Is It Time for a New Edition of the Jesuit Relations from New France? Campeau vs. Thwaites

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It would be difficult to overestimate the influence that the seventeenth-century Jesuit Relations from New France have had on scholarly accounts of colonial North America and the Iroquoian and Algonquian groups that inhabited it. As historian Allan Greer put it, the texts “constitute the most important set of documentary materials on the seventeenth-century encounter of Europeans and Native North Americans.”¹ Greer’s assessment has been shared by scholars of history and literature alike, writing in both English and French and studying not only New France but also the colonization of North America more broadly.² In light of the scholarly consensus regarding the importance of the Relations for a variety of approaches to colonial North America, it is perhaps surprising that there exists no critical edition upon which scholars can rely entirely, and that most scholars who study the texts seem unaware of the limitations of the most popular option. This article intervenes in longstanding debates about the relative merits of the two most prominent editions – Reuben Gold Thwaites’s *Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents* and Lucien Campeau’s *Monumenta Novae Franciae* – and brings to light aspects of each that have until now gone unremarked. Although most scholars continue to prefer the century-old Thwaites edition, there are good reasons to opt for Campeau’s more recent work, at least

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¹ Allan Greer, ed., *The Jesuit Relations: Natives and Missionaries in Seventeenth-Century North America* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2000), 1.

² See Reuben Gold Thwaites, ed., *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents: Travels and Explorations of the Jesuit Missionaries in New France 1610–1791*, 73 vols. (Cleveland: Burrows Bros, 1896–1901), 1: vii; and Alain Beaulieu, *Convertir les fils de Caïn: jésuites et amérindiens nomades en Nouvelle-France, 1632–1642* (Montréal: Nuit Blanche Editeur, 1990), 19. In keeping with scholarly convention, Thwaites’s *Jesuit Relations* is abbreviated in this article as *JR*. The other main edition under consideration here is Lucien Campeau, ed., *Monumenta Novae Franciae*, 9 vols. (Rome: Monumenta Hist. Soc. Jesu, 1967–2003). It is here abbreviated *MNF*.

until a new edition appears that addresses the shortcomings of the options that are currently available.

The mission reports commonly referred to as the Jesuit Relations were published annually from 1632 to 1673. The Superior of the Jesuit mission in New France prepared each report on the basis of letters and journals written by his brethren in what is today eastern and Maritime Canada, stitching the various parts into a coherent whole and lending it a single voice. Merchant ships bearing a season's bounty in furs and other goods transported the manuscript reports each autumn from the colony to France, where the texts were edited before being published.³ The Relations appear to have been produced in relatively large numbers, at least to judge from the multiple variants and reprints of most of the texts that appeared in the seventeenth century, catalogued in J.C. McCoy's *Jesuit Relations of Canada*. Although once relegated to rare book rooms at research libraries and private collections, the original seventeenth-century editions of the texts have become more readily available to researchers in recent years thanks to large-scale digitization projects like the French National Library's Gallica collection. Anyone with an Internet connection now can consult early editions of the texts. As valuable as such access is, the original editions are perhaps less than ideal as scholarly tools. They are bereft of critical apparatus and are less easy to read than more recent editions due to seventeenth-century typography and orthography.

The standard edition of the texts is, and has been for more than a century, Reuben Gold Thwaites's seventy-three-volume *Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents*, a monumental achievement in its time and one that made the missionaries' texts widely available to anglophone and francophone scholars alike for the first time. Thwaites was a former journalist turned head of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, and a prolific editor and writer of books about the exploration and settlement of North America. He had little formal training as a historian, and "was by nature and temperament much more the entrepreneur than the scholar," according to the Jesuit historian Joseph Donnelly.⁴ Thwaites's edition of the reports, along

³ On the editorial process and the changes made by editors in Paris, see Lawrence Wroth, "The *Jesuit Relations* from New France," *The Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 30 (1936): 110–49; and Micah True, "Travel Writing, Ethnography, and the Colony-Centric Voyage of the *Jesuit Relations* from New France," *American Review of Canadian Studies* 42, no. 1 (2012): 103–17.

⁴ Joseph P. Donnelly, SJ, *Thwaites's Jesuit Relations: Errata and Addenda* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1967), 19. For more on Thwaites's life and career, see

with a selection of letters, journals, and other texts related to them, appeared over the course of only 65 months straddling the end of the nineteenth century. This swift pace of publication was enabled by a team of assistants, translators, and other contributors, about many of whom relatively little is known aside from their names.⁵ Scholars have cited Thwaites's monumental work consistently since its publication at the turn of the century, and even a rapid perusal of recent scholarly books in both French and English on the Jesuit mission in New France and the texts that it produced confirms that this dependence has not waned.⁶ The popularity of the edition has no doubt been aided by its facing-page English translations of the entire series, and by its presence in far more research libraries than any of its competitors. At least 700 libraries worldwide hold the first edition published by the Burrows Brothers in Cleveland, the 1959 reprint by the Pageant Book Company, or both.⁷ Moreover, recent years have seen the entirety of Thwaites's edition published online in various formats, a convenience that likely has cemented its status as the standard scholarly edition.⁸

Donnelly's introduction and Luca Codignola, "Jesuit Writings According to R.G. Thwaites and Lucien Campeau, SJ: How Do They Differ?" in *Little Do We Know: History and Historians of the North Atlantic, 1492–2010*, ed. Matteo Binasco (Cagliari: Istituto di Storia dell'Europa Mediterranea / Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche, 2011). Codignola's article is a somewhat revised version of "The Battle Is Over: Campeau's Monumenta vs. Thwaites's Jesuit Relations, 1602–1650," *European Review of Native American Studies* 10, no. 2 (1996): 3–10. I refer in this article to the newer version.

