

Red River Poetics: Toward a Métis Literary History

by

Matthew Jay Marchand Tétreault

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## Abstract

The study of Métis literature is a growing field in Canada, related to broader Indigenous literary studies, but also reflecting the emergence of a distinct Métis body of writing. However, there has been a tendency to compartmentalize the field into particular categories, be it through language, publication history and production (historical vs. contemporary), genre, and so on, which has hindered its broader reception and recognition as a distinct national literature. This dissertation contributes to the fields of Métis literary studies and Métis studies by providing the first literary history of the Red River Métis. It offers a comprehensive overview of Métis writing in French and English over the last two centuries, and troubles easy categorization, by surveying, mapping out, contextualizing, historicizing, and analyzing Métis literary production through its rise, ruptures—linguistic and cultural shifts—and resurgence.

Borrowing from methodologies of Indigenous literary nationalism, this literary history offers a balance of close textual analysis, historical readings, and contextualization as it presents a history of Métis writing. It centres Métis texts and scholarship in the interpretive framework of Métis literature and, without suggesting a linear development, narrates the rise of a Métis literary tradition. Admittedly incomplete, as an entirely comprehensive literary history is “impossible,” this dissertation also strikes a balance between the focused analysis of “canonical” texts, which emerge from the historical survey, and the encyclopedic survey of other Métis texts and writers which form the connective tissues of the body of Métis literature.

In Chapter One, I examine the songs of Pierre Falcon, and show how they remain key texts (both oral and written) that not only inform historical and contemporary articulations of Métis nationalism but also reveal important stylistic and poetic elements that echo in the works of subsequent writers. In Chapter Two, I survey the writing career of Louis Riel and follow a

thread of home and kinship in his poetry to demonstrate how there remains much work to be done assessing his copious poetry and prose through contemporary methodologies. In Chapter Three, I begin to link historical and contemporary Métis literary production by examining the rise of literacy in the North-West, and reveal how, although attenuated, Métis literary production persisted at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, by surveying the careers and select excerpts of texts from writers such as Alexander Kennedy Isbister, Sara Riel, Louis Schmidt, Alexandre DeLaronde, as well as writings by L'Union nationale métisse Saint-Joseph du Manitoba, and briefly, Jim Brady. Chapter Four reveals how in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, Métis literature was largely kept alive through the labours of women, such as Marie Rose Smith, Marie-Thérèse Goulet-Courchaine, and then re-invigorated by Maria Campbell and Beatrice Mosionier. Chapter Five presents a broad survey of the last thirty-odd years of Métis literary production, and analyzes select texts from Joanne Arnott, Gregory Scofield, Marilyn Dumont, Rita Bouvier, and Katherena Vermette to consider not only how dispossession, settler-colonialism, language loss, and violence, but how processes of cultural and historical recovery also mark contemporary Métis literature.

Métis writing offers a critical glimpse into how Métis writers have historically perceived themselves, how they perceive themselves now, and how they will likely perceive themselves and the world in the future. While one of the aims of this project is to map out the body of Métis writing, I dwell on notable texts to consider how they shape, re-shape, build, and trouble what we have come to see as Métis literature, and I recognize the emergence of a Métis literary tradition.

## **Dedication**

For Lisa Marie Bergen and Geneviève Marie Tétreault

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## Introduction — What Is Métis Writing?

Broadly interdisciplinary, yet rooted in literary studies, this dissertation engages in questions of race, indigeneity, and national identity as it traces the literary history of the Red River Métis. It considers not only *what* is Métis literature, but *where* is Métis literature. That is, in recognizing the role of literature as a site of cultural and national definition, I locate, survey, historicize, and contextualize Métis literary production from its rise, through its ruptures, to its resurgence, in order to better consider how generations of Métis writers have varyingly constructed, negotiated, and articulated their identity and experiences. Dwelling on notable texts, but also tracing such articulations in “lesser” known texts, I consider how they have shaped and re-shaped what we come to see as Métis literature, and show an emerging Métis literary tradition.

Although much ink has been spilled recounting Métis political history, and increasingly by Métis scholars themselves, along with literary criticism examining particular aspects of Métis literature, there remains a lack of a robust, comprehensive, comparative literary history. In the study of Métis writing, there is still a tendency to segment Métis texts and authors by historical or linguistic categories. Though numerous articles examine individual writers or select texts, few parse disparate Métis texts and literary scholarship to envision and theorize a body of Métis writing as a distinct literary tradition. This dissertation contributes to the field of study of Métis literature by offering the first book-length study of the writing of the Red River Métis. My aim is to trace and analyze Métis literary production from the early 19<sup>th</sup> century to the present, mapping out the trajectories of writing, contextualizing the conditions of its production, and examining the ways that Métis writers have imagined and discursively constructed their identities, relationships, and nation, by keeping Métis writing at the centre of the analysis. Taking a largely chronological approach, I variously catalogue and examine texts from over two-centuries of production, which

include, among others: Pierre Falcon's songs; Louis Riel's prose and poetry; the discursive resistance of L'Union nationale métisse St-Joseph du Manitoba during the "forgotten years"; the writings of Maria Campbell; and the resurgence of literary production in the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries with the works of Gregory Scofield, Marilyn Dumont, and Katherena Vermette. I consider works produced in English and French to not only outline the multilingual production of Métis writing, but to trace the cultural ruptures which mark and shape Métis literary history.

In approaching a disparate body of works, temporally, geographically, and linguistically distended, variously produced, and published (sometimes belatedly) across this vast swathe of the North-West, or what largely encompasses the present-day Canadian provinces of Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta, an important question arises: what constitutes a Métis text? While the dissertation's title, "Red River Poetics," suggests an abiding concern with poetry and verse forms, I use "poetics" to include prose fiction, non-fiction, and other modes of creative writing, and, as I elaborate below, I use "Red River" to refer to the broader Métis nation beyond, but historically linked through culture, kinship, and economic ties to the Métis people that lived, and still live, in southern Manitoba. In this broad survey, an examination of the development of Métis writing sharpens the consideration of Métis literature and the emergence of Métis literary arts. While Métis literature shares many elements with Métis oral culture, I do not suggest that Métis writing arises out of the oral tradition, or that oral culture gives way to literary culture. Rather, as Métis writing emerges, and operates almost in parallel with oral culture, it initially serves a different function than oral storytelling. Early Métis writing is less concerned with the transmission of traditional stories, myths, legends, tales, and so on, than with the communication of particular—economic or political—concerns, internally and externally (to other Indigenous people as well as non-Indigenous people): consider the letter signed by the "four chiefs of the

half-breeds” (MacLeod and Morton 29-30), and delivered to the Hudson’s Bay Company in 1815, during the Pemmican Wars; the 1847 petition against the HBC’s “despotic sway” (1), whose introduction was penned by Alexander Kennedy Isbister, and submitted to the British Government; or the multitude of documents, orders, letters, bill of rights, and such written by Louis Riel and other members of the provisional government at Red River in 1869-70. Aside from political texts, diary and letter writing also emerged as areas of literary expression, and some, such as Louis and Sara Riel’s letters, not only provide significant context for political concerns, and insights into 19<sup>th</sup> century Métis culture, but demonstrate eloquence and early aesthetic impulses. As I discuss in Chapter Three, the rise of Métis literary culture in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century is in many ways also linked to the emergence of different socio-economic classes, particularly in more “urban” centres such as the Red River Settlement, which had, as early as the 1830s, dozens of boys and girls attending schools. Given the breadth of Métis kinship networks across the Prairies, however, class divisions are not clean-cut, and are undoubtedly muddied by intersections of race, gender, religion, and language, yet they present a useful framework through which to trace and examine the emergence of diverging wordsmithing and literary traditions. As educational institutions were often run by Christian religious (notably Catholic and Anglican) orders, early Métis writing is influenced by European standards and mores, and we can trace this influence through notions like the “progress of civilization” as articulated in the writings of Louis and Sara Riel, Louis Schmidt, and later writers working with L’Union national métisse.

While I suggest a rise of Métis literary culture in parallel with oral culture, it is crucial to note that the two are not wholly isolated, but are in some instances mutually influencing. Jacques Julien shows, for instance, how through repeated transcription and dissemination, Pierre Falcon’s songs became integrated into both literary and oral traditions. More than simply blurring the line

between forms, the intersection of oral and literary traditions also informed and impelled Métis literary production in both direction and aesthetics: the “documentary” nature of Falcon’s songs, for example, resonates generations later with the prose style of some writers, as does his use of satire and sardonic humour; and even Riel, trained in more formal, literary styles, is occasionally drawn to oral forms as shown in the songs he penned. Orality continues to mark Métis texts.

Aside from considering questions of writing modes and forms, and acknowledging the influence of writings from political documents to letters, and oral culture from songs to stories, there remains another issue to address when determining what makes a Métis text: who is Métis? The Métis are a post-contact Indigenous people of the northern Plains. As stated above, there has been much written on Métis ethnogenesis and early history, and in the last decade, a number of works have de-coupled and shifted discourse away from racialized conceptions of Métis identity, toward more historically and culturally specific conceptions of Métis peoplehood and nationhood as articulated by Métis writers themselves. I adopt the definition by Chris Andersen, who uses “‘Métis’ to refer to the history, events, leaders, territories, language, and culture associated with the growth of the buffalo hunting and trading Métis of the northern Plains” (24). To elaborate on the role that Red River played in the complex economic and kinship networks that spanned the North-West, Andersen describes the Red River Settlement, along with Fort Edmonton, as the “beating heart[s]” of the Métis nation, which facilitated the circulation of people and goods (qtd. in Stirling 2016). Building on Andersen’s description, Zoe Todd likens the rivers, creeks, and lakes of the Lake Winnipeg watershed to arterial networks along which “flo[w] ... people, stories, life, and labour ... [and also inform] the legal-political consciousness of ... the Métis” (qtd. in Adese et al. 12). Jean Teillet shows in her book—whose title, *The North-West Is Our Mother*, is drawn from Riel’s address to the jury at his trial in 1885 (and which I briefly touch on

in Chapter Two)—how the Red River Settlement functioned as a nexus, a critical site of Métis political expression, action, and national resistances (151) which informed and undergirded a broad Métis nationalism across the North-West. The first resistance, culminating in the incident at Seven Oaks in 1816, “was against the Selkirk Settlers” (151); the second resistance, she argues was the Sayer trial, when on 17 May 1849, armed Métis from around St. Boniface crossed the Red River and surrounded the Hudson’s Bay Company courthouse in Fort Garry to protest the trial of Guillaume Sayer, a Métis man who, along with three other men, had been arrested and charged with illegally trafficking in furs. Though Sayer was found guilty, the court’s decision to avoid punishment, an admission of its inability to enforce its rules, effectively shattered the HBC monopoly. The third is the armed resistance at Red River in 1869-70, when a Métis-led provisional government negotiated Manitoba’s entry into the Canadian Confederation. The fourth resistance to which Teillet refers is the North-West Resistance of 1885, when Métis at Batoche confronted Canada over outstanding land rights and other issues (311). To Teillet’s list we might also add the Battle of Grand Coteau, in 1851, when Métis buffalo hunters from White Horse Plains (or St. François-Xavier) confronted a large group of Yanktonai Dakota, in present-day North Dakota, as an event demonstrating Métis sovereignty on the northern Plains.<sup>1</sup>

The question of Métis identity remains complicated however by geographic distances, linguistic, cultural, and religious differences. Without over-stating or immediately dwelling on divisions, we must acknowledge that differences existed between 19<sup>th</sup> century French-speaking Métis and English-speaking “Half-breeds” at Red River. Divisions and differences can be seen in their respective perspectives and positions as recorded in the minutes of the conventions during the Red River Resistance in 1869-70; but we can also observe how such differences were set

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<sup>1</sup> This introductory paragraph on Métis history and identity is necessarily concise as I touch in detail upon historical events and textual articulations of identity throughout the dissertation. For more on Métis history and identity, see

aside as they worked together in the operation of the provisional government (for example, an English-speaker, James Ross, served as a minister under Riel). As I touch upon later, such differences and divisions would be further minimized in the mid-to-late 20<sup>th</sup> century when Métis political reorganization gained steam. Whereas French (or French-Michif) languages and Catholicism had served as sorts of essential indicators of Métis identity as opposed to a “Half-breed” identity, these indicators were de-coupled from exclusive identifiers, and re-positioned as indicators of internal diversity. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the term “Métis” would come to incorporate descendants of both the 19<sup>th</sup> century French-speaking Métis and English-speaking “Halfbreeds”. As some descendants of historical “Halfbreeds” note, this unity is occasionally contested. Gregg Dahl argues that “[t]he preference for the term ‘Métis’ can ... be characterized as an instance of remediation by exaggeration. In order to rid themselves of the English label, the Métis insist that *all* mixed-heritage people use the French label” (124). While a shift away from more racialized understandings of Métis identity has occurred, genealogical considerations remain, linking both historical and contemporary Métis people not through a biological emphasis, but through kinship and relation. Returning to the literary question, broadly speaking, a Métis text is one produced by a writer descended from and connected to the people, culture, and history outlined above. I argue that the study of Métis literary history is critical to understanding how Métis writers have written about themselves as individuals and as a people—how they have imagined and articulated being Métis and how they perceive the world. In addition to revealing and celebrating a living culture, this dissertation demonstrates, by tracing the contradictions, and shifts in cultural emphasis and language—from articulations of identity, language, and religion, to how Métis writers construct historical narratives, take up Louis Riel, to express concerns for or about their community—how historical articulations of Métis experiences both reify and complicate contemporary narratives.

## Contemplating a Métis Literary Canon

While one of the aims of this project is to map out and survey the body of Métis writing, as well as re-integrate francophone Métis culture into contemporary Métis Studies, I also dwell on notable texts to consider how they shape, re-shape, build, or rupture what we have come to see as Métis literature. Working with David Perkins's insights on the "impossibility" of writing literary history, because "representation and explanation can never be complete," and thinking through "the question [of] how much incompleteness is acceptable" (13), I began by assembling a comprehensive list of Métis writings. From this list, I identified notable texts and writers to read closely, like Falcon, Louis Riel, and Campbell, and so on; then, striving for comprehensive representation, I added some writers and texts to represent periods, communities, linguistic and cultural gaps located in the works of the first group, and for measured consideration of broader trends and linkages, such as Isbister's introduction to the 1847 petition against the HBC, a brief look at Sara Riel's letters, the discursive resistance of L'Union nationale métisse, the works of Marie Rose Smith and Marie-Thérèse Goulet-Courchaine (Manie Tobie) in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. Even as I touch on the intrinsic value of the works that I examine, like in my reading of Falcon's songs, I initially determined which texts to examine through extrinsic factors. While I strive to centre the writing in my analysis, the dissertation tends at times toward a "history of writers and not of *writing*" (Guillory 63) as it narrates the emergence of a Métis literary tradition through the disparate works of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, as Perkins argues that "the function of narrative in literary history is explanation" (45), and in light of the changes, the challenges, and the struggles brought on by settler-colonialism in Métis communities over the last century and a half, some explanation is necessary to contextualize not only the production of Métis texts, but also the *lack*



of production during certain periods. As Perkins contends, striking such balance is difficult:

[L]iterary history loses focus on texts if it tries to exhibit much of their context. This causes acute practical difficulties in the writing of literary histories. On the one hand, literature must not be engulfed and lost from view in representations of the total historical process of which literature is a part. On the other hand, the social and historical context must not be relegated to an introduction or to separate chapters or parts of the book. For, in this case, the context inevitably becomes background, that is, a nexus of data loosely related to the texts themselves, the reader being required to do most of the relating. (127)

In terms of Métis literary history, context is crucial to explaining the gaps in the history formed by the absence of “literary” production, significant linguistic changes, and later shifts in cultural focus. Although I take a narrative, and mostly chronologically linear approach, in a sense telling the story of Métis writing, I am careful to not overly frame it as one of progress and development due in large part to the disparate and at times anachronistic or belated publication history of some texts, such as Peter Erasmus’s memoir, Louis Goulet’s memoir, or a significant portion of Riel’s poetry. I would argue that a Métis literary tradition is still emerging because aside from the issue of the belated publication noted above, the formation of a distinctly Métis writing community is relatively recent (late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries), as previously Métis writers largely worked within broader, pan-Indigenous writing communities, in non-Indigenous writing communities, or outside of writing communities altogether. Exceptions include the members of L’Union nationale métisse’s historical committee, in the 1920s and 1930s, which I examine in Chapter Three.<sup>2</sup>

In considering the concept of a “literary tradition,” alongside philosophies of “Western”

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<sup>2</sup> One might argue that the discursive resistance of L’Union nationale métisse evidences some form of a writing community, but as I discuss later, these men were not professional writers, nor engaged in literary arts, but focused on discursively defending rhetorical assaults against the Métis in newspapers, and in producing a Métis history with French-Canadian (but French-educated) historian A.H. de Trémaudan.

canon formation and revision, John Guillory not only complicates the division and distinction, but re-frames the concerns over tradition:

The canon achieves its imaginary totality ... not by embodying itself in a really existing list, but by retroactively constructing its individual texts as a *tradition*, to which works may be added or subtracted without altering the impression of totality or cultural homogeneity. A tradition is ‘real,’ of course, but only in the sense in which the imaginary is real. A tradition always retroactively unifies disparate cultural production ... while such historical fictions are perhaps impossible to dispense with, one should always bear in mind that the concept of a given tradition is much more revealing about the immediate context in which that tradition is defined than it is about the works retroactively so organized. (33-34)

Recognizing that traditions are constructed, how might we envision the Métis literary tradition? Do Falcon and Riel mark the beginning of a Métis literary tradition, or are they forced to bear the weight of what we have come to see as a Métis literary tradition? Are there intrinsic elements to their texts which echo in the works of later writers and perhaps indicate an aesthetic influence, or an abiding concern with specific themes or topics, or has a literary tradition been constructed primarily through extrinsic factors: shared ethnicity, national belonging, kinship, language? I argue that while extrinsic factors undoubtedly link Falcon and Riel, and subsequent generations of Métis writers, we can also trace occasional intrinsic similarities—stylistic and thematic—not only between Falcon and Riel, but between them and later writers. Examples include Falcon’s “documentary” style and sardonic humour which echo and resonate in the works of many later writers, and thematic concerns with Métis sovereignty, nationalism, community, and territory. Although extrinsic factors remain critical in initially apprehending and constructing a Métis

literary canon, textual and culturally informed intrinsic factors also connect disparate texts, and gesture to an emerging tradition.

Two important threads that this dissertation traces as it examines disparate Métis texts from across a wide swathe of periods, regions, and experiences, are the ideas of nationhood and peoplehood: expressions of national identity, belonging, and history, and literary evocations of Métis peoplehood. Jonathan Kertzer's *Worrying the Nation: Imagining a National Literature in English Canada* (1998) provides an intriguing model for a literary history, particularly for the ways it dwells in the muddy intersections of literature, nation, and history. It articulates relevant questions around issues of artistic and social integrity, in which "national literatures get caught up in a politics of inclusion and exclusion" (21), how issues of "artistic and social authenticity" (22-25) become threaded into the tapestry of literary history, and which not only resonate with this project, but also offers a methodological framework for approaching such questions. Kertzer complicates the notion of a national literary history. "Literature," he writes, "makes the nation both possible and impossible, imaginable and intolerable" (12), before demonstrating how such terms as literature, history, and nation, "devour each other" (18). How might Métis writing make the nation imaginable and intolerable; how does historical (creative) writing complicate present-day narratives? Despite such paradoxes, there remains a concrete question of how to account for a body of writing produced by a distinct group of people. Reading with a "vision of justice" or an "ethic of social responsibility" (30), Kertzer suggests, provides a conceptual means of mediating between slippery, unstable terms. The concern, he contends, of "any national literary history ... with the intertwining of social and aesthetic justice in so far as they meet, or fail to meet, in the nation" (35), resonates loudly with the calls for cultural and historical specificity, fidelity, and accuracy when studying and writing about Indigenous literatures, as voiced by proponents of

Indigenous literary nationalism such as Jeannette Armstrong, Craig Womack, and others.

### **How to Read Métis Texts**

“How do we read Métis writing in light of Métis standards of culture and aesthetics, rather than Indian or White standards,” asks Emma LaRocque (“Contemporary” 140). Where Perkins, Guillory, and Kertzer provide insights into the forms of literary history and questions of canon formation and revision, scholars of Indigenous literatures, and proponents of Indigenous literary nationalism provide crucial interpretive models for reading Métis literature. Indigenous literary nationalism encourages a reading ethic and strategy which positions an Indigenous nation at the interpretive centre of its own literature. Declaring that he “seek[s] a literary criticism that emphasizes Native resistance movements against colonialism, confronts racism, discusses sovereignty and Native nationalism, seeks connections between literature and liberation struggles, and, finally, roots literature in land and culture” (11), Womack embraces a method to interpret and analyze his own nation’s literature through Creek contexts. Daniel Heath Justice states that “Literary nationalism looks first to Indigenous contexts for interpretive analysis, to social histories, intellectual values, ceremonial traditions, and lived experiences of being both tribal—as in one’s specific nation—and being Indian/Aboriginal/Indigenous, a broader category” (“Necessity of Nationhood” 248). Importantly, as Jace Weaver notes, this ethic does not demand blind adherence to the exclusion of outside sources and theoretical tools, but rather, it forwards a robust theoretical pragmatism to contend with historically shifting standards of culture and aesthetics. “Native American critics,” he writes, “may use the tools of critical theory or not ... they may elect to do so in some instances and not in others, depending upon their particular goals and audiences” (35). Returning to LaRocque’s opening quote, I argue that the answer is to centre

Métis standards of culture and aesthetics in the interpretive analysis of Métis literature. Yet, this is not as straightforward as it appears. Culture is not static or homogeneous. How do we define these standards? What informs them? Are they rooted in historical events such as struggles and resistances against external forces? Or are they be rooted in what Pamela Sing calls “cultural cores” (“Globalization” 222), namely in the stories, symbols, songs, oral histories, and cultural markers of the nation? Although there is obvious tension generated by the juxtaposition of such seemingly antithetical positions—Kertzer’s contention that literature troubles the nation versus the tenets of Indigenous literary nationalism that suggest a mutually supportive relation between a nation and its literature—this tension underscores the provocative complexity of literature (and art more broadly) and the significance of its study, and establishes a productive lens for critical analysis by allowing us to consider how Métis literature both supports and troubles the nation.

Indeed, a consideration of historical events and “cultural cores” organizes the framework through which to read Métis literature. Since Métis nationalist movements are also linked to the symbols, songs, and oral histories that circulate among Métis people, and arguably informed and shaped by them, recognizing this link is critical in accounting for shifts in articulations of Métis cultural identity (like linguistic and religious affiliations) between historical and contemporary Métis people, and how they are expressed in writing and reinforce or reify national movements. I would argue that these shifts evidence not only the Métis’s particular and complex relationship with Canada—kinship with French Canadians, armed resistance against Canadian colonialism, participation in the Christian proselytizing mission of First Nations Peoples and struggles against Anglo-centric policies of assimilation, to name a few elements—but the discursive construction of the nation. Andersen positions “Indigenous nationhood or peoplehood as a form of [Benedict] Anderson’s imagined community” (91), though with important distinctions, such as their prior

existence to settler-states, their relational political designations, and their “‘pre-state’ origins and associated historical power ... [which] clashed with European, state-based understandings of nationalism, particularly in relation to kinship” (92). He points to historical events such as the Battle of Seven Oaks, the Sayer trial, and the Battle of Grand Coteau, as moments that “cemented the Métis hunters’ sense of ‘horizontal comradeship’ characteristic of affiliations of nationhood” (113). Out of such moments Métis wordsmiths produced songs and texts that likely reinforced the sentiments generated during (and likely in the lead up and afterglow) of the events themselves: Falcon’s “La Grenouillère” and Louis Riel’s “La Métisse.” Although contemporary articulations of Métis nationhood often position the Métis as an Indigenous nation, increasingly anchored in aspects which resonate with ethnonationalist logics, such as an emphasis on kinship, specific territory, and evidence of genealogical descent from 19<sup>th</sup> century Red River Métis, I contend that this is not only an ethnonational turn or impulse from within the nation itself but also a reaction impelled by outside pressures on Métis people (Tétreault, “Literary Resistance”). In his consideration of multinational federalism in Canada, Eric Woods points out that John Hutchinson’s work, which understands nations as internal zones of conflict, provides “insights ... beyond primordialism and modernism [ethno- and imagined conceptions of nationhood]” and particularly in the ways that “nationalists’ cultural ‘repertoires’ are limited by an already existing pool of myths and symbols” (279). Summing up Hutchinson’s argument, Woods asserts that the “constant evocation and re-evocation of different myths and traditions sustains and reifies the nation over time, even as its trajectory and definition is transformed” (279). This last point is key to tracing significant differences between historical and contemporary Métis literary production (from predominantly Franco-Catholic to Anglo/Cree and Anishinaabe epistemologies).<sup>3</sup> On the

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<sup>3</sup> I say “some” because I do not mean to suggest that reconciling all differences is possible: rather, some differences are due to the wealth of *internal* diversity within the Métis Nation, and ought to be celebrated.

one hand, the articulated (re)turn toward Indigenous knowledges and traditions in contemporary Métis literature might be framed as a re-evocation of differing, but also pre-existing, myths and traditions in comparison to those articulated by earlier generations of Métis writers. On the other hand, this re-evocation might also be framed as a rejection of the European-influence—Franco-Catholic traditions, to be precise—that informed historical Métis thinking and writing. Although contemporary artistic re-imaginings of the nation, people, and culture do incorporate elements taken from a pre-existing “repertoire” of symbols and myths, these re-imaginings are selective and limited, shaped by more than a century of settler-colonial policies which sought to erase the Métis.

Ernest Renan argued that the acts of both remembering and forgetting (38) are crucial to nation building, and his notion provides an important additional frame through which to consider the above noted ruptures, cultural shifts, and “re-evocations.” A consideration of which aspects of Métis history and culture are “forgotten,” elided, omitted, or de-emphasized in the discursive construction of the nation, and in articulations of Métis identity and experiences, as well as what aspects of Métis history and culture are “remembered” or emphasized by contemporary Métis writers, not only provides insights into how external factors affected and informed Métis writing (dispossession, assimilation, and so on), but also how internal shifts in cultural and historical knowledge, and personal experiences, come to shape the body of Métis writing. These acts allow for a reflection on the agency of Métis writers.

Lastly, while I attend to LaRocque’s calls for the inclusion “not only [of] the meaning of nationalism, resistance, or agency in Metis history and ethnocultural development, but also an interest in Indigenous-based but decidedly Metis poetics” (“Contemporary” 143) in the study of Métis literature, I observe Jennifer Adese’s appeal to “become better acquainted with ... what it

means to be Métis and, more specifically, with respect to notions of Métis *peoplehood*” (“The New People” 58). “Métis literary criticism that does not engage with Métis worldviews, histories, and ways of knowing,” writes Adese, “elides Métis peoplehood, foments ‘Métis- as-mixed’ rhetoric and reentrenches the racialization of Métis people” (59). Resonating strongly with Indigenous literary nationalism’s calls for centering specific cultural contexts in the study of an Indigenous nation’s literature, Adese’s call for greater inclusion of “peoplehood” shifts the interpretive focus from symbols, myths, or legends, towards an emphasis on agency, or how those symbols are engaged, invoked, and re-invoked. She draws attention to the activities and ways of being and knowing, or “*how Métis are Métis*” (59). In outlining “the primary tenets of Métis peoplehood ... [namely] kinship and relatedness, mobility, and geography” (61), and in showing how their consideration informs the study and interpretation of Métis texts, Adese offers a strong intervention in Métis literary criticism that informs this study of Métis literary history.

Adese’s appeal for scholars to also “become better acquainted with the available body of literature produced in the field of Métis studies” (59), however, re-opens questions about what constitutes a Métis literary canon as it positions non-literary texts as critical and necessary to the interpretation of literary texts. It either greatly expands the canon, or demands recognition of the existence of a parallel canon or suggests that one must be constituted. Adese implies that a canon of Métis literary texts is incomplete without a parallel canon of non-literary texts (such as songs, oral stories, as well as oral and written histories) that provide the critical, cultural, and contextual frameworks through which to recognize, read, and interpret literary texts as *Métis* texts. It is with this framework in mind that I strive to centre Métis writing and recount a Métis literary history in this dissertation.



## Chapter Summaries

In Chapter One, I examine early Métis literary history through the songs of Pierre Falcon. I first provide a short biography of Falcon, before analysing his most famous work, “La chanson de la Grenouillère.” I argue that this song remains a critical Métis text that not only captures a seminal moment in Métis history and early expression of nationalism, but through its rhetorical use of language exhibits elements of Métis culture from resistance, humour, to humbleness. I consider what it means to have a dozen known versions of the song, and close read and compare three early versions (two possibly obtained from Falcon himself) to suggest that a deeper, careful authorial consideration of the song’s rhetorical effects appears present in the composition and, possibly, revisions of the song. Following a summary and examination of his other songs, where I draw out recurring themes across his body of work, I investigate how scholars and writers have taken him up in the intervening years. I show how early scholars have largely conflated his songs with his life, shaping interpretations of his life and songs through hyperbolized and romanticized depictions, that resulted in multiple contradictions and, as Albert Braz argues, a “denigration” of Falcon (“Duelling” 157), linked to an early Anglo-settler-scholars tradition of using the history of Seven Oaks as a means to subvert Métis territorial claims and sovereignty.

Chapter Two tackles Louis Riel’s literary legacy. It asks how we might appreciate his literary contributions, and situate his literary production within Métis literary history while the enormous shadow of his political career and cultural influence looms over it. As such, the aim of this chapter is not to disentangle Riel’s writings (the creative, epistolary, and political) from his politics or Métis history, but to celebrate and contextualize his creative works. I first present a biographical sketch of his life, and conduct a survey of his literary production, before performing a closer analysis of his most significant poems and essays. Despite the wealth of texts and studies

on Riel, there still remains much work to be done in considering his broader literary contribution. Attending to Adese's call to foreground the "tenets ... of Métis peoplehood" ("The New People" 61) in Métis literary criticism, I re-approach Riel's writings through a study of how kinship and territory intersect across his poetry, and examine how he writes about *home*, *place*, and *people*. I conclude with a summary of his disjointed (or belated) publication history and survey the relative paucity of sustained literary study of his works.

In Chapter Three, I shift from a single author focus to a broader survey of Métis writing from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> to early 20<sup>th</sup> century to show how the story of Métis writing is a complex and multi-layered one, tied to the socio-economic history of the North-West. In order to demonstrate how the rise in Métis literacy is linked to emerging class distinctions, I trace this growth through an account of European-style education in the North-West. By examining the careers and select works of Alexander Kennedy Isbister and Sara Riel, I reveal how early Métis writing was not solely francophone or male-produced. I then begin to link historical and contemporary Métis literature through the ruptures and cultural shifts which mark Métis history through the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries to outline Métis literary production beyond Falcon and Louis Riel. I first frame the social conditions of Métis literary production against such assimilationist government policies as the Manitoba Schools Question which gestures to a broader climate of exclusion and prejudice against which Métis writers wrote, and I trace the transcription and writing of memoirs, dwelling on Louis Schmidt's work as one of the few to be published historically, and also close read select poems of Alexandre DeLaronde,<sup>4</sup> to show how Métis literary production persisted in an albeit attenuated state. In the final third of the chapter, I examine the discursive resistance of

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<sup>4</sup> J.R. Léveillé spells his last name as de Laronde in *Anthologie de la poésie franco-Manitobaine* (1900), however, other sources have spelled his name both de Laronde and De Laronde (*Instruction en sauteurs sur toute la doctrine catholique*, 1911), de LaRonde ("La Littérature Française Au Nord-Ouest" *Le Manitoba*, 24 Mai 1916), and

L'Union nationale métisse St-Joseph du Manitoba: from a speech given by Guillaume Charette, published in 1923, in *La Liberté*, a French-language newspaper in St. Boniface, Manitoba, to the construction of Métis identity and incipient historical revisionism as articulated by L'Union's "comité historique" in the foreword and appendix to Auguste-Henri de Trémaudan's, *Histoire de la nation métisse dans l'Ouest canadien*. I conclude with a brief reading of select writings of Jim Brady on Métis history and identity, which notably diverge from the works of earlier writers (in particular through his Marxist-socialist approach), but also resonate with emerging strategies of circumspection and revisionism, and demonstrate significant investment in Métis narratives.

Chapter Four continues the broad focus established in the previous chapter, and surveys Métis literary production from its nadir in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century to its early resurgence in the late-20<sup>th</sup> century. I show how it was the intellectual and literary labour of women that sustained Métis literature through the mid-century. I first contrast Marie Rose Smith's autobiographical account *Eighty Years on the Plains* with Marie-Thérèse Goulet-Courchaine's prose and poems, which largely appeared in French-language newspapers across western Canada, and reveal how their texts are marked in different ways by the socio-economic realities of settler colonialism, racism, and cultural assimilation. I then turn to a watershed text in contemporary Métis literature with Maria Campbell's memoir, *Halfbreed*, and contemplate how her work signals both a break with, and a return to, earlier traditions. Her anti-Catholicism, for instance, stands in stark contrast to earlier writers like Louis and Sara Riel, Louis Schmidt, and Alexandre DeLaronde, but it also resonates with earlier Métis leaders and intellectuals who showed schisms with the church, such as Jim Brady. Her attention to Cree and Cree-Michif epistemologies, worldviews, and spirituality resonates with oral histories and cultures. In the final section, I survey the initial burgeoning of

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DeLaronde ("Soiree au College de Saint-Boniface" *Le Manitoba*, 27 Jan 1887; Gray, Léon. "Mânes de Riel" *La Patrie*, 14 March 1937). For the purpose of this dissertation, I spell it as DeLaronde.

Métis literary resurgence from the publication of personal narratives, memoirs, and dictionaries, to the emergence of different genres of Métis writing from poetry to long-form fiction. I examine select poems by Adrian Hope and George Morrisette, then conclude with a reading of Beatrice Mosionier's *In Search of April Raintree* as an example of the processes of “[c]oming to accept the distinctive nature of Métis culture and heritage ... [that became] a consistent theme in Metis (or metis) writing of the [late] twentieth century” (LaRocque, “Contemporary” 136).

Chapter Five examines the recent flourishing of Métis literature and how questions of Métis identity, heritage, language, and history link successive waves (generations) of writers. I trace the gradual shift, in the sense of “‘returning’ home” (136), that emerges between what LaRocque calls “second wave” writers, or post-1990s writers such as Joanne Arnott, Gregory Scofield, Marilyn Dumont, and Rita Bouvier among others, and what I refer to as *third wave* writers like Katherena Vermette (among others). Drawing on the scholarship of Jo-Ann Episkenew to frame processes of identitary recovery through the idea that stories also “served educational, spiritual, and healing functions” (*Taking Back* 192), I close read pivotal works of the above noted authors to identify thematic elements in the growing body of Métis literature in the closing decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, such as issues of identitary recovery and representation, and the gradual re-framing of Métis identity as a cultural and national identity (as opposed to a primarily racial category). I argue that while some works increase (cultural, linguistic, gender) representation of historically under-represented voices, such as Indigenous women, and serve to expand the focus beyond the male-centrism of early Métis literature, they also demonstrate significant “forgetting” of earlier cultural elements in comparison to historical Métis writings. I conclude with a consideration of Vermette’s writings, and contend that her work shows an increasing awareness of Métis history, and builds upon earlier contemporary Métis writing

toward firmer articulations of Métis identity, rooted in specific places, events, persons, and experiences, but also overlooks historical Métis writings in ways which complicate present-day Métis narratives.

The Conclusion reflects on questions of language and religion as it summarizes broader shifts and ruptures in Métis writing through the last two centuries. I hold that although showing increasing and significant recovery of traditional cultural practices and knowledge, contemporary Métis writers also betray discomfort with certain elements of Métis history and literary history. Intertwined strains of anti-French and anti-Catholic sentiment make difficult the reconciliation and representation of the “Golden Age” of Métis society, prior to the armed resistance against incipient Canadian colonialism, which was largely produced and articulated by French Catholic Métis writers. Through a brief consideration of Vermette’s novel *The Strangers*, I show how historical Métis writing complicates contemporary Métis narratives, and demonstrates the urgent need for further study of Métis literary history.

### **Positioning Myself: A Personal Narrative**

I complete this introduction by introducing myself. I was born in Winnipeg and raised in and around Ste. Anne, Manitoba. Growing up, I had only a vague sense of being Métis.

My father is French-Canadian and my mother is Métis. However, even this distinction is complicated by their own cultural upbringings. Growing up in Richer, MB, in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in close proximity with Métis families, my dad and his family believed themselves for a time to be Métis; they shared cultural practices, connections, relationships, and fragments of Michif cropped up in their language (“la chicoque” or “shikak” instead of moufette, or skunk). Only after some genealogical research did they become aware of their lack of direct connection.

My père Tétreault was born in Pembina, North Dakota, in 1900. His family had lived in New England, and Québec before that. The family of my mère Tétreault (née Gauthier) was also originally from Québec, moving to Manitoba in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century (approximately).

