

In truth, an enclosed Ursuline convent in Tours

was too small a world for the religious energy of Marie Guyart de l'Incarnation and for her daring. For the spiritual heroes of the Catholic Reformation, these traits were best expressed in the quest for martyrdom. Martyrdom was not a passive affair, a mere acceptance of meritorious suffering and death, as in the sanctification of the Lord's name approved by Glikl bas Judah Leib. Martyrdom was a prize one sought, a mobiliser for audacious action, a priming of that flesh already disciplined by nettles, an enflaming of the heart – the seat of bravery – already fueled by union with the heart of Christ. Canada's terrors made it a splendid place to follow Christ's footsteps, especially for women: Father Le Jeune called for virtuous women to come there to instruct “the savage girls”, but added that they “would have to surmount the fear natural to their sex”. So much the better for Mother Marie. As she wrote to Dom Raymond de Saint Bernard in 1635, “I visualise the travail, both on the sea and in the country; I visualise what it is to live with Barbarians, the danger of dying there of hunger or cold, the many occasions when one might be seized...and I find no change at all in the disposition of my spirit.”

The Tours convent was also too restricted for what we might call the “universalising” impulse in Marie Guyart. For this woman who had never left the Touraine region and had only occasionally ventured outside the walls of her city who seems never to have read any travel literature except for a life of François de Xavier and the

Jesuit Relations, the Christ who had shed his blood for all people, the Christ who would one day return as king of all nations, bore her in spirit to every corner of the inhabited world:

I saw, in inner certainty, demons triumphing over those poor souls, ravishing them from the domain of Jesus Christ, our divine master and sovereign, who had ransomed them with his precious blood... I could not bear it. I embraced all these poor souls, I held them in my breast, I presented them to the Eternal Father, saying to him that it was time he did justice in favor of my Spouse, that he knew well that he had promised him all the nations for his inheritance... "Oh, Father, why are you so tardy? It's a long time since my Beloved shed his blood !"

... And the Holy Spirit, which possessed me, led me to say to the Eternal Father, "... I am learned enough [*assez savante*] to teach of [Christ] to all nations. Give me a voice powerful enough to be heard at the ends of the earth, to say that my divine Spouse is worthy of reigning and being loved by all hearts..." And in my excitement and my longing, without searching for them, but impelled by the Holy Spirit, I produced for the Eternal Father the passages from the Apocalypse that spoke of this divine king of all nations.

From Women on the margins : three seventeenth-century lives,
Natalie Zemon Davis. (Harvard University Press, 1995)

NATALIE ZEMON DAVIS, after retiring from a long and splendid career as a historian at Princeton University, continues to teach at Toronto University in Canada. Among her many important books, the most widely known is probably *The Return of Martin Guerre* which has been translated into 22 languages. In 2009 she was awarded the Holberg Memorial Prize for her narrative approach as "one of the most creative historians writing today."