Saved from the waters: the drowning world of Paul Lejeune
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There has been much discussion in recent years about the precise location and extension of New France. As Catherine Desbarats and Allan Greer have shown, the term New France is "fundamentally imprecise": the space of New France as a project was always piecemeal, provisional, projected, and ever shifting.[1] Yet wherever else it was, New France took place on the water, clinging to the river as both infrastructure and organising principle, as Helen Dewar's chapter in this volume makes clear.[2] Even the frontispieces of what since the nineteenth century have been called the Jesuit relations, those missionary reports sent to the metropole and forming one of the richest sources of narrative from New France, announce they will tell us what happened "en la Nouvelle France *sur le grand Fleuve de S. Laurens*" [emphasis mine], *on* the great Saint Lawrence river. It is that prepositional space – on, and sometimes in – which I describe here. *In*, because the river ceaselessly and cruelly revealed human vulnerability to the elements.[3] Even the toponymy of the new territory marked this painful history, with Portage du Fort, a particularly difficult rapid, named for a *voyageur* who had drowned there, and the Sault au Recollet, similarly, named for the Recollet brother Nicolas Viel who had drowned at that point in spring 1625.[4]

In what follows I describe how this threatening waterworld shaped the metaphors with which French writers "before Canada" sought to make sense of New France, and ask how we

[1] "Où est la Nouvelle France?" Catherine Desbarats and Allan Greer, *Revue d'histoire de l'Amérique française* 64: 3-4 (2011): 31-61 (62).
[2] Helen Dewar, "Corridors of jurisdiction: The Role of Aquatic Spaces in Sovereign Claims-making in New France (1600s-1620s)."
[3] Québec parish registers from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries show that, in the circumstances where death was recorded by a priest, over a quarter of recorded deaths in the parishes along the banks of river were by drowning. Allan Greer, *The People of New France* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 24.
[4] On that death and its retellings see Claiborne Skinner, *The sinews of empire: The voyageurs and the carrying trade of the pays d'en haut, 1681-1754* (Ph.D thesis, University of Illinois at Chicago, 1991), 255; Bruce Trigger, *The Children of Aataentsic; A History of the Huron People to 1660* (Montreal-Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1976), 395.

might read that history in different ways. Writing of colonial authors' observation of New France, the historian Christopher Parsons has noted "the immersive perspective of early authors such as Champlain, Sagard, and Le Jeune."[5] Here, I take that language of immersion seriously: what happened when colonial authors got wet? What happens to our sense of this period if we take that immersion seriously?

In drawing on this language of the wet and the dry, I want to nod to the rich work of literary scholar Steve Mentz, whose account of what he calls "shipwreck modernity" puts the narrative of the maritime disaster, what he calls "wet catastrophes," at the heart of early modern travel writing, and who notes that via a narrative "progression of shock, immersion, and salvage" such stories often "contain a dry counter-movement that attempts to make sense and meaning out of disaster."[6] Mentz writes chiefly about oceans, and I will be moving down a very different waterway, "le grand Fleuve de S. Laurens." I want to hold on, though, to Mentz's image of the post-disaster as a way to think about the waterworld of "before Canada," in order to acknowledge the disastrous effects of European settlement and eventual nation-building in that world. In following downstream behind colonial writers as I do in this chapter, I mean not to look to their work as a model, but rather to ask how we might as scholars and readers today acknowledge the disaster left in their wake.

That move from writing the ocean to writing the river is significant. The great eddies of sea studies, from Paul Gilroy's *Black Atlantic* to Bernard Bailyn's *Atlantic History* and on, have substantially reshaped the way we think about the early modern world; this oceanic turn means that today many scholars might more readily identify their discipline via an ocean than via a landmass.[7] In recent years Atlanticists have attended, too, to the curious liminal zones

[5] Christopher M. Parsons, *A Not-So-New World: Empire and Environment in French Colonial North America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018), 57.
[6] Steve Mentz, *Shipwreck Modernity: Ecologies of Globalization, 1550-1719* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), 1, 11.

[7] Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993); Bernard Bailyn, *Atlantic*

that are neither land nor ocean. Andrew Lipman's *The Saltwater Frontier*, for instance, follows the New England coast to trace a "borderland that was not entirely based on land," looking to what he calls an "amphibious genre of 'surf and turf' histories."[8] And a wave of recent writerly accounts of the Atlantic take the ocean as both material ground and metaphor for the history of slavery: Jessica Marie Johnson's *Wicked Flesh* (2020), which begins its history of women in the Atlantic world with the figure of "the woman in the water," Tiffany Lethabo King's *The Black Shoals* (2019), which imagines the shoal, a formation that is neither sea nor land, in relation to the encounter of Black and Native studies, and Christina Sharpe's *In the Wake* (2016), to whose painful play on the term "wake" I return at the end of this chapter.[9] If these bodies of water have produced distinctive contours of the imaginary and new scholarly cartographies, the river moves us in another direction again. It signified a particular promise for the colonial writer, and in turn it allows us to see something particular in their work.

When the French returned to the Saint Lawrence Valley in the seventeenth century, with an eye on Jacques Cartier's writings of the century before, it was with a revived confidence that the extraordinary internal river system and its links to the Great Lakes might provide an easy transit system across the Americas to the riches of China and other lands. In a 1630 letter to the king requesting the continuation of his pension (that is, with an eye on his own interest as well as that of France), Samuel de Champlain extolled this new France for "la communication des grandes rivieres et lacs, qui sont comme des mers traversant les contrées,

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History: Concepts and Contours (Harvard University Press, 2005).

[8] Andrew Lipman, *The Saltwater Frontier: Indians and the Contest for the American Coast* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), 5, 11.

