

## Notes and/et Documents

### Louis Riel as a Latin Poet\*

by Thomas Flanagan and John Yardley

Louis Riel composed a good deal of verse in French as well as in English, although his efforts in the latter language never rose above the level of doggerel. To this can now be added a recently discovered manuscript of a poem in Latin, which is printed here because of its biographical interest.

In 1966 the Provincial Archives of Manitoba acquired an extensive body of correspondence and other papers that belonged to Louis Riel. One of the most interesting items in this collection is a notebook of poems composed by him as a young man.<sup>1</sup> The book, 80 pages in length, contains about three dozen poems, all except two of which are in Riel's hand (the two exceptions seem to have been written by his fiancée). Although not every composition is dated, most of the items appear to have been entered in chronological order. The first poem is dated January 15, 1864; the last two concern Riel's departure from Montreal, which took place on June 19, 1866. All of the notebook is in French except the one Latin poem "Incendium" which is given below.

In 1858 Riel had been sent by Bishop Taché to study with the Sulpician Fathers at the Petit Séminaire de Montréal. It was expected that after completion of the classical curriculum Riel would enter the priesthood. But on March 8, 1865, only a few months before he would have finished his course, he was dismissed from the college. The reasons are not entirely clear, but the most likely explanation is that having fallen in love and hoping to marry, he was no longer willing to submit to the strict discipline of the institution. His father had also died about a year before, an event which profoundly saddened the young man. It is possible that concern over the future of his mother and younger brothers and sisters prompted him to seek a career in the secular world as a way of providing for them. In any event, the poetry in this notebook is of particular interest because it spans this decisive and yet poorly understood period of Riel's life.

Riel's only Latin poem is by no means flawless. Sometimes he is guilty of grammatical errors (e.g. *sonassent* in 34, *exurentia* used intransitively in 49, *acris* as an ablative plural in 67); and he is not averse to using unusual or unpoetic words which would not have appeared in the work of a Roman poet (e.g. *antlia* in 7, *rudera* in 27). Occasionally, however, there are non-Latin forms which he uses deliberately for effect, and with some success, too (*horrisonans* in 9, for

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instance, and *turbatim* in 8). As for metre, most of the lines do scan. Only in 25 and 53 are there major flaws (where *prōdēndō* must be scanned as *prōdēndō* and *jūdicīā* as *jūdicīā*), though there are caesura problems in a couple of lines (31 and 63). The greatest defect in Riel's metrics is his heavy use of spondees, a fault to which beginners in Latin hexameters are particularly prone. In Riel's case, only twenty-eight of the seventy-eight lines in the poem have more than one dactyl outside the fifth foot.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, one must concede that, despite grammatical and metrical defects, not many undergraduates, or even graduates, at our universities today could produce a better effort. We have rendered the text exactly as found in the manuscript, including manifest errors as well as the diacritical marks used by Riel in a few places to indicate long vowels.

Unfortunately "Incendium" cannot be dated with precision. Its place near the end of the notebook suggests 1866 or late 1865; but on the other hand it seems rather unlikely that Riel would have composed Latin hexameters after leaving school. It is probable that "Incendium" was originally a classroom exercise which he later copied into his book. Some support for this view comes from the errors in the Latin of the poem. Riel's Latin is not, as mentioned above, without its solecisms, but it is good enough for us to attribute some of the glaring errors in the poem to careless transmission from an original to the notebook. For instance, Riel's knowledge of the language was not bad enough for him to have written *vi magno* at 57, where his original was surely *vi magna*. An even better example is *fatiguat* (for *fatigat*) in 66, a corruption which clearly reveals the native tongue of the copyist. (Other possible "scribal errors" are mentioned in the notes.) If the poem was originally written as a school exercise, it could hardly have been composed before 1860-61; for that was the year when Riel was in the curriculum level known as "Versification," in which the writing of Latin verse was introduced. It is probable, however, that "Incendium" was composed later than that, perhaps in 1861-62, or 1863. Details and words in the poem recall the destruction of Troy as related in *Aeneid* 2, the great fire of Rome described by Tacitus in *Annales* 15, and the panic after the eruption of Vesuvius as described by Pliny the Younger in *Epistles* 6, 20; and these classics were not read until the two years following "Versification."<sup>3</sup>