⁵ Donnelly, *Thwaites's Jesuit Relations*, 22; Codignola, "Jesuit Writings," 227.

⁶ See, to cite only a few examples that represent a variety of critical approaches to the Relations, Tracy Neal Leavelle, *The Catholic Calumet: Colonial Conversions in French and Indian North America* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012); Takao Abé, *The Jesuit Mission to New France: A New Interpretation in Light of the Earlier Jesuit Experience in Japan* (Leiden: Brill, 2011); Sara E. Melzer, *Colonizer or Colonized: The Hidden Stories of Early Modern French Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012); Réal Ouellet, *La relation de voyage en Amérique (XVI^e-XVIII^e - Siècles): au carrefour des genres* (Québec: Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 2010).

⁷ This estimate, along with figures for the other editions discussed in this article, is based on a search of the WorldCat database. Since that database is not a comprehensive catalogue of all libraries, the figures offered here are best understood as conservative estimates.

⁸ Thwaites's English translations, without the original French text, are available at "The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents 1610–1791," Creighton University, last updated 14 April 2011, <http://puffin.creighton.edu/jesuit/Relations>. The

Another regrettably often overlooked option exists for scholars wishing to consult the Relations: the late Canadian Jesuit Lucien Campeau's *Monumenta Novae Franciae*, nine weighty tomes that are part of *Monumenta Historica Societatis Iesu*, a series of volumes containing documents pertaining to the history of Jesuit activity throughout the world.⁹ Thwaites's rapidly produced edition could not stand in starker contrast to Campeau's much larger collection of documents that began appearing in 1967, and, with its most recent volume in 2003, included the published Relations from their beginning to 1661. In addition to the missionary reports, Campeau's volumes contain hundreds of letters, journals, and other materials related to the New France mission, far surpassing the smaller collection of supplementary documents in the Thwaites edition. In his comparison of the two editions from 1610 to 1650, historian Luca Codignola found that Thwaites's *Jesuit Relations* contained sixty-seven documents aside from the Relations themselves. Campeau's *Monumenta Novae Franciae*, on the other hand, included 963, a tally that has grown only more lopsided, as Campeau produced in the intervening years two more volumes in his series.¹⁰ In contrast to his predecessor, Campeau was a trained, professional historian and his work is without a doubt the most rigorous scholarly edition of the texts available. Nonetheless, most scholars have neglected it.¹¹ One does not have to look very hard for factors that may account for the continued preference for the earlier edition. Where Thwaites provides facing-page translations in English of the Relations and other documents, Campeau's edition presents them in their original languages only – French, and sometimes Latin or Italian. And if Thwaites's *Jesuit Relations* is easily accessible on the Internet and in most research libraries, *Monumenta Novae Franciae* is found in approximately one hundred libraries worldwide, and is not available electronically. Further limiting the more recent edition is the fact that the editor's death in 2003 left the final twelve years of published reports unaccounted for, not to mention the letters and other supplementary documents for those years. At least so far, none of Campeau's Jesuit colleagues have stepped forward to finish his work.

entire edition, including both French and English, is available in the online collections, *Early Encounters in North America* and *Early Canadiana Online*.

⁹ For more on this series of Jesuit documents and the place of Campeau's New France volumes within it, see *MNF* 1: 53–54.

¹⁰ Codignola, "Jesuit Writings," 234–37.

¹¹ Codignola, "Jesuit Writings," 220–22.

Despite the above weaknesses, the few scholars who have compared the two editions have found at least one reason to embrace Campeau's *Monumenta Novae Franciae*: its far richer and more soundly edited collection of historical documents related to the New France mission – the letters, journals, lists, legal documents, etc., that are not Relations. Of the supplementary documents that Thwaites published for the period 1610–50, Codignola found that “none of them is taken from its original source. They all derive from other books, contemporary copies, modern reproductions, modern translations, or modern transcriptions,” despite the editor's own pledge to rely on originals. In Codignola's estimation, this failure to meet modern scholarly standards makes Thwaites's work “not to be trusted at all” with regard to its collection of supplementary documents.¹² Campeau himself suggested that the primary advantage of his own work over that of his predecessor was its far larger collection of related texts, culled from their original sources. As for the Relations themselves, he found that they were “faithfully reproduced” by Thwaites, an assessment echoed by Codignola.¹³ To the extent that some few scholars have recognized a reason to prefer Campeau's work to that of Thwaites, then, it has been due to the former edition's much richer and more reliable collection of related materials. The Relations themselves in Thwaites's collection have generally been deemed quite sound. If that were the end of the story, it would be easy to conclude that scholars have not necessarily been wrong to embrace *The Jesuit Relations* and mostly ignore *Monumenta Novae Franciae*, at least when studying the published missionary reports themselves as opposed to the supplementary materials.

