentsic* est tombée du Ciel, où il y a des habitans comme icy, & que quand elle tomba, elle estoit enceinte. Que si vous leurs demandez qui a fait le Ciel & ses habitans, ils n'ont autre repartie, sinon qu'ils n'en sçavent rien. Et quand nous leur preschons un Dieu, Createur du Ciel & de la terre & de toutes choses : de mesme quand nous leur parlons d'un Enfer & d'un Paradis, & du reste de nos mysteres ; les opiniastre respondent, que cela est bon pour nostre Pays, non pour le leur ; que chaque Pays a ses façons de faire : mais leur ayant montré par le moyen d'un petit globe que nous avons apporté, qu'il n'y a qu'un seul monde, ils demeurent sans replique. (*JR* 8: 118–20)

Brébeuf's Wendat teachers evidently became frustrated with him, as we can see from the debates recorded in the passage above. They told Brébeuf directly that his paradise was good for Christians, but not necessarily for Wendats, who had their own paradise. The Wendats did not accept the Jesuit doctrines uncritically, and easily rejected aspects of Jesuit teachings as they saw fit. Likewise, Brébeuf no doubt found it advantageous to lay out his specific trials in teaching and converting his Wendat subjects, and to show the cracks in their belief system, into which God's truths could slip in. Yet this account suggests that the Wendats from whom Brébeuf learned of Sky Woman were satisfied with their own traditions. Further on in his letter Brébeuf complained about the old people in the village who stubbornly resisted accepting any of his teaching: "Je suis souvent aux prises avec eux, où je les convains & les mets en contradiction, de telle sorte qu'ils advoüent ingenuement leur ignorance, & les autres se moquent d'eux; neantmoins ils ne se rendent pas, ayant pour tout refuge, que leur Pays

n'est pas comme le nostre, qu'ils ont un autre Dieu, un autre Paradis, en un mot d'autres coustumes" (*JR* 8: 146–7 and see *JR* 10: 14–19). The Wendats were willing to accept Brébeuf's assertions about God and heaven, but did not believe they undermined their own beliefs. For the Wendats, the world was capacious enough for many sets of beliefs.

Brébeuf's description of Wendat beliefs continued:

ils croyent l'immortalité des ames, qu'ils feignent estre corporelles. Toute la plus grande partie de leur Religion consiste en ce poinct.... Nous en avons veu quelques-uns dénuez, ou peu s'en faut, de toutes leurs commoditez, pour ce que plusieurs de leurs amis estoient morts, aux aimes desquels ils en avoient fait largesse. Au surplus les chiens, les cerfs, les poissons & autres animaux ont des ames immortelles & raisonnables à leur dire. (*JR* 8: 120–22)

Despite Brébeuf's disapproval of Wendat beliefs, his relations exposed significant details about non-Christian life. The importance of the soul in the Wendat worldview, perspectives on animism, materialism, suicide and the afterlife, and the centrality of dreams³⁶ to Wendat spiritual beliefs were all brought to light in this description. We learn that Wendat souls were tangible and required material goods and food to accompany them on their journey to the afterlife. Human souls were not considered superior to animal souls, both of which were imbued with reason. It was important for Brébeuf to incorporate a discussion on the soul.³⁷ The Christian-like qualities of the Wendat soul represented the possibility for conversion to Catholicism, and were integral to Brébeuf's desire to portray the Wendat as humans led astray, rather than condemned to hell. Although Brébeuf went on to describe at length how Wendat perceptions of the soul varied according to context, and their firm belief in the corporeal manifestations of a soul once it had left a human body, he had a difficult time respecting their beliefs, and referred to them as amusing, ignorant, and stupid (*JR* 10: 140–41, 146–9). And yet he recounted in great detail several vivid stories about Wendat experiences with souls of the departed (*JR* 10: 148–56). Despite Brébeuf's frustration and disgust with Wendat beliefs, he heard them, and recorded them in some fashion, rendering them understandable to some degree for his European audiences. Brébeuf's fascination with Wendat souls

was a particularly conflicted terrain for this intelligent, scientifically minded, but deeply devout missionary.