My mother is Métis. She grew up in Haywood, Manitoba, but, like her siblings, had little sense of herself as Métis. In an interview we conducted for an oral history project I completed at the University of Winnipeg, my mother recalled how identity was a topic that never really came up; “Mère [Marie Hélène Dubé (née Dufault)] was always a little dark,” (Tétreault, “Personal Interview”) she admitted, but they never talked about it. My mère, Joséphine Marchand (née Dubé), died when my mom was still in high school. I never got to meet her. In the mid-1990s some family members started looking back at our family history, researching our genealogy, and through this work uncovered our connection to Red River and Métis relatives as descendants of the Hogue family, which lived in St. Charles Parish from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> to early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Marie Hélène was the daughter of Elizabeth Dufault (née Hogue), who in turn was the daughter of Antoine Hogue and Crawford Brown. Antoine was the son of Margaret Hogue (née Taylor) and Louis-Amable Hogue; Crawford was the daughter of Sarah Brown (née Bremner) and Peter Brown. My late cousin Daniel Roch was the first (that I know of) in our extended family to obtain his membership with the Manitoba Metis Federation, but soon thereafter, other cousins, aunts, and uncles followed. I remember one Christmas, over a dozen years ago, when my uncles showed off their membership cards and passed them around the table. The process of cultural and historical education, reconnection, and relationship building however is ongoing.

Speaking personally, I have often wondered about the line between French Canadians and Métis. While there is one, it is often blurry, particularly among francophone families in southern Manitoba (from what I have seen). While in the 1990s Métis identity was not always

discussed openly or publicly, often kept within families, gesturing perhaps toward a careful or guarded sense of identity, and certainly linked to white-passing privilege, this seems to have changed somewhat in the intervening years, as more people (friends and acquaintances) that I grew up with have begun openly speaking about their heritage, and publicly identifying as Métis.

Chantal Fiola has described Ste. Anne as “heavily assimilated, with most of its residents self-identifying solely as ‘French Canadian’ and non-Aboriginal, and much of its Métis history denied or silenced,” but also acknowledges how the “atmosphere began to shift” (8) in the last two decades toward more openness. Like Fiola, I also did not learn that Ste. Anne was a historic Métis community until I was an adult, when I moved to Winnipeg to attend university. I identify as Métis and French Canadian, but I am always learning, striving to re-connect to community, and reflecting on the silences that hid or obscured our heritage and history—that muddy and complicated intersection of language, race, religion, and culture. When I was at the University of Winnipeg, I remember conducting research as part of a creative writing class for a story I wanted to set during the fur trade. In a book on Sir George Simpson (*Emperor of the North*, by James Raffan), I came across a name from my own genealogy, Margaret Taylor, and discovered that she had been Simpson’s “country wife,” before he abandoned her in favour of marrying a white woman (his cousin). No one in my family knew her story and her journeys back and forth across the North-West. It was not lost on me that what we generally know about her stems largely from her association with Simpson. However, it was not just her stories that I wondered about, but also those of her descendants all the way to the mémère I never met. What happened to their stories? Where are the Métis stories? This last question impelled me through my creative and academic careers, and though I know that the answer rests in part with Elders, and knowledge keepers (and oral tradition), this dissertation offers an account of the written stories.

## Chapter One — Early Métis Poetics: The Songs of Pierre Falcon

Métis literature begins in the intersections of Métis writing and oral cultures in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Although he was likely not the first to compose songs, Pierre Falcon (1793-1876) holds a critical place in Métis literary history. He is the first known Métis poet and songwriter, and is widely considered to be the author of the first significant Métis literary work, “La chanson de la Grenouillère.”<sup>5</sup> Recounting the events of the Battle of Seven Oaks, which occurred on 19 June 1816, when Métis hunters largely aligned or employed by the North-West Company confronted a group of Selkirk settlers and Hudson’s Bay Company clerks, just north of present-day downtown Winnipeg, Falcon’s song is not only an assertion of Métis nationalism and resistance against incipient settler-colonialism, but an exemplification of Métis poetics and cultural expression. The song proved extremely popular. It swept across the North-West “like prairie fire” (Complin 50), and transformed into a sort of national anthem (Chartrand, *Pierriche* 4). It would reportedly be sung by Métis soldiers during the battle of Tourond’s Coulee (Fish Creek), some sixty years later, during the North-West Resistance. Although Falcon composed numerous songs in his lifetime, only a handful were transcribed, remembered, and survived to this day. However, even limited, this body of work provides an important window into early Métis culture, linguistic heritage, and poetics, and through its account of historical events and figures, is an important example of Métis historiography and self-expression.

In this chapter, I begin with a biography of Falcon before turning to his songs. Then, reading “La chanson de la Grenouillère,” I argue that the song remains a critical text that not only captures a seminal event in Métis national history and articulates early nationalism, but through its narrative, exhibits elements of Métis culture like resistance, humour, and humbleness.

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<sup>5</sup> Also known, occasionally, as “Falcon’s Song” (Chartrand, *Pierriche* 4), “La bataille de Sept-Chênes” (Julien, 2: 61), “La victoire des Bois-Brûlés” (61), “The Michif National Anthem” (Chartrand, *Pierriche* 4), “Ballade of “Frog



I also consider what it means to have at least “14 versions” (Chrétien and Papen 42) of this song, and what the possibility of comparing two versions, allegedly obtained from Falcon himself, decades apart, might suggest in terms of his creative agency and his rhetorical decisions. One example between two versions is the replacement of the word “éffroyer,” for a repetition of “épouvanter,” which hints at a careful consideration of the song’s rhetorical effect, and perhaps recognition of its historiographical importance as an oral history of Seven Oaks. I also examine Falcon’s other songs and draw out some recurring themes to demonstrate how a pattern of satire emerges from his body of work: the ridicule of powerful (mostly white, English-speaking) men.

Following these readings, I consider how Falcon has been taken up by others to show how his life narrative has become entangled with his songs, and demands careful splitting of fictional (romantic and hyperbolized) descriptions from the known facts of his life. Although, as Monique Giroux notes, there is a “strikingly large number of popular and academic references to his life and songs” (44), few of these have been written by Métis writers. Moreover, as Giroux and Albert Braz demonstrate in different ways, from the slew of “contradictory representations of Falcon ... [which] tell of the uneasy positioning of Metis people [in the settler imagination]” (Giroux 57), such as in Agnes Laut’s century old novel *Lords of the North*, which has “become pivotal in the memorialization of the Métis bard” (Braz, “Duelling” 157), outsider discourse has largely shaped the written record and analysis of Falcon’s life and work. Métis legal scholar Paul Chartrand’s *Pierriche Falcon: The Michif Rhymester* (2008), a recent Métis-written text on the life and songs of Falcon, which includes four Michif-French translations of his compositions, along with a CD, marks a critical exception to outsider discourse. However, even as Chartrand provides a much-needed Métis-centric study of Falcon, which he “hope[s] ... will lead to a renewal of interest in Falcon’s songs” (8), his vocabulary in discussing “La chanson de la

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Plain” (Julien, 2: 61), “The Frog Plain Song” (MacLeod 1), or “The Battle of Seven Oaks” (1), amongst others.

Grenouillère,” and phrases and words like “breathe new life” (IV), “resurrect” (4), and “resurrection of Falcon’s anthem” (4), betray the diminished interest in Falcon’s songs. Might this diminished interest be in part precipitated by factors such as the “denigration” (Braz, “Duelling” 157) of Falcon in settler texts?

In the final third of the chapter, I turn to Laut’s depiction of Falcon in *Lords of the North* to build on my examination of the mythologization of Falcon, considering what it means to have a work of fiction, and one “overtly dismissive of Falcon, both artistically and politically” (Braz, “Duelling” 158), inform us about Falcon and his songs, and which remains the sole source of the buffalo hunt song attributed to Falcon. Finally, examining how interpretations of Falcon and his most-famous song have become critically intertwined in the historiography of Seven Oaks, I show how narratives of his life, descriptions of his character, and considerations of his songs often rhetorically mirror the historiography of the Battle of Seven Oaks, and I argue that Laut’s treatment of Falcon is part of a broader, early Anglo-settler-scholars tradition of using Seven Oaks as a way to present and emphasize “alleged Métis weakness of character, [to] implicitly [justify] the dispossession of their lands” (Dick 112). I conclude with a consideration of how Falcon has been taken up by contemporary Métis writers and undergirds Métis literary tradition.

### **A Brief Biography of Pierre Falcon**

Little is known about Pierre Falcon’s maternal ancestors. George Bryce contends that Falcon’s mother was an Indigenous woman from “the Missouri country” (qtd. in Julien 1: 116), but most scholars believe she was Cree. More is known about Falcon’s paternal ancestors, whom scholars trace via Québec to France. Falcon’s patrilineal grandfather emigrated from La Picardie, France (Julien 1: 115) sometime after the British conquest of Québec; he married a French-

Canadian woman, Marie-Geneviève Tremblay, and settled in “le district Blairfindie de Laprairie, connu maintenant comme L’Acadie,” after a sojourn at Baie-Saint-Paul (116). Falcon’s father, Pierre-Jean-Baptiste Falcon, was born in 1766, presumably in Québec.

The son of a French-Canadian voyageur and an Indigenous woman, Pierre Falcon was born in the North-West, on 4 June 1793,<sup>6</sup> at “Fort-au-Coudre,” near rivière du Cygnes (Julien 1: 116), in what is now the Swan River area of Manitoba. At the age of five, he was sent to live with his paternal grandparents in Québec and obtained some schooling. There is debate regarding Falcon’s level of education and literacy. Jacques Julien (116) traces the source of this question to Joseph Hargrave’s account of Falcon in 1871, where in his book, *Red River*, Hargrave states that Falcon “neither reads nor writes” (Hargrave 488). Julien points out that, ironically, Hargrave contradicts himself, introducing the famed song “écrite [written]” (Hargrave 488) by Falcon. In contrast, “se fondant sur les renseignements donnés par les descendants de Falcon” (Julien 1: 116), Margaret Arnett MacLeod contests the idea of Falcon’s illiteracy, writing that “they [his grandchildren] recall him in [a] velvet smoking jacket and skull cap, seated at his writing table, issuing government bounty for wolf heads” (*Songs* 35). Speculating, MacLeod maintains that as “a man who had spent eleven years of his youth in Quebec for an education, living with a well-educated grandfather, and who became a clerk in the fur trade, and in later life was appointed a magistrate, [Falcon] undoubtedly knew how to read and write” (34). Pushing back against MacLeod’s categorical assertion, Julien wonders whether the question of Falcon’s literacy itself is a “distinction que les générations ultérieures ont voulu projeter sur une époque où [l’écriture] n’était pas pertinente” (1: 117). The issue over his literacy reflects a projection of contemporary values upon an era (a time and place) in which literacy skills were presumed to be less pertinent, where orality was central. I dwell on the issue of literacy to show how historical uncertainties

blanket Falcon’s narrative, how lapses muddle what we know, and how gaps in his biography and questions about the composition of his works seem to invite constant speculation, hyperbole, and invention. “[F]acts about his life ... are few and far between,” writes Giroux, “[it] is perhaps not surprising ... that a number of these sources [on Falcon] are from the realm of fiction” (45).

After a decade in Québec, in 1808, at the age of fifteen, Falcon returned to the North-West and obtained employment with the North West Company, as a “*commis ou acheteur de fourrures*” (Julien 1: 117). In 1812, he married Marie Grant,<sup>7</sup> sister of Cuthbert Grant, the leader of the Métis forces at Seven Oaks. They had at least seven children, three boys and four girls.<sup>8</sup> Falcon was at least peripherally present at the Battle of Seven Oaks, on 19 June 1816, and near enough to witness the event and later put it into verse, without taking part in the actual fighting.<sup>9</sup> He allegedly composed his most famous song the evening of the battle. Months later—precisely when is unclear, but after 12 August 1816 when Lord Selkirk captured the North West Company post at Fort William—Falcon is purported to have composed “*La danse des Bois-Brûlés*.”

Throughout the tumultuous final years of the so-called Fur Trade Wars, from 1816 to 1821, Falcon worked for the North West Company. Details of his precise activities are scant to non-existent. Following the merger of the North West and Hudson’s Bay companies in 1821, he briefly worked for the newly merged Hudson’s Bay Company. In 1824, he settled in Grantown (also known as White Horse Plains, and later as St. François Xavier), about “half a mile” (MacEwan 30) from Cuthbert Grant’s place, where he lived “*comme propriétaire fermier*” (Julien 1: 117). Other than Falcon’s likely presence in Red River, suggested by the composition

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<sup>6</sup> Most scholars and writers give June 4 as his date of birth, but Martial Allard gives June 1.

<sup>7</sup> Margaret Complin notes that Marie Grant “did not speak French at the time of her marriage, and never learned to speak it very fluently” (51), and dwells on the couple’s differing paternal heritages (French vs. Scottish), but tends to ignore their similar maternal ancestry (Cree) and the likelihood that they would have also spoken Cree or Michif.

<sup>8</sup> Most sources state that they had seven children, but one ancestry website, lists eight children (including names, dates of birth, and spouses): [www.redriverancestry.ca/FALCON-PIERRE-1793.php](http://www.redriverancestry.ca/FALCON-PIERRE-1793.php)

<sup>9</sup> William Coltman does not list Falcon as a combatant in his report (1818).

of the humorous “Ballade du Général Dickson,” in 1837, about an American adventurer who came to Red River to recruit Métis hunters into his army, with which Dickson hoped to “found a kingdom in California” (MacLeod and Morton, *Cuthbert* 117), little is known about Falcon’s life in the intervening years.<sup>10</sup> In 1855, Falcon was appointed “justice of the peace” (MacEwan 34), or “magistrate” (MacLeod, *Songs* 31) of White Horse Plains (Saint-François Xavier).

There are competing, sometimes contradictory, images of Falcon in his final years. One presents an image of a still-fierce Falcon, who, according to Joseph Tassé, during the Red River Resistance, in 1869, wished to join Métis hunters and soldiers marshalling near St. Norbert, who were heading “pour s’opposer à l’entrée dans le pays du gouverneur” William McDougall (350).<sup>11</sup> He composed “Les tribulations d’un roi malheureux,” a song alluding to McDougall’s repulsion at the border in late fall/early winter of 1869. However, only a dozen or so lines later, Tassé describes Falcon as very old, broken, and barely speaking (351). Julien observes how, with Tassé, we begin to detect romanticism in the description of Falcon that conforms “bien à l’image populaire qu’on voudra se faire des Métis” (1: 110). In contrast, Complin conveys a glimpse of Falcon in his final years through the memories of his grandchildren, who described him as a “tender, noble, saintly old man . . . , [a] true Frenchman of quiet, peaceful manners” (52). Falcon died on 26 October 1876, at the age of 83.

### Reading Falcon’s Songs

Aside from comparative readings of select versions of “La chanson de la Grenouillère,” I

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<sup>10</sup> Most scholars take up Falcon’s life narrative again in 1855, but Grant MacEwan offers a (likely mistaken) account of Falcon’s involvement in the Battle of the Grand Coteau in 1851. I examine this account more closely below.

<sup>11</sup> William McDougall, an Ontario-born politician, “the chief advocate of Canada’s expansion into Rupert’s Land” (Siggins 98), was appointed Lieutenant-Governor of Rupert’s Land and the North-West Territory in 1869 by the Government of Canada. He was repelled by Métis soldiers at the Red River/United States border (see Siggins or Teillet) and was forced to remain on the American side while the Métis negotiated Red River’s entry into Canadian Confederation as the Province of Manitoba.

do not dwell long on the provenance of Falcon’s songs as much work has already been done on this front (see LaRue, Hargrave, Tassé, Complin, Allard, MacLeod, Ferland, Julien, Chrétien and Papen), and moreover, as a literary scholar, and not a folklorist or ethnomusicologist, my interest rests in the intersection of language, form, and thematic content in the songs.

**“La chanson de la Grenouillère” / “La victoire des Bois-Brûlés”**

As mentioned in the introduction, Falcon’s song details the incident at Seven Oaks when Métis hunters, largely aligned or in the employ of the North-West Company, confronted a group of Hudson’s Bay Company clerks and Selkirk settlers along the Red River, a few miles north of present day downtown Winnipeg.<sup>12</sup> I reproduce here a version of the song, originally printed in François-Alexandre-Hubert LaRue’s *Le Foyer canadien* (1863), which Julien notes has become “en quelque sorte comme texte canonique” (2: 61):

Voulez-vous écouter chanter,

Une chanson de vérité: (bis)

Le dix-neuf de Juin, la bande des Bois-Brûlés,

Sont arrivés comme de braves guerriers.

En arrivant à la grenouillère,

Nous avons fait trois prisonniers:

Trois prisonniers des Arkanys,

Qui sont ici pour piller notre pays.

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<sup>12</sup> See Dick (1991), Shore (2018), or Teillet (2019) for more context on the incident, including the Fur-Trade Wars, the Selkirk Settlement, the Pemmican Proclamation, and the years of rising tension between the North-West

Etant sur le point de débarquer,  
Deux de nos gens se sont écriés:  
Deux de nos gens se sont écriés:  
Voilà l'anglais qui vient nous attaquer.

Tout aussitôt nous avons deviré,  
Nous avons été les rencontrer:  
J'avons cerné la bande des grenadiers,  
Ils sont immobiles, ils sont tous démontés.

J'avons agi comme des gens d'honneur,  
J'avons envoyé un ambassadeur:  
Le gouverneur, voulez-vous arrêter  
Un petit moment, nous voulons vous parler?

Le gouverneur qui est enragé,  
Il dit à ses soldats: tirez.  
Le premier coup c'est l'anglais qui a tiré,  
L'ambassadeur ils ont manqué tuer.

Le gouverneur qui se croit empereur,  
Il veut agir avec rigueur:  
Le gouverneur qui se croit empereur,

A son malheur, agit trop de rigueur.

Ayant vu passer tous ces Bois-Brûlés,

Il a parti pour les épouvanter:

Etant parti pour les épouvanter:

Il s'est trompé, il s'est bien fait tuer.

Il s'est bien fait tuer

Quantité de ses grenadiers;

J'avons tué presque toute son armée,

Quatre ou cinq se sont sauvés.

Si vous aviez vu tous ces Anglais,

Tous ces Bois-Brûlés après,

De butte en butte les Anglais culbutaient,

Les Bois-Brûlés jetaient des cris de joie.

Qui a composé la chanson,

Pierriche Falcon, ce bon garçon.

Elle a été faite et composée

Sur la victoire que nous avons gagnée.

OU:

Elle a été faite et composée,



Chantons la gloire des Bois-Brûlés. (368-69)

The song has an obvious and almost unrelenting candour, or straightforwardness, to it. Opening with a declaration of its truthful account of the event, it proceeds to relate the incident in a detailed linear narrative, somewhat akin to a play-by-play, that traces the parties' movements, actions, and words, as they collide. Falcon includes contextual details, which serve to not only differentiate the two parties, les Bois-Brûlés from the others, noting for instance the nationality of the captured prisoners, from "les Arkanys." With the line "qui sont ici pour piller notre pays," he simultaneously emphasizes their antagonistic intentions, and claims the territory. He frames the confrontation as one between Indigenous inhabitants and outside forces seeking to loot their land, and only by the end of the third stanza proceeds to recount the encounter itself. Notably, he describes the actions of the Bois-Brûlés as primarily defensive, emphasizing their reluctance to engage in violence as they attempt a diplomatic solution, "J'avons agis comme des gens d'honneur / J'avons envoyé un ambassadeur," and resorting to violence only once fired upon by the English, "Le premier coup c'est l'anglais qui a tiré." The seventh stanza stands out as a brief break in the action that momentarily reflects on the behaviour of the English governor, Semple's folly, and how he acted with "trop de rigueur," too much severity, aggression, and arrogance in confronting the Bois-Brûlés. The following three stanzas relate the rout of the English, how the Bois-Brûlés killed "presque toute [Semple's] armée," and watched a handful of survivors flee. There is also an air of dark humour in the image of the survivors' withdrawal, how "De butte en butte les Anglais culbutaient," which suggests a certain frantic, undisciplined, head over heels withdrawal that shatters notions of English superiority. With "des cris de joie," the Bois-Brûlés' celebration becomes not only a reflection of triumph, but a warning, a declaration that cements earlier claims to territory; that this is their homeland, and they can defend it.

Stylistically, Falcon uses very direct language, verbs, and brief successive images and actions to illustrate a remarkably fluid, complex, and ultimately explosive encounter. There is little figurative language. This directness seems to emphasize the narrative thrust of the song, and its almost journalistic qualities, as it succinctly summarizes the who (Bois-Brûlés and “les Anglais”), what (“attaquer,” “rencontrer,” “tuer”), when (“le dix-neuf de Juin”), where (“à la Grenouillère”), why (“[to defend ourselves against those who came] ici pour piller notre pays,” “qui vient nous attaquer”), and how of the events (“comme des gens d’honneur”). In this journalistic, documentary vein, the song accrues value as a living, oral, historical document, which carried news of this seminal event in early Métis national history across, and beyond, the Métis homeland. Some contemporary scholars also emphasize the song’s historiographic value; Tatiana Arcand praises the song’s “valeur documentaire,” (21), and Lyle Dick describes it as an “authentic expression of Métis perceptions and attitudes” (99), in relation to the battle of Seven Oaks, centering the song’s historical value. Along with this “documentary” value, the song also functions as satire in its treatment of the English, HBC, and Semple, by emphasizing through repetition of the line “Le gouverneur qui se croit empereur,” how his apparent arrogance, hubris, and likely notions of British superiority, formed fatal flaws which lead him and his men to their death. As Falcon states, “[Semple] s’est trompé, il s’est bien fait tuer.”

Paul Chartrand’s recent call for the “resurrection of Falcon’s anthem” (*Pierriche* 4) illustrates how some two centuries after its composition the song’s popularity has diminished greatly. Yet, despite its declining reach, Chartrand’s call also, ironically, gestures to the song’s lasting, and lingering significance, which points to its enormous historical influence. Why resurrect this particular song? “In thinking about the possibilities for the resurrection of Falcon’s anthem,” Chartrand writes, “I wonder if Métis nationalism is not so much about the memory of

what we have been, or even the reality of what we are today, but the vision of what, thinking, acting and singing together, we can become” (4). The “resurrection” of the song is not only about buttressing contemporary Métis nationalism by rooting the contemporary nation in the historical events and locations from which the historical nation emerged, but it is also about the processes of national reconstruction, through culture, that “vision of what, thinking, acting and singing together, we can become” (4), and how Falcon’s song might continue to shape this vision. The song is not only a window on the past; it continues to function as a catalyst for a Métis national identity. However, it is one perhaps bounded by regional, cultural, and linguistic affiliations. Do contemporary Métis in Alberta identify with the song in the same way as do those in Manitoba? Moreover, there is irony in Chartrand’s obvious religious allusions regarding Falcon’s song, as Katherine Durnin notes, since, unlike Riel, Falcon “does not incorporate any Christian imagery or ideology in connection with the Métis claims or identity expressed” (68) in “La chanson de la Grenouillère” or his other songs, both before and after the arrival of Christian institutions at Red River in 1818. In any event, in these ongoing processes of nation-making, and national (re)construction, the song functions as “a *performance* of nationhood aimed at building national consciousness through its rhetorical effects” (Durnin 62).

What are these “rhetorical effects” and how might they inform expressions of Métis national identity? Tracing its “rhetorical effects” is somewhat akin to groping through a hall of mirrors—the original song obscured by a multitude of imperfect reflections. Drawing upon the scholarship of Jacques Julien, and of Annette Chrétien and Robert Papen, I briefly juxtapose and examine a few versions of “La chanson de la Grenouillère,” underscoring points of divergence or difference between them before considering the rhetorical (linguistic, poetic, literary) strategies which not only accrue a “powerful rhetorical thrust” (Durnin 62) of nationalist performance, but

reveal early Métis culture and the roots of Métis literary tradition. As this dissertation is a literary history of the Métis, I do not examine the song's music, nor dwell on all the known versions of the song, but rather attempt to situate Falcon within a larger body of Métis literature.

“La chanson de la Grenouillère” recounts the Battle of Seven Oaks and multiple versions of the song attest to its historical popularity. Rather than posing an analytical problem in terms of identifying the “original,” the multiplicity of versions offers a refracted look at Métis oral culture and its intersection with ongoing processes of nationalism.<sup>13</sup> Some of these versions suggest the possibility of authorial revision. What has been dubbed the “authoritative” (Durnin 58, n18) version, obtained from Falcon by Joseph Hargrave, might not be the only one obtained directly from Falcon. The version that Chartrand uses as the base for his French-Michif translation stems from a version obtained in 1818 by William Coltman, allegedly recited to him by Pierre Falcon, during his investigation of the events leading to the incident at Seven Oaks, and presently located amid the Selkirk Papers, and available online through Library and Archives Canada. Contrasting the Selkirk Papers version with the Hargrave version reveals multiple differences not only in the structure of the song, demonstrating a different organization in the number of stanzas, but also at the level of language: word choice, conjugation, and so on. “Une Bande des Guerriers” (SP), for instance, becomes “des braves Guerriers” (Hargrave). Julien notes that, in comparison to the 1863 LaRue version, Hargrave “cherche à donner une version en meilleur français” (2: 62). He points to Hargrave’s occasional use of a more literary French as evidence of this inclination; where the second line of the fifth stanza in the LaRue version reads “J’avons envoyé un ambassadeur,” in the Hargrave equivalent, the fourth line of the third stanza reads as “Nous envoyâmes un ambassadeur.” Although the literariness of this example strongly suggests

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<sup>13</sup> See Julien (1995 and 1996) or Chrétien and Papen (2010) for more on the provenance and divergences of these multiple versions.

Hargrave's editorial influence during the song's transcription, we might also ask which of the differences between the Hargrave and LaRue versions are due to Hargrave's editorial decisions during the transcription, as opposed to potentially Falcon's own decisions during his recitation of the song. Might the version Falcon sang in the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century not differ slightly or considerably from that composed earlier? Though the Selkirk Papers version offers the possibility of comparing two authoritative versions, the register of the language also casts some doubt on this version's provenance and suggests additional mediation between oral and written versions. It raises the possibility of editorial work taking place during the transcription. The line about the "ambassadeur" in the Selkirk version reads as "Nous avons envoyés un Ambassadeur," which, although not as elevated as in the Hargrave version, is a less vernacular version in comparison to LaRue's "J'avons envoyé." Chrétien and Papen point to the presence of the word "j'avons" as evidence of Falcon's biographical details, tracing the influence of this traditional Acadian linguistic form to Falcon's time in Québec "au village de L'Acadie ... [which had been founded] par des Acadiens" (48). The switch from "j'avons" to "nous avons" in the fifth stanza of the Selkirk Papers version is odd given that "j'avons" appears unchanged in the fourth and eight stanzas: "j'avons cerné la Bande des Grenadiers" and "J'avons tué presque toute son armée." If Falcon recited this version to Coltman, why did he change these instances and not the others? If this is not the version Falcon allegedly recited to Coltman, might it be the copy that Selkirk allegedly seized when he captured Fort William in 1816?

The curious presence of "effroyer" in the seventh stanza of the Selkirk Papers version, which is not found in either the LaRue or Hargrave versions, but is replaced by a repetition of "épouvanter," suggests that this is an early version of the song.<sup>14</sup> "[E]ffroyer" is an adjective

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<sup>14</sup> Prior perhaps to the possible fixing of standard or popular versions. The Coltman, or Selkirk Papers, version is the only known version to include the word "effroyer."

relating a great sense of fear; with an “a,” the word “effrayer” becomes a verb; it has more active connotations: to strike fear. With an “a” or an “o,” the word slightly alters the narrative that the song relates, as it ascribes a different motivation to Semple. It suggests he initially confronted the Bois-Brûlés to frighten them, which in turn leaves open the issue of how violence erupted, and subsequently, by not quashing the question, preserves the possibility that the Bois-Brûlés bear some culpability in the eruption of violence. “[E]pouvanter,” on the other hand, though having similar connotations—such as striking terror—also carries hints of violence by layering menace overtop of fear; Semple seeks not only to strike fear in the Bois-Brûlés but to overwhelm them. The repetition of “epouvanter” instead of “effroyer” therefore diminishes the possibility that violence was sparked by the Bois-Brûlés and locates instead the seed of violence in Semple’s initial motivation, prior to the encounter at Seven Oaks. This rhetorical decision reinforces the thematic resistance of the song by subtly emphasizing the aggressive nature of Semple’s actions and works to absolve the Métis of fault. With the seeds of violence located in Semple’s initial actions, the Bois-Brûlés’ response to his aggression becomes reasonable.

In contrast to the notion of Falcon quickly composing a simple song,<sup>15</sup> the substitution of a word which might generate a more nuanced interpretation of the confrontation, “effroyer,” for a deceptively simple repetition of “epouvanter,” suggests a deliberate process of composition; it hints at considerations that may have influenced decision of one word over another. It implies a conscious effort to frame events in a way to emphasize resistance against aggression. Whether or not the word was removed by Falcon, altered by Coltman, or fell out of favour by the time that LaRue and Hargrave transcribed their versions half-a-century later, this seeming replacement provides an intriguing glimpse into the rhetorical intersections of literature and nationalism.

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<sup>15</sup> I touch on the trope of Falcon’s rapid composition, often atop a horse, briefly in the section on Falcon’s other songs, and in greater detail in the “Mythologizing Falcon” section below.

Circling back to the fifth stanza, might the replacement of “J’avons” with “Nous avons” be tied to the same considerations? The Acadian-influenced vernacular of “J’avons,” in favour of the more formal “Nous avons,” suggests a formal shift in the signifying expression of collective subjectivity—it offers a less vernacular form, which simultaneously disambiguates and broadens the rhetorical net of the collective reference, aligns the speaker (the poet) with that collective, as well as emphasizes the collective aspect or will of the actions which follow. This emphasis also opens questions of audience. Contrasting the unique appearance of “nous avons” in the Selkirk Papers version with the LaRue and Hargrave versions, the more formal, collective pronoun acts almost like as an improvised alteration for the benefit of an audience potentially unfamiliar with the vernacular. The disambiguation of the collective pronoun in the fifth stanza, juxtaposed with the collective action taken immediately upon encountering Semple and his forces, emphasizes in no uncertain terms that the group, “nous [Bois Brûlés]” acted with “honneur” by sending an ambassador to parlay with the Governor. Given that the alleged audience of the Selkirk Papers version was Coltman, whose reception and interpretation of the song, and the events which the song relays, carried legal weight, clarification seems quite possible. The presence of “j’avons” in the fifth stanza in the LaRue version, and its equivalent position in the Hargrave version (with the exception of the odd “nous voyâmes,” which Julien attributes to Hargrave’s editorializing), might then reflect more vernacular, popular, versions which did not need to disambiguate such collective pronouns for outsiders.

Historically contextualized, literary comparisons of multiple versions of Falcon’s song hint at larger questions. How do we distinguish and attribute differences and divergences in the songs between Métis singers and informants, and non-Métis scholars and transcribers? Might we detect Métis cultural agency between some versions? How might the performance, recital, or

transmission of the song have shaped it? In other words, what effect might the song's emergence as the national anthem have had on the song? Might the multiplicity not offer a refracted glimpse of Métis national and cultural history? We might consider the variations themselves as tracings of shifts in Métis concerns over time. While he critiqued Marcien Ferland's version—obtained from Paul Lavallée, at St. Ambroise, Manitoba, in 1978—as “tellement corrompues que le chant en est presque impossible” (2: 62), Julien also notes that the version is interesting for its “traces de la prononciation populaire” (62). But, cautioning that the dialect is not contemporary with Falcon's time, Julien warns how “elle peut masquer ... tout autant” (62) as it might reveal. Although it might not shed more light on Falcon's time, its original composition, or the historical events in question, compared to other versions, the Ferland/Lavallée version offers insight into the broader history of the song, its process of cultural transmission, and contemporary Métis perceptions. Points of divergence in other versions of the song might reflect more contemporary (from when the specific version was recorded/obtained) Métis political and cultural perceptions and attitudes. In the Ferland/Lavallée version, the reference to the Orkneys<sup>16</sup> is dropped and the English antagonism emphasized. Another version obtained by Henri Létourneau from Alfred Lafrenière in Portage La Prairie, in 1970, obscures historical details by rendering the Orkneys as “[les] garganiques,” but, in contrast to other versions, repeats the line “pour piller not' pays,” thus re-emphasizing the central, ongoing, political crux of the song: Métis sovereignty over homeland. In this way, the territorial dispossession of the Métis under settler-colonialism seems reflected, even emphasized, in versions of the song obtained post-1885. Similar emphasis is produced in recent references by contemporary Métis writers. In *Pemmican Wars*, the first volume of her graphic novel series *A Girl Called Echo*, Katherena Vermette reproduces only the first two stanzas of the song, despite ample space on the page for more. Ending on “Qui sont ici

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<sup>16</sup> “Orguenis” (Coltman/Selkirk); “Arkanyis” (LaRue); “Orcanais” (Hargrave)



pour piller notr' pays. / To rob our country" (47), certainly emphasizes Métis land claims, and links the song, and Seven Oaks, with other Métis resistances (1869-70 and 1885).

With its multitude of versions, the Seven Oaks song has remained a living oral and literary document, which not only provides insight into historic(al) Métis nationalism, but also contemporary nationalism. Julien notes that as "un sujet totalement issu de la culture orale [qui] s'est transporté dans le domaine de l'imprimé" (2: 71), Falcon's songs have become literary objects, but as Paul Chartrand's recent book, *Pierriche Falcon: The Michif Rhymester*, and the accompanying CD, demonstrate, the song remains also a song. In both its oral and literary forms, Falcon's "anthem" continues to inspire and arouse Métis nationalism.

### **Falcon's Other Songs and the Early Métis Literary Tradition**

In contrast to "La chanson de la Grenouillère," Falcon's other songs are not as well-known. However, their transmission, dissemination, and survival across the North-West, to the now, suggest that they had some significant popularity during Falcon's time. Demonstrating important thematic and stylistic elements—mostly direct language, the "documentary" value in relaying events through Métis perspectives, the use of humour and satire, the centrality of music, the persistence of orality and performance in literary production, and perhaps most significantly, consistent political resonance, including nationalism, territory, and resistance—these songs not only shed light on Falcon's body of work, but illustrate the stylistic range of early Métis poetics which we see reappear in later Métis writing.

#### **"La danse des Bois-Brûlés" (ca. late 1816)**

Falcon's pseudo-meta song about singing and dancing, "La danse des Bois-Brûlés," can

be read as a form of politically aware satire. Touching on the machinations of Lord Selkirk after his (the HBC's) seizure of the NWC post at Fort Williams in August of 1816, the song features dueling voices as it recounts a ball allegedly held to entice and retain the fort's servants and workers, and also "[loosen] tongues ... to reveal the secrets of the opposition" (MacLeod 10). The reproduction in Chartrand's *The Michif Rhymester* lists four separate voices: a Herald, the Master of Ceremonies, the Bois-Brûlés, and "His Lordship" (Falcon, "Danse" 15), presumably Lord Selkirk. Falcon seems aware of the ball's duplicitous intent, and ironic references through "L'Ordonnateur [s Master of Ceremonies's]" constant appeal and promise of music and a good time, "Y a musique, et vous aurez beau bal!" accrues a vaguely menacing intensity as the song progresses; the unrelenting insistence created by repetition suggests some certain wariness and reluctance in those being appealed to. The possibility of trickery, or ambush, is also created by the reference to the "Meurons," the mercenary regiment of Swiss soldiers hired by Selkirk to accompany him to Red River. The image of mercenaries tuning violins, "Meurons, accordez," amplifies a growing sense of jeopardy. While the Bois-Brûlés eventually accept the invitation, "Allons! Pas tant d'façon. / Sautons donc, dansons donc" (17), they do so with wariness and reluctance. "Que l'diable emport' Milord et son régal!" (17). In the wake of Seven Oaks, this song seems at the very least to contain some exhortation of caution, if not proffering an outright damning of Selkirk, as underlying the jovial dance, there is a warning to take heed when dealing with him and the HBC.

### **"Ballade du Général Dickson" (1836-1837)**

Falcon's "Ballade du Général Dickson" is perhaps less obviously political compared to his other songs, as it presents an outsider, General Dickson, arriving in Red River in 1836 not as

a colonizing force looking to take over Métis lands, but rather attempting to enlist “Bois-Brûlés” as a fighting force for some far-off military campaign. Unlike his other songs, which recount the violent confrontation at Seven Oaks, the machinations at Fort Williams, and the resistance of 1869-70 through the story of William McDougall, in the “Dickson” song, Falcon captures the Métis during their ascendancy in Red River. That is, during the Métis’ so-called “golden years.” With their martial prowess having some broader renown, the Métis are not resisting an outside force, but rather an outside force has come to seek assistance. General Dickson lavishes Cuthbert Grant with “[des] épaulettes d’argent” and promises of glory in “Mexico,” where they will find their “couronn[es]” (Falcon 19). The song begins in the poet’s voice, with a narrative account of Dickson’s arrival in Red River, his desire, and purpose, before a large narrative ellipsis between the third and fourth stanzas shifts the poetic perspective and presents a six-stanza speech in Dickson’s voice. With his plans foundered, Dickson readies for departure, but not before a public and effusive display variously outlining his woes, his gratitude for hospitality and aid after all of his men and officers have abandoned him. The final few lines of his speech suggest a tragi-comic image of Dickson being escorted out of Red River by a pair of Métis guides.