A closer look at Thwaites's edition, however, shows that the editor's apparent lack of care in establishing sound sources for what he termed the “allied documents” also affects the Relations themselves. The editor dutifully recorded his source in a note immediately prior to each text, in most cases a copy held in the Lenox Library, which has since been absorbed by the New York Public Library. A bibliographical note found at the end of each volume in the series presents more details on the seventeenth-century editions that he used, along with information about known variants. What is troubling, however, is that Thwaites's text of each Relation is not always consistent with the particular variant that he claims as his source. In several cases,

¹² Codignola, “Jesuit Writings,” 235.

¹³ *MNF* 1: 258 (introduction); Codignola, “Jesuit Writings,” 235.

the text bears the marks of one variant, while source notes indicate that another was used. In a note preceding the 1646 text, for example, Thwaites informs us that he reprints “a copy of the original Cramoisy, in Lenox Library.”¹⁴ In his bibliographical note at the end of the volume, he describes a minor difference between his source and another known variant. “In the Lenox copy from which we reprint, the sentence in Montagnais commencing on line 10 of p. 176, in Part I., begins: ‘Tapoué Nama Nitirininfin;’ but in another copy in that library, formerly George Bancroft’s, this sentence begins: ‘Tap de Nama.’ Evidently the latter is the earlier impression, in which ‘oué’ of ‘Tapoué’ was thought to be ‘de.’”¹⁵ Despite Thwaites’s claim that his source contained the apparently correct Montagnais phrase “Tapoué Nama Nitirininfin,” his text itself reflects the variant that he deemed erroneous, reading “Tap de Nama Nitirininfin.”¹⁶ No explanation for the discrepancy is apparent. Did the editor or a member of his team confuse the two texts, and inadvertently base their transcription on the wrong variant? Did Thwaites become convinced that “Tap de Nama” was correct, and neglect to update his note? It is impossible to know for sure.

Were the 1646 Relation the only text in the edition that is attributed to one variant while bearing the marks of another, it would be easy to excuse one small error in such a massive collection. But a thorough comparison of Thwaites’s notes to his text turns up other examples. Two variants of the 1635 text contain slightly different passages describing the muskrats that European colonizers encountered for the first time in the New World. The apparently earlier variant reads thus:

On l’appelle Rat musqué, pource qu’en effect les testicules, pris au Printemps sentent le musc, en autre temps, ils n’ont point d’odeur.¹⁷

In a later edition, the same passage is slightly altered:

On l’appelle Rat musqué, pource qu’en effect une partie de son corps prise au Printemps, sent le musc, en autre temps, elle n’a point d’odeur.¹⁸

¹⁴ JR 28: 253.

¹⁵ JR 28: 310–11.

¹⁶ JR 29: 225.

¹⁷ James C. McCoy, *The Jesuit Relations of Canada, 1632–1673* (Paris: Arthur Rau, 1937), 40.

¹⁸ McCoy, *The Jesuit Relations*, 44.

Thwaites's note at the beginning of the 1635 Relation tells us that his source was "the copy of the first issue in Lenox Library," and his bibliographical note indicates that this text identified testicles as the source of a muskrat's odor.¹⁹ One would therefore expect to find in Thwaites's text the first version of the above passage, the one that apparently followed the missionary author's own wording instead of the alteration made by an editor in Paris prior to a subsequent printing. But the text instead reflects the apparently later variant, both on the question of muskrat odor and in two other small differences.²⁰

In other cases, it is not clear whether the editor strayed from his stated source, or simply altered the text of a Relation on his own to correct the apparent errors of the seventeenth-century printer. In his general preface to the series, Thwaites explains his policy of correcting errors that he thought were caused by editors and typesetters, instead of the Jesuit authors themselves. Such errors included transposed, slipped, and turned letters, faulty spacing, clearly incorrect spelling, and other such obvious mistakes in setting type. Explained the editor, "Palpable blemishes like these, we have deemed it advisable to correct without specific mention; in some instances, however, the original error has been retained, and in juxtaposition the correct rendering given within brackets."²¹ Thwaites's execution of this plan unfortunately sometimes contributes to the problem of source confusion in the edition. In the case of the 1637 text, for example, the editor tells us that his source is the "original printed *Relation* (first issue), in Lenox library," and points out two minor differences between that text and an alternate edition: in his source the word "traicts" is missing the letter "i," and the word "long-temps" is printed with a hyphen before the "g" instead of after it. Both apparent errors were remedied in the variant edition, as well as in the Thwaites edition itself.²² These differences would seem to be just the kind of minor errors that the editor pledged to remedy without comment or use of brackets. On the other hand, given what this article

¹⁹ *JR* 7: 247, 306.