[9] Jessica Marie Johnson, *Wicked Flesh: Black Women, Intimacy, and Freedom in the Atlantic World* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2020); Tiffany Lethabo King, *The Black Shoals: Offshore Formations of Black and Native Studies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019); Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016).

et qui rendent une grande facilité à toutes les découvertes, dans le profond des terres, d'où on pourroit aller aux mers de l'occident, de l'orient, du septentrion, et s'étendre au midi." [10] That wet dream was to animate many French colonial projects, dominating reflections on New France throughout the century; the beguiling frontispiece to Louis Hennepin's *Nouvelle découverte d'un très grand pays dans l'Amérique* (1697), featuring a lazy river slipping invitingly round before the viewer, shows that Champlain's confidence in the model of riverine communicative penetration still held sway at the end of the century, in a very different political context and on a very different river.[11] If we slip down this idealized waterway from Champlain to Hennepin, perhaps a few bends down the river we might bob up against Donald Creighton's fabled Laurentian thesis, which read a history of Canada issuing forth from the St Lawrence drawing the country, together on an east-west axis: just as French colonial writers, before Canada, saw the river as the key to global treasures, so in 1937 Creighton imagined Canadian history shaped by a river which "invited journeyings; it promised immense expanses, unfolding, flowing away into remote and changing horizons […] The river was not only a great actuality: it was the central truth of a religion."[12]

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[10] "Mémoire de Champlain au roi pour que sa pension lui soit continuée," *Œuvres complètes de Champlain* ed. Éric Thierry (Québec: Septentrion, 2019), v. 2, 626.

[11] Louis Hennepin's *Nouvelle découverte d'un très grand pays dans l'Amérique* (1697) was published fourteen years after he had dedicated his very similar *Découverte de la Louisiane* to Louis XIV; failing to receive the honours he sought from the French king, in the second publication Hennepin took his Mississippi journey across the Rhine with a dedication to William of Orange. For the frontispiece in question, see this link to the German edition of 1699: https://jcb.lunaimaging.com/luna/servlet/detail/JCB~1~1~3168~5020004:-Native-American-holds-a-peace-pipe?sort=image_date%2Csubject_groups&qvq=w4s:/who%2FHennepin%25252C%2BLouis%25252C%2B17th%2Bcent.;q:hennepin;sort:image_date%2Csubject_groups;lc:JCB~1~1&mi=8&trs=10

[12] Donald Creighton, *The Empire of the St Lawrence: A Study in Commerce and Politics*. First published 1937. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002, 6-7. On the significance of the Laurentian thesis for understanding Anglophone Canadian literary writing, see Donna Bennett, "The Waters of Life and Death: A New Laurentian Thesis," *Acqua, realtà e metafora* eds. Caterina Ricciardi, Laura Ferri, Fabio Mugnaini (Rome: SEMAR, 1998), 77-84.

All of these rivercentric accounts – Champlain to Creighton, Hennepin to Frye – make the river into a precondition for what we might call Canada, for the petition to settle a state or the attempt to make a history out of it; they make a teleology from a water course. And yet we know that rivers do not always enable smooth and unruffled travel in one direction, metaphorically or otherwise. The historian of early modern empire Lauren Benton has argued that riverine regions "often militated against political stability," giving rise to "a potent connection between riverine expeditions and the legal politics of treason." [13] (Benton's examples are mostly drawn from English and Spanish sources, but she also takes up the moment of Jean Duval's plot against Champlain in 1609; a still better New French example would be the endless disorder of La Salle's Mississippi excursions, recorded with spiteful verve by that river rover Louis Hennepin.) Europeans had already discovered how tricky navigation could be on river waters, and Benton shows that as a political project, too, the river could turn out to be less of an invitation and something more like a threat.

In recent years, early modern scholars have figured the capabilities, knowledge, and *techne* of ocean-going mariners as a way of thinking through certain forms of narrative. For Margaret Cohen, maritime texts give us a model of embodied intelligence as "a capacity: a distinctively modern form of practical reason," and her surprising and illuminating history of the novel traces this embodied intelligence from Samuel de Champlain's *Traité de la Marine et du devoir d'un bon marinier* (1632), read as a foundational text for this integration of varied forms of knowledge, to Joseph Conrad, Herman Melville and Jules Verne.[14] (In Cohen's reading Champlain certainly launches a teleology, but perhaps not the one he had imagined in his letter to Richelieu). Michael Wintroub, similarly, traces a microhistory of the forms of knowledge vehicled by a ship out of Dieppe deterministically named *La Pensée*,

[13] Lauren Benton, *A Search for Sovereignty: Law and Geography in European Empires, 1400-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 58-9.
[14] Margaret Cohen, *The Novel and the Sea* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 2.

showing navigators who were not merely intelligent but also collectors of intelligence.[15] More broadly, critical attention to the genres of colonial writing has remained focused on this question of skill, even if only the skill of self-presentation. Michael Witgen argues that French writers as disparate as Pierre-Esprit Radisson, Samuel de Champlain and Paul Lejeune all forge a distinct literary genre, that of the narrative of discovery.[16] The telling of these stories, Witgen argues, presents the writer as explorer-entrepreneur, addressing himself to European readership in order to usher in future colonial investment.

Yet in river waters, the French were not always skilled navigators, but sometimes more hapless and uncomfortable travellers. Even the canoe, long central to Canadian national mythology, tells a different story before Canada, when its colonial usage and navigation on internal waters often betokened not dexterity or direction but rather a clumsy precarity, dependent on but sometimes loathe to credit Indigenous skill and labour.[17] In what follows I attend not to the Champlain-Creighton axis, the smooth and skilled navigation of mighty rivers, but rather to the distinct modes of writing that emerge from failed encounters with water, as the European moves not *along* the river, but rather down – and sometimes up again – in it. What can this movement offer us as a model for reading before Canada?

I take as my case study the Jesuit Paul Lejeune, whose reports from the Saint Lawrence float between physical and figurative waters, and who persistently sets out a journey from surface to depth and back again. Lejeune had arrived in New France in 1632, was Superior of the Jesuit missions until 1639, and wrote certainly ten of the annual volumes

[15] Michael Wintroub, *The Voyage of Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

[16] Michael Witgen, *An Infinity of Nations: How the Native New World Shaped Early America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 36-8.

[17] On early French admiration for Indigenous skills on and in the water, in their first journeys in the Saint Lawrence valley, see Allan Greer, *Property and Dispossession: Natives, Empire and Land in Early Modern North America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 40. On the canoe in nationalist myth-making, see Gilles Havard, *Histoire des coureurs de bois. Amérique du Nord 1600-1840* (Paris: Les Indes savantes, 2016), 761.

sent back to France. A convert from Protestantism who had studied rhetoric at the Jesuit Collège de La Flèche, he crafted his writings with the rhetorical flair of that erudite tradition. His writing is also punctuated by a series of flounderings in deep water. In tracing Lejeune's watery movements, I mean not to make missionary work a model for thinking about before Canada; but rather to look beneath his rhetorically crafted surfaces to glimpse something left behind by his writing, and to imagine how we might bring that to the surface of our attention today.