The subject matter also suggests that "Incendium" was composed while Riel was a pupil. The poem describes a great fire which burns much of the city of Montreal. Details show that Riel had in mind the terrible conflagration of June 7, 1852. That blaze threatened the church of Notre Dame, the largest parish in the city and the historic showpiece of the Sulpicians. At that time, the Minor Seminary was nearby, not having been moved to its present location on West Sherbrooke. The seminarians, in fact, were called out to help fight the fire and formed a bucket brigade to wet down the roof of the Hôtel-Dieu,

also threatened by flames. Even though Riel did not arrive in Montreal until six years afterward, he would doubtless have heard stories about the memorable blaze, particularly since in July of 1852 there was an even more catastrophic fire which left about a sixth of the city homeless. Indeed 1852 must have seemed like the year of God's wrath; and yet to the Sulpicians it must have also seemed a sign of God's blessing that their church and college were spared from destruction.

Other details in the poem can also be traced to historical events of June 7. Riel speaks of a burned child cradled in the arms of bystanders (36-37); there was in fact such an incident. He also speaks of the fire threatening the ships in the harbour, which retreated to the middle of the river (67-69); and this happened too. Clearly Riel was transforming the memory of real events into poetry.<sup>4</sup>

But he was transforming them in another way as well. The main point of the poem is that happenings in this world are interpreted as decrees of heaven, *caeli decreta* (73). The citizens, repentant for their sins, implore mercy from heaven, but God is determined to let the fire burn until the debt is paid. Only after enormous devastation is the blaze put out by the intercession of the Blessed Virgin. Everything works, as the poem's superscript, the motto of the Jesuit order, succinctly puts it, *ad majorem Dei gloriam*.

This is of considerable interest for what it tells us about Riel's character and way of thinking. He obviously took considerable pleasure in the punishment of the wicked, which is depicted quite vividly in the first fifty lines. But he was also alive to the possibility of mercy, as shown by the poem's conclusion. These two attributes of God—his just punishment of wickedness and his merciful treatment of repentance—became the foci of Riel's later thinking about religion and politics.

This is not the only poem in the notebook which displays such a grimly moralistic attitude. Next to "Incendium" is a long piece entitled "Les hommes après le déluge," which describes Noah and his family as the receding waters finally allow their ark to touch ground. The poem goes on at great length and with obvious relish about the destruction caused by the flood. It interprets the flood as God's just punishment for man's sinfulness; but, like "Incendium," it ends on a hopeful note. Man has a future if only he will obey the word of the Lord. There is no escape from Providence which inevitably punishes the wicked and rewards the good.

This simplistic moral determinism also pervades many of the other pieces in the notebook. About a score of them are fables consciously modeled on those of La Fontaine. In the world of the fable, virtue, or at least cleverness, always prevails, while vice or stupidity leads to a bad end. In all of Riel's fables, there is never the slightest doubt about the moral. There is a penurious master who will not feed his dog and thus loses him when the poor hungry creature

gulps a piece of poisoned meat; a vain rooster who is unable to prevent his son from imitating his father; a gullible hunter who is talked out of his prey by a clever goose, etc. In sum, "Incendium," read in the context of the other pieces composed about the same time, reveals a moralistic young man with a strong streak of self-righteousness. These characteristics remained marked in Riel throughout his life, and help to account for his evolution into "the prophet of the New World," as he styled himself. When he met defeat politically, he could not believe that God would let his sufferings go unrewarded and would not punish the misdeeds of his enemies. He rationalized his setbacks according to the higher logic of Providence, and waited for the day when justice would be done to his enemies and mercy would be shown to him.<sup>5</sup>