²⁰ *JR* 8: 44. Thwaites's text of the 1635 Relation contains a Montagnais phrase, "Mirinan oukachigakhi nimitchiminan," from the seventeenth-century edition that the editor labelled the "second issue" (*JR* 8: 37). It also includes a slightly different passage regarding the destination of a ship from France, indicating that it had been sent to "Mr le Com. De Razilly" instead of merely to the "coste de l'Acadie" (*JR* 8: 45). A table showing these differences can be found in *JR* 7: 306.

²¹ *JR* 1: x–xi.

²² *JR* 11: 272–273; 12: 214; 12: 220.

has already shown about Thwaites's lack of care in adhering to his stated sources, one has to wonder whether these are more examples of reliance on a text other than the stated source. Although the two differences mentioned above are quite minor, the question becomes potentially more troubling in light of Thwaites's own admission that a full accounting of the differences between the two editions had not been undertaken. Wrote the editor, "Possibly other changes might be found, upon a line-for-line comparison."²³ Does the edition's text of the 1637 *Relation* reflect its stated source, with the exception of some corrected typos? Or does it follow the variant edition, which may have differed from the stated source in ways for which Thwaites could not fully account? In this and in similar cases, scholars using only the *Jesuit Relations* have no way of knowing.²⁴

Perhaps as troubling as Thwaites's unreliable adherence to his stated sources is that variants like those described above are likely to remain completely unknown to scholars relying exclusively on his edition. That is because even when the editor acknowledges the existence of variants in his bibliographical notes, the text itself often contains no notes, symbols, or other indications that an alternate version exists. The examples noted above can only be found by consulting each text's bibliographical note, which is not always in the same volume as the passage containing variable text, due to Thwaites's habit of splitting individual *Relations* between two or more volumes. It seems that few scholars are likely to take the trouble to check the notes for variants when there is nothing in the text itself to suggest that there is a reason to do so.²⁵ In-text superscript numbers that correspond to endnotes occasionally are used to indicate variants that Thwaites apparently deemed more substantial, but their use seems arbitrary; Thwaites never explained how he decided which variants were worth bringing to the attention of readers and which were not.²⁶

²³ *JR* II: 273.

²⁴ More examples can be found in Thwaites's text of the 1652 and 1642 *Relations*. In both cases, it is at times not clear whether the editor corrects typos or strays from his source.

²⁵ Indeed, when I consulted the bibliographical notes in my institution's copy of the Thwaites edition, the relevant pages in many volumes were uncut, testifying to the failure of any scholar in the last century to consult that information.

²⁶ For an example of a variant that Thwaites chose to indicate clearly in his text, see *JR* 5: 270–72. Endnote 48 refers the reader to the bibliographical note, where the variant in question is discussed.

It is important to recognize that less obvious instances of variation might well be lurking undetected in the volumes of *The Jesuit Relations*. The examples noted above are limited to cases that can be found by comparing Thwaites's bibliographical notes to his text of the Relations themselves. But as McCoy and Campeau's subsequent work has shown, there are many instances of variation in the published reports of which Thwaites apparently was not aware. In light of that fact, the editor's lack of care in adhering to his sources raises the possibility that he unknowingly reproduced variants that are not accounted for in his bibliographical notes while drawing on an edition other than his stated source. Arriving at a complete understanding of Thwaites's sources and the role of variants in his edition would require a word-for-word comparison of the edition to its purported sources and other known variants, a task beyond the scope of the present article and that is, in any case, unnecessary to prove the point: Thwaites's sources were not always what he claimed.

Thwaites's lack of care in following his sources and alerting readers to variants may, in most cases, be of little practical importance. Most of the variation in the seventeenth-century editions consists of typos or seemingly minor changes in wording. On the other hand, the potential importance of such differences is hard to predict, since it depends on a scholar's particular reason for consulting the Relations. One can imagine, for example, that the substitution of "body part" for "testicles" could be interesting for scholars studying a range of subjects: early modern anatomical knowledge, the role of editors in preparing the texts for publication, taboos around body parts, etc. Thwaites's apparent mistake in presenting the Montagnais phrase, "Tapoué Nama Nitirinifin," certainly could mislead linguists who might draw on the texts for clues about Algonquian languages at the time of contact, or Jesuit linguistic knowledge. And scholars who read the texts to discern the voice, ideas, or rhetorical skill of a particular Jesuit writer, or the hand of a seventeenth-century editor, might be disappointed to learn that it is sometimes impossible to tell if particular words or phrases in the edition represent the work of one of those figures or Thwaites's own interventions. At the very least, it can be said that the lapses traced above are indicative of a lack of care on the part of the editor that should give pause to the scholars who rely on his work. Although Thwaites certainly deserves credit and gratitude for making the Relations available to scholars, his edition's accounting for and presentation of variants leaves much to be desired.