Even from Lejeune's earliest text, we see something of how the journey to New France shifts the set of watery topoi available to writers. Lejeune's first piece from New France was the *Brieve relation du voyage de la Nouvelle France* of 1632, which formed a prototype for the subsequent letters home which since the nineteenth century have been known as the Jesuit Relations. The *Brieve relation* begins at sea, where Lejeune learns that being afloat is somewhat different from watching from the shore:

> J'avois quelquefous veu la mer en cholere des fenestres de nostre petite maison de Dieppe: mais c'est bien autre chose de sentir dessous soy la furie de l'Ocean, que de la contempler du rivage […] on laissoit aller le vaisseau au gré des vagues et des ondes, qui le portoient par fois sur des montagnes d'eau, puis tout à coup dans des abysmes.[18]

From the outset, Lejeune signals that to travel to New France will be to leave behind a set of philosophical commonplaces. Instead of contemplating the choleric sea, Lejeune feels the ocean "over" him. The allusion to the contemplation of the ocean from the shore is drawn from the *proemium* to Book II of the Roman poet Lucretius's epic philosophical poem *De rerum natura*, which turns around an image that would become dear to early modern writers. There Lucretius draws a comparison between the philosopher's pleasure in his withdrawal

[18] *Brieve relation du voyage de la Nouvelle France* (Paris: Sébastien Cramoisy, 1632), 5. On the status of this report, see Bruce Trigger, 32.

from the world and the experience of someone who stands on the shore and witnesses a storm at sea.[19] The Lucretian shoreline becomes what Jennifer Oliver calls "the site of warning against taking to the seas."[20] In asserting the difference between seeing ("veu) and feeling ("sentir"), Lejeune of course participates fully in the textual tradition, common to much European travel writing, that announces the abandon of textual topoi for lived experience. But his taking to experience, shaped by an up and down of water from waves to the abyss neatly reworked in his sentence's parallelisms (par fois…tout à coup), is also proleptic in its argument for a knowledge brought about through the water's depths. This will not be the only time that experiencing the water's ups and downs allows Lejeune to arrive at a surprising form of philosophical reflection.

Lejeune's initial descriptions of New France, like those of many European writers in the Americas, stays close to similitude: the Saguenay fjord is "as beautiful as the Seine, and almost as swift as the Rhone" (15).[21] His writing is richly attentive to the natural world, since the missionizing plan was from the outset imagined in ecological terms: if Indigenous populations could be sedentarised and made to cultivate the land, Lejeune reasoned, their wildness would then give way to Christian flourishing.[22] But the hopefulness of this relation

[19] "Suave, mari magno turbantibus aequora ventis, /e terra magnum alterius spectare laborem; / non quia vexari quemquamst iucunda voluptas, /sed quibus ipse malis careas quia cernere suave est." [Pleasant it is, when on the great sea the winds trouble the waters, to gaze from shore upon another's great tribulation: not because any man's troubles are a delectable joy, but because to perceive what ills you are free from yourself is pleasant.]
Lucretius, *De rerum natura* Book 2, lines 1-4, translated William Henry Denham Rouse (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 95.

[20] Jennifer H. Oliver, *Shipwreck in French Renaissance Writing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 5. Where Hans Blumenberg's famous 1985 study of this motif, *Shipwreck with Spectator: Paradigm of a Metaphor for Existence* (translated Stephen Rendall, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996) distinguishes between aesthetic and moral reactions to the shipwreck, Oliver argues that there is no opposition between these two in early modern writing.

[21] On this practice of colonial analogy see Lauren Benton, *A Search for Sovereignty*, 19; Parsons, *A Not-So-New World*, 34, 65.

[22] On Lejeune's ecology of salvation, see Christopher M. Parsons, *A Not-So-New World*, chapter 3, 69-96.

to the land's settlement does not extend to the precarious waters, whose dangers are carefully noted. In January 1633 he watches Indigenous men trying to cross the Saint Lawrence in canoes, dodging the ice floes, and notes that although they were very skilled ("habiles"), some were drowned nonetheless. [23] (His accounts run from drowning to smaller hazards: a Frenchman so thirsty that he licked the snow off his shovel has his tongue frozen onto the metal.)[24] Lejeune makes clear he can see some room for joy in this winter landscape; that same year he reports rolling down snowy hills "without any other trouble other than my black habit becoming a white one, all that to my great amusement" (71), and in a particularly lyrical passage some years later he marvels at his first icestorm, which turns the woods into a crystal forest.[25] But he also learns a new wariness of icy depths: one cannot roll across the ice in spring, he notes, "because of the danger of finding an opening that would have you sink down below."[26] In many of these remarks, the water's surface functions as a sifting mechanism, distinguishing between who sinks and who survives: Lejeune notes carefully a drunk man, who eventually gets out of the water "after having splashed around a great deal," "bien barboté"[27]; in May 1637, the body of an Indigenous man who had died in April along with another when their canoe was smashed by ice is found "floating on the river," but his companion's body is lost forever[28]; the same year, another Indigenous man who is found floating in the lake (301). In 1639, he writes that he saw "something [je ne sçay quoy] floating on the river"; at first it looks like a log, then he sees it is a stag swimming across; they shoot it.[29] And in one curious formulation of his early years in New France, Lejeune

[23] "quoy qu'ils soeint tres-habiles, il ne laisse pas de s'en noyer quelques-uns,", *Relation de ce qui s'est passé en la Nouvelle France en l'année 1633* (Paris: Cramoisy, 1634), 63.
[24] *Relation de ce qui s'est passé en la Nouvelle France en l'année 1633*, 70.
[25] *Relation de ce qui s'est passé en la Nouvelle France en l'année 1636*, 203.
[26] *Relation de ce qui s'est passé en la Nouvelle France en l'année 1633*, 73.
[27] *Relation de ce qui s'est passé en la Nouvelle-France en l'année 1634* (Paris: Sébastien Cramoisy, 1635), 214.
[28] *Relation de ce qui s'est passé en la Nouvelle France en l'année 1637* (Rouen: Jean le Boulanger, 1638), 256.
[29] *Relation de ce qui s'est passé en la Nouvelle France en l'année 1639* (Paris: Sébastien Cramoisy, 1640), 120.

describes the ships from France bringing families to settle as "floating households," "maisons flotantes."[30] Lejeune's joy at the arrival of the floating house puts floating as figure for settler survival, for the attempt to stay afloat and make a home in these new waters; but as we parse who survives and who sinks in his record, a grimmer history emerges.

