

Martin Robertson

## The Shepherdess of Cahuzac

from Eugénie de Guérin's *Journal*

The girl came into the church  
from changing light,  
birdsong and trees, to stone  
and a half-light.

God's body lay on the altar.  
She pitied Him there  
under the vaulted dark,  
the still, stale air.

Would not God be in His world  
of living day?  
She laid the thing in her apron,  
slipped away.

—

The priest comes to the altar,  
finds it robbed.  
Gone the silver monstrance  
with the flesh of God.

Elders gather, the bells  
ring out of time.  
What ugly villain commits  
so lost a crime?

But someone saw the girl  
with her apron-full.  
They follow her to the fields.  
She tells them all,

leads them by track and tussock,  
finally stops  
where a wild rose-bush flowers  
at the edge of a copse.

Monstrance and Host in the grass  
wink at the sky.  
They must home to the church  
and the girl must die.

—

They set a stake in the square  
for her soul's good,  
and first of the faggots they laid  
the rose from the wood.

Shriven, she raised her face  
to the sweet air  
and a voice came out of the wind  
for all to hear

“The spirit is innocent  
and comes to Me.”  
Then all around gave thanks  
on bended knee,

blessed God for a soul rescued  
from Satan's siege.  
But the girl of flesh they burned  
for her sacrilege.