In addition to missteps in presenting the material chosen for inclusion, the Thwaites edition also omits entirely several important manuscript editions of the reports, which may have been unknown in Thwaites's time. Paul Le Jeune's 1632 *Briève Relation* exists in an alternate version, a letter that he apparently prepared for Church authorities in Rome slightly more than a week before he wrote the text that would become the published Relation. The two texts record the same events and follow a parallel organization, making the manuscript letter an important companion piece to the published Relation, one that potentially could shed additional light on events in the colony or perhaps even on the process by which the texts were prepared for publication. Similarly unaccounted for in Thwaites's edition is a little-known handwritten copy of Le Jeune's 1634 report that is housed at the French National Library. It contains several passages that apparently were present in Le Jeune's original report, but were deleted prior to publication, on the subjects of Montagnais clothing and fashion, and the errors introduced by the printer in the previous year's text.²⁷ In the absence of the long-lost original manuscripts sent to France by the missionary authors, the handwritten copy of the 1634 Relation provides an extremely rare glimpse of the hand of a seventeenth-century editor at work. Scholars relying solely on *The Jesuit Relations* would simply never know of the existence of these fascinating and valuable manuscript versions of two of the Relations.

Campeau's *Monumenta Novae Franciae*, in contrast, reflects a far more careful and thorough approach to accounting for the variety found across early editions of the Relations. The editor includes precise information about the variants on which he relied, along with commentary on other versions, in the preface to each text. Like Thwaites, Campeau sometimes makes choices about which variants to include in the body of his text. But unlike his predecessor, he consistently uses footnotes to alert readers to the differences between the particular variant he chose to reproduce and other versions of the text printed in the seventeenth century. And rather than correct perceived typographical errors without signalling his intervention,

²⁷ For more on these two versions of the 1634 text, see True, "Travel Writing, Ethnography," 109–11. The manuscript version of the 1634 Relation served as the basis for Guy Lafèche, ed., *Le Missionnaire, L'Apostat, Le Sorcier: Relation de 1634 de Paul Le Jeune* (Montréal: Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 1973). Lafèche claimed that the copy housed at the French National Library is the original manuscript sent from New France (226), a conclusion that has been convincingly disputed by Campeau (*MNF* 2: 532–34).

as Thwaites often did, Campeau offers clarifications to confusing spelling or printing errors in footnotes, or, when intervention in the text itself is unavoidable, clearly indicates what changes he has made.²⁸ In each of the cases highlighted above, Campeau notes the variants prominently, increasing the likelihood that they will be noticed and remarked upon by scholars.²⁹ Campeau's edition also includes the alternate versions of the 1632 and 1634 reports that are entirely absent from Thwaites's *Jesuit Relations*. The two versions of the 1632 text are printed separately, and Campeau's edition of the 1634 Relation includes the deleted material from the manuscript in brackets, clearly indicating its provenance in footnotes and in the preface. In addition to providing a more accurate and complete picture of the missionary reports, *Monumenta Novae Franciae* also, in cases like the 1634 text, arguably better reflects what the Jesuit authors actually wrote, as opposed to what editors in France deemed proper or worthy of inclusion. The deleted material on Montagnais clothing, for example, might well have been interesting to scholars who have cited Thwaites's version of the chapter as indicative of its seventeenth-century author's ideas about Amerindian cultures.³⁰ In sum, Campeau offers a clear and prominently displayed description of his sources and accounts carefully for variants, information that is only sometimes and obscurely available in *The Jesuit Relations*. In general, the scholarly apparatus in *Monumenta Novae Franciae* far surpasses Thwaites's edition in usefulness and rigour.

Despite its undeniable strengths, Campeau's edition is not without its own weaknesses, which probably account for the fact that some

²⁸ *MNF* 1: 258 (introduction).

²⁹ In the case of the muskrat testicles, Campeau's text reflects the original attribution of the odour to the testicles, but the second part of the sentence ("[...] en autre temps, elle n'a point d'odeur") grammatically reflects the second variant, in which "elle" referred to "une partie du corps." Despite apparently introducing a grammatical error into the text, Campeau's version arguably is superior to Thwaites's because it alerts readers to the replacement of "testicles" with "a body part" in later editions. See *MNF* 3: 75–76.

³⁰ See, for example, Melzer, *Colonizer or Colonized*, 163; and Réal Ouellet and Emmanuel Bouchard, "Nègres, Caraïbes et Sauvages du Canada dans les relations de voyage du XVII^e siècle," *Littérature et dialogue interculturel*, ed. Françoise Tétu de Labsade (Sainte-Foy: Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 1997), 218. The analysis of these scholars, although interesting, does not account for the material that Le Jeune wrote in the manuscript and that was eliminated by editors prior to publication, apparently due to their reliance on Thwaites and resulting lack of awareness of the deleted material.

scholars acknowledge its existence, but nonetheless decline to use it. In addition to the general limitations noted above – the incompleteness due to the editor's death, the relative obscurity of the edition and lack of electronic access, and its lack of English translations – Campeau's religious outlook has been off-putting to some scholars. Alain Beaulieu, for example, cites Campeau as an example of a scholar who continues to "carry the torch" for his Jesuit predecessors.³¹ Indeed, it is not difficult to find commentary in *Monumenta Novae Franciae's* critical apparatus that is more reflective of the editor's religious viewpoint than of the state of scholarship on the mission and the Amerindian groups with which the Jesuits were in contact. To cite just one example, the editor explains the scant details that Jesuits provided on Montagnais religious beliefs by claiming that "The rapid adoption of Christianity by the same Montagnais then relegated to oblivion their religious traditions."³² This explanation apparently reflects the editor's belief that the Montagnais were quick to realize the superiority of Christianity and wholly abandon their own traditions, and is out of step with scholars who do not view colonial contact exclusively – or even primarily – through a religious lens. Confined as they are to notes and introductory comments on the texts, Campeau's at times faith-based interpretations are easily ignored, and do not, in this author's opinion, outweigh the many fine aspects of his edition.