The final three stanzas return to Falcon’s poetic voice, and briefly recount how the song was composed over drinks, “Un jour étant à table / A boire et à chanter” (19), and celebrates the song’s composer. MacLeod curiously speculates that, after witnessing the event, “as he galloped home [Falcon] composed his song to the rhythm of the horse’s hoofbeats” (26), even as the song itself suggests, “Un jour étant à table / A boire et à chanter (bis) / A chanter tout au long / La nouvelle chanson” (Falcon 19), its partial spontaneous composition around a table, over drinks. Might Falcon have purposely cultivated this notion of spontaneous composition? The narrative ellipsis, and temporal distances created between Dickson’s speech, the ceremony of lavishing

epaulettes on Grant, and some later day when Falcon (or the speaking voice) recounts the event over drinks at a table, suggests less spontaneity than deliberation, or some measure of thoughtful intentionality on Falcon's part rather than casual improvisation. Regardless, as Falcon's voice bookends the parody of Dickson's speech, the structure implies that the song offers more than a straight-forward and humorous account. Although the incident is presented jovially, by capturing "the final theatrical scene of the incident" (MacLeod 23), Falcon's "Dickson" becomes, like "La Grenouillère," a more complex work, that not only functions as a work of entertainment, satire, or parody, but by simultaneously conveying notable events from a Métis perspective, accrues documentary or journalistic impetus. The incident is contextualized with a minimalist account of who, what, where, and why: General Dickson, attempting to recruit Bois-Brûlés, in Red River, to invade Mexico. Further, by containing, preserving, and transmitting a paraphrase of Dickson's words, the song encodes this primary source. Finally, like the caution of Selkirk in the previous song, the "Dickson" song also contains a warning for others who may encounter Dickson—to be wary of his silver tongue. While the six-stanza-long speech illustrates Dickson's charm, the song reveals Métis pragmatism by foregrounding in the second stanza, how Dickson's appeal lacked material or monetary support, noting that he "n'a point d'quoi payer" (19) for their services.<sup>17</sup>

### **"Les tribulations d'un roi malheureux" (1869-1870)**

Composed in late 1869 or early 1870, the last song attributed to Falcon, "Les tribulations d'un roi malheureux," returns to the theme of national resistance through William McDougall's ill-fated attempt to accept the governorship of the North-West following the HBC's sale of Red

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<sup>17</sup> MacLeod notes that the HBC "refused to honour Dickson's drafts" in an effort to undermine Dickson's offer, and thus "Red River was saved" (25). However, in this case, "Red River," seems to mean the HBC only, and not the Métis. A speculative question remains: had Dickson's drafts been honoured, and had he had the funds with which to pay for their service, would some Métis have joined him?

River (and the North-West) to Canada. It humorously establishes McDougall's arrogant desire for "richesses" (22) before recounting how his dream foundered at the hands of Métis resistance.

The eighth stanza appears to directly reference Métis words and actions:

Déjà de son royaume  
 Le sol il va toucher,  
 Quand tout à coup un homme  
 Lui défend d'avancer,  
 Lui disant "Mon ami  
 C'est assez loin d'ici." (22)

The final lines in particular seem to echo Louis Riel's words to Canadian surveyors earlier that fall, when he stepped on a survey chain and told them, "You go no further" (qtd. in Siggins 97), but the lines more likely refer to Ambroise Lépine's repulsion of McDougall at the border with the United States (Teillet 188). An earlier allusion, in stanza six, to McDougall's forgery of the Queen's proclamation that the North-West Territories and Rupert's Land were now part of Canada: "Et la voir imprimée / Avant qu'elle soit passée" (22), which Maggie Siggins notes was "revealed as bogus" (126) by mid-December 1869, suggests that the song was composed at the earliest in late December. The general celebratory air of the song, which ends with "culbutés" and echoes Falcon's "Grenouillère," confirms that the composition occurred prior to the arrival of the Canadian troops under Colonel Garnet Wolseley in the summer of 1870. Although the song is attributed to Falcon, "Les tribulations d'un roi malheureux" is probably a collaboration, possibly with Abbé [Georges] Dugas, curé of St. François-Xavier, in late 1869. Martial Allard contends that the song "fut retravaillée avec la permission de Pierriche" (qtd. in Julien 2: 67). But Julien troubles this possibility; despite the presence of some "fragments qu'on pourrait attribuer

... à Falcon” (2: 67), he wonders about the possibility that someone else composed the song in his style. While pointing to the popularity of Falcon’s earlier songs, and known snippets of parody, as evidence supporting the theory of the song as a parody, Julien stops short of declaring it so.<sup>18</sup> Instead, he presents the song’s linguistic and thematic inconsistencies, and juxtaposes elements that echo Falcon’s previous works, and those which suggest “un effort littéraire plus laborieux” (68). Julien holds the fourth stanza as example of the “humour et l’ironie que l’on retrouvait dans les chansons signées” (67), and which also resonate with “La Grenouillère[’s]” image of settlers “ici pour piller not’ pays” (Falcon 11):

Comptant sur les richesses  
 Qu’il trouverait chez nous  
 Il eut la maladresse  
 De ne pas prendre un sou (Falcon 22)

However, the middle stanzas, five to nine, contrast Falcon’s style with extended metaphors, images, word choice, allusions, and rigid rhyming. The description of McDougall’s journey as “un voyage en mer menacé par l’orage et la tempête” (Julien 2: 68), hints at the presence of another voice, influence, or collaborative partner. The return of Falcon’s voice in the final three stanzas, apparent through a humorous, scatological reference to McDougall’s current throne, “un trône percé”, and another allusive echo of “La Grenouillère” in the final two lines “Déjà tous culbutés / Par les Bois-Brûlés” (Falcon 22), re-establishes Falcon’s influence on the piece as a whole. The sequence of stanzas exhibiting elements of Falcon’s voice, as opposed to the second

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<sup>18</sup> Margaret Complin states that there was a “parody on Falcon’s [Grenouillère] written in 1869” (53) about Pascal Breland, a Métis man, married to Cuthbert Grant’s daughter Maria, who had disagreed with Riel’s provisional government in 1869-70. Jean Teillet notes that “Breland had never supported the Riels. He was from St. François Xavier, and since the *Sayer* trial, there had been a difference of opinion between the Métis of St. François Xavier and the Métis of St. Vital and St. Norbert” (222). The surviving snippet: “Pierriche Falcon est un brave homme, / Pascal Breland est un cochonne [sic]” (qtd. in Complin 53), reveals then not only Falcon’s popularity and esteem, but the disparaging of Breland suggests a heterogeneity of Métis sentiments and internal disagreement.

voice, creates a framing effect, whereby the voice in the middle stanzas is contained in a way similar to how Dickson's voice is embedded within Falcon's re-telling and performance in the "Dickson" song. Although "Les tribulations" shares polyphonic similarities with Falcon's earlier songs, as evidenced throughout his works by the number of lines featuring quotations and citations in other characters' voices, and lines such as "Il dit: 'J'ai confiance'" and "Lui disant 'Mon ami'" (22) in this last song, "Les tribulations" differs in the sense that the outside voice, framed by Falcon's, is not restricted to citation, quotation, or paraphrase only, but directly shapes the poem's poetics. In other words, it alters the poem's style and narrative voice: the extended sea voyage metaphor, for instance, seems out of place stylistically when compared to earlier songs. Despite the dissonance of this outside voice, "Les tribulations" functions like the earlier songs as a complex work of oral culture, at once a form of entertainment, a source of local news, as well as a catalyzing performance of Métis nationalism. As I argued earlier, considered as a whole, a pattern of satire emerges from the body of Falcon's compositions, the songs work as caricatures, which mock Semple, Selkirk, Dickson, and McDougall by re-counting how their arrogance leads them (mostly) into disastrous conflict with the Métis.

### **Mythologizing Falcon: Writing over the Gaps**

In the end, consolidating seemingly contradictory images of Falcon reveals perhaps less a contradiction than it provides, albeit through the tiniest of fragments, a glimpse of the multiple facets of a more complex character than what historical records can verifiably confirm. That is, these descriptive fragments, held up alongside the history of Red River, present only the barest sketch of a long and full human life. As suggested above, all the gaps and uncertainties about Falcon's life seem to invite speculation, hyperbole, the conflation of his biographical details with

his songs, and even invention. For instance, Grant MacEwan's description of Falcon's laughter as "heard across the broad valley of the Assiniboine" (25) seems to be a romantic, metaphorical recognition of his influence rather than a historically accurate account of some event. Perhaps Falcon could be heard laughing across some narrow stretch of the Assiniboine River, but there is no documentary evidence for the claim. "Dans la vie de Falcon," notes Julien, "il semble que plusieurs éléments soient reconstitués après coup" (1: 118). Clarifying, he adds that "la plupart du temps, il s'agit d'une reconstitution de la biographie à partir des chansons de Falcon qu'on prend comme scénario de la vie de l'auteur" (118). Julien sees a tendency to equate Falcon's biography and his character with the events and descriptions found in his songs, either by placing Falcon at the scene of his songs or by conferring to the songs a self-description of his character. "Pierre was a lively, spirited and sparkling individual," write George and Terry Goulet, "whose qualities are reflected in his songs" (197).

Julien traces how Tassé's 1882 description of Falcon informs a number of subsequent studies and texts on the songwriter,<sup>19</sup> from Bryce's description of Falcon's "excitable patriotic spirit" (qtd. in Julien 1: 110), through Agnes Laut's disparaging characterization of the bard in *Lords of the North*, to Barbara Cass-Beggs's later wholesale generalization of the Métis as an "excitable, imaginative, and ambitious; passionate, restless, easily amused and generally devout" people (qtd. in Julien 1: 110). Julien points out how these images often "correspond à l'image populaire qu'on voudra se faire des Métis après l'escarmouche de 1816, le coup d'éclat de 1869 et la catastrophe de 1885" (1: 110). We find traces of this desire to create an image of Falcon and

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<sup>19</sup> "Lorsque l'insurrection éclata dans l'automne de 1869, sous la direction de M. Louis Riel, et que les Métis français se rassemblèrent à Saint-Norbert, pour s'opposer à l'entrée dans le pays du gouverneur nommé par les autorités canadiennes, [Falcon] voulut accompagner ses enfants, et il se désolait parce que ces derniers s'y opposaient. Malgré son âge avancé, il voulait à tout prix dérouiller son vieux fusil de chasseur. 'Pendant que les ennemis seront occupés à me dépecer, disait-il, nos gens taperont dur et pourront porter de bons coups.' Il rêvait sans doute des combats dans le genre de ceux d'Homère, où le vainqueur fait un long discours à l'ennemi avant de l'expédier au pays d'où l'on ne revient plus" (Tassé 350)



the Métis in other works as well. Tatiana Arcand's claim in her 1989 study that Falcon "a donc fait plus que raconter: il a vécu avec ses compatriotes l'histoire de son peuple" (21) gestures to an ascription of centrality that tends to obscure rather than illuminate historical events, causes, and effects. I do not suggest that Falcon did not live much of this history, but rather that this ascription of centrality can overstate his role in historical events. Arcand's account of how "une copie de 'La chanson de la Grenouillère' étant tombée entre les mains de Lord Selkirk, ce dernier, en route vers la colonie, saisit aussitôt le fort William par représailles" (22), appears unlikely in its implication that the song in part impelled Selkirk's seizure of Fort William, given the timeline, distance, and orality of the song. It confers "un caractère dramatique à la chanson," writes Julien (1: 117). Yet, in asking "peut-on entrevoir la possibilité d'une distribution écrite à quelques mois de la composition" (117), within the context of oral transmission, Julien also ignores, or at least does not address the issue regarding a "handwritten version [of the song that] was among papers seized by Lord Selkirk at Fort William in 1816" (Dick 98, note 35), nor the possibility of an informant, or how information was transmitted at the time. Selkirk's reprisals are more likely due to the events at Seven Oaks themselves (not to mention the years of violent antagonism between the NWC and HBC which brought about the confrontation) than a response to Falcon's song; and the handwritten copy of the song, to which Arcand alludes, and Dick refers, would likely have been among the papers seized *after* the taking of Fort William.<sup>20</sup>

A more egregious example of the problematic centering of Falcon as a significant player in Métis history emerges from MacEwan's version of Falcon's life in his book *Métis Makers of*

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<sup>20</sup> There appears to be some confusion regarding which version is in the Selkirk Papers. Paul Chartrand bases his Michif-French translation of "La Grenouillère" on a Library and Archives Canada version included in the Selkirk Papers, available online, reportedly written by William Coltman (of the Coltman report) in 1818. However, Tatiana Arcand and Lyle Dick separately refer to another copy allegedly seized by Selkirk after taking Fort William in August of 1816, prior to Coltman's investigation into the incident at Seven Oaks. For this dissertation, I treat the version found in the Selkirk Papers as an early version of the song (prior to its publication by LaRue in 1863), but leave open the question of its date of transcription.

*History*, in which MacEwan diverges from Falcon's standard biographical narrative (after noting that Falcon settled in Grantown in 1824, most accounts tend to skip to 1855) to insert him into the Battle of Grand Coteau in 1851.<sup>21</sup> Not only does MacEwan confer to Falcon a leadership position in the hunt, which no other sources mention, he also estimates that the number of times that "Falcon served as the supreme commander of the hunt" was "probably several" and that "all the Métis present that day emerged as heroes and heroines but special honours fell to Pierre Falcon" (32). The issue of leadership appears to be a case of mistaken identity as W.L. Morton points out that it was not Falcon, but his son Jean-Baptiste Falcon, who led the hunt that year. While not impossible, it seems unlikely that Pierre Falcon was present at this battle. He would have been 58 years old, and even the old leader, Cuthbert Grant (who was born the same year), was not present that summer, having instead stayed behind "to lead the old folk to Grant's Lake for the goose hunt" (MacLeod and Morton 151). Although the absence of a song about the Battle of Grand Coteau might suggest that the bard was not present at this event, "[h]ow strange," Morton laments "that this epic of Métis valour did not stir Pierre Falcon to compose another of his ballads!" (151), the absence does not preclude him from having been present, participated in, or having witnessed the battle, nor does it mean a song was not composed and then subsequently forgotten. What this focus on absence does emphasize more definitively is how the perceived gaps in our knowledge of Falcon, and more broadly certain aspects of Métis history, time and again invite conjecture and speculation. Morton's lament echoes MacLeod's sentiments over the so-called absence of a song about the buffalo hunt; MacLeod, as Monique Giroux reveals, felt that Canada not only ought to have, but even "*needed* to have a song of the buffalo hunt" (Giroux 51; emphasis mine). Giroux takes care to demonstrate how MacLeod describes this

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<sup>21</sup> This battle between a small group of Métis bison hunters from St. François Xavier, or White Horse Plains, and a large group of Yanktonai Dakota, occurred on July 13 and 14, 1851; see Morton (1978), as well as Barkwell and

absence of a song about the buffalo hunt as a “great lack” (qtd. in Giroux 51), and subsequently how the desire to satisfy this lack informs MacLeod’s eventual decision to include in her collection, *Songs of Old Manitoba*, the buffalo hunt song, as written by Agnes Laut, thus perpetuating a problematic attribution of this song to Falcon.

### **Agnes Laut’s Denigration of Falcon and the Song of “The Buffalo Hunt”**

What does it mean to have a work of fiction, particularly one that is “overtly dismissive of Falcon” (Braz, “Duelling” 158), inform us about him and his songs? Laut’s “denigration” of Falcon is not accidental, Braz contends, but is rather part and parcel of a settler-strategy to erode Métis nationhood and justify the settler-colonial occupation of the North-West through the undermining of key aspects of early Métis nationalism: subverting Falcon and “La chanson de la Grenouillère.” According to Braz, “Laut herself appears to sense that Falcon’s poem could undermine the politics of her own narrative” (162), one that, without irony, irreconcilably holds “Indigenous people as victims of the machinations of the fur companies, yet envisages the fur traders as the heroes of her narrative” (164). Laut’s treatment of Falcon and other Indigenous figures/characters relies on familiar tropes, devices, and rhetorical strategies: from dehumanizing language, animalistic descriptions of Indigenous characters, to a captivity narrative which propels her protagonist, Rufus Gillespie, into the North-West, to lauding the Hudson’s Bay Company, which “reclaimed [the North-West] from savagery for civilization” (Laut 5). Laut’s novel depends on and promotes a binary between savagery and civilization, or what Emma LaRocque calls a pervasive “super-myth” that was “constructed to serve the material, cultural, and ideological ends of the colonial enterprise” (*Other* 4). For Laut, the Métis are “as wild a figure as any one of the savage rabble” (qtd. in Braz 161). Laut’s animalistic description of the

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Haag (2009) for more, including translated eyewitness accounts, and transcribed oral accounts of the event.

Métis, from “mongrel plain-rangers” (Laut 145), describing Grant’s smile as reminiscent of “a dog’s snarl” (145), to comparisons of “Indian nature [as] more in harmony with the hawk and the coyote than with the white man” (342), to her characterization of Falcon’s “verse-making” as an embodiment of nature, akin to the “wind and the waterfalls and the birds” (201) functions as a concerted dehumanization, which not only places the Métis, and other Indigenous characters, on the “savage” end of the civ/sav binary, but more broadly justifies their eventual colonization.

I dwell on these examples of dehumanization of Falcon, the Métis, and other Indigenous characters in Laut’s novel because her book is so insidiously “pivotal in the memorialization” of Falcon and his songs (Braz, “Duelling” 157), and its effects are multifarious. Laut’s influence affects not only how Falcon is discussed but also the ways in which songs have been attributed to him, such as MacLeod’s inclusion of “The Buffalo Hunt” in *Songs of Old Manitoba*. Tracing resonances of Laut’s rhetoric and influence on the subsequent scholarship on Falcon, both Julien and Giroux show how Laut’s historical fiction undergirds certain characterizations of Falcon and remains the problematic source of “The Buffalo Hunt.” Further, we can see how this influence emanating from Laut, sustained through MacLeod and Martial Allard, continues to inform recent scholarship on the Métis. In *Métis and the Medicine Line*, his excellent book examining Métis communities’ intertwined history with the Canada/U.S. border, historian Michel Hogue points to “The Buffalo Hunt” as an exemplary political “expression” which underscores “the economic and social significance of the buffalo hunt to [Métis communities in the northern Plains], as well as its importance to their sense of autonomy” (44-45). The issue with Hogue’s assertion comes down to whether the “Buffalo” song is composed by Falcon, or if it is Laut’s invention, which subsequently affects how it is interpreted and held up as a Métis text, or conversely is a text on the Métis—which are very different things. Is it a Métis expression of Métis culture, or is it a

parody? Does it testify to Métis cultural practices, or is it an appropriative outsider observation? In unquestionably accepting the song's provenance or "transmission," Martial Allard seems to anachronistically legitimize it. "Quoique le roman soit fictif," writes Allard, "l'idée de Pierriche composant une chanson de cette façon-là est tout à fait vraisemblable" (74). This "façon," betrays Allard's misreading of Laut's novel, and his conflation of author and protagonist: "elle [Laut]," Allard seems to suggest, "avait accompagné les Métis lors d'une chasse au buffalo. La journée finie Pierriche compose cette chanson" (74). However, since she was born in 1871, Laut is clearly not Falcon's contemporary. The figure that accompanies "Pierre" (Laut 201) and the Métis on a buffalo hunt in the novel is the novel's fictional, male, protagonist, Rufus Gillespie. Allard's claim that one must have lived the hunt "pour pouvoir décrire aussi clairement les événements" (74), reveals not only a curious disregard for literature as creative writing, the craft of fiction, but a dismissal of first-hand accounts which might have informed Laut's writing, such as Alexander Ross's account (234-274) in *The Red River Settlement* (1851). Given Laut's inaccurate translation of "La Grenouillère," also included in her novel, and which seems devised to position the Métis as "savage" (Laut 342) and bolster an Anglo-settler sense of belonging in the North-West, as well as the inclusion of additional, apparently fictional, verses and fragments focalized through Laut's "bard" (202-203), the attribution of "The Buffalo Hunt" to Falcon is incredibly problematic. Even if Laut's "Buffalo" song is an inaccurate translation, this does not mean that an original, or base, version on which the translation is based was necessarily Falcon's composition. Allard does not support his contention of the song's provenance with any stylistic analysis or comparison.

Stylistically, the "Buffalo" song diverges significantly from Falcon's other songs. Even setting aside Laut's literary embellishments, extended use of figurative language, her description

of Métis hunters as “hounds on the scent” or “stealthy panthers” (Laut 218), the prevalence of overtly romanticized imagery, the buffalo as hiding in “lair[s] of dank spear-grass,” and details that dwell on characterization instead of action, such as the buffalo’s “tossing of horns, a pawing of hoofs” (218), other elements appear oddly absent for a Falcon composition. There is no apparent satirical target, no mocking of an outside figure, no specific voice preserved in song to transmit to others, no humour. What dialogue that appears seems curiously unnecessary. The commands to “Get you gone to the [women] at the tents, old men” and later “Now, old men and wives come you out with the carts!” (218) are puzzling given that the Métis would have already known their roles, and it suggests that they are meant to inform outsiders about the rules of the hunt rather than the Métis themselves. In fact, given that Falcon’s songs tend to deal with notable events, a seemingly generic buffalo hunt—which many Métis would have experienced multiple times—appears out of place, and casts more doubt on Falcon’s composition of the song. In the end, I tend to agree with Julien’s contention that the song ought to be read “comme une oeuvre de fiction historique” (2: 71); not a work by Falcon, but a parody that loosely emulates his style.

As hinted above, Laut’s influence extends through the description of Falcon’s alleged creative process, to the interpretation of the tune, or the music, of the songs as well. Julien notes how Laut established “définitivement le cliché d’une composition faite dans la nature, au rythme des pas du cheval” (1: 112). Laut was not the first, however, to draw on this sort of imagery; in 1871, J.J. Hargrave wrote that “[La Grenouillère] was composed on horseback while [Falcon was] on his way back home from the scene of [the battle’s] occurrence” (75). While it is not inconceivable that Falcon composed songs from atop a horse, and an equestrian rhythm might have informed his compositions, there is no evidence to support the assertion. Rather, what this repeated claim of equine influence implies, which Julien traces through Complin’s collaborator,

Abbé Picton, who preferred “la mélodie de Cuthbert Falcon”<sup>22</sup> (1: 112) with regards to “la chanson de la Grenouillère,” because it contained “more of the ‘horsemen’s swinging rhythm” (Complin, qtd. in Julien 1: 112), to Allard, and McLeod, is the emergence of a specific trope. Although horsemanship is an important part of historical Métis culture, as evidenced through accounts of hunts and material culture, and perhaps due to it, the affirmation that certain versions of Falcon’s songs are more “authentic” because of their “swinging rhythm” not only remains debatable, but indicates a romanticism that has become concretized as truth.

In this way, Falcon is at times more a myth than historical fact. Giroux argues that the “overlap between fact and fiction points to a flagrant disregard for Pierre Falcon as a real, Metis person (given that fiction seems to have been a good enough source for a factual account of his life and music) in favour of a version of Falcon that serves the particular vision white settlers had, and have, for Canada” (46). Laut’s descriptions of Falcon, and other Métis characters more generally, as “riotous” (3), filled with “the savage instincts of the wild beasts” (145), of Falcon as “the equestrian personification of the frenzied muse” (202), and the Bois-Brûlés at Seven Oaks as “furious at [Grant’s] disciplined restraint” (333) and “bloodthirsty” (335), among a slew of examples, show that this “vision” white settlers had for Canada, which Giroux underscores, positions Falcon, the Métis, and other Indigenous people as uncivilized, wild, and specifically animalistic as part of a broader strategy to justify the dispossession of their lands, and the imposition of a settler-colonial government. As the composer of what has been called the Métis national anthem, “La chanson de la Grenouillère,” Falcon has become a lightning rod, his life-narrative a rhetorical battleground where differing “vision[s]” of the Métis are contested.

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<sup>22</sup> Grandson of Pierre Falcon.

### **The Battle of Seven Oaks and Pierre Falcon: A Brief Historiographical Comparison**

Agnes Laut's dehumanization of Pierre Falcon and the Métis is not unique. It is part of a much broader tradition of early historians of Western Canada lauding Canadian expansionism at the expense of Indigenous people. In its descriptions of Indigenous characters—in its imagery, and plot devices—Laut's novel borrows from early settler-written histories of Western Canada. Through Laut we begin to glimpse at how historiographies of the Battle of Seven Oaks and of Falcon and his songs become critically intertwined. In his seminal study of the historiography of Seven Oaks, Lyle Dick traces how the narrative interpretation of the battle shifts dramatically with the arrival of Anglo-Ontarian settlers in the years after 1870, and as Braz notes, Laut's "denigration" of Indigenous peoples not only "echoes what ... Lyle Dick has identified as the dominant historiography of the Red River Settlement" (Braz, "Duelling" 166), but reveals how this dominant historiography also informs a great deal of the scholarship on Falcon.

#### **On Seven Oaks:**

Where previous accounts of Seven Oaks had largely been written by local, amateur historians with ties to the Red River Settlement, and often based on first-hand accounts, later histories, such as those by George Bryce and subsequent historians, relied less on such balanced approaches and "drew [almost exclusively and uncritically] ... from treatments earlier advanced by Lord Selkirk, the Hudson's Bay Company, and their sympathizers" (Dick 93). In other words, beginning around 1890, Anglo-Canadian historians "promoted to orthodoxy" (93) the old HBC version of the event, ignoring alternate voices, contrary evidence, and nuanced analysis. Dick points out that while historians were aware of the Coltman Report, the "most detailed and comprehensive analysis ever prepared on the Seven Oaks incident" (95), they largely ignored its



findings in their own works, bypassing “the original testimony” (96), or eyewitness accounts of the incident, in favour of mediated testimony. Dick argues that Bryce’s methodology was biased:

Bryce’s approach to historical evidence was also quite straightforward: in researching Seven Oaks, he simply looked for testimony from the Selkirk side alleging Métis savagery, quoted it at length, and ignored contrary evidence ... [b]y quoting testimony from only one side, Bryce was able to rewrite the history of Seven Oaks to incorporate all of the old Selkirk party’s allegations which had been rejected by Coltman and called into question by the Red River historiography. (103)

Moreover, Dick demonstrates how Bryce’s history was perhaps less a matter of poor scholarship (although Dick also seems to suggest that its methodology and analysis were less than rigorous) than of legitimizing Anglo-Canadian dominance in the West. “Representing Seven Oaks as a ‘massacre,’” writes Dick, was “integral to the construction of a new master narrative of progress in the West.” Most concerning, for this project, is that Bryce also “set the tone for the subsequent historiography of Seven Oaks” (104). That is, Bryce’s biased reversal of the narrative of Seven Oaks, and the construction of an Anglo-centric account which legitimized (in the eyes of settlers) Indigenous dispossession, undergirds a host of subsequent scholarship. Dick traces Bryce’s influence in the works of historians such as Chester Martin, George Stanley, Marcel Giraud, and W.L. Morton;<sup>23</sup> historians, it should be noted, whose scholarship pepper the works cited of texts on Falcon. Dick asserts that while there has been a gradual emergence of more “discriminating” (111) scholarship on Seven Oaks since around the early 1970s, accounts by Bryce and others remain influential, informing numerous scholarly and popular works on the

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<sup>23</sup> According to Dick, “In uncritically reproducing stereotypes from Alexander Ross, Stanley helped perpetuate the conventional wisdom of Métis inferiority in Anglo-Canadian discourse” (106); Marcel Giraud’s “contribution was to give renewed credibility to the old stereotypes ... derived from the encrusted prejudices of half a century of Anglo-Canadian writing on [the Métis]” (107); and W.L. Morton’s “characterisation [of the Métis is] almost uniformly

subject. Even recent works bear the mark. Francophone historian Jacqueline Blay's recent *Histoire du Manitoba français*, for example, seems to rely heavily on this Anglo-Canadian historiography, and curiously, an unspecified account taken from Paul Benoît's 1904 book on the life of Archbishop Alexandre-Antonin Taché,<sup>24</sup> who, it should be noted, was not yet born in 1816 (64-67). What is more, despite a long historiographic tradition of equivocation and passive sentence construction regarding who fired the first shot, and most importantly, that Coltman "unambiguously concluded that the first shot was fired by the Selkirk party" (Dick 97), Blay, through the unspecified account taken from Benoît's book, not only perpetuates Bryce's old contention that the Métis fired the first shot, but uncritically cites a passage that refers to the incident as a "massacre" (65). That such biased versions of the event persist suggests the sedimentation of an "ideological bedrock" (Dick 113), which signals a continued disregard, or ignorance, of available evidence as the Coltman report, and Falcon's famous song.

### **On Falcon:**

Dick contends that "La chanson de la Grenouillère" is more than a song as it marks the beginning of "Indigenous historiography of Seven Oaks" (98). Critically, Dick demonstrates how it functions as an orally transmitted account of this historical event; one that, when compared to the textual evidence of the time, "corresponds closely to sworn testimony at the trials in central Canada and depositions taken by Commissioners Coltman and Fletcher" (99). However, Dick also notes that after its inclusion in J.J. Hargrave's *Red River* (1871), the song was "never again ... accorded credibility as a legitimate account" (101), in the Anglo-Canadian historiographic tradition—spanning from the late 19<sup>th</sup> to late 20<sup>th</sup> centuries—that he deconstructs. Even Hargrave

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negative" (109) and, what is more, "approach[es] the mythical" (110).

<sup>24</sup> Alexandre-Antonin Taché (1823-1894) was a French Canadian Roman Catholic priest, missionary, the second

troubles the song's credibility, arguing that since Falcon was "a member of the North West party ... [his] prejudices have seriously interfered with the accuracy of his description" (75).

The ways in which Anglo-Canadian histories of Falcon and his songs, and of the Battle of Seven Oaks, are intertwined is akin to a loose braid, whereby various narrative focuses, rhetoric, language (and the ways in which they discuss the Métis), intermittently converge and intersect, and then diverge over time. We observe moments of such intersection in the works of Agnes Laut, Margaret Complin, Martial Allard, Margaret Arnett MacLeod, and William Morton, when through their similar rhetorical choices which position the Métis and Falcon as "wild," and their equivocation, through passive sentence construction, on descriptions of the battle itself, and who fired the first shot, perpetuate a decidedly Anglo-Canadian perspective, which, Dick has argued, was constructed following Red River's entry into the Canadian Confederation. In this way, we read vast swathes of these historiographies as almost twin-strands, mutually functioning to support a common ideological and material project: the justification of settler-colonialism and the dispossession of Indigenous peoples' lands and cultures.<sup>25</sup> Laut's smearing of Falcon, and Bryce and others' "construction of historical tradition" (Dick 91) regarding Seven Oaks, betrays underlying sentiment. They reveal not only an "uneasy positioning of Metis people [in the settler-imagination]" (Giroux 57), but speak to a persistent settler-anxiety grounded in what Braz describes as "the need of non-Indigenous Canadians to feel at home in a land in which they lack ancient roots" ("Duelling" 168).

Giroux's contention that settler-Canadian scholarship on Falcon reveals an "uneasy positioning of Metis people" extends beyond Anglo-Canadian historiography of Western Canada

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bishop (after Bishop Provencher), and later the first Archbishop of St. Boniface, Manitoba.

<sup>25</sup> We might consider these closely-related historiographies as mutually supporting a common project, but it seems that one's influence on the other was mostly unidirectional—the "tradition" that Dick deconstructs influences and informs the historiography of Falcon and his songs, and much less the other way around.

to include francophone historiographies. As she demonstrates, this “positioning” emerges in the specific ways that Falcon is presented through a Québécois or Franco-Manitoban lens. Combing through francophone historiography of Falcon and his songs, from historical sources such as LaRue, Tassé, Prud’Homme, and Barbeau to more contemporary works of literary criticism by Annette St-Pierre, Tatiana Arcand, J.R. Léveillé, and Jacques Julien, Giroux exposes a tendency to emphasize Falcon’s francophone roots at the expense of a Métis identity.<sup>26</sup> Without specific and direct reference to Falcon or his songs as being Métis, Giroux contends, his “Metis identity ... becomes hidden under the veneer of French culture” (57). Although she takes care to point out an exception with the work of Marcien Ferland, who “clearly identifies [Falcon’s song] as Metis” (53), she concludes that Falcon has largely been “subsumed into a Franco-Manitoban, or French-Canadian identity” (57).

Giroux shows that Falcon’s Métis identity is often downplayed or ignored in many of the works on him, to the detriment of Métis nationalism, and potentially to the recognition of Métis cultural traditions—including oral and written storytelling, and literary culture—but Giroux also problematically never defines the Franco-Manitoban identity she accuses of subsuming Falcon. She does not ask what a Franco-Manitoban is. Rather, through this lack of definition, she seems to suggest a sort of ahistorical, fixed-notion of Franco-Manitobans as only related to Québec, as western, French Canadians. However, this position simplifies and conflates a complex history and surprising diversity among Franco-Manitobans; it elides important and complex kinships between French Canadians and French-or-French-Michif speaking Métis, overlooks Louis Riel’s

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<sup>26</sup> Giroux’s essay does not provide a comprehensive historiographic review of works on Falcon, or a francophone historiography on Falcon. Other than a brief mention in relation to MacLeod, Giroux largely ignores Martial Allard. Marcel Giraud also does not appear. While both Allard and Giraud are conceivably avoided due to their perpetuation of Anglo-Canadian narratives, Giroux does not disclose the reason for their absence. Annette Chrétien appears only briefly, juxtaposed with a citation by Chris Andersen. Chrétien and Papen’s recent (2010) chapter on “Le Voyage de la Chanson de la Grenouillère” (*Se Raconter des histoires* 35-69) is also ignored.

“Le peuple Métis-Canadien-français” (4: 319-25), offers no analysis of historical divergences between the Métis and other French-speaking Manitobans, and collapses successive waves of French-speaking European settlers (from France, Belgium, and Switzerland) arriving in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, not to mention recent non-European French-speaking immigrants from Africa and Asia, into those early waves of French Canadians (largely from Québec) and Franco-Americans arriving shortly after the creation of the province. It does not allow for the possibility of complex, layered identities: Métis *and* Franco-Manitoban; or the conception of Franco-Manitoba as a nexus point, a linguistic intersection of many cultures.

### **Conclusion: Métis Literary Tradition**

Falcon’s direct literary influence became greatly attenuated in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, recent evocations of historical nation building, undergirded by the performance of nationalism of “La chanson de la Grenouillère,” in contemporary Métis literary works, suggests a modest, but symbolically significant revival of Falcon’s influence. Multiple references, allusions, intertexts, and citations from Falcon’s song in various works of contemporary Métis literature demonstrate that he has not been forgotten, but has been rediscovered and is even being reclaimed, although he remains primarily associated with historical (and present-day reflections on historical) Métis nationalism. Recent works that reference Falcon include Katherena Vermette’s graphic novel series, *A Girl Called Echo*, Volume 1, which also reproduces the first two stanzas of his “La chanson de la Grenouillère”—but in this case, it is entirely paratextual—outside of the narrative proper, relegated to the appendix. Maia Caron, in her novel *Song of Batoche*, references Falcon directly in the narrative, amid an action-filled chapter recounting the battle of Tourond’s Coulee (Fish Creek), in which a nameless Métis soldier “sing[s] Pierre Falcon’s song from Red River”

(226). Caron reproduces three lines, cobbled together from different stanzas of an English-translation by James Reaney (MacLeod). Much like Vermette's, the reference is associated with the song's status as the historical national anthem, and exhibits less stylistic or cultural influence, than that of a nationalistic touchstone—almost like the linguistic equivalent of the national flag. Nevertheless, Falcon's stylistic influence resonates still in Métis poetics, echoing within certain styles, forms, techniques, and themes.

Humour and irony are not unique to Falcon, but some of the ways in which contemporary Métis poets use humour and irony to denigrate non-Métis figures of authority certainly recall Falcon's style. Gregory Scofield's "Sir John's Polka" (*Louis* 63-64), for instance, takes up the satirical tradition of turning powerful enemies of the Métis into caricatures. Scofield's technique is decidedly more literary and features a complex intertextual play between Sir John A. Macdonald's own words, taken from official House of Commons Debate reports, and the parodic voice of Riel. Its resemblance to Falcon is brief and general. Marilyn Dumont's use of irony in her poem "A Letter to Sir John A. Macdonald," which Jennifer Andrews argues "deflate[s] the glory of Macdonald's nation-building" and underscores Métis "survival" (17), shares some similarities through its satirical mode, but then differs in its execution: whereas Falcon's songs satirically recount events, Dumont's poem directly addresses its target. In terms of humour, Joe Welsh's short story collection *Jackrabbit Street* shares some sardonic, even scatological, humour with Falcon, such as in the story "St. Pierre and the Bandit," when these characters force each other, at gunpoint, to "make a big *mishi* [shit]" and "eat [it]" (12). Again, the target is different, but similar. Whereas Falcon directs scatological humour toward McDougall and his "trône percé," Welsh performs in his story a dark, reflective, self-deprecating humour, which comments on the Métis' near-total dispossession and dispersal following the late 19<sup>th</sup> century resistances of

which Falcon's last song captures only the initial movement, but Welsh's other stories notably also function to satirize non-Métis authority figures like Catholic priests.