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#### NOTES

- 1 The only scholar thus far to use this notebook is Gilles Martel, *Louis Riel: Les années de formation*. (M.A. Thesis, Sherbrooke, 1972.) He has not commented on "Incendium," however, and does not give the text.
- 2 In fact, outside the fifth foot, only one line has four dactyls, twenty-one have two, thirty-eight have one and twelve have none at all.
- 3 A syllabus of the college is included in Olivier Maurault, pss, *Le Petit Séminaire de Montréal* (Montreal, 1918), pp. 219-222.
- 4 For a description of the fires of 1852 see Kathleen Jenkins, *Montreal: Island City of the St. Lawrence* (New York, 1966) pp. 347-348. It is also possible that another source contributed in some measure to Riel's choice of theme. On December 14, 1860, St. Boniface Cathedral burned to the ground together with adjacent residential buildings. That very day Louis' sister Sara wrote her brother a vivid description of the unhappy event. At the top of her page she wrote in large letters the word "Indendie." Louis must have read the letter carefully; he corrected his young sister's faulty grammar and preserved the text, which is now in the Provincial Archives of Manitoba, Riel Collection, No. 1.
- 5 For a description of Riel's prophetic religion, see Thomas Flanagan, "Louis 'David' Riel: Prophet, Priest-King, Infallible Pontiff," *Journal of Canadian Studies* (August, 1974).

A[d] M[ajorem] D[ei] G[loriam]  
Incendium

- 1 Immanes per totam urbem distantia luctus  
Aera sonant, tinnitusque it per tecta lugubris.  
Attoniti cives confestim in turbine longo  
Concurrunt: una clamant: turbaque ruente,
- 5 Conculcata gemit magno sub pondere tellus.  
Artifices dum praecipitant iter ignibus hostes  
Antlia quaeque gerit rapidum quocumque volatum  
Atque viis multos turbatim terga sequentes  
Protrahit horrissonans: Surgunt incendia longe,
- 10 Et, vento multum furibundo, flamma laborans  
Sub tectis velox ardentibus undique lucet.  
Iratum primo monstrum toti imminet urbi.  
Vastantem illius cuncti restinguere tentant  
Vim. Truncant alii flammaram alimenta securi,
- 15 Undis oppugnant alii pestem. Aestuat humor  
Aere projectus violenter et arte metuque  
Ad sedes summas. Nec omittitur ulla salutis  
Spes. Sed totius populi conamina sanē  
Irrita. Prorumpunt invictae obstacula flammae,
- 20 Et subitō multā tegitur caligine caelum.  
Vicini exsortes agnoscunt signa sinistra.  
Afflicti nostrum regalem nube sub atra  
Montem prospiciunt ipsi: heu! jam dira per aedes  
Iam per templa furor ventorum incendia torquet.
- 25 Tecta cadunt formidandum prodendo fragorem  
Devolvuntur humo moles, vastaeque recumbunt  
Ferventes. Donec faciant nova rudera tanta.  
Ignem dum spargant citius loca proxima circum.  
Apparent quasi vesani quicumque pavore
- 30 Turba ruunt: immixta viis sunt omnia triste.  
Currus aspectavisses, animalia, gentem  
Certatim properare, simul vitare ruinam . . .  
Decurrunt . . . gemitus, voces, ingentia necnon  
Murmura confusē deturbatā aure sonassent . . .
- 35 Ante oculos complorantes quanta horrida dictu.  
Unus et ipse infans usta inter brachia matrum  
Exiit exustus . . . Labuntur dira tigilla  
Inflammata super fugientem turbine plebem,  
Excidioque gravi cum conjuge conditur uxor.
- 40 Ac aetate viri provecti hinc atque geruntur  
Illinc: concussi casu sternuntur acerbo  
Lucem perdentes, pedibus calcantur equorum

- Igniferaeque rotae calido sub pulvere volvunt.  
 Callet tempestas; reclamantemque tumultum  
 45 Res hominesque ferunt etiam longinqua per arva.  
 Praecipites fugiunt peregrini: Tristia fata  
 Nostra docent occurrentes; nec pingere possunt  
 Quidquid dixissent, mala veris cladibus aequa.  
 Millia tectorum simul exurentia caelo  
 50 Densum demittunt fumum quasi albida thura.  
 Criminibus cives contriti, tardius autem  
 Suppliciter veniam implorant corde sub imo  
 Flentes. Aspexit Deus. Ast iudicia sancta  
 Nunc prius expleri debent. Incendia crescunt . . .  
 55 Tertia pars urbis pyra jamjam immensa videtur.  
 Latē per campos sublimis flamma coruscat,  
 Pulsaque ventorum vi magno fertur ad undas  
 Sancti Laurenti, fluviorum principis ausa.  
 Saltibus immensis volvunt, Sanctaeque minantur  
 60 Dirē ignes Helenae, dulces ubi pace tabernas  
 Armati servant carpentes otia quaeque.  
 Flumen tranquillos lustrantia fulmina fluctus  
 Cernit, miratusque repente fluctuat amens.  
 Turbineum coepit tumidos agitare liquores  
 65 Non secus ac torrens voluisset vincere monstrum.  
 Ad ripas salit; et littus fervore fatiguit.  
 Horrentes portu naves stridoribus acris  
 Caelum concutiunt, nautisque timentibus altum  
 Ad fluvium promptae cedunt. Quicumque dolore  
 70 Appetere aspectat flammam sacraria dulcis  
 Virginis, et matris divae jam altaria triste  
 Comburent. Desperatis ita rebus, adorant  
 Adjunctis manibus caeli decreta, Mariam  
 Implorant. haud surda fuit placidissima virgo  
 75 Extemplō mirē ventorum flamina cessant.  
 Flamma vorax nuper qua tot mala fecerat ardens  
 Atteritur, moriturque parumper. amabile caelum  
 Nostra suo auxilio mater devincerat alma.