A third French-language option exists for scholars who reject both Thwaites and Campeau. The loss in a fire at the library of the Quebec Parliament in 1854 of what was, at the time, the only known complete collection of seventeenth-century editions of the Relations prompted the first relatively complete modern edition of the texts.³³ The three-volume *Relations des Jésuites contenant ce qui s'est passé de plus remarquable dans les missions des pères de la Compagnie de Jésus dans la Nouvelle-France*, sponsored by the government of Quebec and

³¹ Beaulieu, *Convertir les Fils de Caïn*, 157.

³² MNF 2.93 introduction. My translation. "L'adoption rapide du christianisme par les mêmes Montagnais a ensuite relégué dans l'oubli leurs traditions religieuses." For another example, see Codignola, "Jesuit Writings," 238.

³³ Léon Pouliot, *Etude sur les Relations des Jésuites de la Nouvelle-France (1632–1672)* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1940), 31. For more on the history of this edition, see Georges-Émile Giguère, "Sous les Auspices du Gouvernement Canadien," *Revue de l'Histoire de l'Amérique Française* 8, no. 3 (1954): 359–79; and Thomas Charland, "À qui devons-nous la réédition des Relations des Jésuites?" *Revue de l'Histoire de l'Amérique Française* 3, no. 2 (1949): 210–26.

published by Augustin Côté, appeared in 1858. Despite its historical significance and generally sound rendering of the texts, the Côté edition shares some of the limitations that hinder Campeau's *Monumenta*, without any of the counterbalancing strengths. Like Campeau's edition, the so-called "Québec Edition" offers no translations of the texts, limiting its usefulness for Anglophone scholars or those who write for an Anglophone audience. It also is less widely available in libraries than Thwaites's *Jesuit Relations*, although it is accessible online in a variety of formats.³⁴ More serious, perhaps, is that there is no supporting scholarly apparatus to speak of. The editor dutifully informs readers of the source used to establish each text, usually an unspecified Cramoisy edition, but does not include the more precise bibliographical details, explanatory notes, and commentary that are the hallmark of the more recent editions. Where Thwaites included at least some information on variants, albeit not in a particularly useful way, the 1858 edition includes none, making it perhaps the least complete of the three editions at least up to the point where Campeau's edition ends. And finally, the edition includes none of the letters, journals, and other documents that form such an important complement to the missionary reports themselves. Even letters that were, in certain variants, distributed with or published as part of the Relations for the years 1665–68 are in some cases absent.³⁵ Despite these limitations, the Côté edition, or more precisely its 1972 reprint in six volumes, has remained the edition of choice for some Francophone scholars.³⁶

If it is clear that Campeau's edition is much more rigorous and reliable than the other editions available to scholars, that still leaves Thwaites's translations as a strong selling point for the edition. And yet, the translations themselves are perhaps the most frequent target of complaints about the edition, although scholars have been divided on the seriousness, and even the general nature, of their flaws. In a

³⁴ The 1858 edition is available in at least 150 libraries, according to WorldCat. A 1972 reprint by Éditions du Jour appears to be held by fewer libraries. Perhaps the most convenient and universally accessible option for consulting this edition is Google Books.

³⁵ For more on these letters and their occasional inclusion in the Relations, see *JR* 49: 269–70; 50: 313–17; 51: 283–85.

³⁶ For examples of scholarly works that rely on this edition, see Denys Delâge, *Le pays renversé: Amérindiens et Européens en Amérique du Nord-Est – 1600–1664* (Montréal: Boréal, 1991); Normand Doiron, *L'Art de voyager: le déplacement à l'époque classique* (Sainte-Foy: Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 1995); and Marie-Christine Pioffet, *La tentation de l'épopée dans les Relations des jésuites* (Sillery: Septentrion, 1997).

volume intended to correct and clarify Thwaites's edition, the Jesuit priest Joseph Donnelly wrote that "One has the feeling that the translators were people who did not know French or Italian well, who certainly knew very little history, and who knew practically nothing about the Society of Jesus."³⁷ Much of Donnelly's book is devoted to correcting errors introduced by the translators' apparent lack of familiarity with those subjects. Another scholar, Maureen Korp, blasted the edition for bias, partly due to faults she found in its translations, and called it "a minefield of misinformation, perhaps even disinformation, concerning the indigenous peoples of North America."³⁸ Codignola has dismissed that argument as an unfair anachronism, an attempt to hold the editor to standards that only arose many decades after his edition appeared, and concluded that "Thwaites's translations could be better but are substantially sound."³⁹ Most scholars who write in English seem content to rely on Thwaites's translations without examining them too closely or commenting on their deficiencies, a tendency that may be reinforced by the single most convenient and accessible website presenting the Relations: Creighton University's free site devoted to the translations, without the corresponding French text.