Conclusion

Brébeuf framed his 1635 and 1636 relations with general reflections on the important work that all Jesuits in New France were doing for God. At the start of the 1636 relation he wrote:

Ce n'est pas qu'il n'y ait parmy ces Peuples beaucoup d'erreurs, de superstitions, de vices, & de tres-mauvaises coustumes à dèraciner, encore plus que nous ne nous estions figurez au commencement, ainsi qu'il se verra au cours de ceste Relation. Mais avec Dieu rien n'est impossible ; c'est par son ayde que nous avons desja planté la Croix parmy ceste Barbarie, & que nous commences & continuërons, s'il luy plaist, à publier le nom & les merveilles de celuy, qui par la Croix a racheté le monde. (*JR* 10: 8–9)

It is thus all the more ironic that these relations have become central to uncovering and understanding Wendat history and culture in the seventeenth century. All the most comprehensive scholarly work on Wendats relies to varying degrees on Brébeuf's writings.³⁸

Like most Jesuits, Brébeuf used his relations as a tool both to convey messages to a variety of audiences and to participate in broad conversations in seventeenth-century projects for revitalizing the Catholic Church. At the same time, he was contributing to the growing knowledge about indigenous people from all around the globe. Brébeuf's accounts are particularly valuable in the context of Jesuit reporting on New France because he had a remarkable ability as a gifted writer, storyteller, and careful ethnographic observer. In his relations we hear a chorus of Wendat voices, represented in the form of quotations of speeches from named orators, recountings of conversations with nameless elders, observations of individual and collective Wendat practices, descriptions of and reflections on Wendat beliefs, and especially the tangible examples of Wendat converts and potential converts. These elements combined as evidence to prove the success of the Jesuit mission and, crucially, to secure the continu-

ation of their work in North America. Brébeuf was obliged not only to report, but also to translate, in a number of ways, Wendat customs and words for his European audience. In the end, we remain witnesses less to the Wendats than to Brébeuf's attempts to translate Wendat words, turns of phrase, metaphors, practices and beliefs, hoping as he worked that he would not lose the original context of the person, place, or thing he was trying to describe.

Nevertheless, Brébeuf's relations reflect a story of internal and intellectual conflict.³⁹ He recognized Wendats as humans with intelligence, and yet was deeply shaped by his evangelizing mission and his faith. Brébeuf had to convey to his reader that Wendats were savages with ignorant souls, living in darkness, and that their souls must be led into the light to be saved and civilized. But his intellectual fascination with the Wendats and his obligation to condemn their ways and lead them to 'better' ones were constantly in conflict. He wrestled with these contradictions in his relations, which not only reflected his own struggle but a central problem with the Jesuit missionary project, the fissure between conversion and documentation. Although Brébeuf's 'double vision' strained the parameters of the relation, the combination of his rigorous intellectual training and his skill as an observer and writer allows us to see beyond the Jesuit pen to hear a multitude of Wendat voices, and gain a glimpse of the Wendat world as he and his fellow Jesuits encountered it.

Notes

1. Peter Burke, "The Jesuits and the Art of Translation in Early Modern Europe," in *The Jesuits II: Cultures, Sciences, and the Arts, 1540–1773*, ed. John W. O'Malley (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), pp. 24–32.
2. For more detail about this process see Lucien Campeau, "Autour de la relation du P. Pierre Biard," *Revue d'histoire de l'Amérique française* 6.4, (1953), pp. 517–35.
3. Allan Greer, ed., *The Jesuit Relations: Natives and Missionaries in Seventeenth-Century North America* (Boston: Bedford/ St. Martin's, 2000), pp. 1–14.
4. Campeau, "Autour de la relation du P. Pierre Biard," p. 535. For further discussion of bias within the Jesuit Relations, see Carole Blackburn, *Harvest of Souls: The Jesuit Missions and Colonialism in North America, 1632–1650* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000), pp. 5–8.