Lejeune's narratives of vulnerability on water share much with other early modern European narratives of shipwreck which, writes the literary scholar Steve Mentz, were often seen through the lens of Providentialism. In such accounts, Mentz shows how "events in the world appear contingent, to mortal eyes, but really are Providential, in terms of God's plan."[31] Lejeune's Providentialism is inflected with an occasional reflection on the specifically colonial contingency of Indigenous labour. In the 1634 volume of the *Relations* (one that, in Canadian literary history, has sometimes been separated out for its 'literary' qualities) Lejeune recounts a perilous journey with Pierre-Antoine Pastedechouan, an Innu converted in childhood who has subsequently renounced his faith, and is often named by Lejeune as the Apostate.[32] Lejeune, who has been wintering with the Innu, is ill, lending a certain vulnerability to the tale, and his travel account swiftly turns into a parable as they move along towards Kebec in a partly frozen river. As they are perched in their fragile birchbark canoe (named by Lejeune, analogically, as a gondola), the ice makes a zeugmatically splashy opening "qui donna à l'eau dans nostre canot et à la crainte dans nostre cœur," [bringing water into our canoe and fear into our heart]: the structural equivalence of canoe and heart points to the strange affective charge of vulnerable watercraft in these scenes. In Lejeune's

[30] *Relation de ce qui s'est passé en la Nouvelle France en l'année 1636*, 7.
[31] Mentz, *Shipwreck Modernity*, 5-6.
[32] Paul Lejeune, *Relation de ce qui s'est passé en la Nouvelle-France en l'année 1634*. On Pastedechouan, see Emma Anderson, *The Betrayal of Faith: The Tragic Journey of a Colonial Native Convert* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007); on his difficult relationship with Lejeune, for whom he had served as a language teacher, see Anderson, 136-8. On the framing of Lejeune's 1634 *Relation* as literary, see Robert Melançon, "La Nouvelle-France et la littérature," in *Éditer la Nouvelle France*, ed. Andreas Motsch and Grégoire Holtz (Laval: Presses Universitaires de Laval, 2011), 42; on the editorial status of that volume see also Anderson, 237.

telling of this story, the Indigenous men who guide the boat to the safety of an island appear as ministers of a river religion, mending broken birchbark canoes with "une espece d'encens" [a kind of incense], i.e. a resin that runs out of pine trees. These navigators manage to find a little gap in the ice and slip away again, knowing that they sail down such a narrow crevice that if the winds were to start up they would be crushed "comme le grain entre deux pierres de moulin" (313) [like the grain between two millstones]. Lejeune's language here briefly returns us from the waterworld and lands on the shore of his interest in cultivation; his desire to grow and mill grain in the Saint Lawrence valley, in order to enable sedentarisation and thus conversion, emerges in the earthy simile. Fortunately, Lejeune writes, his guides "are very skilled" ("habiles") and it is also true, he notes, that God, whose goodness is everywhere, "se trouve aussi bien dessus les eaux et parmy les glaces que dessus la terre" (314) [is found upon the waters, and among the ice, as well as upon the land], certainly recalling the God of Genesis who moves "super aquas", on the face or surface of the waters. In this story, if God is everywhere, the Indigenous guides seem sometimes to be his intermediaries.

Lejeune's reflections certainly place human fragility in a providential perspective, but they also inflect it with an eye to Indigenous interventions, sharing out the labour of rescue between God and Lejeune's Indigenous companions, and making some reference, however brief, to his companions' skills on the water.[33] Lejeune concludes the story by turning away from that rescue, writing "In truth, whoever dwells among these people can say with the Prophet King, *anima mea in manibus meis semper*," quoting Psalm 118's "my soul is always

[33] Lejeune's nod to Indigenous navigational skill distinguishes him from other colonial writers, who often, as Christopher Parsons writes, "marginalized complex technologies and skills as unlearned and unrefined reactions of *sauvage* cultures" (*A Not-So-New World*, 39); see, for example, the dehumanising dismissal of Buaud de Frontenac, the governor of New France, who wrote to Colbert that "Les gens du pays […] naissent tous canoteurs et sont endurcis à l'eau comme des poissons" ("The people from here are all born canoeists, like fish in the water"). Letter of 13 November 1673, Quoted Gilles Havard, *Histoire des coureurs de bois*, 283.

in my hands." But the question of quite whose hands operate salvation on the waters is ambiguous throughout Lejeune's river scenes: God's salvation frequently works through the manual labour of the unconverted or apostate.[34]

Lejeune's aquatic passages are of course in part a meditation on baptism, a theatrical extension of the sacrament the Jesuit hoped to bring to this waterworld. Throughout his work, stories of drowning are clustered in proximity to references to baptism; we might say that both drowning and baptism are ways of making distinctions through water, both mechanisms to differentiate between those who survive, those who are saved, and those who are lost. In 1636, Lejeune describes a recently baptised man who tries to get across the Montmorency falls, and drowns.[35] Lejeune describes the Jesuit distress at this event, but also reports on an anxiety that it will be misunderstood: what if the event is misinterpreted by Indigenous onlookers, who might understand baptism as in fact a precursor to drowning? Since it was so often a rite performed by the Jesuits in extremis, just as a person was dying, the Wendat suspected that it in fact marked the individual for death.[36] The story seems to revisit the Lucretian topos of the spectator on the shore, but here only the theologically correct onlooker can reflect upon the incident in the proper way.

In a number of pairings of baptism and near-drownings, Lejeune crafts his stories carefully to establish the importance of a profession of faith and a transmission of good news. In a set of accounts of "successful" or salvatory failures on water, Lejeune displays the swift

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[34] In an ontologically pithy twist on a zeugma, the voyageur Pierre-Esprit Radisson could be more direct in his parsing of the labor of salvation; in his fourth *Relation*, he writes that he is cured of an injury, perhaps a hernia, by means "that God and my brother did use." Pierre-Esprit Radisson, *The Collected Writings* vol. 1, ed. Germaine Warkentin (Montreal-Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2012), 284.

[35] Paul Lejeune, *Relation de ce qui s'est passé en la Nouvelle France en l'année 1636*, 210.