Despite the apparent *de facto* consensus that Thwaites's translations are not perfect, but good enough, any prolonged and careful study of the Jesuit missionary reports in English is bound to turn up many potentially significant mistakes. In his 1633 Relation, for example, mission Superior Paul Le Jeune described Montagnais religious beliefs and practices. Wrote Le Jeune:

Je confesse que les sauvages n'ont point de prières publiques et communes, ny aucun culte qu'ils rendent ordinairement à celui qu'ils tiennent pour Dieu, et que leur cognoissance n'est que ténèbres.⁴⁰

Thwaites's edition translates the sentence as follows:

I confess that the savages have no public or common prayer, nor any form of worship usually rendered to one whom they hold as God, and their knowledge is only as darkness.⁴¹

³⁷ Donnelly, *Thwaites's Jesuit Relations*, 22.

³⁸ Maureen Korp, "Problems of Prejudice in the Thwaites's Edition of the *Jesuit Relations*," *Historical Reflections / Réflexions Historiques* 2, no. 2 (1995): 261–76 (261).

³⁹ Codignola, "Jesuit Writings," 234.

⁴⁰ *MNF* 2: 433.

⁴¹ *JR* 5: 153.

The inexplicable translation of “*ténèbres*” as “darkness” rather than “shadows” substantially alters the meaning of the sentence. A shadow bears traces of the object that casts it, and preserves, at a minimum, its bare outline. “Darkness” carries no such suggestion of an imperfect, obscure version of a source object. The importance of this distinction is clear in light of the Jesuits’ attempts to implant Christianity among the Amerindian groups of New France, and to convince their readers of that project’s utility and likelihood of success. Jesuit efforts to convert Amerindians often involved building on their existing knowledge, and explaining it in terms of Christianity, in order to facilitate conversions while simultaneously suggesting to readers that Amerindians were God’s children as much as Europeans were, and could be made to believe it.⁴² A scholar closely reading the English text of Le Jeune’s account of Montagnais beliefs could easily be misled by this imprecise translation into concluding that the Jesuits saw their Amerindian interlocutors’ religious knowledge as a blank slate.

The above mistranslation is by no means an isolated example, and such seemingly minor – but potentially significant – errors appear frequently in the edition.⁴³ It would be a tedious and monumental undertaking to account for all of the translation errors in the Thwaites edition, but a handful of additional examples should suffice to show that faulty translations are indeed a frequent occurrence therein. In Jérôme Lalemant’s 1647 Relation, the reputedly vicious Iroquois’ hunt (*chasse*) for other men becomes a mere “chase.”⁴⁴ In Le Jeune’s 1634 text, an observation that the Montagnais were preoccupied only with living and eating, to the exclusion of all more refined and cerebral pursuits, becomes under the translator’s hand an exclusive interest in “eating and drinking.”⁴⁵ And in Jean de Brébeuf’s 1636 description of Huron beliefs about the creation of the world, the verb “suppose” (*supposer*) is rendered in one instance as “think,” a change that seems to suggest that the Huron belief was based on rational reflection

⁴² See Micah True, “Retelling Genesis: The *Jesuit Relations* and the Wendat Creation Myth,” *Papers on French Seventeenth Century Literature* 34, no. 67 (2007): 465–84.

⁴³ More examples of faulty or inelegant translations can be found in Donnelly’s *Thwaites’s Jesuit Relations*, as well as in an unsigned review of *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents: Travels and Explorations of the Jesuit Missionaries in New France, 1610–1791*, by Reuben Gold Thwaites, *Journal of the American Geographical Society of New York* 28, no. 4 (1896): 428–31.

⁴⁴ *JR* 30: 229.

⁴⁵ *JR* 7: 7–9.

rather than mere supposition.⁴⁶ From the perspective of an historian, Codignola may be right that the translations are “substantially sound,” in that they rarely distort basic facts. But the mistranslations that plague the edition might be far more important for the scholars of literature who have been increasingly interested in the Relations in recent decades, and who interpret the texts by carefully reading and analyzing words, phrases, and passages.⁴⁷ Although it is perhaps not fair to ascribe a cause – such as prejudice or ignorance – to faulty translations made by a team about which little is known, the result is clear: Thwaites’s renderings often change the meaning of passages in subtle ways.

An alternative to the standard translations recently has appeared, but regrettably does not appear poised to become the standard English-language edition. The Canadian Jesuit William Lonc has published eight volumes of translations of the texts in his series *Early Jesuit Missions in Canada*, covering approximately half of the series. The new translation is based on Campeau’s *Monumenta Novae Franciae*, but consists mostly of a “fine-tuning” of Thwaites’s translations, to which Lonc acknowledges his debt.⁴⁸ The result seems to be a sound English-language version of Campeau’s rigorous work. To return to the example cited above, Lonc renders the French word “ténèbres” as “shadow” in the passage describing Montagnais knowledge of creation, a more faithful translation than Thwaites’s “darkness” and one that preserves the implication of imprecise knowledge on the part of the Montagnais. Despite its promise, however, a number of factors likely will limit the influence of Lonc’s new translation. First, it is at least so far incomplete, a condition that is unlikely to change as long as its source, the Campeau edition, remains unfinished. To displace Thwaites, any new translation will need to match its scope. An alternative also will have to rival the easy access that scholars currently enjoy to the century-old edition. On this score, Lonc’s translation falls

⁴⁶ JR 10: 125–27.