To the Greater Glory of God  
The Fire

Distant bells peal out their monstrous, mournful sounds through all the city, and the sad ringing goes through the buildings. Thunder-struck the townspeople immediately run together in a long crowd; together they cry out and, as the mass of people run, the earth groans beneath the heavy weight of their trampling feet (1-5). While firemen hurry on their way, every pump directs its swift jet in all directions and with its raucous clanking draws into the streets many people who follow hot on each other's heels in confusion: over a great area fires spring up, and in the furious wind the flame, hard-pressed, blazes brightly everywhere as it moves swiftly beneath the blazing roofs (6-11).

At first this angry monster threatens the whole city. Everybody tries to quench its destructive violence. Some hack away with axes at the material on which the flames are feeding; others attack the plague with water. The liquid sizzles as it is hurled by metal violently and skillfully and fearfully onto the roofs. No hope of salvation is left untried; but in vain are the exertions of the whole population. The flames burst through their obstacles unconquered and suddenly the sky is covered by a thick veil of smoke (12-20).

People living close to the city, safe from the tragedy, recognize the doleful signs. Distressed at the sight they look at our Mt. Royal beneath its black cloud. Ah, now the furious blasts of wind are twisting the cruel flames through the houses, now through the churches. Buildings collapse, producing a frightening crash (21-25). The huge ruins tumble to the ground, and lie there, vast and burning. Until they can form new and huge piles of rubble. Until they can spread the fire more quickly around the adjoining areas. People have the appearance of madmen—people who rush along fearfully in a crowd. Everything in the streets is a sad confusion (26-30). You could have seen carriages, animals, people racing each other from the disaster, and at the same time avoiding collapsing buildings . . . They run . . . groaning, shouting, deafening roars, all in a confusion would have struck and resounded in your ears . . . before your eyes you would have seen people lamenting so many incidents, grisly to describe . . . an only child, an infant, comes out burnt, passed along through the burnt arms of the townswomen . . . cruel beams fall down in flames upon the people who flee in a crowd and in this dismal calamity a wife is buried along with her husband. . . Men of advanced age are driven from this direction and that; stunned by their bitter plight they are knocked flat, losing the light of life, and they are trodden under by horses' hooves and rolled into the hot ashes by the fire-hot wheels of carts (31-43).

The calamity does not let up, and the echoing clamour of men and objects is carried even through the far-off fields. Headlong fly the country-people. They tell those they meet of our sad fate, but no matter what their words, they cannot describe our misfortunes in a manner close to the reality of the disaster. A thousand buildings, burning all at once, belch into the sky a thick smoke like white incense (44-50).

The people of our city are contrite for their sins, but too late do they, as suppliants, beg for pardon from the bottom of their hearts, weeping. God looked down upon them. But the judgements of heaven must first be fulfilled. The flames increase . . . a third of the city now looks like a huge funeral-pyre. Far and wide through the fields flickers the towering flame, and driven by the mighty force of the wind it rushes daringly to the waters of the St. Lawrence, that prince of rivers. With huge bounds the cruel fire rolls along and poses a terrible threat for Ste-Hélène, where the taverns, pleasant in peacetime, are occupied by armed soldiers enjoying their leisure (51-61).