Ultimately, Falcon's songs stem from an era prior to Canadian control and colonialism, and the dispossession of "notre territoire" ("Les Tribulations" 22), and although they represent a male-centric perspective, they provide a glimpse of Métis culture from the so-called "Golden Years," before the violent upheaval of settler-colonialism and its ruptures—the loss of land, language, culture, and so on. While these ruptures inform much of the work of contemporary Métis writers as modes of re-telling, resisting, witnessing, surviving, re-building, and healing, it is important to note that Falcon did not completely vanish, as evidenced through the multiple transcriptions of his songs throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and as recently as the 1960s and 1970s. Paul Chartrand's call for the "resurrection of Falcon's anthem" (*Pierriche* 4), and subsequent intertextual references, suggests a modest resurgence of interest in incorporating moments of historical Métis writing into contemporary literary production. Besides its overt nationalistic influence, Falcon's literary influence resonates subtly in contemporary Métis writing through their thematic concerns for community, as well as evocations of shared rhetorical and cultural traditions of humour, irony, and satire.

## Chapter Two — “Ma douce contrée!” Louis Riel and the Writing of Home

If Pierre Falcon holds a critical place in Métis literary history, then Louis Riel holds a singularly odd and contradictory position. Better known for his political career, his leadership of two Métis resistances against Canada, his role in the foundation of the province of Manitoba, his tireless advocacy for Métis rights in the North-West, and his execution by the Canadian state, he leaves a complicated literary legacy. Writing across a spectrum of genres, from letters, essays, petitions, memoirs, and poems, to fables, odes, and songs, Riel displays a robust versatility, and, when writing in French, a sharp, practiced eloquence. Weighing his influence on Métis literature, literary history, and on Métis writers and readers, however, is made difficult due to the piecemeal publication history of his writings. Aside from four poems published by Eustache Prud'homme in a Montréal newspaper, *L'Opinion Publique*, in 1870, a few essays and letters published in Montréal newspapers during the 1870s, some poems published in newspapers across Canada during Riel's trial in 1885, and a few songs that entered the oral tradition, the majority of his writings remained unpublished until well after his death, most notably in his *Collected Writings*, published in 1985. Albert Braz notes the “singularity” of this event, since, as of 1985, “no such honour had been bestowed on any (other) Canadian public figure, including Riel's nemesis ... John A. Macdonald” (“Consecrating” 52). Another challenge arises from the question of how to read Riel. How might we apprehend his literary achievements, centre his literary production, and situate his place within Métis literary history while the shadow of his political career and cultural influence looms? The aim of this chapter is not to disentangle his literary writing from his politics or Métis history and culture more broadly, but rather, like in the chapter on Falcon, to contextualize his writings through the political and cultural. In tracing Riel's production, this chapter celebrates his contributions to the body of Métis literature.



While a full account of his eventful life and political career is beyond the scope of this chapter, I begin with a biographical sketch to situate Riel within his historical contexts. I survey his literary production, then examine some of his most notable canonical texts in more detail. In the penultimate section, I consider the ways that kinship and territory intersect in his poetry. That is, I examine how Riel writes about *home* as both place and people. If the “North-West is ... [his] mother” (3: 524), as he declares in his address to the court during his trial, then her history is also his, and we might ask how his writings bears her mark. I conclude with a brief consideration of his literary legacy, and relative paucity of study of his works, before casting a parting glimpse at how, despite his not being a primarily literary writer, Riel has recently been taken up as a literary (as opposed to strictly political) figure by contemporary Métis writers.

### **A Biographical Sketch of Louis Riel**

Born in the Red River Settlement, on 23 October 1844,<sup>27</sup> Louis Riel was the eldest child of Louis Riel, Sr., a Métis man with roots in the Île-à-la-Crosse region, in what is now northern Saskatchewan, and Québec, and Julie Riel (née Lagimodière), a French-Canadian woman whose parents, Jean-Baptiste Lagimodière and Marie-Anne Gaboury, famously migrated from Québec to the North-West in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. As Red River grew into the largest settlement in the North-West, it would have offered the young Riel a front-seat to the political, cultural, linguistic, and religious complexities of the northern Plains. One incident which holds an important place in Riel’s memory was the Sayer trial, in 1849. As he wrote, “[à] la tête de ce mouvement populaire était Louis Riel mon Père qui n’est plus de ce monde; mais dont je vois les vertus chrétiennes et civiques encore toutes en vie autour de moi” (3: 267).

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<sup>27</sup> Riel declared his date of birth as 23 Oct. 1844 (3: 263), but his sister Henriette Poitras states that according to their mother, he was born on 22 Oct. 1844 (3: 265, note 2).

An equally enduring influence in Riel's early life was his parents' faith and the presence of Alexandre-Antonin Taché. While a bishop, Taché had arranged, in the late-1850s, for Riel (as well as two other Métis boys, Louis Schmidt and Daniel McDougall) to study for the priesthood in Québec. In a letter to Taché, written in 1885 as he awaited trial, Riel reminisced on his religious upbringing:

Mes premières années ont été parfumées des meilleures odeurs de la foi ... [l]a prière en famille, le chapelet ont toujours été sous mes yeux ... [l]a figure recueillie de ma mère, les regards qu'elle dirige habituellement vers le ciel, son respect, son attention, une dévotion dans les exercices de piété ont toujours fait et laissé sur moi les vives impressions du bon exemple. (3: 140)

Scattered in his writings, such autobiographical details demonstrate not only how his childhood was steeped in pious Catholicism, but how entangled were his faith, education, and politics.

Riel began his studies on 1 April 1853 with the Grey Nuns, then became a pupil of the "reverend" Christian Brothers in December 1854 (Riel 3: 263). A bright student, Riel "[se] fut donné de [s]'asseoir à [Taché's] bibliothèque épiscopale, avec un prêtre très zélé pour professeur, le Révérend Père Lefloch" (3: 141). In 1858, Riel was awarded a "full scholarship" by Bishop Taché to attend college in Québec (Siggins 45); he would reside in Montréal from the summer of 1858 to June 1866. He attended the Collège de Montréal, a school run by "reverend gentlemen of St. Sulpice Seminary" (Riel 3: 263) and designed to "train young boys for the ecclesiastical life" (Siggins 49). The school had an "eight-year curriculum, with emphasis on languages, literature, philosophy, and theology, [which] led to the baccalaureate" (Flanagan 7). Eustache Prud'homme recalls that "without doubt [Riel] was one of the quickest and best students there was: the prizes he won attest to it" (qtd. in Siggins 50). Riel spent nearly seven

years at the school, before he “left the College” (Riel 3: 263), only “four months before he would have received his baccalaureate” (Siggins 62). Although Flanagan shows that he was expelled, there is some debate over what led to his expulsion. Whether it was a result of his father’s death in 1864, and his “obsess[ion] with the weight of his new responsibility as head of the family” (Stanley qtd. in Flanagan 18), or his romance with Marie-Julie Guernon,<sup>28</sup> that led him to “[give] up his notions of a religious vocation” (Flanagan 21), Riel’s departure from the Collège caused turmoil in his life. Despite having signed a “marriage contract” (25), his romantic relationship with Guernon failed, undermined by her parents’ vehement opposition to the union,<sup>29</sup> and Guernon acquiesced to her family’s wishes to break off their relationship. On 12 June 1866, Riel left Montréal. Rather than returning to Red River, he went to the United States. According to Schmidt, Riel “lived for some time with the French-Canadian nationalist poet Louis Fréchette in Chicago” (qtd. in Flanagan 27), but Riel never mentions it in his writings, stating only that he came “to St. Paul and lived in Minneapolis at St. Anthony and St. Paul [for] two years” (3: 263). Little is known about his time between June 1866 and his return to Red River in July 1868.

In 1869, after Canada purchased the North-West from the Hudson’s Bay Company, Riel became involved in politics, led a group of Métis to confront Canadian surveyors on 11 October 1869, then participated as secretary in organizing the Métis “national committee” (Riel 3: 260; see also: Siggins 101; Flanagan 31). Within a few months he would become the President of the provisional government at Red River, bringing French and English parishes, Métis, and non-Indigenous communities, together to negotiate Manitoba’s entry into Canadian Confederation. He would also oversee the trial and execution of Thomas Scott, an Irish-born immigrant, and

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<sup>28</sup> The Guernons were neighbours to the Lees, Riel’s aunt and uncle, with whom he occasionally visited and stayed.

<sup>29</sup> Siggins writes that the “disapproval of her suitor stemmed from only one source—pure bigotry” (62); as there is little proof, I submit that an intersection of other factors might have also informed this “disapproval,” such as Riel’s limited economic prospects. Regardless of its reason, the end of the relationship seems to have impelled Riel west.

Orangeman, who had joined the Canadian Party, a group of English-speaking Protestants who advocated for the annexation of Red River, and planned violent confrontations with the Métis during the winter of 1869-70.<sup>30</sup> This event would come to haunt Riel in the years following the resistance as it stoked murderous vitriol from English-speaking Protestants in Ontario.

After Manitoba's entry into Confederation in the summer of 1870, and the arrival of the Red River Expeditionary Force,<sup>31</sup> Riel took refuge in Dakota Territory (Pembina and St. Joseph). His correspondence shows how political concerns over land and rights dominated his thinking; without doubt, it marked the beginning of a turbulent time in his life. In 1873, Ambroise Lépine, a member of the provisional government, commander of Métis soldiers, and head of the tribunal that had sentenced Scott to death, was arrested in Red River by Canadian authorities, tried, and sentenced to hang for the death of Scott. Though his execution was later commuted to two years in prison and forfeiture of his civil rights, at the news of Lépine's arrest, Riel hid "in the woods at Vermette's Point ... for a month and a half" (Siggins 222), then fled Red River. He spent time in eastern Canada and the United States. Over the next few years, his life was a mix of highs and lows: elected three times as a Conservative to Parliament for the federal riding of Provencher, he never took his seat. In 1875, he was exiled from Canada for five years. Aside from the odd trip, and time in asylums, Riel spent the rest and early years of the next decade in the United States.

In mid-1875, Riel met clandestinely with Ignace Bourget, the Bishop of Montréal, a key figure in the ultramontanism movement in Québec, which generally advocated for the supremacy of the Pope over secular state governments. He would look back on this encounter as a moment

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<sup>30</sup> For more on Scott, see J.M. Bumsted's *Thomas Scott's Body and Other Essays on Early Manitoba History* (2000).

<sup>31</sup> Commanded by Colonel Garnet Wolseley, the RREF was an armed force of Canadian volunteers purportedly sent to oversee a peaceful transfer of North-West to Canada, however, they in effect reflected Canadian Prime Minister Sir John A. Macdonald's desire that "these impulsive half breeds ... must be kept down by a strong hand until they are swamped by the influx of settlers" (qtd. in Sprague 89). The subsequent persecution of Métis is often referred to as a "reign of terror." See Barkwell for more on the years-long campaign of violence against Red River Métis.

of great blessing and succor: “Monseigneur,” Riel wrote to Bourget, “Votre sainte bénédiction a répandu dans mon coeur une bien grande sérénité. Et comme lorsque je me suis relevé de devant vos pieds, très souvent le jour, je répète je suis guéri Dieu! m’a guéri” (1: 321). Riel also received a letter from Bourget, in which the Bishop recognized that God had given Riel “une mission qu’il vous faudra accomplir en tous points” (qtd. in Riel 1: 492). Bourget continued: “vous ne réserverez rien de ce qui vous appartient, de ce qui vous touche: vous souhaiterez ardemment servir Dieu et procurer sa gloire le plus possible; vous travaillerez sans cesse à l’honneur de la religion; au salut des âmes, au bien de la société; enfin vous vous sanctifierez vous-même en désirant ardemment la sanctification des autres” (1: 492). Though somewhat general, this letter had a profound effect on Riel and fundamentally reshaped his thinking and his actions in the years to come. He would carry it with him for the rest of his life. In many ways the letter became a catalyst for his shifting perspectives on Catholicism and his visions of religion in North America, which became an obsession that dominated his thinking and writing from the mid-to-late 1870s onward. As Gilles Martel concludes in his book-length study, Riel moved “d’une conscience moraliste et providentialiste à une conscience millénariste et même, au moins à certains moments, carrément messianique” (373) over the course of his life.

Later in 1875, in Washington, D.C., Riel met with Ulysses S. Grant, then President of the United States, to seek aid in defending Métis rights in Manitoba and the North-West. Following their unsuccessful meeting, Riel was struck by a series of emotional events, religious epiphanies, or visions, and, on 8 December 1875, while attending mass at Saint Patrick’s Church, he became emotionally overwhelmed. One moment, he “sentis soudain dans mon coeur une joie si maîtresse de moi, que pour cacher à mes voisins le rire de mon visage, je fus contraint d’étendre mon mouchoir à sa grandeur et de le tenir ... avec ma main sur ma bouche et sur mes joues” (2: 163-

64), and in the next moment, was “saisi par une immense douleur d’âme. Et si ce n’eût été des grands efforts que j’ai faits pour contenir mes sanglots, mes cris et mes larmes eussent éclaté terriblement dans l’enceinte de l’église” (2: 164). Writing in 1885, curiously in the third person, he elaborated on a significant vision, how on “14<sup>th</sup> December 75, at one o’clock in the afternoon, the Spirit of God comes upon him, fills his body and soul of his divine light and essence; transports him to the fourth heaven and instructed him about the nations of the earth, speaking to him for at least an hour and half” (3: 261). He described yet another event to a correspondent of the *Montreal Star*, “while standing alone on a mountain top, near Washington, D.C., the same spirit that appeared to Moses in the midst of clouds of flame, appeared to me in the same manner. I was astonished. I was dumbfounded. It was said to me: ‘Rise, Louis David Riel, you have a mission to accomplish for the benefit of humanity’” (3: 566). Working through these visions would occupy Riel’s time over the following years. Whether or not these visions are linked to his subsequent mental health crisis, either as cause or symptom is impossible to discern. The issue is complicated by the *intensity* of belief and the breadth of traditions and faith as experienced and understood by 19<sup>th</sup> century Métis Catholics as well as the hierarchical, and patriarchal, authority of the Catholic Church as an institution, and how criticism of its doctrines could be perceived as blasphemy. The issue is further complicated by the ways that his mental health was politicized at his trial in 1885 when against his wishes his lawyers used insanity as a defence strategy. Speaking contemporarily, Jean Teillet writes that Riel’s “sanity has never been an issue for the Métis. But it is an obsession with Canadian historians” (367); but rather “for most Métis,” she argues, “Riel continues to be their saint, *aen saent*, an intensely religious man who saw, talked and walked with God, the angels and the souls of the dead” (367). She contends that many Métis do not see Riel’s belief that he had a mission from God “as evidence of insanity,” and that “they

will not judge Riel by the mental illness standards of others” (368). However, her contention seems generalized, eliding complicated reactions to Riel’s visions and actions from historical Métis people (from Louis Schmidt’s concerns over Riel’s religious views and his breach with the clergy, to how L’Union nationale forbade Trémaudan to broach the subject in his *Histoire*, as I discuss in Chapter Three), and glossing over his writings that seem indicative of mental health challenges. In a letter to Bourget, for instance, Riel wrote “Le Saint Esprit m'a dit Hier au soir 8 Mai, de tout immoler. Mes plaisirs, mes goûts, ma volonté je me mets tout à vos pieds. Même je suis tout nu. Car je me [suis] tout dépouillé de mes habits” (2: 56).

Clearly, at the time, away from the North-West, Riel’s mental health was of concern to his friends and acquaintances, and both his Indigenous and non-Indigenous kin in Québec, such as the Lees. Separating religious beliefs—contrarian ones at that—from his actions does reveal unusual behaviours; sometimes Riel “bellowed like a bull” (Gagnon qtd. in Flanagan 60), he occasionally fabricated elaborate ancestries and stories and aggrandized himself (Flanagan 60), and he periodically tore his clothes and beddings to shreds (63). Although the evidence does not point to a specific mental health illness, it suggests a great deal of stress. On 6 March 1876, his uncle, John Lee, took Riel to the Longue Pointe Asylum in Montréal. A few months later, he was moved to an asylum in Beauport, just outside of Québec City, due to safety concerns as Riel was in Canada illegally (Flanagan 51-80; Siggins 249-70). In all he spent two years in asylums.

Upon his release, in 1878, Riel convalesced with Father Fabien Barnabé, a Catholic priest in Keeseville, New York, with whom he had struck a friendship earlier in life. He also romanced Father Barnabé’s sister, Évelina Barnabé, who, over the course of his convalescence, became his “bien aimée” (4: 218). Love poems attest to the seriousness of the relationship he had with his “fiancée” (4: 219). Despite this romance, after almost a year in New York, he returned west. Still

unable to legally enter Canada due to his exile, Riel went to live in Montana. Through the early 1880s, he would advocate for local Métis groups, meet, speak, and write to First Nations leaders, and envision a broad Indigenous alliance to counteract Canadian “tyranny” (2: 260), dabble in local politics, attempt to curtail the liquor trade, spend weeks in jail on drummed-up charges of voter fraud, marry Marguerite Monet dit Bellehumeur, a Métis woman born in Red River, start a family, and obtain American citizenship.<sup>32</sup> He briefly visited Manitoba to attend his sister’s wedding in 1883, then returned to Montana to become a schoolteacher in St. Peter’s Mission.

On 4 June 1884, a delegation of Métis and Halfbreeds from what is now Saskatchewan (comprising Gabriel Dumont, James Isbister, Moïse Ouellette, and Michel Dumas) arrived at St. Peter’s Mission to ask Riel for his help in advocating for them in the North-West. Riel answered with a letter; their request was “one of the gratifications of [his] life” and that he would “go and spend some time amongst [them]” (3: 4-5). What compelled Riel to provide a written answer, in English at that, to this delegation? While the delegation had provided him with letters of support from people in Saskatchewan, it seems odd that he would provide a written response considering that some in the delegation were purportedly illiterate and spoke little English. Might it suggest the grave importance of the occasion as well as the weight that Riel placed on the written word? In any event, Riel’s decision marked a fateful return to politics, and he spent the summer and fall advocating for Métis rights, crafting a petition to Ottawa, and meditating on religious doctrines, prophecies, and broader Métis relationships with the Catholic Church. In the late-winter and the spring of 1885, he led an armed resistance against Canada that culminated in a series of military encounters and a Canadian attack on the settlement at Batoche. Following the defeat, on 15 May 1885, he surrendered to the Canadian forces. He was transported to Regina and imprisoned, then tried, found guilty of treason, and sentenced to death. He was hanged on 16 November 1885.

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<sup>32</sup> See Michel Hogue’s *Metis and the Medicine Line* (161-75) for more on Riel’s activities in Montana.



## Riel the Writer: A Brief Survey of His Prose and Poetry

How do we read and categorize Riel's vast literary production? He wrote throughout his life. In terms of poetry alone, he produced over one hundred and fifty poems, in various stages of completion, that total nearly five hundred pages. Three more volumes, comprising nearly fifteen hundred pages of prose (letters, essays, and other writings), complete *The Collected Writings of Louis Riel / Les écrits complets de Louis Riel*. The first extant piece of his writing, a letter to his benefactor Sophie Masson, is dated 30 December 1858.<sup>33</sup> There are no extant writings from his boyhood in Red River. In terms of creative production, he wrote nearly forty poems and fables while in Montréal, often moralizing tales concerned with divine justice, inspired by or even in the style of famed French fabulist Jean de La Fontaine,<sup>34</sup> and many letters; there exists nothing from between the summers of 1866 and 1868 aside from one letter to his mother.

After his return to Red River, Métis politics, leadership, and resistance would dominate his writings; political documents, public declarations, paperwork, and letters, vastly outnumber his creative production during the Resistance of 1869-70. His creative writing came to reflect a centering of Métis nationalism. The few creative works penned during the Red River Resistance differ substantially in tone and content from his earlier literary writings in Montréal and reveal a more intimate, regional focus on the history and politics of Red River. Poems like "La Métisse" and "Les Premiers Temps," which Glen Campbell notes are "structurally similar to the songs of ... Pierre Falcon" ("Introduction" xxxvii), display a rare, celebratory tone. In commemorating the early successes of the 1869-70 Resistance, and linking them with prior Métis struggles, Riel weaves together a historical and nationalist narrative that frames the Red River Resistance as yet

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<sup>33</sup> This letter was discovered after the publication of *The Collected Writings*. The earliest text in that collection is also a letter to Masson, dated 29 December 1861. See Campbell and Flanagan's "Newly Discovered" for more.

<sup>34</sup> See Roseann Runte's "Espaces politiques et poétiques: Louis Riel et Jean de La Fontaine" for more on the French poet's influence on Riel's early poetry.

another critical step which the Métis have taken to assert themselves as a nation. After the arrival of Canadian soldiers in the fall of 1870, the celebratory tone would disappear from his writing. Though Riel would continue to show thematic resonances with Falcon around concerns for the nation and its people, and increasing focus on national identity, he would diverge in stylistic and poetic strategies. While he occasionally incorporates outside voices in his poems, and some of his texts function in a satirical vein similar to Falcon, Riel offers little to no humour, much more rhetorical flourish, figurative language, and draws heavily from Catholic imagery and ideology.

During the periods in Red River and early exile, Riel would produce just over a dozen poems, suggesting that political concerns, not to mention the logistics of exile—hiding, running, travelling, etc.—dominated his time and his thinking. He maintained steady correspondence with family, friends, and political allies, and even wrote letters and brief accounts of 1869-70 which were published in Montréal newspapers. While it is impossible to know exactly how the logistics of exile affected the volume of his literary production, the “widely scattered” (Stanley, “General Editor’s Remarks” 2) whereabouts of his extant texts is demonstrative of the disparate condition of their production. Hardships also affected other elements of the work: melancholic and morose themes emerge after the fall of 1870, gesturing toward the influence of personal adversity on his writing, and his growing focus on the fallout of the Resistance. In “La Perdrix” (4: 97), a poem likely composed in Dakota Territory, Riel allegorizes Canada’s betrayal of the Métis through the image of a hunter killing an innocent partridge; in “Que les gens d’armes” (4: 107), likely written when hiding at Vermette’s Point, Riel finds succor in the voices of his people on the wind as he hides in the woods from bounty hunters; and in “Quand on est loin de son Pays” (4: 110), penned in the East, he laments his separation from family and homeland.

During his time in the East, Riel’s production grew more political and religious in theme

and content, from correspondence and essays that re-told the history of the Red River Resistance, Thomas Scott's execution, the early failures of the implementation of the Manitoba Act and the issue of land and scrip, to the question of amnesty for the leaders of the Resistance. His writings grew severe, particularly after repeated political failures. "[B]etrayal" (Campbell, "Introduction" xxxviii) became a prevailing theme. His political poems from this period, aimed at particular individuals, incidents, or machinations, became a way to chronicle the complex series of events that buffeted him and the Métis. In "L'ontario" (4: 117), he traces the province's colonial ambitions in the North-West, and its antagonism, through an account of the actions of English-speaking pro-Canadian figures such as Charles Mair, John Christian Schultz, John Snow, and William McDougall in the early stages of the Red River Resistance;<sup>35</sup> in "Pendant que les métis semaient" (4: 122), Riel derides French-Canadian politician Marc-Amable Girard, accusing him of self-interested actions at the expense of Métis interests;<sup>36</sup> and in "Fourbe et menteur" (4: 127), he outlines a long series of grievances and personal betrayals, including a notable castigation of French-Canadian politician George-Étienne Cartier, his one-time idol, to whom Riel had written and dedicated a series of poems in the 1860s: "Sir George Etienne, avec sa politique anglaise, / Et sa hauteur," writes Riel, "M'a trahi! Son coeur noir m'a fait souffrir, à l'aise" (4: 127).<sup>37</sup> These poems also seem to partially operate in the vein of Falcon's satirical targeting of notable figures and antagonists of the Métis Nation, as well as the "documentary" style: "Moi, je suis à buriner / Le souvenir de tes coches" (4: 132), states Riel. In effect, as he builds his litany of grievances and betrayals, Riel produces—at least in these early poems from Beauport—less of an

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<sup>35</sup> Mair was a Canadian poet who denigrated Métis people in print and advocated for the Canadian annexation of Red River; Schultz was another Canadian annexationist, who confronted Riel and the Métis in 1869-70 and later fled to Ontario riling up Orangemen fervor against the Métis, and later again, became a Member of Parliament; Snow was a Canadian who directed the construction of Dawson's Road between Fort Garry and Lake of the Woods.

<sup>36</sup> Girard was a Manitoba MLA who Riel considered "comme traître au peuple métis" (Campbell, *CW* 4: 126, n.1).

<sup>37</sup> Cartier was a politician from Québec who was elected in the Provencher Riding after Riel withdrew his candidacy. Riel accused him of treachery over his lack of support on the question of amnesty.

aesthetic of revenge, than a symbolic denunciation, a shaming of enemies, which echoes with the Métis Laws of the Prairie, and in particular the penalty for theft, for which thieves were brought to the middle of the hunting brigade camps, their names decried, then repeatedly punctuated with the word ‘thief/[voleur],’ or as he writes, “Fourbe et menteur” (4: 127). However, in their staunch criticism of others, these poems also betray Riel’s own intractable, and often Manichean, perspective, as well as the absence of critical self-reflection.

Spiritual and religious issues would increasingly dominate his thinking in the years in the Longue Pointe and Beauport asylums. In collapsing divisions between religion and politics in his writings, religion became a vehicle for Riel to imagine political change. However, the increasing prevalence of religious themes, language, references, and allusions suggests that religion accrued a significance beyond that of political machinations. In his most intensely religious texts, akin to apologies for Catholicism, he zealously defends and promotes his faith. In “La force que Dieu me donne,” written in 1876 or 1877, he displays an evangelizing, prophetic tone that brooks no alternative. I present the last two stanzas here:

Le Seigneur dit aux tyrans

Qu’il va mettre en lambeaux tous leurs maudits corans;

Que les Czars tombent par mille.

Jésus-Christ seul est Roi; la loi, c’est l’évangile.

J’accomplis tout ce qu’il faut.

La vérité de Dieu, Sa Sainteté l’affiche.

Je viens des pays d’en Haut.

Suivez-moi, vous vivrez: car je suis pauvre et riche. (4: 144)

In his prose, Riel wrote a series of revelations on various subjects from the breadth of English power across the world to the corruption of Rome, and would return time and again to Catholic stories. He transcribed his visions, like those that gradually came to inform his desire to reform Catholicism in North America: “Le dix-huit mars 1877, j’ai prié Dieu de vouloir bien me dire si l’église vitale du Bas-Canada devait suivre le rit romain. Aussitôt le bon Seigneur Dieu a daigné me répondre en m’accordant une vision” (2: 113). These visions and revelations came to inform his politics, as evidenced in a letter penned in May of 1877 to his cousin Paul Proulx, where Riel demonstrates how for him language, religion, and politics are interwoven:

La nation canadienne-française a reçu de Dieu la belle mission de continuer les grands travaux de la France de ce côté-ci de la mer. Et quoique cette nation canadienne-française paraisse petite dans l’Amérique du Nord, la Providence lui fournira les moyens de faire son grand ouvrage. Parce que les canadiens français aiment le Bon Dieu. Mais une fois que la nation canadienne-française aura accompli sa tâche et qu’elle se sentira prise des infirmités de la vieillesse, il faudra que sa mission passe en d’autres mains. Et moi je voudrais qu’avec le secours de Dieu, nous travaillions à faire du peuple métis canadien-français un peuple assez grand pour mériter de recueillir alors l’héritage du Bas Canada[.]

(2: 119-20)

Riel saw the Métis as inheriting not only language and religion from France, via French Canada, but a mission to build (if not also spread) a particularly French-Catholic society and civilization. Despite at times far-ranging references and allusions to historical and biblical figures, historical events, and biblical allegories and Christian doctrines in his Beauport writings, his focus returns continually to the North-West. Riel’s vision to transfer the seat of the papacy, for instance, from Rome via Montréal, and eventually to St. Vital, although radically fantastic, reveals a continued

investment in the struggles of his motherland:<sup>38</sup> “Rome, en dix-huit cents ans, perd sa succession. / La Reine des Lacs est faite son héritière. / C’est l’église Vitale. Elle vient la dernière” (4: 149).

But, as mentioned, the Métis struggle is now apprehended, and re-framed, through religion.

What might a generous reading of Riel’s writings reveal about his process as a creative writer? What might it mean to acknowledge the blurring of his political struggles, his faith and his Catholicism, and his attachments to both the Métis nation and French-Canadian culture, with his creative writing? Where is the line between creative writing as experimental expression and as autobiographical confession or between a mimetic voice and symbolic focalization? Without a doubt “parfumées des meilleures odeurs de la foi” (Riel 3: 140), imbued with “Franco-European values of civilization and progress” (Durnin 50), his writings evidence a cathartic fantasizing in experimental thinking framed through Catholic theology, experiments in form, such as the prose-poem “Alexandre-le-grand” (4: 151) that he devoted to Archbishop Taché, and experiments in poetic voice, like in “L’Esprit immonde est un colosse” (4: 192), in which “se faisant le porte-parole de l’humanité ... [il] confesse tous les péchés des hommes” (Campbell *CW*, 4: 199, n.1). “L’Esprit de Dieu me parle,” writes Riel, “j’entends. L’Esprit de Dieu daigne me parler plus fort, j’écoute. ... Ainsi par Sa grâce, je suis devenu l’Infaillible témoin de la parole divine. Ce que j’écris, je l’écris sous la dictée du Saint Esprit” (4: 154).

It is also in his Beauport writings that Riel first adopts the name “David,” and changes his signature. Siggins claims that “with a few exceptions—primarily the letters to Bishop Bourget, whom he considered his private mentor—documents signed ... [Louis David Riel, Prophet, Infallible Pontiff, Priest King] were for his own personal rumination” (266). While his signature varies in letters to Bourget, and to Taché, Riel clearly reveals the depth of his fixation on religion

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<sup>38</sup> While Riel would admit to Proulx that “Quoique je sois éloigné mon esprit est toujours avec vous” (2: 119), he would also reveal in the same letter how he considered that “La Province du Bas Canada ... est notre mère” (2: 121),

and notions of the divine. His experiences, stresses, and the reversals of fortunes which rendered him powerless in the face of Canada's policies of colonialism in the first half of the decade, not to mention his confinement, certainly seem to inform his turn toward religion. However, though the incorporation of theological rhetoric and spirituality occupied his writings, perhaps serving as means of re-gaining some form of power,<sup>39</sup> it is also important to note that such themes had long marked his writings. He wrote about "la justice de Dieu" (4: 57) and "la mission divine" (4: 59), as early as the mid-1860s when studying in Montréal. In Beauport, he produced at least nineteen poems, and numerous letters, revelations, and other writings.

Post-Beauport, in New York State, in 1879, Riel produced only a handful of poems, but their content and tone are remarkably different from those above. Predominantly love poems about and to Évelina Barnabé, they exude an experiential vitality lacking from his earlier poems:

Les lèvres de ma bien aimée  
 Tentent ma bouche encor plus que le melon d'eau  
 Quand j'ai soif. Elles sont pudiques et vermeilles,  
 Plus douces à goûter que le suc des abeilles. (4: 218)

Though his language is still marked by religious imagery and allusions, there is a turn away from dominating philosophical and religious concerns in favour of embodied experiences. Bitterness and anger had shaped his writings in previous years, but here, Riel dwelt briefly on love and joy.

Only a few months later, in the West, Riel's production fluctuated tonally. He explored complex—nostalgic, melancholic, joyful, and bitter—emotions as he drew near, but remained unable to enter, Canada due to his exile. Bitterness and anger reappeared in some poems, such as in his diatribe "Sir John A. MacDonald [sic] gouverne avec orgueil" (4: 234), but he also evoked

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revealing the complexity of his French-Canadian Métis national identity.

<sup>39</sup> For more on notions of the "divine" in Riel's writings and his life, see Flanagan's *Louis 'David' Riel: 'Prophet of*

cheer in others, like “Je m’en vas dans la baie” (4: 229), one of four poems dedicated to the Marion family of St. Joseph, North Dakota, providing a rare glimpse of Métis popular culture: “Après souper, la danse; / Le violon. / Je vas veiller dans l’anse / Chez Marion” (4: 229). His writing would increasingly bear through cultural references, allusions, imagery, and content, regional influences that reveal his association with Métis south of the medicine line. Over the next few years in Montana, from 1879 to 1884, Riel wrote widely, maintaining correspondences, producing letters, petitions, declarations, prayers, and a variety of poems chastising the immoral behaviour of some Métis men, praising priests and other religious figures, and even boasting of his linguistic skills in English. He began to work on a book, titled in Cree, *Massinahican*, and which Gilles Martel contends “aurait donc été une vaste synthèse englobant à la fois une cosmogénèse et une histoire politico-religieuse de l’humanité divisée en trois époques: religion mosaïque, religion romaine, religion nouvelle du Nouveau Monde, de type œcuménique, dans laquelle les Métis, et en particulier les Métis canadiens-français, auraient joué un rôle privilégié” (“Introduction” xliii). Sadly, other than fragments which Riel might have intended to include in the book, little survived. He produced about thirty poems of mixed focus on local issues, history, and on Métis nationalism, the most significant being, “Le peuple Métis-Canadien-français” (4: 319) for how it interweaves history, geography, language, and religion in a vision of the nation (I touch more on it below). Religion and spirituality also re-emerged as significant themes which he contemplated. Riel dedicated a series of poems to clergymen like Frédérick Ebersville,<sup>40</sup> Ritchot, and Taché, litanies, prayers, and religious-philosophical meditations on God, the Divine, the self, faith, and the Métis nation.

Following Riel’s return to Canada, his writing in Saskatchewan centered on advocating

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*the New World*’ or Gilles Martel’s *Le messianisme de Louis Riel*.

<sup>40</sup> Frédérick Ebersville (or Eberschweiler) was a Jesuit priest Riel met in Montana.



for Métis rights, producing letters, petitions, speeches, and so on, then on organizing and leading the resistance, and eventually religious matters as for Riel political and material concerns became intrinsically linked with, if not apprehended through and dominated by, spiritual salvation and his relationship with God. Riel documented his visions, prophecies, and his daily observations in a series of journals or diaries. “Les prêtres ne sont pas la religion” (3: 406), he wrote in response to the antagonism of the clergy during the winter of 1885, but later, imprisoned, he admitted in a letter to Taché, how it was clergymen like “Père Lefloch ... [qui] m’avait ouvert la route des aspirations vers Dieu” (3: 141). Much like in his imprisonment in Montana, and his confinement in Beauport, following the military defeat at Batoche and his surrender to Canadian forces, Riel wrote extensively while in Regina, before and after his trial, and as he awaited his execution, composing letters, memoirs, notes, spiritual revelations, and a number of poems. Although not written, except for preparatory notes, his addresses to the jury and the court, which are transcribed and included in the appendix of volume 3 of his *Collected Writings*, marked significant, albeit improvised, English-language articulations of Métis grievances leading up to the North-West Resistance. His affective observation on the loss of a homeland, and how “we [the Métis] are not birds. We have to walk on the ground” (3: 547), is drawn from the second address.

There is again a marked shift in tone in his writing after his trial as Riel seemed to grow more reflective, serene. In the last months of his life, he dedicated himself to spiritual concerns and the Métis cause, penning one of his most significant and enduring texts, the essay “Les Métis du Nord-Ouest” (3: 278). Although many of his poems continue to have a striking spirituality to them, the prayer-like appeals became less corporeal or material, less concerned with his physical survival than with that of his, and his wife and children’s, spiritual condition. In “Palpite! Ô mon esprit! Ô mon âme! tressaille!” (4: 425), he appears contemplative, almost meditatively striving

for serenity, writing “Ayons la paix de l’âme! Et l’Infini nous ouvre / Des aperçus nouveaux, gais à chaque moment” (4: 425). In a poem addressed to his wife, “Margaret: be fair and good” (4: 433), he reminds her to “Obey the words of [God’s] scripture” lest she “fall in the place of anguish” (4: 433), because ultimately, “The body dies: but not the soul” (4: 434). In the end many of the poems written in Regina are fragmentary, and underdeveloped, (4: 339-446); yet, considered alongside his correspondence and his essays, they offer a glimpse of personal aspects of his thinking, evidence of his character, and reveal the ongoing value that he placed on writing, from its instructive possibilities, through to its exercise in spiritual serenity.

### **Toward a Canon: Reading a Selection of Riel’s Texts**

Drawing out a canon of Riel’s most significant texts is complicated by his prodigious production and breadth of subject matter. His correspondence traces both personal and political issues throughout his lifetime, and his essays demonstrate considerable reflection on issues from the consequences of Thomas Scott’s execution and the issue of political amnesty for members of the provisional government (“L’Amnistie,” 1: 298-319), Métis national and political history, and land rights, to Canada’s betrayal of the Manitoba Act and the scrip fiasco that dispossessed many Manitoba Métis through the 1870s (“Les Métis du Nord-Ouest,” 3: 278-294). Numerous letters, like the one sent to Archbishop Taché (3: 140-153) while Riel was jailed in Regina, offer insight into his spirituality and his complicated relationship with Catholicism. In many ways, however, his poetry offers a refined entry-point into broader topics of nationalism, politics, language, and religion. With a focus on Riel’s poetry, I read here a select representation of his most significant texts.