[36] On the Indigenous fear that baptism was dangerous, see Lejeune, *Relation de ce qui s'est passé en la Nouvelle France en l'année 1636*, 29. On Jesuit baptismal practice, see Emma Anderson, "Blood, fire, and 'baptism': Three perspectives on the death of Jean de Brébeuf, seventeenth-century Jesuit 'martyr,'" *Native Americans, Christianity, and the Reshaping of the American Religious Landscape*, eds. Joel W. Martin and Mark A. Nicholas (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 145-7.

translation of accident into address. In 1638, he tells the story of two Indigenous men stranded on an ice floe, conscious that if the ice were to shift "ils couleroient à fond."[37] After a lengthy account of the adventure, Lejeune reports that they came back to shore, to share their news, and were swiftly baptized. The emphasis on speech emerging from the waters is important: Lejeune as narrator is able to listen into the dialogue, presumably because the men in turn "publierent" the story of what happened on their floe. Rescues are there to be reported: first to the Jesuit, second to the readers in France.

A similar story takes place in the *Relation* of 1640 and 1641. In this story, embedded in an account of the new Christians, the convert Noel Negabamat reports getting stuck on an ice floe. "After having prayed out loud, I said to my people: let us fear nothing, let us die bravely; we are baptised: *courage*, we will go to Heaven." [38] In Lejeune's telling, Negabamat places the vast and threatening waters of the river in narrative proximity to the baptismal waters that give the converts the certainty they will survive drowning: a droplet against the deluge, to counter the Indigenous fear of baptism.

Lejeune's use of the *Relation* texts to account for successful baptisms is extended rhetorically by these scenes of survival via the waters. Yet his rhetorically adroit overturning of the drowning-baptism fear is perhaps somewhat confusing in scale. Jesuit practice of baptism of course did not draw on the resources of the river for a rite of immersion, in the way that Protestant reformers might have done by plunging a body in; instead, the Jesuits splashed water on the forehead in accordance with sacramental practice in France.[39] This

[37] Paul Lejeune, *Relation de ce qui s'est passé en la Nouvelle France en 1638* (Paris: Cramoisy, 1638), 54.
[38] Lejeune, *Relation de ce qui s'est passé en la Nouvelle France es années 1640 et 1641*, (Paris: Sébastien Cramoisy, 1642), 43-4. (Although Vimont's name appears on the title page as author, this relation is thought to have been written by Le Jeune, who signed its letter of transmittal.)
[39] In the 1634 *Relation,* an Indigenous man asks for a bit of water to be thrown over him (*Relation de ce qui s'est passé en la Nouvelle-France en l'année 1634*, 9). For an account of Jesuit baptism, see also Bruce Trigger, 505-6, who also notes that the Jesuits Lalemant and Brébeuf had boiling water thrown over them by the Iroquois in a parody of baptism (764).

technical misscale functions as a form of *copia* carefully drafted for his French audience: so much, so very much water here in New France, and so much potential for salvation.

This relation between immersion and transmission is reworked extensively in a set of lengthy and seemingly connected stories of surfaces and surfac*ing* which punctuate Lejeune's work, appearing in 1632, 1633, 1634 and 1638. Although Jesuit accounts frequently feature notes on who drowned where, at these moments Lejeune drafts another kind of story about someone falling down into the waters but managing to come up again to tell the tale. In these stories, Lejeune turns this movement into a narrative rhythm, giving us a heavily metaphorical journey. We are far here, messily far, from the figure of the spectator on shore or the traveler on a ship; these accounts share instead an uncanniness that seem to set them closer to something like a tale from the underworld, and in their reaching for a different vocabulary they seem to deliberately recognize the mythological potential of this journey to the bottom of the river. What can we see of before Canada from that muddy place? I'll set out the stories one by one.

1632: Lejeune sauvé des eaux

Lejeune's narrative movement down into the waters certainly owes something to his own accident. In his first account from Canada, the *Brièvе Relation* of 1632, Lejeune gives an extraordinary description of his own almost-drowning, a passage whose terms illuminate the structural distinctions and lyrical feel of the later stories, in which a lengthy narrative serves to set out a way of thinking. (I set them out in French here to give a better sense of their narrative rhythm and shared vocabularies.) One August day, he recounts

> je pensay estre noyé avec deux François qui estoient avec moy dans un petit canot de Sauvage, dont nous nous servons. La marée estoit violente, celuy qui estoit derriere

> dans ce canot le voulant détascher du navire la marée le fit tourner, & le canot & nous aussi, nous voyla tous trois emportez par la furie de l'eau, au milieu de cette grande riviere de sainct Laurens. Ceux du navire crie sauve, sauve, au secours, mais il n'y avoit point là de chalouppe, nous attrapons le canot, comme je vy qu'il tournoit si fort que l'eau me passoit de beaucoup par dessus la teste, & que j'estouffois, je quittay ce canot pour me mettre à nager, je n'ay jamais bien sceu ce mestier, & il y avoit plus de 24. ans que je ne l'avois exercé: à peine avoy-je avancé de trois brasses, que ma soutane, m'enveloppant la teste & les bras, je m'en allois à fond, j'avois dejia donné ma vie à nostre Seigneur, sans luy demander qu'il me retirast de ce danger, croyant qu'il valloit mieux le laisser faire, j'acceptois la mort de bon cœur; bref j'éstois dejia à demy estouffé, quand une chalouppe qui estoit sur le bord de la riviere, & deux Sauvages accoururent dans leur canot, il ne paroissoit plus qu'un petit bout de ma soutane, on me retira par là, & si on eût encor tardé un *Pater*, j'estois mort, j'avois perdu tout sentiment, pour ce que l'eau m'estouffoit, ce n'estoit point d'apprehension, je m'estois resolu à mourir dans les eaux, dés le premier jour que je mis le pied dans le vaisseau, et j'avois prou exercé cette resignation dans les tempestes que nous avons passé sur la mer, le jugement me dura tant que j'eu des forces, et me semble que je me voyois mourir, je croiois qu'il y eut plu de mal à estre noyé qu'il y en a: bref nous fumes tou trois sauvés.[40]

Lejeune's breathily swirling account sets out a number of the topoi of river writing: the precarity of the canoe, the affective force of the waters' fury, with, here, a cheerful acknowledgment of his lack of skill; indeed, to be able to swim was a rare capability among Europeans in this period, even for sailors. Meanwhile the rescue, less than a *Pater* later, floats once again somewhere between the will of God and the skill of the Indigenous canoeists who

[40] *Brieve relation du voyage de la Nouvelle France,* 63-65.

rescue the French. This account is, in Lejeune's writing of water, unique in its first-personness, and in its calm note about seeing himself dying; if Lejeune lacks a capacity to read or navigate the waters, he is nonetheless brought to see something via his lack of knowledge. In this vision he sees that he sees nothing, and in that vaults to salvation, the description leaping from choking to saving, in brief, *bref*.