The river sees the flashing flames licking its tranquil waters and suddenly, in amazement, produces a mad swell. The swirling monster began to torment the swollen waters just as if it wanted to overcome the flooded stream. It leaps to the banks and harasses its shoreline with heat. Ships, shuddering violently in the port, shake Heaven with the fierce shrieking of their rigging, and retire immediately, as their sailors tremble in fear, to the deep part of the river (62-69).

In sadness everyone watches the flame make its way to the shrine of the dear virgin, and now the holy mother's altar will tragically burn. In this desperate position, the people, their hands joined in prayer, pay homage to the ordinances of Heaven and beg Mary's aid (69-74).

Not unheeding was the most serene virgin. All of a sudden the blasts of the wind miraculously cease. The ravenous flame, where just now it had wrought so much havoc with its heat, weakens and suddenly dies. Our lady, in her kindness had restrained heaven by her aid and made it gentle (75-78).

#### *Notes to the Text*

(N.B. Numbers refer to lines in the Latin text. Thanks are due to Dr. Elaine Fantham of Trinity College, Toronto, for her comments on the translation and for the suggestions which will be found in the notes.)

1-20 *Panic in the city after the outbreak of fire. Attempts to extinguish it or to block its advance end in failure.*



- 3 *Turbine*: Usually a "whirlwind" or "whirling motion," here it clearly means a crowd. The usage is rare, but not unparalleled in (late) classical Latin; cf. Silius Italicus 15.627, Valerius Flaccus 2.62. Riel uses *turba*, the usual word for "crowd," in the next line (4), and this perhaps accounts for his attempt to find an alternative word here. He is clearly fond of words from the root *turb*, thinking they convey the idea of panic (cf. *turbatim*, a Riel coinage, in 8; *turbineum* in 64).
- 6 *Artifices . . . ignibus hostes*: Riel had difficulty in finding a way to express "firemen." "Craftsmen enemies of fire," the literal translation, is a somewhat pompous circumlocution and so not a very happy attempt.
- 7 *Antlia*: "pump." Properly a mechanism for raising water which resembles the Egyptian shaduf (a swinging beam, resting on a base, with a bucket attached to one end and a counterpoise to the other). Here it clearly refers to a mechanical pump of some kind.
- 8 *Turbatim*: Unparalleled in classical Latin, where the correct form is *turbate* (which would, in fact, have satisfied the metrical demands of the line). But perhaps this is not an error on Riel's part. He may be trying to get the further idea of *speed*, coining the word from *turbate* ("in confusion") and *raptim* ("hurriedly" or "quickly"). In fact the two words *raptim* and *turbate* occur together in Caesar *B.C.* 1.5.1 (*aguntur omnia raptim atque turbate*), the only example of *turbate* quoted by Lewis and Short (s.v. *turbo* 11 B).
- 8- 9 *Viis . . . horrisonans*: The Latin is strained and not altogether clear. Riel seems to mean that the noise of the pumps draws people in a hurried confusion from their homes into the streets (though one would have expected *in vias* instead of *viis* in 8). In *terga sequentes* he is perhaps trying to get the idea of people following very quickly on each other's heels.
- Horrisonans* is unparalleled in classical Latin. *Horrisonus* exists, meaning "sounding dreadfully, that makes a horrid sound" (Lewis and Short) and Riel has, on the basis of this, invented the verb *horrisonare*. The result is quite effective.
- 10 *Laborans*: "hard pressed" or, possibly, "working hard." Either way Riel is clearly referring to the intensification of the flame's brightness by the wind. The description may owe something to Tacitus' description of the great fire of Rome in 64 B.C. which was *vento citus* (*Annales* 15.38.3). If the commas (which are clear in R's text, but which could be a mistake) were removed, the line could be translated: "The flame under fierce (*multum*) pressure of the frenzied wind blazes on all sides" (Fantham).
- 12 *Imminet urbi*: Perhaps a reminiscence of Virgil *Aeneid* 1.420 (*qui plurimum urbi imminet*).
- 14 *Flammarum alimenta*: Literally "the sustenance of the flames." Perhaps inspired by Tacitus' description of the outbreak of the great fire in Rome in *Annales* 15.37.2 (*quo flamma alitur*), or Ovid *Metamorphoses* 14.532, which is, in fact, closer (*alimentaque cetera flammae*).