**“La Métisse” (1870)**

One of his most famous poems, “La Métisse,” recounts an early Métis victory during the first months of the Red River Resistance, when on 7 December 1869, Métis soldiers surrounded the house of Dr. Schultz in what is now downtown Winnipeg, forcing the surrender of a rag-tag army of pro-Canadian annexationists. I reproduce it as published in his *Collected Writings*:

Je suis métisse et je suis orgueilleuse  
 D’appartenir à cette nation  
 Je sais que Dieu de sa main généreuse  
 Fait chaque peuple avec attention  
 Les métis sont un petit peuple encore  
 Mais vous pouvez voir déjà leurs destins  
 Etre haïs comme ils sont les honore.  
 Ils ont déjà rempli de grands desseins

Refrain :

Ah! si jamais je devais être aimée  
 Je choisirais pour mon fidèle amant  
 Un des soldats de la petite armée  
 Que commandait notre fier adjudant  
 Je choisirais un des soldats  
 Que commandait notre fier adjudant.

Quand ils ont pris Schultz avec sa phalange

Le sept Décembre au soir il fit bien beau  
Notre soleil couchant, beau comme un ange  
Veillant sur nous, retira son flambeau  
Seulement quand Schultz eut rendu les armes  
Le lendemain fut splendide pour nous.  
Le huit Décembre, entouré de ses charmes  
Vit let Métis triompher à genoux.

N'ai-je pas vu, moi qui suis jeune fille,  
Le Fort Garry plein de soldats métis?  
Huit cents métis dans le fort et la ville  
Je les ai vus, défendre le pays  
Avec autant d'amour que de vaillance.  
Que c'était beau de voir ces hommes fiers  
Courbant le front, prier la Providence  
De leur aider à garder leurs foyers.

Un saint pasteur, un prêtre inébranlable  
Partit un jour du côté d'Ottawa  
On l'entoura d'un bruit épouvantable  
Mais pour passer le Bon Dieu l'appuia.  
Il s'en revint avec notre Province  
Heureusement faite en six mois de temps,

Et McDougall, un moment notre prince

Resta confus de tous ses mauvais plans! (4: 88-89).

The poem offers a fascinating mix of historical observation and narrative construction, voiced through the perspective of a young Métis woman. While echoing Falcon's documentary and satirical style in the account of Schultz's forced surrender, and the broader consequences of a Métis victory, and in relishing the defeat of English-speaking antagonists, like how McDougall "resta confus de tous ses mauvais plans!" (4: 89), the poem diverges stylistically and structurally from Falcon's songs. Whereas Falcon tends to focus on singular events or persons, and largely linear narratives, Riel decentres both events and persons in favour of a conceptual emphasis on the nation. He anchors the poem in specific geographic references and historical incidents, such as the events of December 1869; however, these events are only introduced in the second stanza (after the refrain), later negotiations with Ottawa in 1870 are only mentioned in the final stanza, and McDougall in the final two lines. Instead, Riel initially introduces, and centres, the "nation" (4: 88), and then proceeds to record and position Schultz, Ottawa, and McDougall as a series of obstacles that the nation overcomes.

Although Riel adheres in the stanzas to a linear narrative, akin to how Falcon recounts events in his songs, he diverges slightly in the overall structure, introducing some non-linearity through the initial framing of the poem. Where Falcon starts "La Grenouillère" almost in medias res, without revealing its conclusion (singing of vérité rather than victoire in the opening stanza), Riel alludes openly to the Métis's "destins" and how the Métis have already "rempli de grands desseins" (4: 88). The refrain, which if repeated between each stanza (such as when sung), also adds an element of non-linearity to the poem. There is no change to the refrain after each event or obstacle is overcome, and no apparent development in perspective; rather the strict repetition

of lines and words creates a sort of timelessness, in which this period of the Resistance, this “six mois de temps” (4: 89), stands almost apart from the forward movement of time, and becomes mythologized. In his attempt to capture, and reiterate, this extended moment, Riel also imparts the poem with a liturgic quality: the refrain becomes a prayer-like response. It praises the glories of “la petite armée” and “notre fier adjudant,” Ambroise Lépine, but, through the suggestion of romantic (and perhaps sexual) affiliation between “un des soldats,” among whom the speaker “choiserais pour mon fidèle amant” (4: 88), and the Métis woman, Riel gestures to the reproduction of the nation, guided by “[la] main généreuse” (4: 88) of God.

It is with such thematic allusions, religious references, and elaborate imagery that Riel’s poem diverges most dramatically from Falcon’s songs. Returning to the poem’s opening stanza, we glimpse in the first three lines, the hierarchy which seems to organize Métis society for Riel: the self (or the individual), which belongs to the nation, under God. For Falcon, religion does not appear much in his songs, other than in “Les tribulations,” but for Riel, religion, spirituality, and faith are central. They shape not only the poem structurally and stylistically, but also narratively: God created the Métis, “Dieu de sa main généreuse / Fait chaque peuple avec attention” (4: 88) and God “appuia” Father Noël-Joseph Ritchot’s negotiations in Ottawa (4: 89). This notion of support or good omen is also suggested in the imagery of the sun setting on the confrontation with Schultz: “beau comme un ange” writes Riel “Veillant sur nous, retira son flambeau / Seulement quand Schultz eut rendu les armes” (4: 88), and how “les Métis [ont] triompher à genoux” (4: 88). Lastly, there is a prophetic element in the lines “Mais vous pouvez voir déjà leurs [the Métis’s] destins / Etre haïs comme ils sont les honore” (4: 88), which, in light of Métis reversals of fortune over the decades to come, not only resonates with an inverse affect than that of Riel’s apparent original intent, but portends the significance of prophesy, revelations, and

visions in his later writings.

Riel elaborates on religious influences in another poem, “Les Premiers Temps,” which is a companion piece of sorts to “La Métisse.” Though published posthumously on 10 Nov 1898, in *L’Echo du Manitoba*, this poem was likely composed in early 1870. Deploying a broader temporal perspective, Riel reflects on the whole of the 19<sup>th</sup> century as he constructs a national narrative. From lauding the glory of Cuthbert Grant at the Battle of Seven Oaks in 1816, to the assertion of sovereignty at the Sayer trial in 1849, he not only celebrates triumphs over English-speaking powers, but like in “La Métisse,” Riel positions the Red River Resistance as another victory in the series. Yet, in this national narrative, he also lends significant weight to the arrival of Catholic missionaries in 1822, such as Provencher, “Qui nous ont fait aimer Dieu” (4: 90), emphasizing how, for him, the story of the Métis Nation is a Catholic one.

Lastly, there is the matter of “La Métisse[’s]” speaker and the intriguing positioning of desire. As we can see, the poem is focalized through a young woman’s voice, and the litany of historical events (obstacles) told from her perspective. Reproduction is alluded to thematically, particularly as the growth of the nation necessitates children. However, through the suggestion of love and all it entails, Riel also introduces a curious element of fantasy. Does he articulate female desires or project what he believes to be women’s desires onto an imagined stand-in? While he positions Métis soldiers as the objects of female desire, and Lépine arguably as the standard, or epitome, of Métis maleness, what of Riel and his own exclusion from the poem? Does Riel not see himself as a possible object of female desire or is this a case of humility? His use of the female perspective is notable, but the adoption of an alternate voice is not. He had practiced such creative expression in his poetry before (see “Le Juif de Marseille,” 4: 62-63). Here, the female voice operates within the heteronormative frameworks that he articulates, but it also works to

elevate, and flatter, male figures while simultaneously revealing scant little about Métis women's actions in the resistance. This is not to say Riel was entirely silent on women, since in a previous poem, "À la pointe de chênes," he had alluded to the actions of Annie Bannatyne against Charles Mair as an inspiration for how to deal with Canadian annexationists.<sup>41</sup> "C'est un' dam' qui nous montre / Comme il faut les traiter" (4: 87), Riel writes. However, in "La Métisse," the speaker, and women generally, do very little but observe and venerate the men.

### **"Une voix émue dans Beauport" (1876-1877)**

In this poem, written while at the Beauport Asylum, Riel reflects on Canada's treachery in the first years of the decade, as well as his own personal misfortunes:

Tous les jours mon esprit caresse  
 Le souvenir de mon pays.  
 Je suis plongé dans la détresse,  
 Mes concitoyens sont trahis. (4: 169)

Riel would return to the topic of betrayal time and again in the years after fleeing Manitoba, and his time in exile. He would decry the delayed amnesty for Métis leaders and although, as shown in the previous section, he would often denounce specific figures and individuals in his writings, in this poem, Riel offers only a generalized indictment of "Les Canadiens" (4: 170). He focuses on his own anguish and desolation, amplified by the news of hardships affecting his homeland:

J'entends sans cesse à mon oreille  
 La plainte du Manitoba.

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<sup>41</sup> Annie Bannatyne was a Métis woman who responded to Charles Mair's disparagement of Métis women in print (extracts from letters penned to his brother in Ontario appeared in January 1869 in the Perth *Courier* and Toronto *Globe*) by horse-whipping Mair in a Winnipeg post office. See Todd Lamirande's biography of Annie (McDermot) Bannatyne for a historiography of the incident. Also see Katherena Vermette's "Annie of Red River," a fictional



Sa peine n'a point de pareille

Dieu sait ce qu'on nous déroba! (4: 169)

With a thematic echo of Falcon's "La Grenouillère," and how outsiders came "pour piller not' pays" (368) through the word "déroba" (Riel 4: 169), in Riel's reflection on home, the "souvenir de [son] pays," has become corrupted by the news of Canada's treachery, the stories of Métis dispossession, and how land, language, and rights are being stolen. In a distorted echo of "La Métisse," the once "orgueilleuse" (4: 88) Métis girls are now "en deuil" (4: 169). Similar to that previous poem, he ruminates on how Métis women feel, but instead of articulating such feelings through their voices, Riel envisions and describes them mourning over the fate of their men.

Les candides filles métisses

Sont en deuil à pleins sentiments.

Dans ses forces et ses malices

Bytown [Ottawa] fait souffrir leurs amants. (4: 169)

Riel then imagines an idyllic scene, where he joins the women on the prairie to pick flowers, and where *they* sing *his* pain away:

Je cueillerai dans nos prairies

Encore avec elles des fleurs.

Et j'entendrai leurs voix chéries

Chanter la fin de mes malheurs. (4: 169-70).

The image offers an intriguing glimpse of not only his desires, and the social and romantic costs of his exile, but through the implication of song and music, reveals his yearning for the succor of Métis culture. However, the idea that his suffering might somehow be dissipated through song and idyllic pastoral fantasies, tends to collapse, or reduce the poem onto the self. It exposes the

distance between Riel and his “pays” and “concitoyens” (4: 169).

This distance is also rendered more explicit through historical and contextual insights; the word “déroba” (4: 170), for instance, is made to hold multiple thefts, traumas, and other events. In light of the reign of terror, that unleashing of violence, assault, and murder against Métis men, women, and children following the arrival of Colonel Wolseley and his Canadian volunteers in the fall of 1870 (Barkwell, “Reign”), “déroba” seems insufficient to hold that litany of horrors. Riel avoids imagining—he is either unaware, unwilling to recall, or unable to dare envisioning—the physical assaults, and particularly gendered violence, inflicted upon Métis women. Reading the poem contextually against the history of the period produces dissonance through the framing and the juxtaposition of female mourning as related to Riel’s own suffering. Although there might be an element of remorse, or acknowledgement of responsibility, in the sense of being the source of female mourning, in framing Métis women’s mourning in relation to the suffering of their male kin, “leurs amants ... les guerriers de l’Adjudant” (4: 169), as opposed to their own suffering, he centres male sufferance. In this way, the poem becomes less about “la plainte du Manitoba,” than its conflation with Riel’s own “malheurs” (4: 169-70), and gestures toward his tendency to link the two in his works. As intimated above, this not only shows, but amplifies the growing schisms of his exile, his largely homosocial perspective, and draws out the effects of his social severing exacerbated by his institutionalization. Powerless, Riel can only envision alternatives, and aside from the fantasy of picking flowers on the prairie, he places his faith in divine justice, that “Dieu couchera dans l’ortie / Tous les faiseurs de mauvais coups” (4: 170).

**“Sir John A. MacDonald gouverne avec orgueil” (1879)**

Composed once back in the west, when Riel was still unable to legally cross the border

into Canada (and published posthumously in his collection *Poésies religieuse et politiques* in 1886), this long poem is a sprawling diatribe that distills almost ten years of misfortunes. It is in part a litany of grievances, an appeal to God and allies, and a lament that lays blame for much of his suffering at the feet of Sir John A. Macdonald. Although the tone moves between forms of sorrow and wistfulness, between mourning and envisioning, it remains overall one of anger and bitterness. “Depuis bientôt dix ans, Sir John me fait la guerre,” Riel writes in the second stanza (4: 234). Viewing Macdonald’s actions against the Métis over the decade, from 1869 to 1879, as perfidious, Riel provides a detailed account of Macdonald’s betrayals and hostilities, from how “Sir John fit la couleuvre” (4: 235) by having Taché carry false promises of an amnesty, to how, in 1873, he attempted to bribe Riel to leave the province while Lépine was arrested and initially charged with treason, tried, and sentenced to hang, “Sir John offrit trente-cinq mille piastres / Si je voulais désertre pour trois ans / Ma nation dans ses désastres” (4: 237).

Despite wide-ranging references and allusions to other people (Métis historical figures, Catholic clergy, and English-Canadian and French-Canadian politicians), the poem centres on Riel and Macdonald’s antagonistic relationship. “Pendant que Sir John A. tourne ses plans en lois / Moi je coupe et je fends mon bois. / Je nettoye [sic] humblement tous le [sic] jours une étable” (4: 238), Riel writes, juxtaposing their wildly diverging fortunes. The poem also takes a philosophical turn as their rivalry is made to represent broader ethno-cultural, linguistic, and religious conflicts. That is, for Riel, Macdonald comes to represent the vices of English-Canadian or British culture, an unrequited rapaciousness and desire to destroy and replace non-British peoples, against which the Métis, and French Canadians, struggle to survive. Interspersed with appeals to God, “O Dieu Puissant! Daignez protéger les métis / Que déjà les Anglais ont presqu’anéantis” (4: 239), vivid imagery and allegories of storms representing Macdonald’s own

circuitous career, and voicing vengeful desires, Riel's poem circles back, time and again, toward similar conclusions regarding Macdonald, and more broadly, English-Canadian colonialism.

Je ne souhaite pas, Sir John, que votre mort  
 Soit pleine de tourments. Mais ce que je désire  
 C'est que vous connaissiez et souffriez le remord:  
 Parce que vous m'avez mangé, comme un vampire. (4: 239)

Riel would return to the notion of consumption, and articulate that the fear of being eaten, being “mangé” is less about physical destruction or individual death, than of cultural destruction and assimilation: of also being turned into a vampire. Riel accuses Macdonald of this assimilationist drive, “Vous voudriez remplacer notre religion / Par vos idées philanthropiques” (4: 241). He later warns other francophones of English duplicity, “Canadiens! L'anglais n'est ni droit ni généreux. / C'est absolument le contraire” (4: 242). His caution culminates in a moment of prophetic and haunting clarity as Riel warns of English-Canadian assimilationist impulses, rooted in a sense of British superiority and supremacy, and how such forces will stop at nothing to fulfill their ambitions:

Mais l'anglais d'aujourd'hui se vante sans pudeur  
 De Sa justice Britannique.  
 Et nous savons qu'il veut par d'infâmes leçons  
 Et par tous les moyens nous rendre anglo-saxons. (4: 243)

Against such existential threats, Riel's advice is to re-double his faith, and presumably, appeal for broader, steadfast support of the clergy. “Obéir au clergé, c'est le chemin du ciel” (4: 244). In his view, however, it is not only about the path to heaven, but under divine guidance, building alliances with other Catholic nations and people, “Les enfants dispersés de la Nouvelle-France”

and “Les nombreux rejettons de l’Irlande indomptable” to shield and buttress against British and English-Canadian impulses, “le joug anglais” (4: 249), and “les loges débridées / D’Orange” (4: 238). Riel would further develop these ideas in his subsequent writings, articulating visions of Catholic peoples (Italians, Irish, Poles, Bavarians, and Belgians) each settling one-seventh of the North-West, founding new nations, along with non-Catholics (Danes, Swedes, and Norwegians), and non-Christians such as Jews, “on condition that they acknowledge Jesus Christ as the son of God and the only Saviour of human kind” (3: 545).<sup>42</sup>

### **“Ainsi voler un Buffalo” (1879-1883)**

This poem, penned in Montana, marks an interesting shift in Riel’s writing compared to his earlier texts. It presents through minor descriptions of a bison hunt, and the hardships of an economic and cultural practice built around the hunt, a glimpse of Métis experiences and, albeit more class-specific, lived-realities than do his other historically, politically, or philosophically focused works in which he laments a homeland in exile. I reproduce the last three stanzas:

Un voleur se trouve en dessous  
 Tôt ou tard, il perd tous les sous  
 Qui viennent de sa tricherie,  
 Dieu punit sa friponnerie [sic]  
 Dieu lui fait perdre ses chevaux,  
 Ou lui fait souffrir d’autres maux.

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<sup>42</sup> Riel would articulate such visions in different ways, touching upon his ideas of having Canada set aside land for fellow Catholics in letters to Taché (3: 136-39; 3: 140-53); he would also appeal for American annexation, to have American Catholics migrate to the North-West (“Manifeste” 3: 309-11); he would re-articulate these ideas through

Qui viennent de sa tricherie.                      Bis

Son coureur peut bien dans un trou

Tomber et lui casser le cou.

Par la permission divine

Il se peut que sa carabine

Pour le punir d’avoir fait tort

Lui donne aveuglement la mort.

Par la permission divine                      Bis

Toute chanson de vérité

Doit parler avec probité.

Il faut respecter les personnes

Surtout celles qu’on trouve bonnes.

Nous avons tous notre défaut.

Corrigeons-nous en comme il faut.

Il faut respecter les personnes                      Bis. (4: 253-54)

While not quite mimetic, Riel’s description of a bison hunt, as well as its possible consequences, in explicit and vivid terms, “tomber et lui casser le cou” and “lui donne aveuglement la mort” (4: 253), implies some level of peripheral experience, observation, or familiarity with the hunt that

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spiritual revelations (“Révélation” 3: 312-13); in prophecy (“Prophéties de Régina” 3: 313-19); and in his address to the court (3: 540-62).

gestures to his association with a group of Métis bison hunters in Montana. This notable shift in thematic focus is all the more remarkable as Riel had never before written about bison hunting, either in Red River or in the east. What is more, through this glimpse at the practices of the Métis hunting class, Riel reveals their active relationship with the land and non-human kin (hunter to hunted; hunter to horse; horse to land; hunter to land; hunter to the divine, and so on); although, for Riel, this relationship between non-humans, the divine, and humans is not only mediated, but actively shaped, by Catholicism. Like in his earlier fables, particularly those penned as a youth in Montréal, Riel introduces in the poem elements of his strict morality and divine justice.

A curious, almost anthropomorphic image in the first stanza that compares the theft of a buffalo to a coyote eating an egg out of a chicken's rear, "C'est manger l'œuf, en loup à moule / Dans le derrière de la poule" (4: 253), also recalls his earlier fables. Though the action is a little unclear, as Riel does not elaborate against whom the theft occurs, buttressed by allusions to the broader environment, references to specific animals and their behaviours, the image also evokes possible traditional knowledges. The consumption of the egg suggests that the harvest of a young animal not only robs it, and its progeny, of growth, but that it is in turn a theft against all beings that depend on such animals to survive. Riel also seems to allude to a possible influence for the sudden, rare, semi-humorous image, as the line "Toute chanson de vérité" (4: 253), echoes Pierre Falcon's famous "chanson de vérité" about Seven Oaks ("Grenouillère" 10), and resonates with the bard's work through satirical elements. In contrast to Falcon, Riel diverges significantly from the older poet as he delivers a rebuke directed at his own people. For Riel, the poem is less about the bison hunt than the moral lessons that the hunt might impart. Unlike other surviving accounts of 19<sup>th</sup> century bison hunts, such as in Louis Schmidt's and other memoirs, which often have an ethnographic, almost documentary aspect to them, Riel's treatment of the hunt is distinct

in its more thematic, artistic approach. The hunt becomes a vehicle through which he can express his world view: that divine retribution results in a just world. Because the rider is a thief, the horse will step into a hole and throw off the rider; because the hunter has previously caused harm, the musket will explode in the hunter's hands, blind, and kill the hunter. Whereas Falcon produced humourous, nationalist, celebratory tributes, in contrast, Riel, drawing on notions of "la permission divine" (4: 253), produces a stern, religiously inflected moral.

Riel would pen a handful of other poems about his own people in Montana, and although often moralizing, such as in the series castigating drunk, violent, and abusive men in the camps,<sup>43</sup> they provide interesting glimpses of the culture of the Métis bison-hunting class. They are quite suggestive of class differences within the Métis nation. Riel seems to typify the divisions, in his 1881 poem "Tous les garçons du monde," revealing his discomfort with some of the ways he is treated when showing interest in a woman:

Ma nation que j'aime  
 S'amuse à m'insulter  
 On prend un trouble extrême  
 Pour me déconcerter. (4: 273)

Riel betrays his privileged, educated position, and bourgeois class inclinations. His discomfort not only exposes his own serious nature, and malaise with others' humour (which is not one of his strengths), but it is also suggestive of his limited association with working-class Métis people and, particularly, bison-hunting groups and coarser demeanours. Aside from time spent with Métis farmers, traders, and members of the burgeoning bourgeois class in Red River in the late 1860s and early 1870s, Riel spent most of the last decade associating with politicians and

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<sup>43</sup> "Pourtant si vous faisiez la chasse" (4: 255-59) accuses George Hyacinthe of domestic abuse; "Thomas Larance" (4: 259-61) and "Joseph Parisien" (4: 262-65) of being violent drunks.



clergymen in eastern Canada and the United States. Whereas distance tended to collapse differences between Métis communities in his texts into a generalized conception of the nation, renewed proximity with Métis communities resulted in more nuance. Poems penned in North Dakota near the Red River Valley in 1879, have elements of melancholic familiarity, but his subsequent Montana poems, ironically re-emphasize cultural distance, evincing unfamiliarity and, arguably, culture shock.

### **“Mon Sauveur” (1884)**

Written in Montana, likely while at St. Peter’s Mission, and posthumously published in Riel’s *Poésies religieuses et politiques*, “Mon Sauveur” is a notable and succinct example of his poetic meditations on religion and faith. In this poem, Riel leaves little doubt as to the centrality of Christianity in his world view. I reproduce the first two stanzas here:

O Jésus-Christ! Je veux n’entendre

Et n’écouter que votre voix.

Je veux obéir et me rendre

En tous, à l’Esprit de vos lois.

Je m’attache à vous: Je veux suivre

Le sens de vos instructions

Guidez-moi: Je ne veux pas vivre

Au gré de mes illusions. (4: 391)

Part adoration, part appeal, the poem not only provides evidence of the depth of Riel’s faith, but perhaps more surprisingly, also hints at his spiritual struggles. The lines “Guidez moi: Je ne veux

pas vivre / Au gré de mes illusions” (4: 391) begin with an appeal for guidance, for help, as the speaker, presumably Riel, struggles with the whims of his illusions. What illusions might Riel be referencing? Might they be the reconciliation of the doctrines and policies of the Catholic Church with his own beliefs (shaped through his own misfortunes, and the principles of the ultramontane movement, of whom Bourget was a leading advocate in Québec, which called for the supremacy of papal authority over secular state governments), as well as his lived experience in the West? He wishes to listen to Christ’s “voix,” but admits that Christ “ne [parle] plus à la terre” (4: 391); instead, Christ’s voice is abstracted, and notably, Riel perceives his voice not through the tenets of institutional Catholicism, mediated through the pope, but in the elements of “[le] Paradis” (4: 391) and the natural world. “Vous vous cachez dans l’univers,” Riel writes, “Comme, dans les rosiers les roses / Se cachant durant nos hivers” (4: 391).

The image of Christ hiding in the universe like roses in a rose bush during winter, while aesthetically compelling, also produces a somber effect. Roses bloom in springtime, opening in warmth and light to reveal their splendour and colour. Christ does not bloom; at least not until some supposed second coming. Riel’s image conveys the impression that faith is akin to living through an endless winter, where the roses never flower. In the dearth of overt guidance, and the lack of metaphorical roses, Riel relies less on corporeal, material objects, than on ethereal and intangible inspiration and direction. Describing how Christ’s voice reaches him “à son âme” and “à sa conscience” (4: 391), he not only gestures toward the interiority, but the nature of faith.

### **“Les Métis du Nord-Ouest” (1885)**

Riel’s essay “Les Métis du Nord-Ouest” (3: 278-94), which was posthumously published in the Montreal *Daily Star* on 28 November 1885, and later republished in A.-H. de Trémaudan’s

*Histoire de la nation métisse dans l'Ouest canadien* in 1935, is in many ways a culmination of his thinking and writings on matters of Métis national identity, sovereignty, and land rights, as well as on the material and historical conditions which brought about the Red River and North-West resistances. In this wide-ranging essay, Riel also touches upon issues of terminology, self-naming, and political history, including how the Laws of the Prairies and Métis governance structures emerged from organized bison hunting practices, how the Métis both asserted control and shared territory through conflicts and alliances with First Nations, and how they attempted to defend their land claims and rights in the face of incipient settler-colonialism. It is an exceptional and systematic articulation of Métis national identity and concern for his community.

Riel opens his essay with a prayer to “Jésus ... Marie ... [and] Saint-Joseph,” imploring them to save “nous [presumably the Métis]” (3: 278), and seemingly establishes the overarching presence of the spiritual (Catholic) universe, which structures Métis society, before he introduces the nation and community. There is an intriguing resonance in the opening structure of the essay with the hierarchy of Métis society as first outlined in “La Métisse”: (individuals, which belongs to the nation, under God). However, by clarifying what he means by Métis, he not only defines the term, but expands on the connection between individual and nation through notions of family or kinship, and community. Recognizing that the “Métis ont pour ancêtres paternels les anciens employés des compagnies de la Baie d’Hudson et du Nord-Ouest; et pour ancêtres maternels des femmes sauvages appartenant aux diverses tribus” (3: 278), he does not deny their mixed origins, but readily acknowledges the fact. He even reflects on how the word “Métis” is a more suitable word to convey the notion of these origins than its English-language counterpart “Half-breed,” which “maintenant que le sang européen et le sang sauvage sont mêlés à tous les degrés [the term Half-breed] n’est plus assez générale” (3: 278). However, despite this initial discussion of blood

and mixedness, Riel points out how issues of mixedness, and arguably shame, are often outsider-imposed ones, by “Des gens très polis, très gentils d’ailleurs,” against which the Métis “voudrait bien revendiquer [ses] origine[s] tant d’un bord que de l’autre” (3: 278). Instead, Riel argues that “il est juste que nous honorions nos mères aussi bien que nos pères” (3: 278-79) and importantly, by disrupting the centrality of mixedness, he shows how the Métis are *more than* questions of blood quantum.<sup>44</sup> Through an anecdote, and response of “un” Métis in the final paragraphs of the opening section, Riel introduces the individual. But, in asking “[p]ourquoi nous occuperions-nous à quel degré de mélange nous possédons le sang européen et le sang indien?” (3: 279), Riel stresses not only how Métis identity is founded upon kinship, “reconnaissance et l’amour filial” (3: 279), but demonstrates how individuals are connected to the community through family.

The essay’s opening is a fascinating reformulation of ideas explored in previous writings. He had touched upon them years earlier in his 1877 letter to his cousin by marriage, Paul Proulx, while in the Beauport Asylum, then focusing more upon French-Canadian Métis kinships:

[Je crois que] le nom métis est de nature à favoriser la fondation d’une puissante nationalité dans le Manitoba et le Nord Ouest. C’est un nom qui signifie mélange. Jusqu’ici il a servi à désigner la race issue du sang mêlé des européens et des Sauvages, mais il est également propre à dénommer une race d’hommes, qui se recruterait du mélange de tous les sangs, entr’eux; et qui, tout en passant dans le moule canadien-français, conserverait le souvenir de son origine, en s’appelant métisse. (2: 120)

While Riel acknowledges mixedness in this vision of Métis nationhood, as he does in his later essay, as a matter of historical awareness and pragmatism (since the term has historically served to designate their origins it may continue to do so), he also seems to foreground specific cultural

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<sup>44</sup> As Sylvia Van Kirk shows through the case of James Ross, however, such identity debates or turmoil were not always externally imposed, but sometimes internal. See ““What if Mama is an Indian?” The Cultural Ambivalence

elements. Outlining how, by “[passing through a French-Canadian mould]” and “[conserving the memory of their origins]” (2: 120; translation mine), non-francophone peoples might contribute “à fonder le peuple nouveau” (2: 120), Riel hints at (perhaps unfinished) processes of métissage. In some ways, he also anticipates the emergence of the contemporary Métis Nation, which, while composed of descendants of the historic Métis Nation, is at once, arguably, more diverse in non-Indigenous parentage and kin (no longer only French-Canadian, Scottish, or English), but more homogeneous in terms of language (in light of the predominance of English) than their ancestors. Although he privileges French-Canadian Métis people in a way that borders on chauvinism, it is a recognition of the central role that French and Catholic Métis people played in the development of the nation, moreover one tempered by a conditional openness toward the integration of others.

He would return to this topic in the ode “Le peuple Métis-Canadien-français,” reflecting on the development of the nation, not through a singular period of resistance such as he had done with “La Métisse,” but rather measured against a broader, expansive, historical narrative. Tracing the “brillants succès” of this “peuple nouveau” (4: 319), who

[A] fait connaître sa gloire

Aux indiens du Minnesota.

Il a toujours gagné victoire

Sur les tribus du Dakota.

Les montagnes et les prairies

Du Nord-ouest ont mille fois

Incliné leurs herbes fleuries

Au souvenir de ses exploits. (4: 319)

Riel frames the nation's emergence through an account of Métis conflicts, victories against, and alliances with other Indigenous peoples, alongside those with Europeans. Notably, Riel maps out not only the human geography, but the geographic boundaries of the Métis homeland. As Métis scholar Darren O'Toole points out in his discussion of the Métis homeland, "the areas and peoples [Riel] mentions — the Indians of Minnesota, the Dakota tribes, the mountains and prairies of the Northwest, Regina, Montana, Manitoba — all fall within what is today termed the Métis homeland" (O'Toole n.p.). Against this historical narrative, Riel envisions a distinctly francophone future for the Métis, with the Métis, French Canadians, and French being united by language and religion under the guidance of the Church.

Le clergé qui nous édifie  
 Nous unira bien sûrement,  
 Comme le trèfle [sic] identifie  
 Ses trois fleurs admirablement. (4: 324)

In contrast, Riel's re-formulation of Métis history and national narratives in "Les Métis du Nord-Ouest" diverges from his past writings on the subject. Whereas in the letter to his cousin, and in his ode, Riel focused intensely on the question of language and religion, suggesting that French Canadian Métis were the "[mould]" (2: 120) through which other mixed groups of First Nations and non-Indigenous ancestry might follow on their way to joining a broader Métis nation, in his essay he largely deemphasizes the issue of language and religion. Although he alludes to some specific French-Canadian Métis communities "Sur la Branche-Sud de la Saskatchewan" (3: 287), Riel frames his historical narrative in a way that includes English-speaking Métis people, or "Half-breeds," with the French-speaking Métis in his broader narrative.

In glossing over cultural divisions, and internal conflicts, between English-speaking and

French-speaking Métis peoples, Riel presents the case for Métis land title and rights in the North-West through a broader, generalized history of the nation, and narrative of emerging sovereignty. While he acknowledges how “[l]e sang indien de leurs veines établissait le droit ou le titre qu’ils avaient à la terre” (3: 279), gave the Métis “la propriété du sol conjointement avec les Sauvages” (3: 279), Riel also takes care to articulate how, through the establishment of specific cultural and economic practices, the Métis nation emerged. That is, although they are mixed, the Métis have been tempered, so-to-speak, through specific historical events and emerging cultural practices, into a nation. Pointing to the cultivation and small-scale farming of land,<sup>45</sup> then the organization of large-scale bison hunts, Riel outlines how the Métis produced their own laws, “[l]e conseil des chasseurs faisait des règlements. On les appelait les lois de la Prairie,” and their own system of governance: “Le conseil était un gouvernement provisoire” (3: 282). Riel roots the nation in the Prairies, not only through its occupation and use of the territory, but through its relationships (both antagonistic and friendly) with other Indigenous nations. “Les métis sont les hommes qui domptèrent ces nations sauvages par leurs armes,” writes Riel, “et qui, ensuite, les adoucèrent, par les bonnes relations qu’ils entretenaient avec elles à la faveur de la paix. Ce sont eux qui mirent au prix de leur sang, la tranquillité dans le Nord-Ouest” (3: 284). Through his narrative of how the Métis emerged from particular economic, social, and cultural contexts, Riel shows how they belong, which subsequently stresses the outrage and injustice of colonization, when Canada, “a mis la main sur le pays des Métis comme sur le sien” (3: 284). There is some idealism at play in the essay, however, as in his de-emphasis of divisions, Riel elides discord, and even conflict between communities during the North-West Resistance (from other French-Métis communities not materially supporting their kin in Batoche, to English-speaking Métis aiding Canadian forces

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<sup>45</sup> Riel argued that because the Métis “bâtissaient ... la labouraient, la clôturaient et l’employaient à beaucoup plus grand avantage que ne faisaient les Indiens” (3: 279), Métis lands were worth twice as much as First Nations’ lands.

as scouts). Despite such lacuna, Riel's analysis builds a compelling and significant critique of Canada's actions.

In this essay, and in his addresses to the jury and to the court in Regina, Riel arrives at the heart of Métis struggles with settler-colonialism: how the destruction of Indigenous nations is tied to land rights. "Est-ce que l'honnêteté permet à un peuple plus grand de ravir à un peuple plus petit sa patrie?" asks Riel. "L'humanité répond que non. La conscience humaine déclare qu'un tel acte est criminel ... *La patrie est la plus importante de toutes les choses de la terre, et de plus, elle est sainte par les ancêtres qui la transmettent*" (3: 285; emphasis mine). In his seminal essay on the matter, Patrick Wolfe asserts that "the primary motive for elimination [of Indigenous peoples] is not race (or religion, ethnicity, grade of civilization, etc.) but *access to territory*. Territoriality is settler colonialism's specific, irreducible element" (388; emphasis mine). Riel anticipates this realization via conceptions of nationhood, language, and identity, as well as through the Métis's complex interrelationships with the land "qui leur[s] appartenait une fois par le titre indien, deux fois pour les avoir défendues aux prix de leur sang; trois fois pour les avoir bâties, cultivées clôturées, travaillées et habitées" (3: 288). Lastly, in the face of merciless colonialism, "lorsqu'un despotisme est sans borne, il faut bien chercher à cogner sur les doigts de la main qui l'exerce" (3: 288), Riel concludes that resistance is the logical solution.

### **Writing Home: On Geography, Kinship, and the Motherland**

Although I have gestured above toward the significance of the homeland for Riel, by pursuing in this section a more thematic reading, and examining poems that resonate with his declaration of kinship with "the North-West" (3: 524), I consider how the "North-West" marks his poetic oeuvre. I show how it is not only a geographic reference, but through the accumulation



of myriad allusions to cultural practices rooted in specific places, his evocations of the homeland evidence a maturing appreciation and articulation of the expansive relationship between people and place that characterizes historical Métis experiences.

Riel's use of space, geographic references, and allusions reveals a complex intersection of epistemological influences, literary techniques, and autobiographical elements. In his early fables, Riel tends to incorporate geography vaguely, mostly as setting. The debate over which nationalism is central in his poem "Le Chat et les Souris" (4: 26),<sup>46</sup> whether it is an allegory of French-Canadian or Métis nationalism, or perhaps an early apprehension of "les Métis-Canadiens-français," for example, seems partially rooted in the ambiguity of the poem's setting. In contrast, his poems composed in Red River feature much more specific geographies that intersect with his growing political awareness and local political involvement. In "A la pointe de chênes" (4: 85), penned in 1869, he references the French Métis parish of Ste. Anne. Allusions of "le chemin" (4: 85) evoke both the Dawson Road, which physically linked Red River with Canada,<sup>47</sup> and the road workers, a rowdy gang of Canadians that included Thomas Scott; the lines "[m]ettons-nous donc à tordre / Les nez de chien de Mer" (4: 86), function not only as a denigrating play on Charles Mair's name, but allude to his physical castigation at the hands of Annie Bannatyne.