⁴⁷ Some sense of the scale and scope of literary approaches to the Jesuit Relations can be found in Micah True, “The Jesuit Relations,” *Oxford Bibliographies in American Literature*, eds. Jackson R. Bryer and Paul Lauter (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013); and Guy Laflèche, “L’analyse littéraire des Relations des Jésuites,” *Recherches Amérindiennes au Québec* 30, no. 1 (2000): 103–8; 30, no. 2 (2000): 89–93; 30, no. 3 (2000): 101–9. Laflèche’s at times polemical bibliography is especially representative of work by francophone scholars.

⁴⁸ William Lonc, ed., *Early Jesuit Missions in Canada*, 35 vols. (Toronto: Lonc, 2001–11), 14:1.

short. The volumes are self-published and are not available online, and appear to be held in the collections of fewer than fifty libraries. Finally, the new translation does not match a key convenience of Thwaites's *Jesuit Relations*, the placement of the English versions of the texts on pages facing the original French. It is also disappointing that although Lonc faithfully translates Campeau's rich and helpful notes and prefatory materials, he does not include the information provided in footnotes about variants to the Relations that, as argued above, give scholars a more accurate sense of the variability of the texts than any of the other scholarly editions. Though apparently of sufficient quality to rival what Thwaites and his team produced, Lonc's translations seem unlikely to compete seriously with the older edition unless these limitations are addressed.

In general, then, it can be said that while Thwaites, Campeau, and others who have sought to make the Relations more accessible to scholars deserve our profound gratitude – for without them, studying and writing about the New France Jesuits would be much more difficult – none of the available editions is entirely satisfactory. As recently as fifteen years ago, this situation appeared poised to change, at least for those who can read French. *Monumenta Novae Franciae*'s seventh volume had just been published, including the missionaries' annual reports up to 1650, prompting Codignola to declare that "The battle between Campeau and Thwaites is, or should most definitely be, over," and that the former had won decisively, a judgment that he recently repeated.⁴⁹ What Codignola could not have foreseen is that Campeau's death would leave his promising work unfinished, and that digitization projects would make Thwaites's edition easier than ever to access and use. The result is that, perhaps now more than ever, the question of which edition scholars ought to prefer is vexed: should we use the century-old standard edition, which despite its unreliable accounting for sources, mediocre translations, and smaller collection of related documents at least includes the final decade of the Relations, and is easily accessed by anyone with an Internet connection? Should we rely on Campeau's more rigorous, but unfinished and less accessible edition, which also has the handicap of not including English translations? Or should we eschew both of those options and prefer the 1858 Côté edition or even the seventeenth-century originals, which, although lacking in scholarly apparatus and

⁴⁹ Codignola, "Jesuit Writings," 238.

mute on the subject of variants, at least spare scholars from Campeau's religious commentary?

This author's practice over the course of years of study of the Relations has been to rely on *Monumenta Novae Franciae* whenever possible, using *The Jesuit Relations* only for the years not covered by the more recent edition, and then only with great care. When quoting from the texts in English, Thwaites's renderings are always verified against the French text, preferably Campeau's edition. Although it is possible in this way to arrive at a more complete and accurate understanding of the texts as they were published in the seventeenth century, and to overcome the shortcomings of the standard translations, it is a cumbersome procedure, and one that probably is impractical for many scholars who do not have access to all of the various editions. What may be truly needed is a new complete edition, one that could match the bilingual convenience and accessibility of Thwaites as well as the scholarly rigour of the incomplete and harder-to-find Campeau edition. Such a project would be a massive undertaking, even if one of the existing editions could serve as a starting point, and would surely take many years to complete. But in the face of the current array of imperfect options, a new, rigorous, bilingual, and electronic edition may be just what is needed.

SOMMAIRE

Il peut être malaisé de surestimer l'influence qu'ont exercée les Relations des Jésuites du XVII^e siècle en Nouvelle-France dans les recherches sur l'époque coloniale en Amérique du Nord et les tribus iroquoises et algonquiennes qui la peuplaient. Après un survol des principaux textes les plus largement admis par les historiens, il est surprenant de constater qu'il n'existe présentement aucune édition critique définitive sur laquelle peuvent s'appuyer les chercheurs dont une bonne majorité d'entre eux ne semblent pas même être au fait des limites que pose l'édition la mieux connue. Cet article relance le long débat portant sur les mérites respectifs de deux éditions en vue, soit *Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents* de Reuben Gold Thwaites et *Monumenta Novae Franciae* de Lucien Campeau et apporte un nouvel éclairage sur des aspects qui n'ont pas encore été abordés jusqu'à maintenant. Même si de nombreux chercheurs continuent

de privilégier l'édition centenaire de Thwaites, il n'y a pas lieu de négliger pour autant celle de Campeau beaucoup plus récente jusqu'à ce que paraisse une nouvelle édition qui viendrait combler les lacunes décelées dans les ouvrages actuellement en circulation.