- 15 For *pestis* used as fire, cf. Vergil *Aeneid* 5.699 (*servatae a peste carinae*).
- 16 *Aere projectus*: Literally "hurled by bronze." For *aes* as a bowl or bucket cf. Horace *Satires* 2.3.21. Riel may have a bucket-brigade in mind, though it is difficult to see, without further knowledge of the details of the situation, how water could be hurled onto the roofs (*ad sedes summas*) from buckets. Perhaps *aes* simply refers to the metal pumps.
- Dr. Fantham has suggested that *aere* may come not from *aes* (bronze) but from *aer* (air). The opening words of the line will then scan *aere projectus*, with the final *e* of *aere* kept short before a mute and a liquid. The meaning could then be "hurled through the air," though *aere* instead of *per aera* is somewhat surprising. Perhaps the meaning is "by air," i.e. by pressure of forced air.
- 21-43 *The fire advances. The people are dejected. Some horrors of the fire described.*
- 21 *Exsortes*: cf. Tacitus, *Annales* 6.10. *exsortes periculi*.
- 25 *Prodendo*: One would have expected a participle in agreement with *tecta* rather than a gerund in the ablative case. However, such a usage is not unparalleled in classical Latin. (See Kühner-Stegman, *Ausführliche Grammatik der Lateinischen Sprache* [4th ed.; Hannover 1962] 2.1.752-3). Its more frequent use in late Latin resulted in its survival as a participle in some of the Romance languages.
- 26 *Devolvuntur moles*: For a similar start to a hexameter, cf. *Aeneid* 2.449 *devolvunt; alii strictis*, etc.
- 27- 8 *Donec faciant . . . Ignem dum*: Quite clearly separate sentences in the ms. Riel's intention appears to be to give a halting effect to the lines, to emphasize the mischievous purpose of the falling *moles*, which falls in order to form new piles of debris and to spread the fire further. (For the idea of purpose in [subordinate] *donec* and *dum* clauses, see Kühner-Stegman, 2.2.380 ff.)
- 27 *Rudera*: "Rare and not ante-Augustan" according to Lewis and Short. It cannot be without significance that the word occurs twice in as many lines in Tacitus *Annales* 15.43.4, referring to the ruins left by the great fire in Rome in 64 A.D. (cf. Suetonius *Nero* 38, also in connection with this fire).
- 29-30 *Quicumque pavore/turba ruunt*. Literally "whosoever run as a crowd from fear." The meaning is clear, but the Latin strained and clumsy.
- 31ff *Currus aspectavisses . . . sonassent*: The technique ("you might have seen" etc.) and the description are perhaps indebted to Pliny's account of the panic at Misenum after the eruption of Vesuvius (*audires ululatus feminarum, infantium quiritatus, clamores virorum*, etc: Pliny *Epistles* 6.20.14). Riel uses the comparatively rare *aspectare* (cf. 70, *appetere aspectat*) where one would expect the more usual *aspicere*.

- 34 *Deturbata aure sonassent*: *Deturbo* means "to drive, thrust or cast down, to throw or beat down" or, less frequently, "to deprive of." Here Riel seems to want it to mean simply "to beat." The literal translation would be "rumblings would have resounded confusedly in your beaten ear."
- Sonassent*: The third person plural of the perfect subjunctive of *sonare* should be *sonuissent*. The perfect form *sonavi* is so rare as to qualify *sonassent* as a grammatical error.
- 35 Understand *fuissent* after *oculos*.
- 36 *Unus et ipse infans etc.*: The picture seems to be of a baby, burnt to death, which has been pulled from the debris and which burns the arms of a group of women (*matrum*) as it is passed along from hand to hand.
- 41- 3 *Concussi . . . volunt*: Perhaps inspired by Pliny's fear in *Epistle* 6.20.13 (the panic at Misenum after the eruption of Vesuvius): "*ne in via strati comitantium turba in tenebris obteramur.*"
- 44-69 *No respite. The people are dejected. The fire reaches the St. Lawrence and attacks the ships.*
- 44 *Callet tempestas*: *Calleo* literally means "to be callous or thick-skinned," and so also "to be insensible or unfeeling." But perhaps what Riel had in mind was *calet* ("grows hot"), although this is metrically unsound.
- Tempestas* (literally "storm") is sometimes used in the sense of "calamity" or "misfortune" (see Forcellini, *Lexicon Totius Latinitatis* s.v. *Tempestas* ii).
- 44- 5 *Reclamantemque . . . arva*: Literally "Things and men carry the resounding tumult through far-off fields." *Reclamare*, which usually means "to protest" or "cry out against," here probably means simply to resound, as it does sometimes in epic. cf. Statius. *Thebaid* 3.120.
- 46 *Peregrini*: Literally "foreigners" or "strangers." After *longinqua per arva* in the previous line it is probably intended to refer to the people inhabiting these areas, the country-people. (Dr. Fantham suggests that it may refer to the resident English of West Mount.)
- 49 *Exurentia*: Riel's intransitive usage is unparalleled in classical Latin. See the *Oxford Latin Dictionary* s.v. *exuro* (p. 664).
- 50 *Albita*: Non-existent in classical Latin. What Riel meant was *albida*, a very rare word meaning "white." The error is perhaps again to be attributed to Riel's misreading of his original while transferring the poem to the notebook.
- 51 *Contriti*: Literally "worn out" or "crushed" by their sins, but Riel probably intends it to convey the idea of contrition.
- 55 *Sublimis*: "Towering" or "high," but Riel is trying to convey the notion of "sublime" or "heaven-sent" as well.