Reconsidering "La Métisse," we see how Riel anchors his hymn in Red River through specific allusions, geographic references, and incidents that localize the resistance at the centre of Red River. Although the line ending with "défendre le pays" gestures toward a broader Métis sovereignty that possibly alludes to land that encompasses the North-West, the semiotic slippage

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<sup>46</sup> Some scholars maintain the mice in this allegory represent French Canadians (Campbell, *Selected Poetry of Louis Riel*, 128; Flanagan 11), and others contend it demonstrates an early Métis nationalism (Runte 27; Siggins 55).

<sup>47</sup> The Dawson Road was a route from Thunder Bay (Fort William) to Winnipeg (Fort Garry), commissioned by the Canadian Minister of Public Works, William McDougall, and begun without the HBC or local Indigenous peoples' permissions. The road workers were mostly from Ontario, and included Mair (paymaster) and Scott, etc. For more on the violent "shenanigans" of the road crew, see Siggins (84-85).

of “pays,” particularly when considered alongside the line “garder leurs foyers,” suggests a more narrow, almost domestic focus. While “pays” and “foyers” overlap somewhat spatially, they also overlap socially; “foyers” would seem to concentrate the broader implication of “pays” onto the home, emphasizing less the land on which Métis houses sit, than highlighting that sense of home, and broader Métis society, within. It does not elaborate on the relationship between Métis society and the land. I do not mean to suggest that Riel dismisses the importance of land, but rather that he emphasizes how the resistance seeks to protect a domestic way of life. Looking at the articles in front of “le pays” and “leurs foyers,” reveals how the country is defined declaratively without possession, “le” instead of ‘notre,’ whereas, “leurs” designates the possession of those “foyers” (4: 89). In his first poems composed in the North-West, Riel seems to skirt deeper consideration, and maintaining a separation between land and people, does not articulate complex relationships. But, through his emphasis on home, Riel also implies the feeling of a sort of filial attachment to the space; of home nestled within a homeland.

In the shock of Canada’s betrayal and Wolseley’s arrival, Red River and Manitoba would become reoccurring themes for Riel, which he explores in different ways. In the aftermath of Manitoba’s entry into Canadian Confederation, he begins to explicitly contemplate land as home and dwells in the relational intersections between land and people. In “La Perdrix,” likely penned in late 1870, after Riel fled Fort Garry at the arrival of Wolseley and his troops, and he stayed in St. Joseph, on the American side of the border, the homeland—both place and people—becomes symbolically represented as a partridge, whose fate at the hands of a hunter allegorically echoes Canada’s treatment of the Métis, post-Confederation: “la perdrix sauvage / Si charmante dans nos bois / ... / Du chasseur la main cruelle / Vient-Elle finir ses jours!” (4: 98). The allegory of the partridge marks the beginning of a move in his poetry toward a deeper, relational

consideration of the homeland, but one that is initially apprehended through the de-humanizing actions of others. Although non-human beings also appeared in his earlier fables, he initially approaches specifically Métis-themed notions of human and non-human relations, or kinship, through the violent treatment that Wolseley's soldiers delivered.

In "Que les gens d'armes" (4: 107), penned in the fall of 1873, when hiding in the forest around Vermette's Point, near St. Norbert, after being warned that the Government of Ontario had placed a bounty of \$5000 on his head (4: 108, n. 1), Riel expands on themes of human/non-human kinship by alluding to the homeland more intimately through repeated comparison of the homeland as either lover or girlfriend. Here is the third stanza:

Je me couche dans la froidure.

Triste et seul, au milieu des bois.

Du vent, j'entends tout le murmure.

Il me semble que c'est ta voix.

Ma douce contrée!

Il me semble que c'est ta voix.

Ma blonde adorée! (4: 107-8)

Using romantic language, he finds comfort in the sound of wind as if it were a murmuring voice in the woods. While the poem suggests that he literally hears his People's voices on the wind, the lines also anthropomorphize the country, who whispers to him as would a lover in the night.

Riel would return to this linkage of country and kin, and country as kin, time and again over the following years. In "Quand on est loin de son Pays" (4: 110), written in 1875, in New England, in the early days of his five-year exile from Canada, a melancholic Riel dwells on the effects of his displacement, and how memories of the homeland tug constantly at his soul. Words

such as “tristesse,” “pleurs,” “pleurant,” “mes douces larmes,” “l’ennui,” and “triste chagrin” (4: 110-11) easily reveal his sorrow. Recalling his “maison paternelle,” and his siblings, “[m]es frères et mes soeurs, objets de mon amour / Aux genoux de mon Père” (4: 110), he emphasizes *home*, family, and relationship in his meditation on the homeland. Given that his father had died eleven years earlier, the poem exhibits a wistful yearning to return home, not to a Manitoba post-resistance, but one prior to the resistance. It becomes a lament for the succor and safety of his childhood home. Weaving exilic sorrows with memories of his parents and his siblings, Riel underscores that exile is not simply a matter of geography, but a psychic and social experience.

While Riel does not dwell at length in the intersections of gender, territory, and broader kinships, he draws a vivid contrast in his representation of the homeland between two poems — “les gens d’armes” and “loin de son pays” — through his choice of words and metaphors. In the French language, nouns possess a gender; the word “contrée [country]” in “les gens d’armes” is a feminine noun and he frames the image and metaphors (albeit heteronormatively) in relation to the word’s gender. The country becomes his girlfriend, as opposed to father, brother, or boyfriend. In contrast, in “Quand on est loin de son pays,” the word “pays” is a masculine noun, and it seems no accident that Riel uses this particular word as way of entering into a memory of his “maison paternelle,” his father’s home. Dwelling on this contrast, and recalling the apparent distinction in “La Métisse,” and “Les Premiers Temps,” between land and society, suggests the particular gendered aspects of this distinction. Although “contrée” and “pays” overlap greatly in meaning [country], “pays” can also mean “les gens, les habitants du pays [people, or inhabitants of the country]” (*Micro Robert* 917), so, through the reference to his father’s home, his “maison paternelle,” and his “pays,” or the society of the people, Riel seems in the second poem, to yearn less for the country or the land herself, than for the homosocial bonds that his exile has severed.

Written in 1879, near the end of his five-year exile, and after his two-year stint in asylums in Montréal and Beauport, Riel traces, in his poem “Dans l’Etat du Minnesota” (4: 221), his journey westward after convalescing in New York. Concrete references to “Minneapolis ... [and] St. Paul,” as well as to “Breckenridge ... [C]rookston ... and St-Vincent [which is located on the Minnesota side of the Red River across from Pembina, North Dakota]” (4: 221), initially build a joyous momentum as he travels through Minnesota and approaches Manitoba. His heart “sauta / De joie,” at the sight of this territory, and there is an undeniable familiarity, if not even intimacy suggested through the litany of references. The admission of “huit ou neuf parents,” in St. Paul, places him within the kinship network that undergirds the settler-political geography, and amplifies his outrage when, nearly on the border, but still unable to legally cross, Riel contemplates “tout proche [sa] patrie / Chérie,” and compares his beloved homeland to “une épouse” (4: 221), a cherished spouse caught in the hand of Orangemen:

Mais le train continue: et la locomotive

M’emporte à Breckenridge, à [C]rookston: et j’arrive

Enfin à St-Vincent. Me voici plus heureux

Car je puis contempler tout proche ma patrie

Chérie.

Province du Manitoba

Je t’aime et te chéris comme on fait d’une épouse.

L’orangiste te tient: mon âme en est jalouse. (4: 221)

Once again, Riel returns to the language of kinship in describing the homeland. However, the gendered imagery carries a dark subtext. The implication that his “épouse” is held against her will evokes anger and jealousy. Although this holding is perhaps meant more politically, read

through “the reign of terror” (Barkwell), the act conjures up the gendered violence, and recalls the physical and sexual assaults that Métis women suffered in the years after Manitoba’s entry into Confederation. Whether or not Riel responds to this implication, his “[jealousy]” turns to rage as he envisions violent retribution and the liberation of his home in the form of Indigenous allies, “des nations sauvages,” coming to aid the Métis, sweeping into Manitoba to “[raze]” (4: 222) Portage la Prairie. However, in this description, he seems to also reveal how the territory south of the medicine line does not hold for him the same emotional attachment; it is Manitoba, and not Minnesota that is *his* “patrie.” Shifting between affinity and aversion, and maintaining a generally deferential attitude toward the United States in contrast to his antagonistic relationship with Canada, Riel mostly perceives America as a place of asylum, and even a foil to Canada.<sup>48</sup>

In this particular period, while on the edge of Manitoba, writing starkly different poems about home, family, and Métis culture, compared to his diatribe against Macdonald, Riel offers a compelling glimpse at complex intersections of emotion. This complexity is also partially woven by the divergent deployment of geographic and geological references, allusions, and metaphors. This is hardly surprising, given the range of topics he addresses. More pertinently, as previously shown, the way that Riel characterizes and portrays territory shifts following his affiliation with a group of Métis bison hunters in Montana, becoming expansive, yet also subtle, as though no longer imagined, and mourned, but instead viscerally, experientially, embodied. Revisiting the multiple, overlapping, meanings of “pays” as simultaneously incorporating both physical space and the people of that space, we can see how Riel captures some segments of the “pays,” in his Montana poems. In his perception of the struggles and lives of Montana Métis bison-hunting communities in the early 1880s, Riel focuses on the ill-effects of alcohol. In “Pourtant si vous

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<sup>48</sup> Though he took up American citizenship in Montana, Riel also appealed to Jesus for help in leaving the United States: “Délivrez-moi des Etats” (2: 357), but later, in Batoche, he prayed for the United States, “mon pays adoptif,”

faisiez la chasse,” he touches on gendered consequences of excessive alcohol consumption in the camp, denouncing the poem’s protagonist, “Vous prenez son [the protagonist’s wife’s] épargne et vous allez la boire / Vos enfants, sans secours s’abreuvent de leurs pleurs. / Ils ont faim. Et leur mère est seule à tous ces malheurs” (4: 256). Fixating on hardships, Riel conveys a sense of his people reeling under the pressures of settler-colonialism, as increasing settler presence, and dwindling buffalo herds, increase conflict. Lamenting the social disintegration caused by alcohol, he links this rupture to a weakening sense of nationhood and the camp’s inability to defend itself—like against horse raids from “Les guerriers Sioux / De la Pointe-aux-Loups” (4: 264). In contrast to the vehement sentiments directed at English-Canada, at Macdonald, and at unnamed Orangemen in the Minnesota poem for what they have done to Manitoba, Riel does not articulate similar emotions toward American settler-colonialism in Montana, and in fact, in his correspondence, even demonstrates a much more deferential attitude. Although he evokes in his poems the broader Métis social networks that span the North-West and the northern United States, he also, figuratively, betrays the tenuous fragility of Métis sovereignty in Montana.<sup>49</sup>

However, his “pays” also bursts through the poem, “Mon nom c’est Baptissiez Ledoux” (4: 270). Penned in the early 1880s in Montana as well, this poem weaves an intriguing, mimetic, polyphony of voices, from “Baptissiez Ledoux” (4: 270); “Antoine Fleury” (4: 270); “Jean-Baptiste Berger” (4: 271); and “Cléophas Ducharme” (4: 271) that not only evokes a broad sense of Métis peoplehood, but resonates stylistically with Falcon’s songs as it encodes and contains the words of others. In this poetic dialogue between four Métis men and a member of North-West Mounted Police, one “Capitaine Cruiser,” in which the former plead with the officer to

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to come to the Métis’ aid, “[pour] effacer la ligne de séparation entre le Nord-Ouest et les Etats-Unis” (3: 301).

<sup>49</sup> Like in Red River, and later Batoche, Riel would also craft petitions in the United States, asking, in a letter to an American general for “the government to set apart a portion of land as a special reservation in this territory for the

intervene in the theft of Métis horses by “les gens du sang [the Blood],” the poetic persona dissolves, and Riel’s presence is felt largely through the poem’s structure as he instead centres other voices. It is through this polyphony of voices that an impression of peoplehood emerges: “j’ai trois associés,” alludes to kinship, and “[n]os chevaux de tire et de course / Étaient chez nous à paccager [sic] / C’étaient notre seule ressource,” gestures to a sense of relationship, or interdependence, between hunters and horses, and the line “nous sommes / De plus loin que le Missouri” (4: 270-1) evokes Métis history, mobility, culture, presence, and belonging. It is also interesting to note how Falcon’s influence most obviously reappears in Riel’s writings when he is once again physically present in Métis communities.

Riel’s poetic writings on the North-West, exulting place and people, out of his sustained literary productions, seem to culminate in his aforementioned ode to “Le peuple Métis-Canadien-français” (4: 319). Written in 1883 in St. Peter’s Mission, Montana, in the wake of a months-long visit to Manitoba earlier that summer to attend his sister Henriette’s wedding, which also marked his first return to Canada after the end of his five-year exile (4: 319, n.1), this “ode” demonstrates not only Riel’s passionate concern for his people, and a defence of francophone Métis identity and culture, but does so by intriguingly deploying specific historical contexts that evoke relations with other peoples and experiences of place. References to “Minnesota ... [and] Dakota,” to the sweep of “Les montagnes et les prairies / Du Nord-ouest,” and references to the cart trails, “Ses jolis chemins de charettes / Nombreux autour de Régina,” extending “Jusqu’au loin dans le Montana” (4: 319), map out a Métis homeland across settler borders, and gesture to aspects of Métis sovereignty with allusions to conflicts with other Indigenous nations, such as the Battle of Grand Coteau, which the Métis fought against “les tribus du Dakota” (4: 319). This also offers an

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halfbreeds” (2: 224), but in contrast to those other petitions, Riel would not describe territory in the United States in similar terms of attachment (or like in his essay “Les Métis du Nord-Ouest,” through their labouring on the land).



interesting contrast to “Dans L’État du Minnesota”, where Riel’s lament for Manitoba suggested a then narrower, personal, perception and experience of the homeland, influenced by his inability to enter Canada, that clashed with the idea of the Métis homeland as transnational; in this later poem, his concept of the homeland encompasses broader Métis experiences in the United States, or those territories adjacent to Manitoba claimed by the United States. The lack of reference to the Hudson’s Bay Company workers, and their complicated relationship (as kin and antagonists), along with opening references to other Indigenous nations, and geography, initially emphasizes Métis indigeneity. Riel initially situates the Métis within Indigenous contexts, if not expressly within larger Indigenous kinship networks, before gradually proffering his vision of the Métis, French Canadians, and the French uniting in the North-West, like “les trois feuilles du trèfle peuvent / Exister sur le même pied” (4: 324). This union seems calculated to buttress the Métis against “la Puissance / [qui] ne cherche qu’à l’anéantir” (4: 322). Clearly, the poem functions as an early formulation of what he would write two years later in “Les Métis du Nord-Ouest,” as the lines touching on the irrelevance of blood quantum, “la grande indifférence / Que nous tenons du sang indien” (4: 322), presage his later question asking “[p]ourquoi nous occuperions-nous à quel degré de mélange nous possédons le sang européen et le sang indien” (3: 279). As he does in his later text, he situates the Métis in the North-West and exhorts them to demonstrate their belonging: “Montrons que nous sommes d’ici” (4: 321). However, though tracing Métis history across the breadth of the homeland, and envisioning their future, as Riel seeks to “consolider ... / La nation manitobaine / Des Métis-canadiens-français” (4: 325), he also places French-speaking Manitoba at the core of the nation.

Riel’s apprehension and characterization of the Métis homeland evidences remarkable shifts through his body of poetry. From initial geographic references as settings to early Métis

national resistances, to contemplative considerations of land and country as home and kin, to his maturing meditations on this kinship—from describing the homeland as girlfriend, to spouse, to mother—from laments of exile to the embodied being of the homeland as place and people in the Montana poems, the North-West undeniably marks and subtends Riel’s disparate poems. Kinship informs Riel’s perception of territory, and broader aspects of Métis experiences, understandings, and relationship to human and non-human kin—the power of the Montana poems is located less in its technical aspects, than in the precision of its representation. Riel also evidences a constant concern for Métis communities through his works, even as he shows great variety in articulating these concerns—such as the ebb and flow of Falcon’s stylistic influence, but a persistence of his thematic influence—as well as a continual, contextually nuanced, return to expressions of Métis identity. Even though I have limited the discussion to how the North-West marks Riel’s poetry, and offered only a glimpse at his complicated relationship with the United States, I recognize that they follow only a few threads in his larger oeuvre. This makes clear how there remains much work to be done in re-reading Riel through contemporary methodologies of Indigenous literary nationalism and Métis Studies. What might a consideration of his articulations of land, and place, as kin suggest if apprehended through *wahkohtowin*? How might we reconcile his articulations of the homeland with his spirituality and veneration of “le ciel [heaven]” (3: 462)? What might a deeper reading of Riel’s different characterizations of the United States in comparison to Canada reveal about his apprehension of the Métis homeland and the limits of Métis sovereignty? What might a reading through intersections of race and gender proffer? In many ways, due to the sporadic study and sparseness of primarily literary analysis of his poems in comparison to his political activities, Riel’s literary legacy remains underexamined.

### What Legacy? Notes on Riel's Fragmented Publication History

Riel's fragmented publication history explains in part the recentness of literary study of his texts. The vast majority of his poems, not to mention his correspondence and notes, appeared long after his death. Riel had some articles, essays, and poems published in the early parts of his career, and some newspapers published a good deal of his writings during his trial in 1885; these nonetheless represent a disparate and disrupted publication process. Riel did wish that his papers be published, appointing "le Révérend Père Alexis André pour mon exécuteur testamentaire au sujet de mes papiers. Ma volonté est, que tous mes papiers lui soient remis et qu'il en ait le soin et que la publication lui en appartienne" (3: 256). But André did not appear to take much action. Riel's family selected eight poems to publish posthumously in 1886, in *Poésies religieuses et politiques*, but of these, at least three had previously been published in newspapers during his trial.<sup>50</sup> Otherwise, his "literary" publications remained relatively few and far between. Other than those published in 1870, his Montréal poems remained largely unknown to the public until the Riel family turned them over to the Archives of Manitoba in 1966; composed between 1858 and 1866, they were published in *Poésies de jeunesse*, edited by Gilles Martel, Glen Campbell, and Thomas Flanagan in 1977. The publication of Riel's *Collected Writings*, in 1985, brought all his texts together (aside from a handful discovered since). However, as they reproduced the texts in their original language, this likely limited their transmission and circulation. The vast majority of the texts examined above are in French, and not all have been translated.

Glen Campbell points out in the introduction to volume 4 of the *Collected Writings*, the volume of poems, how Riel's poetry had until "recently ... remained a largely unexplored area," and when biographers such as "[Joseph Kinsey] Howard, [G.H.] Needler, and [George] Stanley"

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<sup>50</sup> Excerpts of "L'Archevêque de Saint Boniface" appeared in the *La Minerve* and *Le Courrier du Canada* on 5 June 1885; "La Sainte Vierge" also appeared in *La Minerve*, same day; and "Notre Seigneur identifié avec son clergé,"

(xliv), found a great deal lacking in Riel's poetry, they had "had at their disposal only about half of the corpus of Riel's poetry" (xliv). While there has been a handful of literary studies on Riel published since the *Collected Writings* appeared, these studies are relatively few. This is not to say that there has not been important work done. Campbell's return to Riel over the years has certainly borne fruit; his early editorial work and analysis in *Poésies de jeunesse*, for instance, remains critical. His more recent tracing of literary "resistance" in Riel's poetry ("Stratégies de résistance"), through Riel's rhetorical strategies of "condemnation, ridicule et menaces" (191), demonstrates how Métis nationalism becomes a principal overarching thread in his poetry post-Montréal (post-1866). Religion and spirituality have also drawn some literary attention: Albert Braz has examined "the revenge motif" ("Vengeful" 30) in Riel's poetry and highlighted a Manichean or Old Testament aspect of his poetic vision—how Riel calls repeatedly for the shock and awe of divine retribution. Echoing Campbell, Sylvain Rheault has recently written that "Riel has received much study as a man of politics but little to date as a man of letters" (149), as he examines how "the unique character of a poetic universe in which a temporal world and a spiritual world both coexist and collide" (149). Roseann Runte takes a comparative approach in her reading of his poetry through the writings of Jean de La Fontaine, providing insight into not only his literary form and La Fontaine's influence, but the rhetorical strategies and poetics of his early poetry. Katherine Durnin's unpublished PhD dissertation, "Mixed Messages: The Métis in Canadian Literature, 1816-2007" (2008), is one of the few studies, that I am aware of, that considers Riel comparatively alongside Pierre Falcon within a larger tradition of Métis writing. However, her inclusion of non-Métis writers, and non-Indigenous writers, shifts her focus from an examination of Métis literary history to broader consideration of Métis representation. Self-representation is very different from literary representation of the Métis by non-Métis writers.

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also appeared in both papers, same day. These three poems were republished in 1886.

Finally, it is also worth noting how Riel's legacy unfolds alongside contemporary Métis literary production. Due to his fragmented and relatively recent publication history, his literary legacy continues to gain pertinence as contemporary writers return to, engage, and dialogue with his writing. Though his political and cultural legacies, and his discourse, have long-shaped Métis writing, from Alexandre DeLaronde's poems, the Métis-commissioned *Histoire de la nation métisse de l'Ouest canadien*, to Manie Tobie's writing in the 1960s, Beatrice Mosionier in the 1980s, and Marilyn Dumont and Katherena Vermette's texts in the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, Riel's influence as a poet and creative writer has been less explored. However, from the complexities and contradictions of his messianism (his constant desire to save the Métis), to the blurring of his political and religious views, his authoritarian impulses and absence of self-criticism, to his apparent chauvinism toward First Nations and Eurocentric veneration of Franco-Catholic culture, and Manichean conceptions of cultural progress, which echoes non-Indigenous rhetoric of civilization and savagery, his writings present significant challenges for contemporary readers and writers. That said, the ways that Gregory Scofield weaves excerpts from Riel's poems into his own and uses them as intertext in his book, *Louis: The Heretic Poems* (2011), and the glimpse of Riel as a poet that Maia Caron offers in her novel *Song of Batoche* (2017), suggest a moderate increase in attention to Riel as a producer of literature, and a tentative reconciliation with his complicated literary legacy that serves as a tenuous span of literary eras. In their efforts to write with Riel (and occasionally against him, as in Caron's case), not solely as a political figure, leader, and visionary, *but as a writer*, contemporary writers are beginning to stitch together ruptures in Métis (literary) history that are not so easily sutured.

### Chapter Three — Writing from the “Golden Age” through the “Forgotten Years”

Pierre Falcon and Louis Riel are undoubtedly the major wordsmiths of Métis literature in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and their works continue to resonate into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. However, even as they epitomize broader narratives of Métis literacy, education, and writing in the ways that they come to produce their works, and embody the cultural and political conditions which mark their songs and writing, Falcon and Riel were not the only Métis writers of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Linked to the socio-economic history of the North-West—from the politics of the fur trade to assertions of Métis national identity—the story of Métis writing is a complex, multi-layered, and far ranging one, marked by the tensions between the arrival of proselytizing Christian-missionaries in the North-West, the rise and spread of education, both French-Catholic and English-Protestant, and the persistent draw and influence from external centres such as Montréal, Toronto, London, and Rome. Métis writing is also shaped by multiple cultural and linguistic heritages: Saulteaux, Cree, Dene, French-Canadian, English, and Scottish, and the emergence of Michif.

Shifting from the singular close readings performed in the previous chapters to a broader survey, this chapter weaves many threads as it begins to link historical and contemporary Métis literature by contextualizing some significant shifts that mark Métis history through the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early to mid-20<sup>th</sup> centuries. In order to frame Métis wordsmithing beyond Falcon and Riel, I first return to the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century to juxtapose the careers and writings of Alexander Kennedy Isbister and Sara Riel, and show how they share abiding concerns for their communities. I argue that following the resistances, the arrival of settler-colonialism, land and cultural dispossession, Métis literary production would become focused upon the preservation and promotion of Métis stories and national history, but also, through revisionism and circumspection, increasingly show less critical self-reflection, than an initial idealization of Métis historical experiences.

Analyzing the state of Métis literary production in the years after the defeat at Batoche, I contemplate how settler-colonial policies, like the Manitoba Schools Question, not only gestured to the broader climate of exclusion, prejudice, and racism that permeated, and still permeates, the Prairies, but impelled deepening caution—including circumspection, elision, and shifting cultural emphasis—in Métis writing. Surveying examples of Métis literary production, such as poems by Alexandre DeLaronde, I show that despite significant social challenges, Métis literary production persisted, albeit in an attenuated state. Aside from the posthumous publication of Riel's *Poésies religieuses et politiques* in 1886, there was little Métis writing published in book form in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>51</sup> Some memoirs were gathered and drafted, but few were published. *Les mémoires de Louis Schmidt* is a prominent exception that appeared in multiple parts through 1911 and 1912, in *Le patriote de l'Ouest*, a French-language newspaper published in Duck Lake, Saskatchewan. The disparate publication histories of other memoirs gesture to barriers faced by Métis writers: the memoirs of Gabriel Dumont, Louis Goulet, Peter Erasmus, and Johnny Grant were gathered and transcribed by other Métis writers, but remained unpublished for years. In contrast, a settler writer, Mary Weekes obtained, transcribed, and published the recollections of Norbert Welsh, an elderly Métis man, as *The Last Buffalo Hunter* (1939), in less than a decade.<sup>52</sup>

Newspapers had also provided an important platform for Métis writers. James Ross co-owned the *Nor'-Wester* in Red River between 1860 and 1863, and as Bruce Peel shows in *Early Printing in the Red River Settlement*, during the resistance of 1869-70, printing presses were a lightning rod between pro-Canadian annexationists and the Métis-led provisional government, resulting in clandestine printing, the forging of the Queen's signature, and the seizure of presses

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<sup>51</sup> An exception is Amelia M. Paget's *People of the Plains* (1909), an ethnography of the Plains Cree and Saulteaux, "among who she lived" (<https://uofrpress.ca/Books/P/People-of-the-Plains>).

<sup>52</sup> Notably, Dumont dictated multiple memoirs; the first was to a French Canadian, B.A.T. Montigny, during his speaking tour of Québec, and which was edited by Adolphe Ouimet, and published as *La Vérité sur la Question*

by the provisional government. Elsewhere, newspapers in Québec printed many of Riel's letters, historical accounts of the resistance, and appeals for Canada to honour the terms of the Manitoba Act through the early 1870s. While a comprehensive survey of Métis writing in the newspapers of North America is beyond the scope of this chapter, I focus on representative excerpts of the discourse printed in *La Liberté* in the 1920s. I examine a transcribed version of Guillaume Charette's speech at the inauguration of the monument "de la Barrière"<sup>53</sup> from 21 August 1923, along with letters to the editor in subsequent issues of the paper. Together, they reveal important themes that dominated Métis discourse at the time, like continued investments and articulations of Métis national identity and history, and expose shifting social realities, racism, and the growing fissures between French-speaking Métis and francophone settlers. The discourse on national history presages the impetus behind L'Union nationale métisse Saint-Joseph's hiring of Auguste-Henri de Trémaudan to produce a Métis-informed history of the Métis nation. I analyze the foreword and appendix to Trémaudan's text, which were written by L'Union nationale's historical committee, and though operating within a French-Catholic worldview, betray tension with the Catholic Church, and establish, through their circumspection of controversial questions regarding Riel, less a critical historical reflection than the construction of national myths. Lastly, I examine a selection of Jim Brady's writings, which, through a deployment of Marxist-socialist analysis, and materialist concerns, and the rejection of Catholicism, demonstrate a significant ideological break with previous generations of Métis writers, and augur broader intellectual and cultural shifts away from Christianity that mark more recent Métis literature. Despite different ideological underpinnings, however, Brady's texts also resonate with L'Union's writings, not

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*Métisse au Nord-Ouest* in 1889. I look briefly at these texts below, and with more detail in the following chapter.

<sup>53</sup> The place on the Pembina Trail, near Saint-Norbert, where in 1869, one of the first acts of the Red River Resistance occurred when the Métis erected a barrier to prevent Canada's envoys, William McDougall and his entourage, from entering the settlement and establishing Canadian control.



only in countering disparaging narratives about the Métis, and investments in producing Métis histories from Métis perspectives, but in narrative strategies of circumspection (particularly around Riel), elision, and romanticization. Brady's and L'Union's works are also quite suggestive of how Métis intellectual labour in the early to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century was focused primarily on national survival (discursive and material), rather than literary art.

### **Literacy, European Education, and the Role of Class in the Early Literary Traditions**

Métis literacy in French and English is partially linked to the founding of schools in the North-West in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. These schools arose as a response to the incident at Seven Oaks, the establishment of the Selkirk Settlement, and the growing Métis and First Nations settlements in the Red River Valley. In 1818, led by Bishop Joseph-Norbert Provencher, the first Catholic mission arrived and began providing education. John West, an Anglican Minister, arrived in Red River and opened a small school in 1822. More day and residential schools, mixed, and female schools, would be established over the years and decades to come (Bumsted, *St. John's College* 1-5). While noting the arrival of Franco-Catholic and Anglo-Anglican education in Red River, I do not suggest that the Métis (Bois-Brûlés, Halfbreeds, Country-Born) were uneducated and illiterate beforehand, as previous chapters show that sons of fur traders were often sent east to obtain education: among them, Falcon and Louis Riel Sr. to Québec; Cuthbert Grant to Scotland. Métis were also educated in a variety of Indigenous traditions, cultural and economic practices, which fostered a robust fur-trading, buffalo-hunting, pemmican-producing economy, medicines, languages, and so on. Nor do I mean to suggest that the advent of western-European style education in the North-West ended the practice of sending young men east, as shown by the careers of Alexander Kennedy Isbister in the 1830s (Scotland), Louis Riel in the 1850s and

1860s (Montréal), and James Ross in the 1850s and 1860s (Toronto). The dissemination of European-style education was also an uneven process due to the broad physical and social geographies of the North-West (McMahon and Levasseur-Ouimet n.p.).

Schools in the North-West, however, offered primary, European-style education to those unable to journey east from the homeland, and as J.M. Bumsted notes in his history of St. John's College (University of Manitoba), women's education played a large role.<sup>54</sup> The school run by William Cockran and his wife, in Red River, in 1829, had "eighteen female students" (*St. John's College* 5);<sup>55</sup> in 1833, Reverend David Jones "established the Red River Academy," and "enrolled seventeen boys and sixteen girls" (5). French-Catholic education also expanded in 1844 when Grey Nuns arrived and opened schools "for all segments of the population" (McGuire 24); they had "at the beginning fifty-four pupils, mostly Saulteaux or Métis, some Sioux" (24). A decade later, "the Christian Brothers, a teaching order" (Erickson, "Bury" 23), established a boys' school which eventually became the Collège de St. Boniface. In discussing the nuances of these various educational establishments at Red River, Lesley Erickson stresses how, in

[r]ecognizing that wealthy, influential, and Catholic HBC officials did not want to send their daughters to the Grey Nuns' day school, where they would rub shoulders with Métis, Mixed-blood, and Saulteaux girls of the hunting class, [Bishop/Archbishop] Taché and the Grey Nuns created a curriculum for their boarders that was on par with European finishing schools. Unlike the Grey Nuns' day school students, who learned the rudiments of reading, writing, religion, and sewing, boarding school students prepared for their role as wives to future HBC officers. ("Bury" 23)

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<sup>54</sup> Following the merger of the North West and Hudson's Bay Companies in 1821, and the reduction in their workforce, Red River became an increasingly important centre, drawing people from across the North-West.

<sup>55</sup> Born in Northern England, William Cockran was a Scottish Anglican Missionary who arrived in Red River in 1825, and had a long career in the settlement. He died in Portage la Prairie in 1865. See Foster for more.

In touching upon the intersections of class, language, religion, race, and gender that education accentuated, Erickson hints at the complex cultural tapestry that undergirds Métis literature and language arts. Her analysis of the life and writings of Sara Riel shows how diverse communities at Red River were dynamically interlinked, but also how class divisions in Métis communities marked divergent experiences. “Families like the Lagimodières, Riels, Marions, and Hamelins,” Erickson notes, “increasingly divorced themselves from the unlettered and unpropertied *engagés*, tripmen, hunters, petty traders, and small farmers who made up the majority of the Métis communities at St. Francis-Xavier and Pembina” (22). Erickson pinpoints religion, education, and cultural practices as sources of contrast within communities, arguing that “Métis hunters and their families were only nominally Catholic, they organized their lives around the seasons of the hunt, and they engaged freely in social activities like drinking and dancing, which the clergy deplored” (22). The notion that hunters were “nominally Catholic,” however, seems overstated, contradicted by evidence of priests often accompanying hunting brigades. The first rule of the hunt in 1840, for instance, notably forbade the running of buffalo on “the Sabbath” (Bryce 371), which suggests that the hunting classes were perhaps more than Catholic in name only. Yet, what Erickson’s contention might hint at is a spectrum of piety and religious practice linked to class and economic practices: the sustained proximity to religious institutions for the bourgeois Métis in the settlements, and the intermittent influence of missionaries on Métis living away from the settlements. Recall Louis Riel’s discomfort at the humour directed at him by his people in the bison hunting camp in Montana. In terms of influence on Métis literary production, this contrast gestures to parallel traditions of language arts: Franco-Catholic, and Anglo-Protestant, literary education in the heart of the settlement, and the primacy of oral culture in the broader homeland.

**“Their deity is gold”: Alexander Kennedy Isbister and the Hudson’s Bay Company**

Although not quite contemporaries, Alexander Kennedy Isbister and Sara Riel evidence in contrasting ways the intersections between gender, religion, and language while writing about their connections and concerns for Métis communities. Born in 1822, at Cumberland House, in what would become Saskatchewan, the son of an HBC clerk and Orkneyman, Thomas Isbister, and Mary Kennedy, the country-born “daughter of Chief Factor Alexander Kennedy and his Cree wife Aggathas” (Van Kirk n.p.), Alexander Kennedy Isbister began his education on the Orkney Islands. However, the “death of his grandfather [with whom Isbister was living in Scotland] appears to have occasioned his return” (Van Kirk) to the North-West. He attended the Red River Academy from 1833 to 1837. He entered the service of the HBC at the age of 16, but chaffing under racial prejudices, and seeing “little chance of being promoted to the officer class” (Van Kirk), he resigned, and travelled to Great Britain to pursue higher education, and a career in academia.<sup>56</sup> Though he would not return to Red River, the welfare of the Settlement’s inhabitants remained important to him, and marked his writing. As an “active supporter of the campaign for free trade rights in Red River,” Van Kirk explains, Isbister “headed a delegation in 1847 which presented a petition against the HBC to the British Government on behalf of approximately 1000 inhabitants of Red River” (n.p.), and helped pen its introduction.

Isbister’s “A Few Words on the Hudson’s Bay Company,” the introduction to the petition of 1847, marks a significant, critical example of early Métis writing. With polemical criticism of the HBC and its policies, Isbister wrote:

That by the practice of exclusive trading with the natives, which the Hudson’s Bay Company assert is secured to them by a royal Charter, that Company has for nearly the

last two hundred years, to the utter impoverishment, if not ruin, of the natives, amassed a princely revenue, which, as your Memorialists believe, now amounts to nearly a quarter of a million sterling, per annum. Though one of the leading objects contemplated by the incorporation of the Company was the introduction of Christianity amongst the Indians and the securing a due provision for their moral, religious, and social improvement, little or none of the vast sums the Company has been permitted to accumulate, has been devoted to such purposes. (4)

Isbister demonstrates an abiding concern for the Métis and other Indigenous peoples, and taking issue with policies that maintained the HBC's monopoly and allowed them to unjustly profit off Indigenous people, also offers a glimpse at rising tensions that anticipate the political conflicts of the mid-to-late 19<sup>th</sup> century. He would describe the HBC's influence as "despotic sway," and its "supreme jurisdiction ... [over] all nations not being Christians" (1) as detrimental to Indigenous lives and livelihoods. Pointing to how HBC policies had long been self-serving, not "the slightest advantage to ... the mother country [England]" (3), and "still less advantage ... to the natives of Rupert's Land" (3), Isbister outlined how his "fellow-countrymen the Indians, and Half-breeds residing in and near the Colony on the Red River, [pray] for the redress of certain grievances" (4). However, even as he links economic practices with social consequences and shows how the HBC's policies were extractive and exploitative, as the above block quote shows, Isbister does not press for the abolishment of the HBC, so much as increased compensation through "moral, religious, and social improvement" (4). He produces a litany of grievances by drawing attention to the company's inability to live up to the letter of their charter, and how over "two hundred years", systemic abuses by the HBC have strategically "[kept] the natives in a state of utter

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<sup>56</sup> Isbister earned an MA from the University of Edinburgh in 1858, and an LLB from the University of London in 1866. He would also serve as headmaster at various schools in and around London and write over "20 school

dependence, and of perpetuating the wandering and precarious life of the hunter,” and ultimately subservient to the interests of the company. Instead, the HBC has used the proselytizing mission, and the “introduction of Christianity amongst the Indians” (4) as a façade to pursue economic domination unchecked. Whatever economic and social benefits that the “natives” ought to have received in trade, Isbister notes that not one “school, church, or other establishment for religious or general instruction [has been] established by the Company” (5), and he levels charges of hypocrisy and immorality against the men of the HBC: “Their deity is gold, to obtain which they trample down Christianity and benevolence” (6). In his criticisms, Isbister does not reject Christianity, nor the benefits of civilization, and in fact appears to call for the fulfillment of the proselytizing mission and increased remuneration.