Lejeune's swift movement, from lengthy narrative of suffering to salvation, all hinges on that "bref." And it is worth saying that elsewhere, Lejeune can be very brief indeed: in the year after this near-death experience, he tells us almost mockingly of a young Huguenot boy who drowned before he was sent home, it being illegal to be other than Catholic in New France: "strange effect of the providence and predestination of God! *Unus assumetur, alter relinquetur, the one shall be taken, the other left.*"[41] (The tag is from Luke 17, with reference to the destruction of Sodom, coming just after a passage on the flood.) In such a way does salvation function on the waters: for the Jesuit, (someone else's) good work of the speedily rescuing canoe, for the Huguenot boy the narrative ellipsis of predestination, which does not afford him his own story of surfacing from the depths. The gesture to the Huguenot boy comes just after Lejeune has told a story of Brébeuf fetching water from the river to baptise a child: the one shall be taken, the other left.[42] In brief, *bref*: I suggest that to look at "before Canada" from the bottom of the river must mean that we look to see those whom are taken and those whom are left, to think about just who survives and who sinks – or is made to sink – in these narratives.

1633: To dream of restoring the world

In 1633, as Lejeune is beginning to try to understand Indigenous belief systems, he recounts another story of drowning. This time the story is at a much larger scale: not the drowning of a

[41] *Relation de ce qui s'est passé en la Nouvelle France, en l'année 1633*, 257 (sic: for 157).
[42] *Relation de ce qui s'est passé en la Nouvelle France, en l'année 1633*, 254.

man, but the drowning of the whole world. Here is what he says the Innu tell of the history of the world:

> Ils disent qu'un nommé Messou repara le monde perdu dans les eaux; Vous voyez qu'ils ont quelque tradition du deluge, quoy que meslée de fables, car voicy comme le monde se perdit, à ce qu'ils disent.
>
> Ce Messou allant à la chasse avec des loups cerviers, au lieu de chiens, on l'advertit qu'il faisoit dangereux pour ses loups (qu'il appelloit ses freres) dans un certain lac aupres duquel il estoit. Un jour qu'il poursuivoit un eslan, ses loups luy donnerent la chasse jusques dedans ce lac: arrivez qu'ils furent au milieu, ils furent abymez en un instant. Luy survenant là dessus, et cherchant les freres de tous costez, un oiseau luy dit qu'il les voyoit au fond du lac, et que certaines bestes ou monstres les tenoient là dedans: il entre dans l'eau pour les secourir, mais aussi-tost ce lac se deborda, et s'aggrandit si furieusement, qu'il inonda et noya toute la terre.
>
> Le Messou bien estonné, quitte la pensée de ses loups, pour songer à restablir le monde. Il envoye un corbeau chercher un peu de terre, pour avec ce morceau en restablir un autre. Le corbeau n'en peut trouver tout estant couvert d'eau. Il fait plonger une loutre, mais la profondeur des eaux l'empescha de venir jusques à terre. En fin un rat musqué descendit, et en rapporta: Avec ce morceau de la terre il remit tout en estat, il refit des troncs d'arbres, et tirant des fléches à l'encontre, elles se changeoient en branches. Ce seroit une longue fable de raconter comme il repara tout: comme il se vangea des monstres qui avoient pris ses chasseurs, se transformant en mille sorte d'animaux pour les surprendre: bref ce beau Reparateur estant marié à une soury musquée, eut des enfans qui ont repeuplé le monde.[43]

Lejeune's telling of the myth takes up some features of his account of his own drowning, and especially the narrative temporality between the "longue fable," which he tells us is too long

[43]Lejeune, *Relation de ce qui s'est passé en la Nouvelle France en l'année 1633*, 77-8.

to recount, and the conclusion, once again, "bref." If "bref" marks a compression of the longer narrative, it also here allows for an extraordinary perspective on a future repeopling of the world; this, much like Champlain's 1630 vision, is a story of the "before" of a later fruitfulness. Lejeune's account is also, of course, interested in the relation of this Innu story to Christian belief. He both pushes away the Indigenous account (the distancing repetition of "ils disent" and its labelling as fable) and draws it close to his own world, underlining its proximity to stories of the Flood as told in Genesis. Lejeune's story tracks in particular the bond between human and nonhuman – the lynxes known as brothers, Messou's transformation into animals, his union with the muskrat – but it also draws out the similar bonds in the Hebrew Bible's account of the Flood, and the bird, a creature from a different element, who is sent forth to imagine life *after* the waters. Along the way, we might say his reading makes a more creaturely account of Genesis possible.

It is not clear, notes Micah True, that Lejeune's mastery of the Innu language was sufficient at this date for him to fully understand the story told to him; True follows Lucien Campeau's suggestion that this version of the story might be as much Lejeune's invention as anything.[44] The story certainly seems to track closely the story of Lejeune's own near-drowning and salvation, and where Messou is, compared to Noah, unclear about what is happening, his amazement tracks more closely the clear-eyed confusion – seeing that one does not see – which Lejeune sets out in his own account. The multivalence of the repairer figure can be seen, too, in a curious moment later in the same *Relation* when the structure of the world's swamping appears again in the reported speech of an Innu man, who says that when the English controlled Québec "la terre n'estoit plus terre, la riviere n'estoit plus

[44] Micah True, *Masters and Students: Jesuit Mission Ethnography in Seventeenth-Century New France* (Montreal-Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2015), 123. True demonstrates that, nonetheless and problematically, Lejeune's account has come to stand as a standard version of Innu belief in subsequent European scholarship.

riviere, le ciel n'estoit plus ciel," but that since the return of Champlain all has been restored.[45] In this cosmology as first understood by and then told by Lejeune, the repairer of the world is its colonial master.

For seventeenth-century European theologians and philosophers, a reflection on the Flood commonly marked an inquiry into the nature of historical transmission. Jonathan Sheehan describes how antiquarians across Europe seized on American accounts of rising waters as "the key to the recovery of the unique origins of mankind," writing that "we can understand the Flood as a seventeenth-century meditation on the *durability* of memory across time and space."[46] And if missionary investigations into the Flood's vestigial presence in American collective memory insisted on the need for these stories to be recuperated by the narrative whole of the Christian Bible, European scholars more generally insisted on the fragmentary and rudimentary status of such orally-transmitted stories without the salvatory European model of writing. The story of the Flood makes for an urgent reflection on the possibilities of transmission across place and time, something of grave importance to colonial writers like Lejeune.