- 57 *Vi magno*: Quite clearly a slip for *vi magna* (which Riel surely had in his original).
- 58 *Ausa*: In agreement with *flamma* (56). The word order is very strained.
- 59 *Saltibus volvunt*: The aptness of flames "rolling with leaps" is perhaps questionable. For *volvare* in a similar context cf. Vergil *Aeneid* 2.706 (*incendia volvunt*).
- 59-61 *Sanctaeque minantur . . . otia quaeque*: This sentence may mean two things. *Sancta Helena* may be the Ile-de-Sainte-Hélène in the St. Lawrence, which is not far from the harbour. At that time it was the residence of the British garrison. If this is what Riel is referring to, then he is reproaching the soldiers for relaxing in their *dulces tabernae* while the citizens bear the brunt of the fire. Alternately, Riel may be referring to the Rue-Sainte-Hélène, which was in the fire district, about a block away from the Collège de Montréal. In this case, he would be picturing the soldiers as guarding shops from being looted (the garrison was in fact called out for that purpose). In either event, these lines are definitely an expression of racial hostility toward the British garrison.
- 64 *Turbineum*: "Swirling" or "twisting" (cf. Ovid *Metamorphoses* 8.557), to be taken with *monstrum* (referring to the fire) in 65.
- 66 *Fatigat*: Clearly *fatigat* was intended, and probably did exist in Riel's original. For its position at the end of the hexameter, cf. Vergil *Aeneid* 1.28 (. . . *metu caelumque fatigat*).
- 67 *Acris*: Surely intended as an ablative plural in agreement with *stridoribus*, and thus a grammatical error. The very few instances of *acris* as an ablative plural, such as *Carm. Epigr.* 629.2 and Charisius 1.117.11 ff [Keil] (where Charisius discusses the declension of *acer* and observes that Cn. Matius had treated it as a second-declension adjective) were probably unknown to Riel had not the reason for the usage here. He is presumably forced into error by metrical exigency.
- Dr. Fantham suggests *aeris* for *acris* ("with shrieks of [grinding] metal"). The notebook clearly gives the reading *acris*, but the possibility that Riel had *aeris* in his original and wrote *acris* when he transferred it to the notebook cannot be dismissed.
- 69 *Promptae*: Literally "prepared" or "ready" for something. It looks as if Riel is here using the adjective in agreement with *naves* as an equivalent for the adverb *prompte* ("promptly," "quickly").
- 69-70 *The fire makes for the church of Notre Dame, but miraculously stops short of it and abates.*
- 69 *Quicumque*: Here, clearly, used (incorrectly) as an equivalent to *omnes*.
- 76 *Qua*: "Where." But perhaps Riel had *quae* in his original, referring back to *flamma*. ("The ravenous flame which had recently wrought so much havoc.")

77 *Amabile*: Proleptic. "Had bound and thus rendered lovable."

78 *Devincerat*: This is an error, whether Riel thought he was forming the pluperfect of *devincio* or *devinco*. In the translation we have assumed that he was using the former verb, since the stem of the latter is so common that he probably would not have made a mistake in conjugation.