Isbister identifies policies maintaining the HBC monopoly, and the “gross aggressions on the right and liberties of the natives” (6) to seek access to alternative markets (like in the United States) as not only oppressive, tyrannical, tactics, but interlinked with the “precarious state of the public peace” (6), as a source of political instability. Decrying how HBC “agents have seized the furs of such parties as refused to sell them at the prices fixed by the Company, and in some instances have imprisoned the recusant natives” (6), he seems to not only foresee the strife of the Sayer trial, but also touches on the sentiment that would inform later Métis resistances. In his criticism of the HBC’s “misgovernment” (7), Isbister subtly calls for some measure of self-governance or autonomy, “simple remedies as a people both willing and able to help themselves, but deprived of the power, alone require to restore to them the blessings of peace and prosperity, and render them happy, contented, and grateful subjects” (8), under the British Empire.

Though he would touch on issues affecting Red River and the North-West in later texts,<sup>57</sup>

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textbooks, principally on English grammar, arithmetic, and geometry,” (Van Kirk n.p.).

<sup>57</sup> Examples include: *A Proposal for a New Penal Settlement in the Uninhabited Districts of British North America*

and extend material support, endowing “a prize for the winner of an open competition among scholars from the common schools of Red River” (Van Kirk), as well as leave his collection of “nearly 5,000” books to the University of Manitoba, which were unfortunately “lost in a fire” in 1898 (Van Kirk), Isbister’s work on the petition of 1846-47 is his most notable contribution to Métis literary history. It not only shows critical insights into the HBC’s practices, but with its appeals in both English and French, undersigned by Métis community leaders, including “J. Louis Rielle” (11), Louis Riel’s father, the broader petition reveals overlapping collaboration between linguistic and religious communities, and hints at expressions of Métis sovereignty.

#### **“De ta soeur qui t’aime”: On the Letters of Sara Riel**

In contrast to Isbister, Sara Riel writes from a markedly different tradition and position, undoubtedly linked to a particular intersection of language, religion, and gender, but like Isbister, nevertheless demonstrates in her writing multiple connections and concerns with a broader Métis community.<sup>58</sup> Where Isbister had career opportunities that extended beyond the North-West, and participated in public discourse through his writing, Riel’s educational and career prospects were more finite, and her writing centered on correspondence. Born in Red River in 1848, to Julie and Louis Riel Sr., Sara attended “boarding school between 1858 and 1865” (Erickson, “Bury” 23). Her texts evidence the “school’s pious and strict atmosphere” (23) and “devotional Catholicism,” which Erickson notes “sought to promote and preserve patriarchy and paternalism in French-Canadian society” (24). Despite her aptitudes, and burgeoning writing talent, Riel’s opportunities were limited to marriage or religious vocation. She would become the first Métis Grey Nun, and,

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(1850); *Rupert Land: The Colony and Its Limits* (co-authored, 1863); and *The Red River Insurrection: Three Letters and a Narrative of Events* (co-authored, 1870).

<sup>58</sup> Notably, Sara and Louis’s younger sister, Henriette, also wrote poetry, penning at least four poems, “de façon vérifiable” (Léveillé 181) in a notebook in which she copied and re-worked some of Louis’s own poems. For more,

in 1871, volunteer for the mission at Ile-à-la-Crosse, where she served until her death in 1883.

Throughout her life, Sara Riel maintained correspondences with family, friends, mentors, and acquaintances. An early letter to her brother Louis, dated 14 December 1860, demonstrates an interesting use of perspective in reporting the loss of the St. Boniface Cathedral to fire:

Ah! voyez-vous ce monceau de cendres, ces ruines encore fumantes, ce sont les seuls restes d'une église qui nous était chère à tous, à bien des titres, c'est l'église de la paroisse, pleine de souvenirs pour nous, c'est la cathédrale où la beauté des cérémonies tout en nous montrant la grandeur de notre Sainte Religion nous faisait désirer le ciel ... les pleurs, les cris et les gémissements ont aujourd'hui pris la place des chants joyeux[.]  
(29-30)

Through the use of keen details, evoking the embers, the smoldering ruins of the building, along with the appeal to imagine the scene, Riel roots readers at the scene. The description also reveals much about Riel's own emotional state—the run-on sentence perhaps suggesting, aside from her inexperience and absence of editorial opportunity, an affected state, sadness, shock, and a desire to not only share, but frame and understand what this loss means for both herself and the broader community. The way that she centres the Cathedral, the ceremonies, and praises the comfort and succor it holds for the community in her text, shows how Catholicism held a critical position for her, her family, and other local French-Métis. Moreover, the passion of her description not only resonates with her brother Louis's writings, and expressions of faith, but augurs the role that faith and religion would play in her life.

While Sara Riel displays keen observation skills throughout her writings, her prose is often coloured by her faith, and the symbolic universe which she inhabits. In 1868, she would give herself “entièrement à Dieu de [son] plein gré et libre volonté” (33), and officially become

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see Léveillé's entry on “Henriette Poitras” in *Anthologie de poésie franco-Manitobaine*, pp. 181-187.



the first Métis missionary nun. Given the prevalence of Catholicism among French-speaking Red River Métis, and her vocation, Riel's use of religious imagery in her prose is unsurprising, and arguably common among writers of the era, but what is notable is the *intensity* of the images. Erickson argues compellingly that many of Riel's letters "reveal the intensity of her faith and her commitment to Catholic missionary endeavours" ("Repositioning" 117).

Although undoubtedly personal and complex, some of her motives for volunteering for the mission at Ile-à-la-Crosse, as expressed in a revelatory letter to Louis in 1871, shed light on the intersection of her "intense" faith and education. Confessing that she had "toujours désiré la mort" (61), Sara Riel came to find solace and purpose in the notion of community service:

Si c'est la volonté du Seigneur, j'aimerais vivre bien des années pour le servir, et réparer le temps perdu. Tous, tant que nous sommes, nous avons ce malheur à déplorer ... une vie, c'est si court pour mériter une récompense éternelle. Quelle mission que celle de la soeur de Charité! ... Soigner, visiter, consoler, fortifier les malades, prier avec eux, leur parler du bon Dieu, c'est quelque chose qui fait bien au cœur. Élever, instruire les enfants, leur faire connaître et aimer le bon Dieu. (61)

There is a remarkable resonance between Sara and Louis in the idea of a mission and a messianic desire to dedicate oneself in the name of God to the service of those in need. However, Sara also reveals in the above text how this desire is not borne out of utter selflessness, but is tempered, even impelled, by the promise of eternal recompense. There is an almost transactional quality as the idea that her service will be rewarded in the afterlife hints at notions of reciprocity. Though she would serve as a missionary and teacher at Ile-à-la-Crosse until her death in 1883, this was not an easy decision, but one it seems taken in part to ease the misfortunes of her elder brother:

Dis-lui souvent [she asks her younger brother Alexander to tell Louis] que Sara l'aime et

que Sara ne l'oubliera jamais ... Quant [sic] tu le verras triste et soucieux, quand peut-être les larmes couleront de ses yeux, alors mon petit frère, monte sur ses genoux, couvre-le de caresses et dis-lui que loin, loin, dans le Nord, Sara missionnaire prie et travaille pour lui. (81)<sup>59</sup>

In Ile-à-la-Crosse, her education, and her “linguistic talents” (Erickson, “Repositioning” 130), afforded Riel opportunity as a teacher. At the same time, they also occasionally brought her into conflict with local Métis communities. In one such incident, tensions arose over the instruction of English, and multiple families threatened to withdraw their children from her classroom: “Les gens du Fort ici sont grandement irrités contre moi; ils dissent que j’importune leurs enfants, que je les oblige à parler en anglais ... Ils menacent de retirer leurs enfants de l’école” (Riel 133). Eventually, she relented, and waited for Bishop Grandin to visit the settlement and resolve the issue (“Repositioning” 131-32).

Erickson argues that Riel’s letters home, and to Bishop Taché, evidence a psychological distancing from “Métis aspirations” (“Bury” 35), and her home community at Red River. That her “intense” faith and sense of mission at Ile-à-la-Crosse seem to distend Riel from the shifting realities at Red River, and from her own family. She turned down, for instance, an opportunity to visit Red River in 1882. Yet, in this apparent “distancing,” Riel shows tremendous selflessness, sacrifice, and what is more, a sustained concern over communities beyond Red River proper. In a letter to Taché, Riel advocated for “[l]es Indiens, ici, [qui] sont dans une misère terrible ... [et que] nous sommes obligées, par amour, d’accueillir le pauvre, l’infortuné” (150), and requested, from the sale of land owed to her under the Manitoba Act, funds to support orphans as opposed to her “relatives” in Red River (Erickson, “Bury” 36). “Dieu seul sait quelle serait ma joie,” Riel

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<sup>59</sup> In another resonance between her and Louis, Sara would, following a near-death experience in 1873, change her name to Soeur Marguerite-Marie (Riel “Letters” 111).

wrote “si vous pouviez obtenir cet argent, qui est mon droit, pour une nouvelle construction, si nécessaire, à l’Île-à-la-Crosse” (150).

However, where Erickson points to Riel’s attempt to fund an orphanage using moneys from the sale of land as evidence of her ceasing “to identify with Métis aspirations” (“Bury” 35), I suggest that this apparent psychological distancing from Red River is less of a disidentification with Métis aspirations than a recognition of Métis and other Indigenous kin’s struggles beyond Red River. Repeated concerns for broader Métis and First Nations communities, often articulated through Catholic doctrines and notions of “civilization,” characterize her writings, and reveal a sense of community with Ile-à-la-Crosse, and with “Ces familles [qui] sont un peu civilisées et s’habillent à la française ou à la canadienne, peut-être vaudrait-il mieux dire à la Bois-brûlée” (168-70), but also express her relationships and sense of duty and dedication. Yet, a melancholic longing for Red River also haunts her writings. As much as Riel comes to accept her place in the community at Ile-à-la-Crosse (albeit perhaps reluctantly and through a severe sense of duty), Red River would continually draw her attention and emotions. She would fantasize about visiting her home: “je suis le petit chemin tracé à travers les champs et aperçois la demeure de ceux qui me sont chers ... une lumière me dit que chez nous on veille encore, j’arrive à la porte, j’entends parler, je reconnais des voix qui font battre mon coeur, je frappe, on répond d’entrer” (98), and repeatedly refer to her mission as a matter of “Exil” (107; 112), suffer through the death and loss of loved ones alone, with only “la pensée du ciel, [et] de l’éternelle réunion” (119) as solace, and refer to her time in Ile-à-la-Crosse as a “sacrifice” which robbed her of joy (137). Lamenting the distance, Riel shows how Red River would remain, in her mind, home.

Riel’s letters have been only partially published (see Jordan; Erickson), but they reveal critical elements of early Métis writing and literacy, and most of all, show that Métis literacy in

the 19<sup>th</sup> century was not solely the domain of men. Though curtailed by a lack of opportunity and paternalistic expectations afforded their gender, Métis women read and wrote. As Diane Payment notes, although higher education was mostly available to men, by the late 19<sup>th</sup> century “Métis women generally had more formal education than their husbands” (*Free* 42). Isbister and Riel demonstrate in different ways the influences of western-European style education, and notions of “civilization,” in their writings, but they also display through their abiding concern, how real and imagined communities, and the obligations that these relationships entail, shape their careers.

The early story of Métis literacy and western-European education is also, as Bumsted shows, the story of how “Red River’s inhabitants, especially the Métis ... became linked to the capitalistic society of the United States through the medium of the Red River cart” and how “Red River’s elite had long since become integrated into the outside world” (*St. John’s College* 2). In a pointed reversal of the narrative promulgated by earlier settler-historians, such as how “George Stanley depicted the colony in the 1850s as a quiet backwater” (Friesen, *Canadian Prairies* 112), Bumsted declares that “for its size and situation, by the 1860s Red River harboured one of North America’s most lively and best-educated communities” (*St. John’s College* 2). Yet, as Louis Riel’s comment in a letter to a school friend in 1869, where he asked Eustache Prud’homme to come to Red River, since “nous manquons de personnes instruites parmi la population Métis Canadienne Française” (qtd. in Campbell and Flanagan 266), seem to indicate, higher formal levels of education were perhaps more common among English-speaking parishes, than French-speaking parishes. For Sara Riel, formal education did not draw her to larger settlements or link her with “capitalistic society” (Bumsted, *St. John’s College* 2), except peripherally through her interactions with HBC officials and their families, but it did draw her into the world outside of Red River proper.

### **Ruptures and Sutures: Writing through Dispossession and “le grand silence”**

Canadian settler-colonialism, functioning through genocidal policies of dispossession and assimilation,<sup>60</sup> sought to destroy Métis society in the years after the resistances. Virulent, violent white supremacy fueled policies that materially and culturally affected Métis communities, and dispossessed many of land, language, and identity: Canada’s “fail[ure] to implement the land grant provisions set out in s.31 of the Manitoba Act” (Supreme Court 691); wide-spread Scrip fraud;<sup>61</sup> and the Manitoba Schools Question, are just some examples.<sup>62</sup> The Schools Question, in particular, is quite revelatory: although the policy was not designed to solely target the Métis, as its aim was the exaltation of British—white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant—culture and institutions on the Prairies via the eradication of French Catholicism (Indigenous and non-Indigenous),<sup>63</sup> it betrays how a broader climate of prejudice and racism informed settler-colonial policy decisions and detrimentally affected French and other-than-English-speaking Métis communities.

The targeting of French language rights also speaks to the divergence, and the conflict of interests between French and English Métis communities in the years after Manitoba’s entry into

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<sup>60</sup> See the *Final Report on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada*, which holds that “the central goals of Canada’s Aboriginal policy were to eliminate Aboriginal governments; ignore Aboriginal rights, terminate the Treaties; and, through a process of assimilation, cause Aboriginal peoples to cease to exist as distinct legal, social, cultural, religious, and racial entities in Canada. The establishment and operation of residential schools were a central element of this policy, which can best be described ‘cultural genocide’” (1); see also the *Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls*, which notes that “the violence the National Inquiry heard amounts to a race-based genocide of Indigenous Peoples, including First Nations, Inuit and Métis, which especially targets women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people” (50); and James Daschuk’s *Clearing the Plains* (2013), which documents the Canadian Government’s “policy of starvation” (114), and how the “government accomplished the ethnic cleansing of southwestern Saskatchewan of its indigenous [sic] population” (123).

<sup>61</sup> For more on Métis Scrip fraud, see Tough and Dimmer.

<sup>62</sup> The Manitoba Schools Question, or “crisis,” emerged from a series of attacks on language and religious rights: the abolition of French as an official language in 1890, and abolition of a dual-denominational school system. Although in 1896, after an agreement with the Federal Liberals under Wilfrid Laurier, the Manitoba government allowed some religious instruction in provincial schools, in French where numbers warranted, a subsequent provincial government repealed the language amendment in 1916, and outlawed instruction in any language other than English.

<sup>63</sup> D’Alton McCarthy, an Ontario MP in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, “argued that English Canadians ought to begin the task of exterminating manifestations of distinctive French-Canadian culture outside of Quebec” (Miller 377).

Confederation. It was under the English-Métis Premier, John Norquay, that the government of Manitoba, in 1879, first tried to eliminate the drafting and publication of provincial legislative documents in French (Friesen, “Norquay” n.p.). Despite historical cooperation and the uneasy alliances established during the Red River Resistance, the relationships between these diverse linguistic and religious communities frayed under the influx of English-speaking settlers, and were arguably further damaged, in 1885, when English-speaking Métis communities chose not to support Riel and the French-Métis at Batoche when they took up arms. Some English-Métis even sided with the Canadians and acted as guides and scouts. These divisions tend to be overlooked or de-emphasized in contemporary literature, as Paul Chartrand pertinently notes how “evidence of disunity is not, of course, to be emphasized today in the Métis surge towards nationalism because national movements — the rise of peoples — are not predicated upon a scientific examination of historical minutiae, but upon the glorification of an idealized antiquity” (“Rights” 461-62).

The abolition of French language education in Manitoba is but one thread in a complex tapestry of trauma woven across the Prairies in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Education in other parts of the Prairies—in what would become Saskatchewan and Alberta, for instance—also suffered. Settler-governments “denied” education, writes Fred Shore, to some “because they did not pay taxes on their road allowance homes” (106). Some Métis also attended residential school, as volume 3 of the *Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada* reveals, but as federal and provincial governments denied “responsibility,” Métis communities found themselves in a sort of jurisdictional limbo. “Despite their perceived constitutional responsibility, provincial and territorial governments were reluctant to provide services to Métis people. They did not ensure that there were schools in Métis communities, or work to see that Métis children were admitted and welcomed into the public school system” (4).

Defrauded and dispossessed of land, ignored, and gradually consigned “to a position of irrelevance in the Canadian mosaic” (Shore 106), disparate communities fractured further under the pervasive weight of settler-colonialism. The “major concern,” writes Shore, “was survival as individual families on the periphery of Canada’s new colony” (106). It is also important to note that Métis experiences and struggles with assimilationist policies as conditions varied across the homeland, based on race, class, language, religion, etc. While some, such as Guillaume Charette, born in St. Norbert, Manitoba in 1884, had the fortune to pursue higher education and publicly maintain his identity (he served as president of L’Union nationale for many years), others “shied away from the identity because of the prejudice they experienced” (Teillet 432). Gerald Friesen writes that in some English-speaking Métis communities in Manitoba, “children were integrated into the larger community as if a distinctive English-speaking community of mixed European and Aboriginal heritage had never existed” (*River Road* 9). Two generations later, assimilation produced outright denial, as in the case of Norquay’s descendants who, in 1947-48, “refused to accept the wording of the plaque [unveiled in the Manitoba legislature to commemorate his contributions to the Province] that described him as ‘Halfbreed’” (11). Although writing under these conditions persisted through the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, literary publication was limited, relegated to small, regional, local publications such as newspapers and periodicals.

### **Alexandre DeLaronde**

Born in 1866 at St. François Xavier, Manitoba, and educated at the Collège de St. Boniface, earning a BA in 1887, Alexandre DeLaronde penned poems in French and translated a text on Catholic Doctrine from Cree to Saulteaux in the decades following the 1885 Resistance. Yet, as J.R. Léveillé writes in a brief biography of DeLaronde, “[à] cause de sa modestie ... on

ne saura jamais l'étendue de ses écrits" (244); DeLaronde published a few poems in newspapers and newsletters, but likely wrote and had more published, either anonymously or signed with an "A" (Léveillé 244).<sup>64</sup> Might his "modestie" have been induced or partially intensified by the virulent climate of hate, racism, and prejudice that proliferated across the Prairies in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries? That is, might the general climate of the time have shaped what generally got published? While explicit themes of Métis history, nationalism, or resistance, are largely absent from his published poems (at least those identified in Léveillé's *Anthologie*), mostly subsumed in explorations of religion (Catholicism) and French-Canadian national history, there are recurring considerations of colonialism and its effects.

Although not explicitly seen through a Métis lens, themes of colonialism and Indigenous dispossession appear quite sharply in "Le chant de mort du dernier Pied-Noir." Curiously flirting with the "vanishing Indian" trope, and appropriating the voice of another Indigenous nation, the Blackfoot, DeLaronde nevertheless lays the sins of colonialism at the feet of settlers:

C'est toi, pâle étranger, c'est toi qui fus le traître,  
 Qui causas nos malheurs, hypocrite assassin;  
 Tu vins, on te reçut; de tout on te fit maître,  
 Nous jurant d'être ami, tu nous serras la main.  
 Tes rêves d'ambition, ta funeste présence,  
 Ont chassé le bonheur, ont ravi ma fierté;  
 Oh! rends-moi ma patrie! Apporte l'espérance!  
 Ramène le passé, rends-moi ma liberté! (246)

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<sup>64</sup> J.R. Léveillé notes: "Le chant de mort du dernier Pied-Noir," in *Les Cloches de Saint-Boniface* (1947); "La vallée de Qu'Appelle," in *Répertoire littéraire de l'Ouest canadien* (30 May 1889); "Le Naufrage de l'Auguste," in *Le Manitoba* (14 October 1896); "Vocation et sacrifice," in *Le Manitoba* (26 November 1885); and "Une boucle de cheveux," unpublished (1885).



DeLaronde performed (sung) this poem / or song at the Collège de St. Boniface in 1887, and its lyrics were reproduced a few days later in *Le Manitoba*. It was posthumously republished in 1947. On the one hand, aside from the reference to the Blackfoot, the lack of overt identification in the poem, and the ambiguity within the body of the text, gives the work a broader perspective; it captures and shows Indigenous suffering, anger, and their betrayal at the hands of settlers more generally. On the other hand, the absence of references might be read as a careful circumspection of the poet's own national position, as though DeLaronde were attempting to couch a particular history within a larger one. Certain lines are suggestive. The word "traître," seems specifically associated with the Métis and Cree in the wake of 1885, since, in the poem, the word ironically reverses the discourse which painted them as traitors to Canada, whereas the Blackfoot had not taken up arms. Further, the lines "Ont chassé le bonheur, ont ravi ma fierté; / Oh! Rends-moi ma patrie! Apporte l'espérance" (246) are evocative of the battered pride, buffeted by racist vitriol, suffered by Métis people following 1885, and the dispossession of their homeland. It is perhaps socio-politically astute, but also ironic that DeLaronde conveys these accusations and grievances through the voice of another nation.

DeLaronde maintains a similar circumspection in his poem "La vallée de Qu'Appelle," which was published in 1889:

D'ici voyez là-bas de l'est à l'occident,  
 Comme un riche collier de trois perles brillantes,  
 Prises l'une à l'autre avec un fil d'argent,  
 De trois limpides lacs, les ondes scintillantes;  
 Parcourant le contour de ces lacs enchanteurs  
 Mille rayons dorés jaillissent de leurs sables;

En festons de feuillage, en guirlandes de fleurs,

Les bois couvrent les fronts de coteaux innombrables. (247)

In some ways, DeLaronde's discretion is even more evident in this poem as he seems to ruminate on the Métis homeland beyond Manitoba's postage-stamp borders of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Using rich and extravagantly romantic language to describe the Qu'Appelle valley, and the lakes, hills, trees, and greenery, DeLaronde builds a wonderfully evocative and idyllic tableau. In some ways, the poem reads as an early textual landscape painting akin to later Group of Seven work in visual mediums, one conveying notions of the land as untouched or unspoiled by human hands. Other than the first-person perspective through which the poem is voiced, there is an absence of people in the poem, which, while emphasizing pastoral, utopic, aspects of the land, also renders it empty, and incomplete. Without acknowledging Métis and other Indigenous relationships with the territory, the description of this land as untouched, although beautiful, is a romantic illusion.

DeLaronde's circumspection is perhaps most apparent in the publication history of the poem "Une boucle de cheveux." This affective lament over Riel's death, written soon after his wake, viewing, and funeral in St. Boniface in 1885, builds on religiously inflected verse into a reflection which frames his surrender as a selfless sacrifice undertaken to protect the nation:

Il est tombé là-bas, comme tombe un héros;

Pour sauver la patrie, il s'est offert victime;

Frappé par les arrêts de cruels tribunaux,

Il a livré son coeur, holocauste sublime!

Venez cœurs généreux, de ces jours écoulés,

Venez pleurer encor, la fatale mémoire;

Mais réjouissez-vous, le chef des "Bois-Brûlés"

Revit dans la splendeur, la splendeur de sa gloire. (254)

Once again “la patrie” appears, representing that for which Riel “a livré son coeur” (254). What is more, in positioning Riel as selfless in the face of utter devastation, “[un] holocauste sublime,” DeLaronde not only exalts Riel’s benevolence, but elevates him to martyrdom. Given the public discourse, particularly among English-language communities and media in the months after the resistance, Riel’s trial, and execution, DeLaronde’s poem stands out as a particular repudiation of the narrative of Riel as a traitor. Further, through reference to Riel as “chef des ‘Bois-Brûlés” (254), and use of the older nomenclature, DeLaronde not only gestures to broader Métis history, perhaps alluding to Falcon and his songs, which often feature the “Bois-Brûlés,” and through this allusion shows how he operates within a Métis literary and national tradition. However, the poem would not be published in his lifetime. We do not know whether he submitted it for publication somewhere, and it was rejected, or if he filed it away in his papers without intending to publish it, but the fact that, of his known works, the poem touching most explicitly on Métis specific histories and themes remained unpublished is highly suggestive of the inimical, and strongly conservative, climate that constricted late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century Métis literature.

### **On the Transmission of Métis Narratives in the Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century**

A similar climate affected how Métis narratives were transmitted in and around Batoche following the resistance. “*Le grand silence*,” observes Diane Payment, “was the legacy of 1885” (*Free* 269). She elaborates that “there was a strong legacy of fear among the veterans of 1885, and they rarely spoke of the resistance outside of their ranks or even to their children” (270). While humorous stories, like the “misfiring of the Gatling gun” (270) were shared, she notes that “controversial topics such as Riel’s actions, Métis rights, and current politics were discussed

at private gatherings away from strangers” (270-72). The pernicious effects of racism and hatred that permeated the Prairies after the resistances affected which stories were publicly transmitted.

Founded in St. Vital, in 1887, by “Joseph St-Germain, Joseph Riel, and associates” (267), L’Union nationale métisse Saint-Joseph du Manitoba concerned itself over such narratives. “Its main objectives,” writes Payment, “were the defence of Métis rights, the rehabilitation of Métis history and the promotion of Michif French language and culture” (*Free* 267). One of the ways it sought to accomplish these aims was by recording stories in writing. In 1902-03, a historical committee from St. Boniface visited Batoche to interview veterans of 1885, “including Gabriel Dumont, Moïse Ouellette, and Jean Caron” (269). In the foreword to Goulet’s memoir, *L’Espace de Louis Goulet*, Guillaume Charette describes the process of recovery and documentation as a harvest, “à l’époque où la grande moissonneuse taillait à pleine faux à même les rangs déjà mûris de la dernière génération métisse qui avait vécu la vie des plaines. Nous ne pouvions voir un de ces anciens partir pour l’au-delà sans regretter qu’un récit de sa carrière n’eût pas été recueilli pour enrichir nos annales” (11). Some of the information gathered by the committee would come to be included in A.H. de Trémaudan’s *Histoire de la nation métisse dans l’Ouest canadien* a few decades later, but many of the papers generated would languish in private collections, or later in archives. *Les Mémoires dictés par Gabriel Dumont*, for example, “recueillis entre 1902 et 1903 par un auteur anonyme, [mais] certainement un des membres de l’Union nationale métisse Saint-Joseph du Manitoba qui connaissait le *mitchif* et le français” (Combet 25), lay for decades in L’Union’s archives, before they were transferred to the Provincial Archives of Manitoba. The earliest publication of the memoir was an English translation of Dumont’s account by Michael Barnholden, in *Gabriel Dumont Speaks*, published in 1993. Reflecting on issues of transcribing an oral narrative to the written form, Barnholden pointed to the “cramped” (15) handwriting in

the original manuscript as possible evidence of the transcriber hurrying to capture Dumont's voice. While considering the perspective, and noting how the original manuscript is written not in first-person, as one might expect, but in third-person, and how there are "no Cree words," and the story has been "rendered ... [into] torturous French" (15), Barnholden seemingly gestures at the great, ostensible distance between Dumont's oral narrative and available written versions.

Dumont had previously dictated another version of his memoirs, which appeared in *La Vérité sur la Question Métisse au Nord-Ouest* in 1889, but as Barnholden argues, it was mostly a "polemic ... used to advance the fortunes of the Quebec Liberal Party" (13). In an incident that speaks to fissures between some Métis, the Catholic Church, and French Canadians in the years after the 1885 resistance, Dumont himself was "promptly dropped as a potential political ally of the Quebec Liberal Party when his anti-clerical stance became known" (14). In her study of Batoche, Payment draws attention to deepening fissures between some Métis and the Church, "which had lost the support of many Métis since 1885, [and] reluctantly approved [the erection a monument to victims of 1885 in the cemetery] ... in a gesture of reconciliation" (*Free* 270).

Despite its efforts, L'Union seemed to meet with limited success in terms of immediate publications. Louis Goulet's memoirs would only be published in 1976, after researchers came across Goulet's narrative in "les cahiers de Guillaume Charette" (Pelletier 9). L'Union was not unique in their efforts, nor the only ones to encounter limited, or even delayed, success. A Métis journalist in Alberta, Henry Thompson, "wrote down" Peter Erasmus's memoirs in the early 1920s (Spry xii), but they would only be published later, as *Buffalo Days and Nights*, in 1976.<sup>65</sup> Johnny Grant's memoirs, *A Son of the Fur Trade: The Memoirs of Johnny Grant*, recently edited by historian Gerhard Ens, and published in 2008, were originally "dictated to [Grant's] wife

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<sup>65</sup> As Hugh Dempsey notes, "Erasmus was a highly literate and well-educated man for his time" (vii), and even at his advanced age of 87, and later 94, provided Henry Thompson with a vibrant and remarkably detailed narrative of

Clotilde Bruneau sometime between 1905 and 1907” (Ens viii).<sup>66</sup> Grant’s memoir evidences the extent through which his narrative has been mediated. “Although Clotilde made some attempts to publish the memoir,” writes Ens, “it remained unpublished at the time of her death on October 17, 1919” (viii). He explains how the manuscript was passed through succeeding generations of Grant’s descendants, with various individuals making copy-edits along the way (viii). Finally, in 2004, Audrey Macleod “donated the manuscript” (ix) to the Provincial Archives of Alberta.

### **Louis Schmidt**

Born near Lake Athabasca, in 1844, or “Rabasca” (4: 8 June 1911) as he names it, Louis Schmidt would move to Red River as a child. He attended school in the Settlement, and was one of three boys with Louis Riel and Daniel McDougall sent to Québec by Bishop Taché to “pursue advanced studies” (Huel, “Patriarch” 3). He spent three years at “the *Collège de St-Hyacinthe*” (3), before returning west where he would have a varied career. Serving as an MLA in Manitoba, a bureaucrat, a community leader, and a writer, he often sought work that required literacy, such as “prepar[ing] copies of the Cree grammar and dictionary compiled by Father A. Lacombe” (3). Schmidt was, as Pamela Sing describes him, “a man of letters” (“Intersections” 104). He would also freight, farm, and for a brief time carry mail. Although he participated in the Red River Resistance as a secretary to Riel, Schmidt would have a more limited, and even controversial, role in the North-West Resistance (as I show in more detail below). At the request of a friend, Schmidt wrote his memoirs “pour être publiés par [*Le patriote de l’Ouest*] qu’on était alors en train de fonder” (4: 8 June 1911); this was his second manuscript, as the first was lost to fire.

*Les mémoires de Louis Schmidt* stands out as one of the only long-form, and serialized,

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his life. See Irene Spry’s introduction for more on the manuscript’s production and publication.

<sup>66</sup> Ens notes that “an abridged version” of Grant’s manuscript “focusing on the Montana/Idaho years” was published

Métis-written texts published in the first two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In contrast to the texts in the above section, Schmidt demonstrates significant agency over his narrative, from reflecting over his own writing, to the privileges and challenges which shaped the text. Sing points out that he “is considered to have integrated well into French-Canadian society, having not only obtained land with his ‘scrip,’ but collaborated closely with the clergy, notably in the capacity of an assistant colonizing agent” (“Intersections” 104), which suggests that his social position afforded him this rare publication opportunity. Despite his social position, Schmidt was also affected by “poverty” in his later years (Huel, “Patriarch” 17). His memoirs, which were “enthusiastically received by *Le Patriote*’s readers” (16), summarize his wide-ranging experiences through the mid-to-late 19<sup>th</sup> century, and include reflections on noteworthy persons like Louis Riel and other Métis figures, associations with clergymen, striking moments on the Plains, and the resistances.

Schmidt dedicates significant narrative space toward his early years. First, in awe at its architectural splendour, and delighted by its people, he describes his initial arrival in Red River:

J’arrivais donc en pleine civilisation, moi petit sauvage du Nord. J’avais tout à admirer: les hauts murs de pierre du fort Garry, avec ses bastions ronds, les grandes maisons et les magasins au dedans du Fort; la belle cathédrale de St. Boniface, avec ses deux tours, ses belles cloches qui sonnaient si bien; le grand couvent des Soeurs, et tant de monde que je voyais partout, surtout le dimanche. (4: 29 June 1911)

Focusing on its comparatively cosmopolitan wonders, Schmidt not only positions Red River as the pre-eminent settlement in the North-West, but he frames his perception through the binary of “civilization” and “[savagery].” For Schmidt, Red River becomes a beacon of sorts, representing opportunity; the centre around which trade, and people flow across the territory. Foreshadowing the roles that clergy, the Church, and Catholicism would play in his life, he underscores religious

institutions in his description, but moving from descriptions of physical sites to people gathered on the Sabbath, he also reveals his attraction to the community that religion engenders.

Schmidt also devotes a great deal of space to his time on the Plains after his return from Québec,<sup>67</sup> from accompanying Father Alexis André<sup>68</sup> in negotiations with the Sioux at the behest of the American government, doing freighting on behalf of Bishop Taché, detailing amicable and antagonistic encounters with the Sioux, and in 1866, joining a buffalo hunt. His observations on the hunt offer an intriguing glimpse into Métis economic and social diversity, revealing linguistic differences, and class and educational disparities. His description of Gabriel Dumont's father-in-law, M. Wilkie, "[qui] ne connaissait ni 'a' ni 'b'" but "possédait des connaissances surprenantes sur différents sujets" (4; 31 Aug. 1911), affirms how literacy was not critical to success on the Plains as "[Wilkie's] jugement sûr et sa grande expérience le plaçaient comme tout naturellement à la tête du peuple" (4; 31 Aug. 1911). In his reflections on the hunt, Schmidt also contemplates Métis identity, and seeing how "Métis français et anglais, canadiens et écossais, nous étions tous Métis" (4; 14 Sept. 1911), he recognizes linguistic and cultural distinctions, but reframing them through common economic and cultural practices, he repositions differences as internal diversity.

Although Schmidt served as secretary of the provisional government at Red River, and recounts the events of 1869 and 1870 in some detail, he often erases himself from the narrative as he focuses on the exploits of others from Riel to Thomas Scott. He reduces his own actions, folding them into the collective efforts, "nos demandes ... [and] nos travaux" (4: 27 Feb 1912) of

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<sup>67</sup> Schmidt did not complete his studies, claiming that he returned due to health concerns, but Huel notes that "the penitential tone of the letter [that Schmidt wrote to Bishop Taché in 1861] clearly suggests that factors other than ill health and made him leave the college" ("Patriarch" 3), which include possible problems with alcohol.

<sup>68</sup> Father André (1832-1893) was a French-born, Roman Catholic priest who spent time in the North-West, and the Batoche / Duck Lake / Prince Albert region from the mid 1870s to 1887. Although he and Louis Riel clashed during the 1885 resistance, he attended to Riel during and after the latter's trial: "this close association greatly changed his [until then unfavourable] opinion of Riel" (Robertson n.p.); see the below section, The Appendix to Trémaudan's *Histoire*, for more on André's perspective. Similarly, Riel would also come to view André favourably, writing "Je prie mes amis de partout de tenir le nom du Père André côte à côte avec le mien. Je l'aime, le Père André" (3: 237).



the French-Métis.<sup>69</sup> Despite his self-effacement, Schmidt's perspective and positionality occasionally emerge from his descriptions. Reflecting on the arrival of Wolseley at Red River, in 1870, how "tout tournait mal, et contrairement à ce qui nous avait été promis. Le Canada allait agir en traître jusqu'au bout, et d'une façon indigne d'un peuple civilisé" (3: 18 April 1912), he not only questions the honour of Canada, impugning its alleged civility, reversing the common ascriptions of civilization and savagery, by hinting at, and subtly extolling, the values, mores, and behaviours—loyalty, honour, and deference—that shape his own worldview.

In contrast to his extended focus on his adventures on the Plains, Schmidt dedicated little space to his political career in Manitoba, or his first years on the South Saskatchewan River, in the Batoche area. He reflected briefly on meeting his "vieil ami, le joyeux Père André" (3: 9 May 1912) at Duck Lake, recounted the history of the area and elaborated on the issues of survey and land title that plagued the area, and helped craft petitions requesting that the government address such issues, before he moved to Prince Albert. He notably framed the idea of asking Riel for help as his: "En m'y rendant [to Prince Albert], je rencontrai en chemin Baptiste Arcand qui s'en allait à une assemblée chez les Métis-Anglais. En causant avec lui, je lui suggérai l'idée de faire venir Riel pour les aider dans leurs revendications. Son influence les unirait tous, et leurs demandes auraient plus de chances d'être exaucées" (3; 16 May 1912), demonstrating a rare self-ascription of, albeit momentary, influence in larger events.