5. Rivka Feldhay, "The Cultural Field of Jesuit Science," in *The Jesuits: Cultures, Sciences, and the Arts, 1540–1773*, ed. John W. O'Malley, Gauvin Alexander Bailey, Steven J. Harris, and T. Frank Kennedy (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), pp. 107–30, quotation at p. 115.
6. Marc Fumaroli, "The Fertility and the Shortcomings of Renaissance Rhetoric: The Jesuit Case," in *The Jesuits: Cultures, Sciences, and the Arts*, pp. 90–106, see pp. 92, 98–99.
7. Marc Fumaroli, p. 99.
8. Paul Nelles, "Du savant au missionnaire: la doctrine, les mœurs, et l'écriture de l'histoire chez les jésuites," *XVII^e siècle* 4.237 (2007), pp. 669–89, see pp. 670–71.
9. On this last point see Gordon M. Sayre, *Les Sauvages Américains: Representations of Native Americans in French and English Colonial Literature* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), pp. 24–25, 79–143.
10. Leon Pouliot, "Le Jeune, Paul," in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, volume 1, http://www.biographi.ca/009004-119.01-e.php?&id_nbr=421&interval=20&PHPSESSID=18bsef4f072bfm8mubp7akbat3 (accessed May 23, 2011).
11. On Marquette see *JR* 59: 86–211; and J. Monet, "Marquette, Jacques," in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, volume 1, http://www.biographi.ca/009004-119.01-e.php?&id_nbr=452 (accessed May 23, 2011). On Albanel see *JR* 56: 148–217; and Georges-Émile Giguère, "Albanel, Charles," in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, volume 1, http://www.biographi.ca/009004-119.01-e.php?&id_nbr=9&interval=20&PHPSESSID=4mh1f1112eqqqbnv7q91s1ojt2 (accessed May 23, 2011).
12. René Latourelle, "Brébeuf, Jean de," in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, volume 1, <http://www.biographi.ca/009004-119.01-e.php?BioId=34214> (accessed June 4, 2010). See also René Latourelle, *Études sur les écrits de Saint Jean de Brébeuf*, 2 vols. (Montreal: Les Éditions de l'Immaculée-Conception, 1952–53); and Joseph P. Donnelly, *Jean de Brébeuf, 1539–1649* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1975).
13. For a complete published version with editorial commentary, see Lucien Campeau, ed., *Monumenta Novae Franciae* (Rome: Institutum Historicum Societatis Jesu, 1987), volume 3, documents 26 and 64; and an English version, Jean de Brébeuf, S.J., *Huron Relations: 1635 and 1636*, trans. William Lonc, S.J., ed. Lucien Campeau, S. J. (Midland, ON: William Lonc, S.J. and Steve Catin, 2002). For full French and English versions of the Jesuit relations, see *Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents: Travels and Explorations of the Jesuit Missionaries in New France, 1610–1791*, ed. Reuben Gold Thwaites (Cleveland: The Burrows Brothers Company, 1896–1901).

Henceforth, references to this publication will appear as *JR* in the main text in parentheses.

14. In our quotations from the Jesuit relations, all abbreviations have been silently expanded, and substitutions made for u/v and i/j.
15. Brébeuf calls them “Bisseriniens,” which scholars have identified as Nipissing. See Gordon M. Day, “Nipissing” in *Handbook of North American Indians, Volume 15, Northwest*, ed. Bruce G. Trigger (Washington, Smithsonian Institution, 1978), pp. 787–91, see p. 791.
16. Brébeuf’s party included two additional priests, Father Antoine Daniel and Father Ambroise Davost, and several French servants.
17. Brébeuf mentions that when his travelling companions were studying the Wendat language, they wrote on birch bark because paper supplies were precious. *JR* 8: 132–3.
18. For examples, see “la Perdrix” in *JR* 8: 70; *Aouandoïé* in *JR* 8: 92; Joseph *Oatij* in *JR* 8: 130–31, Marie *Oquiaendis* in *JR* 8: 133–34; Joseph *Joutaya* in *JR* 8: 134–39; and François *Sangwati* *JR*: 10–11.
19. Bruce Trigger speculates that the French called the Wendats “Hurons” as a play on the word “hure,” meaning a boar’s head. “Huron” had long been a French slang for ruffians or rustics, which would have been an appropriate term for the Wendat compared to the coastal indigenous groups who had long been in contact with Europeans and had been using European material goods. See Bruce Trigger, *Children of Aataentsic: A History of The Huron People to 1660* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1987), p. 27.
20. On population losses see Gary Warrick, “A Population History of the Huron-Petun, A.D. 900–1650” (PhD diss., McGill University, 1990), p. 399. The customs and culture of seventeenth-century Wendats are treated thoroughly in Trigger, *Children of Aataentsic*. Trigger generally discourages high Wendat population estimates in the pre-contact period.
21. For an overview of missionary activity in New France see Dominique Deslandres, *Croire et faire croire: Les missions françaises au XVII^e siècle* (Paris: Fayard, 2003). For an overview of French imperial activities and relations with indigenous peoples, see Gilles Havard, *Empire et Métissage: Indiens et Français dans le Pays d’en Haut, 1660–1715* (Sillery: Septentrion, 2003).
22. See Trigger, *Children of Aataentsic*, p. 366.