In an elegant reading of this passage placed in the context of European scholarly debates about the origins of Amerindian peoples, Micah True argues that Lejeune tells this story with an eye on the distant shore of his French readership. Drawing on the editorial work of Lucien Campeau, True suggests that by the time Lejeune retells this story in 1634 he is aware for the first time that his letter home has been published and circulated, and is more careful to frame the story as a corrupted version of the Flood. The 1634 Relation marks the point at which Lejeune first knows his writing is reaching an audience outside his order; it is written still partly for an internal audience, but also with that wider readership in mind.

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[45] *Relation de ce qui s'est passé en la Nouvelle France en l'année 1633*, 177 (sic: for 277).
[46] Jonathan Sheehan, "Time Elapsed, Time Regained: Anthropology and the Flood," in *Sintflut und Gedächtnis. Erinnern und Vergessen des Ursprungs* ed. Martin Mulsow and Jan Assmann (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2006), 321-335 (325, 327).

True's deft reading of Lejeune's intertextuality shows that later, when drawing on a distinction between writing and orality common to European accounts of the Americas, the Jesuit returns to this early reported account. In the 1637 *Relation* Lejeune mentions the story of Messou as part of a reflection upon the importance of writing in transmission of religious knowledge: Christians know their stories because they write them down, whereas Lejeune considers the Innu to have only an imperfect knowledge of the Flood because they rely on oral transmission.[47] Of course, Lejeune means Biblical texts - but his Relations, too, seek to build a textual tradition for the church of New France. In this way Lejeune's text, too, is a vessel that reaches across waters to a secure future; it becomes a technology not just of recording but also of transmission, of survival of the Christian community.

1638: Lifted to the surface

In 1638, with an eye now securely on this wider readership, Lejeune tells still another story of drowning and resurfacing. This time, ringing the narratological changes, it is not his own story, nor the story of Messou, but a third person account of an Algonquin and a Wendat seminarist named (after Cardinal Richelieu) Armand, making their way to Wendat country at the moment that the snow melt was causing the river to run fast.[48] When their canoe overturns, Lejeune recounts that the Algonquin

> qui n'avoit rien que son corps dans le canot, ne pensa qu'à se sauver; il fut bien-tost à bord hors du danger: mais Armand voulant sauver une Chapelle que le Pere portoit pour dire la saincte Messe, & quantité de pourcelaine, & autre baggage renfemé dans une caisse, s'engagea si avant qu'on le perdit de veuë: voila la caisse et le calice, & l'aube, & la chasuble, & tout son equipage abysmé d'un costé, & luy de l'autre. […]

[47] True, 127-8; see also Lucien Campeau, ed. *Monumenta Novae Franciae*, 9 vols (Rome: Monumenta Hist. Soc. Jesu, 1967-2003), 2.403.

[48] On the Wendat convert and seminarian Armand-Jean Andehoua, see Victoria Jackson, "Silent Diplomacy: Wendat Boys' 'Adoptions' at the Jesuit Seminary, 1636-1642," *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association / Revue de la Société historique du Canada* 27:1 (2016): 139-168.

> Ce pauvre jeune Chrestien aiant combattu contre la mort jusques à avoir les mains toutes écorchées, & le corps tout brisé, se trouve assis au fond de l'eau sur une roche: il en fait une Chapelle plus favourable que celle qu'il venoit de perdre: je veux dire qu'il s'adresse à Dieu du fond des abysmes, non de la bouche qu'il tenoit bien fermée, mais du cœur, qu'il respandit devant sa bonté.
>
> Vous estes le Maistre de la vie, luy disoit-il, la mienne n'est plus à moy, car je ne sçaurois conserver, vous pouvés tout, laissez-moy mourir, faites-moi revivre, vous estes mon Dieu. A peine son ame avoit-elle poussé ces affections, que son corps se vit eslevé sur l'eau, où il rencontre des brossailles qu'il attrappe en telle sorte, qu'il trouva toujiours dequoy se tirer jusques au bord du torrent malgré sa rapidité: ses compagnons l'aiant veu disparoistre, regardoient si les ondes ne jetteroient point un corps mort; quand ils en virent un vivant, ils s'escrierent de joye, le P. accourt pour voir son pauvre nourrisson ressuscité. [49]

Lejeune's passage, clutching at the chapel, carries with it many narrative forms: epic, with the visit to the underworld that can only be recounted by those who miraculously return; and, with the description of Armand's renunciation of agency to the divine crisscrossed by the careful parsing out of his grasping of branches, somehow mingling apologetics with an adventure story. The account of the elevation of the soul and the sinking of the material goods makes for a striking echo of early modern images of the Last Judgement, with on one side the sinners cast down and on the other the saved, safe in their elevation, *ressuscité* in the two senses of the French word, resuscitated and resurrected. (It is also a detail backed by archaeological records: we know from such work that losses of goods were particularly common at rapids, and that where bales of fur might float for a time, other trade goods sank immediately.[50])

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[49] *Relation de ce qui s'est passé en la Nouvelle France en l'annee 1638*, 62-5.
[50] Skinner, *The Sinews of Empire*, 212.

This story, with the clumsy seminarian clutching the portable chapel, recalls nothing as much as Peter Carey's 1988 novel *Oscar and Lucinda*, and its magnificently bizarre image of a glass church floated down an Australian river, a figure Carey has described as "a box of Christian stories traveling through a landscape filled with Aboriginal stories."[51] Carey's formulation might often be a useful way to describe the Jesuit texts themselves, here building their church upon a rather surprising rock, except that here our Armand is both Wendat and Christian; as Lejeune inches through his stories of dips into the river this figure of conversion, who brings together two identities, becomes the missionary's ideal navigator. Where Indigenous intervention is what keeps Europeans afloat in many of these accounts, here Lejeune seems to figures conversion – the French intervention – as a different order of flotation device.

Throughout the passage, the narratorial (or *navigatorial*, I might say) perspective is particularly strange, allowing Lejeune to swoop underwater to hear the first-person prayer of the boy, and then come on back up to tell it to his readers. In its successful accounting for this underwater learning experience, its successful conversion, this passage speaks to the failure of other watery moments in the Jesuit archive: it is clearly a baptism narrative, a story about coming closer to God through water, but it manages to tell that story, whereas many accounts of actual adult baptisms in these texts, those of potential converts who don't make it as far as Armand, are marked by linguistic failure; throughout the *Relations*, candidates for baptism are turned away from the saving waters for their inability to correctly learn their catechism, and few of them get to tell their own tale. Here, in contrast, for the Wendat man to use what Lejeune sees as the right words, addressing himself to the right place, brings about a miraculous buoyancy. Armand's elevation to the surface is one of the strangest passages in the *Relations*, and in it the question of an Indigenous voice speaking through the waters laps

[51] Peter Carey, interview at the Hay Festival, Hay-on-Wye, UK, May 2016.

away at the reflections on transmission and address that trickle through all Lejeune's stories from the bottom of the river.

Taken together, Lejeune's repeated wet-to-dry narratives insist on the importance of textual transmission across time and place, of "publishing" what happens under the water, even as they underline the contingency of such address. In this, they dramatize at some length a set of tropes familiar in colonial writing. Even the texts that are eventually transmitted to early modern European readers were sometimes materially marked by water, or at least by the trope that they had been: André Thevet addresses his 1558 *Les singularitez de la France antarctique* to the reader as though the volume in European hands were itself a miraculous survivor of the waters: "Ce pendant si vous plait agreablement recevoir ce mien escript tumultuairement comprins et labouré par les tempestes, et autre incommoditez d'eau et de terre…" ["Please kindly receive this, my book, tumultuously tossed by storms and other incommodities on water and land"].[52] A similar adventure story is told about the survival of the manuscript of the Portuguese epic *Os Lusíadas*, supposedly rescued from a shipwreck in the mouth of its author Luis de Camões.[53] We know, of course, that the "incommoditez" of water destroyed still other texts completely: in the upper country, the *coureur de bois* Radisson and his brother-in-law Des Groseillers lost the journal of their travels when they went over one particularly tough set of rapids: "My brother lost his booke of annotations of the last yeare, of our being in these foraigne nations. We lost never a castor, but, may be, some better thing."[54] Still more hauntingly wet is a map made by Louis Joliet, stemming from the 1673 Marquette journey through the Great Lakes and down the Mississippi. Getting down as far as the Arkansas river, the expedition then returned to Montreal, but fifteen minutes from landing Joliet's canoe was overturned in the Lachine rapids, and his logbook and

[52] André Thevet, *Les singularitez de la France antarctique* (Antwerp: Christophe Plantin, 1558), 163.
[53] See Mentz, *Shipwreck Modernity*, 2.
[54] Pierre-Esprit Radisson, *The Collected Writings* vol. 1, ed. Germaine Warkentin, 238.

preliminary maps (along with three of his companions) were lost in the waters. Joliet's version was roughed out on the return to Montreal, and it served as the basis for many later maps of north America.[55] A great deal of what we know about New France, then, emerges from the water, and Lejeune's dramatizations of almost-drowning participate in this staging of American difficulty for the benefit of a rapt European audience.

But if we tell those stories only in that way, we too fall, I think, into the riverine seduction of the before Canada narrative, reading these as glimpses from the before-time, flotsam from the past; we are brought then to imagine these sodden survivors' tales chiefly as the *start* of something. I want to suggest that Lejeune's disasters also allow us to read another way; certainly against the way he might have intended, but perhaps in a way that allows us to read against the tide of the European concept of nation.[56] For Lejeune's stories, and more broadly colonial writing's interest in the watery disaster, also bear reluctant witness to those who did *not* survive: to the man floating in the water after the massacre, to the men who drowned despite their skills. The account of the Indigenous body renamed for the French cardinal and lifted to the surface asks us, I think, to remember other unsaved bodies, who are (metaphorically, at least) sunk, unsaved in two ways. These stories, with the surface as dividing line between life and death, allow us to think of this period before Canada as a time marked also by an *after*, the aftermath of destruction.

"In the wake."[57] The words are those of Christina Sharpe (currently the director of a programme in Black Canadian studies at York University), from the title of her extraordinary

[55] For the map see https://jcb.lunaimaging.com/luna/servlet/detail/JCBMAPS~1~1~1617~102730003:08854?sort=Normalized_date%2CGeographic_Area%2CCreator%2CMap_title&qvq=q%3A08854%3Bsort%3ANormalized_date%2CGeographic_Area%2CCreator%2CMap_title%3Blc%3AJCBMAPS~1~1&mi=1&trs=3; it figures also in Jean-François Palomino, *La mesure d'un continent*.

[56] On reading Lejeune differently, see Emma Anderson, *The Betrayal of Faith*, who describes encountering evidence of what the missionary "tried to ignore, deny, or suppress"; in an image that speaks to this dynamic, Anderson imagines the Jesuit "determined to squeeze the young Innu's ungainly and reluctant foot into the glass slipper of his opportunistic providentialism" (238-9).

book on representations of Black life in the wake of Black death, a book that draws on and challenges the metaphors common to Atlantic history. Sharpe's rereading of the ocean entwines the multiple significations of wake – amongst others, the path of a ship, the attending to the dead, consciousness – in a reading of what she calls "the conceptual frame of and for living blackness in the diaspora in the still unfolding aftermath of Atlantic chattel slavery."

In an account of the personal weight of these readings, Sharpe writes of how "the sense and awareness of precarity […] texture my reading practices." In moving from the ocean to the river in my reading of aquatic disaster, I want to suggest that what Sharpe calls her "wake-work" has rich potential for a reading of before Canada, a riverine concept to be understood in ebb and flow with the violent oceanic history Sharpe reads through her variously-scaled vignettes. Lejeune's drive to textual transmission asks us insistently to look to salvation, to look to what survives, to what comes after the before. But if, following Sharpe, we allow instead an "awareness of precarity to texture [our] reading practices," then we can read "before Canada" for the loss of Indigenous life that it represents: looking not to those who made it out of the waters, but mourning those unnamed, drifting bodies who did not.

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[57] Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016). I also want to acknowledge the richly productive linguistic play of the Algonquin Anishinaabe performance studies scholar Lindsay Lachance, which has helped me think through this work; I heard Lachance speak of what she calls "landing" practices in Anishnabeg thought and collaborative practice, and was brought to read Lejeune differently as a result. (Keynote, "Manifesting Constellations of Love in Relational Indigenous Dramaturgies," conference on "Emotions in Conflict," biannual conference of the Society for the History of Emotions (Ottawa, October 2019).