23. For an overview see Victor E. Hanzeli, *Missionary Linguistics in New France: A Study of Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Descriptions of American Indian Languages* (The Hague: Mouton, 1969).
24. Peter A. Dorsey, "Going to School with Savages: Authorship and Authority among the Jesuits of New France," *William and Mary Quarterly*, third series, 55: 3 (July 1989), pp. 299–420, see p. 401.
25. Dorsey, p. 406.
26. Dominique Deslandres, "Exemplo aequae ut verbo: The French Jesuits' Missionary World," in *The Jesuits: Cultures, Sciences, and the Arts, 1540–1773*, pp. 258–73, see pp. 261, 266. On the negative views the French held of indigenous peoples, see Olive P. Dickason, *The Myth of the Savage and the Beginnings of French Colonialism in the Americas* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1984), pp. 52–53, 57. For a general exploration of the images of the "bad" Indian found in European writings, see Robert F. Berkhofer, Jr., *The White Man's Indian: Images of the American Indian from Columbus to the Present* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978), pp. 28–29.
27. See Cornelius Jaenen, "The Role of Presents in French-Amerindian Trade," in *Explorations in Canadian Economic History: Essays in Honour of Irene M. Spry*, ed. Duncan Cameron (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1985), pp. 231–50.
28. For all mentions of Louys de sainte Foy, see *JR* 8: 124–25, 148–51 and *JR* 10: 10–13, 30–33, 60–67, 80–81, 196–97.
29. We disagree with Carole Blackburn's assessment that all descriptions of conversions were "literary rather than literal" rhetorical devices to situate "Aboriginal people as vanquished and obedient subjects." See Blackburn, p. 129. Because of the specificity of individuals discussed in many of the passages on conversion, we believe them to be based in some degree on actual Wendat people.
30. *Echon* was the name given to Brébeuf by Wendats.
31. In fact Brébeuf decided to keep the mission where it was for another year so that they could harvest the crops they had planted, and to appear neutral in Wendat politics, but he seemed tempted by the offer (*JR* 10: 247–8).
32. Francis Jennings, ed., *The History and Culture of Iroquois Diplomacy: An Interdisciplinary Guide to the Treaties of the Six Nations and Their League* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1985), p. 115.
33. For a more complete list of Iroquoian metaphors see Jennings's chapter, "Glossary of Figures of Speech in Iroquois Political Rhetoric," in *The History and Culture of Iroquois Diplomacy*, pp. 115–124.
34. See Trigger, *Children of Aataentsic*, pp. 499–602.

35. Georges Sioui, *Huron-Wendat: The Heritage of the Circle* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1999), p. 17.
36. Brébeuf's 1636 relation devotes parts of two chapters to discussing Wendat dreams. See *JR* 10: 168–77.
37. Brébeuf's 1636 relation devotes a chapter to discussing Wendat souls. See *JR* 10: 140–57.
38. For examples see Gary Warrick, *A Population History of the Huron-Petun, A.D. 500–1650* (Cambridge University Press, 2008); Roger Carpenter, *The Renewed, the Destroyed, and the Remade: The Three Thought Worlds of the Iroquois and the Huron, 1609–1650* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2004); Elisabeth Tooker, *An Ethnography of the Huron Indians, 1615–1649* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1991); Conrad Heidenreich, *Huronian: A History and Geography of the Huron Indians 1600–1650* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1971); Trigger, *Children of Aataentsic*; and Georges E. Sioui, *Huron-Wendat: the Heritage of the Circle* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1999).
39. For one description of Brébeuf's ambiguity regarding Wendat culture, see Dorsey, p. 406.