Sing describes the memoir as a "polyphonic text [that] juxtaposes Michif, standardized French, Sioux, Salteaux, English, and Latin, and results in a subtly festive, transgressive textual openness" that further, "give[s] the impression of a francophone territory where intercultural and -lingual relationships are the norm" ("Intersections" 104). Yet, in contrast to linguistic openness,

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<sup>69</sup> His own later Federal political career is curiously summed up in one paragraph: "En 1878, je me présentai à St François Xavier, et je l'emportai sur mon concurrent, mais ce parlement ne dura qu'un an. J'abandonnai alors la

Schmidt's text also evidences a certain conservatism. For instance, Huel describes Schmidt as a "simple chronicler of events" ("Patriarch" 16), and aside from occasional moments of "textual openness," as Sing describes, Schmidt's prose is rather direct, without much sustained stylistic experimentation or philosophical tangents. Except for the code-switching, the prose features a relentless documentary-like, non-style that resonates stylistically with the absence of figurative language and the journalistic qualities of Falcon's songs. (I touch further on stylistic similarities when discussing the work of Beatrice Mosionier). Schmidt also demonstrates conservatism in his framing of cultural groups and influences; while Schmidt "express[es] disdain for the English" (Sing, "Intersections" 105), notably observing how "la haine orangiste" and "fanatisme ontarien, [which not only delayed the amnesty following 1870, and] ce même fanatisme qui fera exécuter Riel en 1885, et qui nous ôtera nos écoles catholiques en 1905" (Schmidt 3; 18 April 1912), he also exhibits repeated deference to Catholic clergy, and occasionally unclear loyalties that seem to eventually estrange him from French-Métis communities around Batoche. The "transgressive" aspects of his text diminish as the memoir progresses, and in contrast to early "openness," his prose becomes restrained, almost circumspect, in his account of the North-West Resistance.

During the months leading up to the Resistance of 1885, Schmidt decided, at the urging of Father André, to remain in Prince Albert, where Schmidt had obtained work in the Land Office (4; 23 May 1912). Louis Riel noted that Schmidt proved helpful there in promoting the Métis cause: "[t]he eastern papers are all pretty mute ... the only news which have yet been published in the 'Manitoba' are due to the pen of Mr Louis Schmidt. He has rendered us very good service" (3: 20). When the North-West Mounted Police attacked the Métis at Duck Lake, Schmidt found himself cut-off from Batoche. He writes of the panicked few hours in town after news of the Métis victory: "On alla immédiatement réveiller dans leurs maisons les enrôlés de la

milice ... on ramassa tout le bois de corde qu'on put trouver dans les environs pour en faire des remparts ... on redoutait une attaque des Métis" (3; 6 June 1912).<sup>70</sup> Occupying a sort of non-combat position, not aligned with the people of Prince Albert, except perhaps physically, as a resident of the town, but unable (or unwilling) to participate in the Métis resistance, he once more effaces himself from his narrative as he recounts events. Although he references at times the Canadians as "l'ennemi" (3: 20 June 1912), the text's measured tone suggests less of a direct alignment with "les Métis" (3) than that of an observer, which in turn generates ambiguity in his personal views over the conflict, and betrays his apparent dissociation from the cause and the events he recounts. In his account of the Red River Resistance, Schmidt's repeated use of first-person group pronouns "nous" clearly demonstrated his alignment with French-Métis efforts. Lawrence Barkwell writes that after 1885, "many Métis became convinced that Schmidt had not only abandoned the Metis cause but had betrayed the cause" ("Schmidt" 2). This sense of betrayal is also rooted in prior events, when Schmidt grew "concerned over Riel's [allegedly blasphemous] behaviour, [and] he communicated this to [Arch]Bishop Taché and implored him to make the Metis grievances better known and thus head off violence and what he viewed as Riel's heretical preaching" (2). However, as Huel remarks, "Schmidt avoided a delicate topic by not mentioning Riel's religion views" ("Patriarch" 16) in his memoirs. While showing repeated deference to the clergy and faithful adherence to Catholicism in his text, Schmidt also avoided discussing Riel's break with the Church at Batoche, suggesting that he may have been sensitive to the persisting tensions around Riel's and other Métis's relationships with the Church in Métis communities.

Schmidt's position, his initial support of Métis claims in 1884, and apparent neutrality

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<sup>70</sup> Although the French word "on" can be used to represent the first or second person (plural), as in "we," it is often used as an indefinite personal pronoun of the third person, meaning "ils/elles [they]." In this case, Schmidt seems to

during the violence of 1885, is noteworthy for proximity to the events and its central figures, but it is not unique. As Louis Goulet, Peter Erasmus, Johnny Grant, and Norbert Welsh demonstrate in their reflections on the resistances, Métis views were not homogeneous. There is an interesting resonance with contemporary Métis literature between Schmidt and the titular character to Maria Campbell's story "Joseph's Justice" in *Stories of the Road Allowance*, who also "wasen interest in fighting" and so "jus mine dere own business" (92), and whose subsequent struggle to seek compensation for furs plundered by Canadian soldiers and General Middleton in 1885, comes to represent an ongoing, and later celebrated, form of Métis resistance. Campbell's story suggests a shifting, more nuanced, perception of Métis non-combatants, and appreciation for other forms of struggle, which may include Schmidt's literary and cultural contributions. Beyond its political accounts, Schmidt's memoirs offer interesting anecdotes of his experiences, notable linguistic "openness," and his direct, documentary-like prose both echoes Métis wordsmithing tradition, and augurs later Métis literary production. His moments of circumspection also intriguingly contrast those of DeLaronde. Where DeLaronde shows caution in writing openly about Métis themes, hinting at wariness of non-Métis readers, Schmidt writes openly about Métis themes, but reveals narrative restraint about the events of 1885, and his circumspection of tensions *within* the community, suggest sensitivity *toward* Métis readers.

**“L’histoire, jusqu’ici, ne nous a pas rendu justice ... mais l’heure est venue de réclamer notre part”:** Writing Métis History, from *La Liberté* to A.H. de Trémaudan’s *Histoire*

Discourse between Guillaume Charette and other members of L’Union nationale and non-Indigenous francophones, printed in *La Liberté* in the 1920s, revealed how unequivocal Métis perspectives and pride were often met with disdain and outright racism. On 21 August

1923, *La Liberté* printed a part of Charette's speech commemorating the erection of a monument to "la Barrière".<sup>71</sup> He stated that

le mouvement de la Rivière-Rouge en 1870 n'appartient pas aux Métis seuls: c'est que Riel, Lépine, Nault et les autres appartiennent à l'histoire. Comme les Champlain, les Montcalm, les La Vérendrye et tous nos héros nationaux, ils appartiennent à tout ce qui parle français, pense en français et vivent pour le sol qui garde leur poussière et le souvenir de leurs actes. (8; 21 Aug. 1923)

Elevating historical Métis figures to a pantheon of francophone heroes in North America, and suggesting that they represent a bridge of sorts, which unites all francophones, non-Indigenous and Métis, Charette attempted to mitigate the tensions between the Métis and other francophone communities that he also exposes in his address. His speech not only describes Métis actions and motivations during the Red River Resistance, and touches on issues of national identity, but also reveals and analyzes a growing strain between French-speaking Métis and broader francophone communities. Proffering at once an appeal to common ancestry, "nous sommes du même sang," as well as a reminder of difference, "si vous [Canadiens français] avez aujourd'hui dans l'Ouest une histoire, nous [les Métis] sommes cette histoire" (8), Charette underscores the growing "ostracisme" (8) of French-speaking Métis by other francophone communities: "qui osera nier que dans certains districts scolaires, nos jeunes filles qui destinent à l'enseignement se voient refuser de l'emploi parce qu'elles sont Métisses?" (8). In the face of this climate of racism and prejudice, he laments its effects on Métis livelihoods and sense of being, and shows concern for the transmission of Métis history and culture. Auguring the impetus behind L'Union's future collaboration with the historian Auguste-Henri de Trémaudan, Charette locates the roots of this

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<sup>71</sup> The monument had first been erected by L'Union nationale métisse Saint-Joseph du Manitoba in 1906; the event in 1923 may have marked the relocation of the monument.

tension in the elisions and misrepresentations of the Métis in historical narratives. Arguing that “L’histoire, jusqu’ici ne nous a pas rendu justice ... mais l’heure est venue de réclamer notre part” (8), he calls for more Métis-centric historical accounts, and noting that they [L’Union nationale] possess “des documents jusqu’ici inédits, inconnus, et que nous voulons publier nous-mêmes” (8), he declares how this reclamation will be achieved through writing.

Two weeks later, *La Liberté* published “une mise au point,” written by an anonymous “ami des Métis” (3), which, deploying a common racist trope, “que ces derniers [Métis] ont pris plus des défauts que des qualités des Canadiens français et des autres nationalités” (3; 4 Sept. 1923), largely confirmed Charette’s allegations of prejudice and racism directed at the Métis by other francophone communities. The writer objected to Charette’s claim that Bishop Taché had “entravé” or hindered Riel and the Métis in 1870, alluding to his mistaken guarantee of amnesty and his intimation of the peaceful intentions of Wolseley’s approaching troops. The writer then accused Charette of throwing “blâme sur les missionnaires” (3) for the misfortunes of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. That Charette’s critique—he located fault in Riel’s overconfidence in the Catholic clergy and denied French Canadians a distinct, separate history in the west (8; 21 Aug. 1923)—elicited such a racist reply speaks to the challenges that the Métis had in telling, writing, and publishing their own stories and histories. Charette would respond in the next issue, countering the accusations by clarifying his position, gesturing toward unity, “la leçon que j’ai voulu tirer du mouvement de la Rivière Rouge en 1870, c’est que nous devons être avant tout catholiques et français” (4; 11 Sept 1923), while simultaneously declaring that he would not ignore their kin who fought in 1870 and 1885, and “quiconque travaille à soustraire les Métis à l’influence de ceux qui cherchent à les exploiter” (4). L’Union also replied in a letter, signed by “[les] membres du comité chargé de la surveillance des intérêts métis,” including Alexandre Riel, Alexandre

Nault, William Beauchemin, Camille Teillet, Honoré Riel, Maxime Carrière, Samuel-A. Nault, and Denys Goulet (3; 11 Sept. 1923), declaring it approved “entièrement les paroles de M. Charette” (3). This attack on the Métis in print was not unique, and the coordinated response demonstrated L’Union’s discursive resistance to such denigrations.

### **The Foreword [Avertissement] to Trémaudan’s *Histoire***

As its historical committee explains in the foreword to Trémaudan’s *Histoire*, L’Union’s goal in the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was “une mise au point de l’histoire des événements de 1869-70-71 et 1885” (Comité, Avertissement 15). However, it recognized that this would be no easy task due to individual and community Métis reluctance to speak about these tragedies:

C’était une rude tâche. Les Métis, recueillis, renfermés en eux-mêmes depuis 1885, courbant la tête depuis ce temps sous une avalanche de calomnies, ne rencontrant que très peu de sympathie autour d’eux, avaient gardé un silence attristé par le souvenir de leurs souffrances et de leurs sacrifices méconnus. (15-16)

In the face of skepticism, lack of sympathy, and even outright “suspicion” of its motives, the committee acknowledged that “[i]l fallait refaire l’opinion publique, combattre le préjugé trop répandu que les Métis étaient bien inférieurs aux autres groupes de la population” (16-17), and that L’Union nationale had established a historical committee “pour lutter, rétablir l’histoire, saisir toutes les occasions de répondre à ceux qui attaquaient les Métis, en un mot pour imposer le respect de la vérité” (17). As Gerhard Ens and Joe Sawchuk note, however, L’Union was largely made up of “middle-class professionals or farmers” (115), none of whom could dedicate themselves exclusively to the task of countering the deluge of printed racism: “responding to every slur on the reputation of Riel in all newspapers in Manitoba and Quebec” (116-17) became

a Sisyphean task. Maintaining this discursive resistance over two decades was remarkable, but either through the ephemeral nature of newspapers, the attrition of countering repeated slurs, or the ever-growing assimilation of francophones and Métis this strategy alone was unsustainable. In 1929, Guillaume Charette had warned that “nos gens ... [qui] succombe aux influences du milieu qui les entoure ... ne servent plus qu’à grossir le contingent adverse de ceux qui assaillent la survivance française dans l’Ouest canadien” and hoped to stem the number “de Métis laissés au jeu des influences ambiantes [et qui] sont perdus pour la race métisse d’abord et pour la race Canadienne-française ensuite” (qtd. in “Fédération interprovinciale,” *Le patriote de l’Ouest*; 4 Sept. 1929).

The foreword to Trémaudan’s *Histoire* outlines the impetus for the book itself, and the unusual partnership between its titular author (Trémaudan) and its proponents (L’Union), and alludes to, while minimizing, the historical committee’s editorial intervention in the fashioning of Trémaudan’s text. Desiring “un récit simple, aussi complet que possible, des faits et gestes de la race métisse canadienne-française dans l’Ouest canadien” (Comité 20), accessible to “la jeune génération,” and which showed francophone belonging, “le droit de cité” (20), in the West, the committee hired Trémaudan in 1924 to write this history. The committee provided him with books—the same ones it had originally purchased from Trémaudan before he had moved to Los Angeles (Ens and Sawchuk 119)—and documents, transcribed oral testimonies from Batoche, and prepared an “outline,” that Trémaudan “agreed to follow” (Ens and Sawchuk 119).<sup>72</sup>

With a pseudo-prophetic envisioning of the future, which recalls Riel’s own visions, the committee elaborated on its purpose to *continue* their ancestors’ work:

Aujourd’hui, nous pouvons entrevoir que, d’ici quelques années, le français aura repris

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<sup>72</sup> See Ens and Sawchuk’s Chapter 5, “L’Union nationale métisse Saint-Joseph, A.-H. de Trémaudan, and the Re-imagining of the Métis Nation, 1910 to the 1930s” (113-132) in *From New Peoples to New Nations* (2016), for a



cette place à laquelle il a droit. Cela, nous le devons à Riel et aux siens. Nous le devons au sentiment de justice qui semble prévaloir dans la nouvelle génération anglo-canadienne. Nous le devons encore à ceux qui ont su inspirer à l'élément canadien-français une politique de résistance basée sur le fait que les droits du français au Manitoba sont inscrits partout, sur le fait qu'il a marqué chaque étape de la civilisation, de même qu'il a inspiré le zèle, le dévouement des missionnaires et des pionniers de l'Ouest canadien. (21)

With much more rhetorical and stylistic flourish than Schmidt's workaday prose, with anaphoric, rhythmic repetition that elicits attention and affect, the committee articulates a Métis nationalism founded upon the francophone and Catholic cultural values of their forefathers. Acknowledging their ancestors, as well as "des missionnaires et des pionniers," who through their "politique de résistance" (21) entrenched their presence, and linguistic and religious rights in western Canada, the committee attempts to rouse contemporary Métis through an account of their origins. Ens and Sawchuk contend that its efforts to "construct an exclusive myth of origin and continuity" (119), and shape the narrative, however, caused disagreements between the committee and Trémaudan. Points of contention included the narrative's length, a "less polemic" (120) tone toward English-Canadians, as evidenced through the notably conciliatory encouragement of their "sentiment de justice" (Comité 21), as well as eschewing contentious issues, such as Riel's religious views, the question of his sanity, and the Frog Lake incident, to name only a few (Ens and Sawchuk 121). In skirting controversial questions about Riel, the committee demonstrated how circumspection and caution also shaped and limited its desired narrative.

Corrections were not completed when, in 1929, Trémaudan became "too ill to continue" (Ens and Sawchuk 122). He stated that if "changes had to be made, he advised the committee to

publish the book as authored by the committee, explaining his role” (122). Trémaudan died on 29 October 1929. The committee found itself “dans la situation ou de se substituer à l’écrivain et de l’écrire lui-même, ou de publier son livre intégralement, quitte à résumer le résultat de ses propres recherches et à les annexer à l’ouvrage. C’est cette dernière solution qui prévalut” (Comité 22). As Teillet points out, the committee’s actions were not as clear as its statement since it “kept editing Trémaudan’s work for years” (Teillet 7). Ens and Sawchuk note that “close to 50,000 words were deleted from the manuscript” (123) and a substantial appendix added. Given the committee’s control, editorial interventions, revisions, and its efforts to “shap[e] the form and content” (123) of the manuscript, even as Trémaudan remains credited as author, the book became a partially ghost-authored Métis text. That the committee felt required to mediate its account of the nation through a French-Canadian writer is suggestive of the onerous socio-economic conditions at the time of the text’s production that might have prevented it from hiring one its own to openly write the history, but it also points to a wariness in the narrative’s wider reception. The committee’s efforts to minimize the appearance of its editorial intervention also signalled a wish to have the narrative conveyed through an outside voice. Might this have been a strategic attempt to avoid accusations of bias? “Parlant pour eux, nous devons dire qu’ils ne croient pas nécessaire de se nommer. Ils appartiennent à la génération qui a succédé à celle qui s’est sacrifiée” (27), the committee wrote, emphasizing, in contrast to the signed communiqué in 1923, that anonymity was desired.

In the main text, Trémaudan touches upon Métis biological and cultural origins, traces the rise of mixed-blood children of European fur traders and Indigenous women, and recognizes the role of geographies (human and physical) and economies in how the Métis became a people and nation: “grâce à leur position géographique ... les Métis de l’Ouest purent conserver leur

homogénéité nationale” (47). He also locates significant moments of Métis national history in specific locations and events, from the Battle of Seven Oaks, the Sayer trial, the Red River Resistance, to the North-West Resistance. The result was, as Ens and Sawchuk compellingly argue, “a highly effective story, declaration of faith, even catechism of the Métis Nation” (123).<sup>73</sup>

Although the historical committee declared in the foreword that “[c]ette histoire est approuvée, dans son ensemble” (22), it also intimated that Trémaudan’s distance, “[l]e fait d’être éloigné du sol canadien, de respirer une autre atmosphère, une nouvelle ambiance, lui fit porter sur certains événements un jugement qui diffère légèrement du nôtre” (23) had caused a shift in perception or some divergence from the committee’s own view on certain matters that required clarification. There is some irony here given the alleged extent of the committee’s editorial intervention. Why include in the body of the text details with which it disagreed, only to disagree with them, however briefly, in the foreword? Is the intervention about critical historical nuance, or anticipating, and through the apparent act of disagreeing with Trémaudan, subverting potential accusations of bias? Though it stated that it had “aucun détail à y ajouter” on the issue of Thomas Scott’s execution, the committee also emphasized how the execution “ramena la tranquillité et la concorde dans le pays” (23), even as Trémaudan showed in the main text, how the broader, post-resistance consequences of the event engendered much vitriol and violence from Wolseley’s troops (257-59). The committee sought to further shape the interpretation of the event by laying blame on “celui qui, tout en assurant le gouvernement provisoire de sa bonne volonté, distribuait l’argent à pleines mains pour soulever les Métis anglais contre les Métis français ... Donald

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<sup>73</sup> Ens and Sawchuk contend that the book “succeeds ... not in spite of its factual errors and omissions, but because of them” (128), arguing that elisions are part of a “rhetorical strategy” (123) that borrows from literary techniques, and structures to discursively produce a narrative of the Métis Nation. These omissions resonate with Renan’s concept of the necessity of forgetting in nation building.

Smith” (23).<sup>74</sup> Accusing Smith of having encouraged brutal violence by asking “[les] Métis français, opposés à Riel, de se répandre dans les paroisses environnantes et d’égorger les femmes et les enfants pour forcer Riel et les siens à sortir du Fort Garry” (23), the committee not only suggested that Smith was partly responsible for creating, if not encouraging, conditions which allowed subsequent violence to occur, and thus justified Métis actions, but seemingly sought to minimize possible intimations of Métis aggressiveness, and emphasize the peaceful intentions of the Métis as being trodden upon by outside forces.

Reflecting on the writing of national histories, the committee advocated for an uplifting narrative while simultaneously noting how hardships and adversity can bring people together:

L’historien sérieux doit être conscient de la responsabilité qui lui incombe auprès des jeunes générations qui liront son livre et qui s’en inspireront. C’est pourquoi, tout en sachant ce que les hommes ont souffert dans les événements qu’il raconte, il considère ces choses comme la part intégrale qui leur revient des souffrances de l’humanité. S’il est chrétien, si les nations dont il écrit les gestes sont chrétiennes, l’histoire considérera ces souffrances comme un apanage qui leur donne droit à l’existence comme nation. Il en est des nations comme des individus: pour progresser elles doivent lutter et souffrir. (26)

The committee not only presents its argument through a firmly Christian perspective, with little to no reflection on the rights of non-Christian nations, but more specifically, by introducing the idea of suffering, it proffers decidedly Catholic overtones. Much like how Sara Riel wrote about her suffering as a requisite to enter heaven, the committee frames the nation’s right to exist in terms of how it has suffered. There is an almost transactional quality to it, which echoes Louis

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<sup>74</sup> Born in 1820, in Scotland, Donald Smith joined the Hudson’s Bay Company in 1838 and rose through the ranks. He became commissioner of the Montreal department in 1868. In 1869, he was tasked by Sir John A. Macdonald to defuse tensions in Red River. He would go on to have long, successful career in real estate and politics. See: [http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/smith\\_donald\\_alexander\\_14E.html](http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/smith_donald_alexander_14E.html) for more.

Riel's claim about Métis belonging in the North-West because of the blood they shed, "[c]e sont eux qui mirent au prix de leur sang, la tranquillité dans le Nord-Ouest" (3: 284). The above text also resonates with Ernest Renan's observations on what makes a nation, namely that "la souffrance en commun unit plus que la joie" (50). Recalling Ens and Sawchuk's claim of the text's myth-making power, we can see how the above excerpt, through its rhetorical approach, its broad summary, and its pseudo-philosophical assertion, tends toward the construction of a compelling national narrative and myth, rather than incisive historical inquiry.

Elaborating upon Métis national struggles, the committee wrote, "Ce pays qui est le nôtre, il a droit à notre amour, à notre dévouement, à notre vie, parce que *c'est pour lui que nos pères ont lutté*, c'est pour lui *qu'ils* ont souffert et *qu'ils* ont vaincu. C'est par là *qu'ils* nous ont tracé le chemin de notre avenir national (27; emphasis mine). Again, anaphoric repetitions and emphasis evoke an epic contest, an existential threat against which "nos pères" stood; each "qu'ils" like a beat, marking another blow endured. There is also a rousing aspect to the lines as the committee implores its compatriots, and "la jeune génération," to join it in following their ancestors' steps and take up the struggle for the "pays." The semiotic slippage of "pays" also reappears, like in Riel's poetry; though the word can mean the countryside, it can refer to the people, and in this case perhaps community. In light of its emphasis on language, religion, and culture, in its foreword, the committee seems to promote a cultural nationalism. However, in this appeal, the committee also produces as a largely male-centric portrait, the story of "nos pères." While Métis paternal ancestry is not always European—for instance, Louis Riel's father was Métis and his mother was French-Canadian—broader, national narratives (occasionally some by Riel himself) tend to hold paternal ancestry as European and maternal ancestry as First Nations. Both Trémaudan's table of content and Teillet's recent tome reproduce this construction.

Contemporary writers from Maria Campbell to Gregory Scofield also deploy similar, metonymic terminology, using maternal ancestry as shorthand for Indigenous heritage and paternal ancestry as shorthand for European heritage. This continual narrative return to origins, emphasizing an original métissage, risks obscuring how “le sang européen et le sang sauvage sont mêlés à tous les degrés” (Riel 3: 278), the cultural complexities of individual families, and how subsequent cultural, linguistic, economic, legal, and political developments, has shaped the Métis nation. In the committee’s text, the emphasis on paternal ancestry centres a national conception tied to French-Canadian culture and Catholicism which can mask nuanced perspectives on gender in Métis communities. Though the argument demonstrates how Métis nationalism—as asserted by a 19<sup>th</sup> century Métis middle-class, and its descendants—was at its core francophone and Catholic, the committee’s portrait of the nation is also incomplete. Aside from being potential victims of Smith’s machinations, women are not mentioned. The male-centrism produces a homogeneous portrait that belies how Métis national identity is based on political struggles *and kinship*.

The committee concludes its foreword with a celebratory reflection of Métis participation in the civilizing mission: “celle de servir de transition entre la barbarie et la civilisation. Ce petit groupe de Métis français sut remplir sa mission ... La race française peut être fière de ce rameau qui, dans l’Ouest canadien, fut fidèle à sa mission civilisatrice” (27-28). While the word “mission” has echoes of the Riels’ usages—Louis’s messianic mission to save the Métis; Sara’s missionary work—the committee’s emphasis on “civilization” hints at how its male-centric account operates within the ideological structures of white supremacy. Whether this represents a strategic attempt to exploit white privilege, couch Métis nationalism in religiously inflected ethnoracial rhetoric so as to rehabilitate the Métis’s image in the eyes of a dominant white society by emphasizing racial and ideological proximity to whiteness, and perhaps mend fraying

relationships with the Catholic Church, or the ideological strain represents a genuine belief critical to the discursive construction of Métis nationhood, is difficult to parse out. It is likely a complicate mixture of all. It is also not new, unique, or surprising, given historical associations with the Church. Stemming from, and cultivated by the Métis's sustained proximity to clergy, the influence of doctrines such as "la mission civilisatrice," are evident throughout early Métis writing. The role of class should also be underlined here, as the influences in question can be traced through the writings of Louis Riel, to the "devotional Catholicism" that Lesley Erickson writes about in relation to Sara Riel, and located in the educational institutions run by religious orders in Red River that served a then-growing Métis middle class in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century. Many members of L'Union nationale, such as those who signed the communiqué in 1923, descended from those families who "divorc[ed] themselves from the unlettered" (22) classes in the 1850s and 1860s. In its veneration of fathers, and privileging of French-Catholicism in the discursive construction of the nation, the committee showed how its members are heirs to, and its text is marked by, such ideological influences.

### **The Appendix [Appendice] to Trémaudan's *Histoire***

Also penned by the historical committee, the appendix to Trémaudan's *Histoire* takes up controversial questions that pervaded Métis-related discourse in the wake of the 1885 Resistance and refutes "accusations qui y sont portées contre Riel et les Métis" (403). It tackles overlapping questions of Riel's trial, sanity, religious beliefs, contentious relationship with clergy, allegations of incitements of a broad Indigenous uprising, and even accuses some clergy of working against Métis interests. There is an odd tension as the appendix suggests that these issues are not central to the narrative of the Métis nation, but its inclusion betrays its significance. Moreover, the added

implication that the appendix “answer[ed] exactly those questions that [the historical committee] had forced Trémaudan to excise from his manuscript and which they had disagreed with him” (Ens and Sawchuk 123) gestures to the sensitive nature of the topic for the Métis. Much as the foreword attempts to shape the reception of Trémaudan’s text, the appendix intervenes in the narrative of the North-West Resistance on behalf of the Métis:

Dans le cas des Métis, nous pouvons déjà juger que s’ils n’avaient pas pris les armes en 1885, s’ils n’avaient pas résisté à leurs oppresseurs, ils auraient encore été contraints d’émigrer et, cette fois, vers les plaines glacées du nord. Comme race ils auraient passé dans la légende, parce que les quelques individus qui seraient restés auraient été fatalement assimilés par les autres groupes. Leur résistance héroïque a attiré l’attention du monde. L’on en parle aujourd’hui comme d’un peuple qui a su défendre le sol qui l’a vu naître: l’Ouest canadien, sa patrie. (406)

While the committee addresses specific questions later in the appendix, the passage above stands out for how its general rhetorical expressions and hypothetical argumentation lend themselves to national myth-making, the instability of the collective pronoun (the committee moves from race to people, and earlier in the foreword, nation, synonymously without defining its terms), for how it names, and links, but also restricts, its homeland to the Canadian West, and, most crucially, for how it frames Métis actions as a matter of survival. Although in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, in French, the word race and people (or people) were largely synonymous, given the historical context of the rise of pseudoscientific fields like phrenology, and the rise of fascist ideologies in the early to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, the lack of nuance from the historical committee demonstrates how its aims were less analytic, than rhetorical. Had the Métis not “[heroically]” taken up arms, they would have somehow vanished, and those few left behind would have been “[fatally]” assimilated due



to the destruction of their national identity. The narrative has a curious, almost romantic lament to it, as though its authors are conceding that despite the resistance of their forebears, and their own efforts to maintain a separate national identity, their identity remains under pressure. The exaltation of their actions betrays tension as the committee attempts to articulate its national position. This strain is perhaps most visible in the dissonance between its rhetorical myth-making impulses and its avowed aim of factual clarification of historical events.

In contrast to the foreword, the committee's systematic responses in the appendix reveal a differently circumspect, but more argumentative style of prose. Responding to the accusation that the 1885 uprising was pre-meditated, it lays blame for violence *entirely* on "Lawrence Clarke [qui est arrivé] avec la nouvelle que 500 hommes de gendarmerie à cheval s'en venaient pour disperser les Métis" (408), despite other indications that he was only *partially* at fault.<sup>75</sup> On the question of whether the Métis kept clergy imprisoned in the days prior to the Battle of Batoche, the committee is cautious, yet outspoken. Acknowledging that "Quand le [Père] Végreville fut traduit devant le conseil, Riel lui fit rendre sa liberté à condition qu'il cessât ses agissements [discouraging armed resistance]" (412), it does not elaborate on the consequences of the breach of these conditions:

Du moment que les missionnaires avaient reçu de Riel la demande ou l'ordre de rester neutres, ils auraient dû comprendre qu'il était trop tard pour enrayer le mouvement et ils auraient dû s'abstenir de traiter les insurgés en ennemis ... Le Père Végreville poursuivait, parmi les insurgés, sa propagande contre Riel et le mouvement; au cours même de la bataille de Batoche, il se rendit parmi les Métis et leur offrit des sauf-

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<sup>75</sup> Lawrence Clarke, an Irish-born HBC officer, was Chief Factor of the Saskatchewan District from 1875 to 1890. He is known for his arrogant treatment of Indigenous people. As Stanley Gordon notes, "it was widely held in the territories that his rash behaviour was partly responsible for the outbreak of rebellion in 1885" (n.p.) by warning the Métis the government's response to their petitions was to strengthen the North-West Mounted Police Detachment.

conduits s'ils voulaient désertter. (413)

The use of the past conditional conjugation with the articulation that Végreville ought to have pursued some other course of action implies that there were consequences to those actions, but the committee is careful in its language. Maintaining circumspection over the consequences, it openly accuses the clergy of acting against the orders, and frames efforts to encourage peace as anti-Riel propaganda. A subsequent declaration, “Le fait que les Pères sont *restés libres dans leur presbytère* est attesté par tous ceux qui ont pris part au mouvement” (413; emphasis mine), suggests that the priests were less than free *outside* of the presbytery. The committee muddles the issue further by rhetorically asking “Comment les Métis auraient-ils pu garder prisonniers des gens qui se trouvaient au milieu de l’ennemi” (413), implying the Métis could not have kept the clergy prisoners as battle lines engulfed the Church, while eliding whatever happened in the days prior. Regardless of whether the priests were curtailed, or remained free to move about, or the issue is greyer still, the committee’s response demonstrates a rigid, defensive position. It avoids condemning the Métis, while placing responsibility for the conflict on the clergy. The committee offers less a nuanced reflection on the conflict than a sharp, partisan refutation of Métis fault.

Tensions are perhaps never more apparent than in the committee’s treatment of Riel’s religious views and its reflections on the role of missionaries in the resistance. Although it does not hold him up as infallible, it maintains that “Riel ne fut pas l’apostat et le bandit” (421) he was accused of being. Relying on oral history, eyewitness accounts, and documents, the committee refutes accusations of heresy and apostasy as misinterpretation and exaggeration: “Qui de nous, chrétiens, n’a pas à certaines heures fait en lui-même des oraisons jaculatoires,” it asks, “qui, si elles étaient imprimées, ne seraient pas conformes à la liturgie?” (425). In its consideration of the evidence, however, the committee curiously omits Riel’s own writings on matters of religion, a

good portion to which it would have had access via the Riel family, as it notes in the foreword (this omission marks an interesting parallel with contemporary Métis writing). Some of these writings, particularly around Riel's break with Rome, complicate the committee's claims: he wrote in a letter, perhaps intended for English-Métis at Prince Albert, of how "french Half-breed members of the provisional government of the Saskatchewan have separated from Rome" (3: 70). In a letter to Archbishop Taché, penned while in prison in Regina, Riel proclaimed Taché, "le Pontife élu de Dieu" (3: 145), advocated for a break with Rome, and the creation of a new Church in Canada, with the seat of papacy to be eventually located in St. Boniface. Although it is unclear to which of Riel's writings the committee had access, in its staunch defence of Riel, it leaves little room for critical self-reflection, examination of his religious views or other Métis' actions toward the clergy. Indeed, addressing the question of Riel's sanity, it avoids complexity as it instead lauds him: "comme tout homme animé d'un haut idéal, il avait une foi profonde en sa propre mission, ne différant pas en cela de nombre de héros qui ont poussé le sacrifice jusqu'à verser leur sang pour la cause qu'ils avaient embrassée" (427).

Ens and Sawchuk effectively claim that the book resembles a "hagiographic epic or life of a martyred saint" that has a largely Manichaeian or "binary" (123) structure. This resonates with the structure of the appendix as self-criticism would conflict with the committee's aims of fashioning a national myth. Maintaining the Manichaeian structures of its arguments, it brooked no opposition and contested: "le rôle de certains missionnaires en 1885 ... Leurs témoignages et leurs écrits nous ont valu trop d'humiliations pour les passer sous silence" (427). In a letter dated 12 June 1885, and addressed to province of Québec, Pères André, Touze, Moulin, Fourmond, Végreville, and Lecoq asserted that "Riel ne mérite pas les sympathies de L'Église catholique romaine" (qtd. in Comité 428). Although the priests appeared to be attempting to shift the focus

on “la plus grande misère” of the population in their parishes, and perhaps to obtain “secours” (428), framing Middleton’s actions as reasonably measured to reduce suffering, and moreover, positioning Riel’s own actions as having been undertaken “dans son intérêt personnel” (428) not only irked the committee, but ran wholly counter to its narrative. Other letters, including one in which Père Fourmond compared Riel to the “antéchrist” and Métis efforts during the resistance to “[des] plans diaboliques” (qtd. in Comité 429), also drew the committee’s ire, and had to be refuted. The committee expressed outrage that “des missionnaires puissent poursuivre un homme avec tant d’âpreté” (430). Largely avoiding analysis, the committee argued that “[p]our nous, la seule explication possible de cette attitude si contraire au caractère du prêtre et au sentiment personnel de quelques-uns d’entre eux, c’est qu’il fallait sauver le Gouvernement d’alors” (429). It saw in the clergy’s efforts to discredit Riel, and subvert Métis efforts, signs that their loyalties lay not with the Métis but with the government. Much like “celle de la hiérarchie du clergé français en 1789 ... [qui] ne pouvait séparer le trône de l’autel,” it argued, “certaines têtes dirigeantes du clergé de l’Ouest canadien se montrèrent les zélés défenseurs du gouvernement” (429, n. 12). Framed through a narrow position where all criticism of Riel was mistaken and in pursuit of its rhetorical aims, the committee nonetheless touched upon the clashing interests of Catholicism and Métis nationalism.

There is some irony here as the committee also re-opens closed wounds—despite Riel and Father André’s contentious relationship before and during the resistance, and Father André’s signature to the letter of June 1885, it is to Father André that Riel turned for spiritual guidance and comfort in the months after his trial, and to whom he entrusted his writings. It is to Father André’s words that the committee also turns for a description of the affective display of Riel’s execution: “jamais cérémonie religieuse n’avait ému et touché les cœurs comme la vue de Riel

allant à la mort” (qtd. in Comité 431). Regardless of its criticism of some clergymen and certain elements of the institution of Catholicism in western Canada, its veneration of Riel—how in his death “lancé dans l'éternité [il] devient un saint et un martyr” (430)—reveals how the committee, and its vision of the nation, continues to operate within the worldview of Catholicism. In the final section of the appendix, the committee cedes the word to Riel, republishing his testament, and his essay “Les Métis du Nord-Ouest,” like a selective gospel of its martyr.

Circling back to the foreword, might the committee’s apparent religious enthusiasm, the celebration of “la mission civilisatrice” (28) function as an attempt to soften the blow of its later criticisms? It does seem to reveal an awareness of the complex intersection of language, religion, and nationalism through which it was navigating—the difficulties and challenges in promoting, and promulgating Métis historical narratives, and keeping a version of Métis nationalism, and a distinctly francophone one, alive under the weight of a religious institution supporting policies of ongoing assimilation and dispossession. This raises questions of how political organization, and Métis nationalism, could possibly re-emerge to challenge settler policies and governments, if sustained through the celebration of “la mission civilisatrice.”<sup>76</sup> How can Métis literature develop as a distinct body of literature under the pressures of assimilation? While it puts its finger on the issue of diverging interests between the Catholic Church and Métis nationalism, there is obvious circumspection, and the committee is limited in its ability to elaborate on this divergence, not to mention effect material changes. It does not belabour the Church as an institution so much as it takes issue with individual clergymen, and does not deny the Church’s influence, nor the faith of many French-speaking, or French-descended, Métis. Moreover, the committee’s celebration of “la mission civilisatrice” might not be restricted to the spiritual realm, but also serve to recognize

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<sup>76</sup> On the other hand, overt criticism of the Church may have conceivably accelerated the ostracism of the Métis in francophone communities, which Charette noted was occurring in 1923, and further amplified language loss.

Métis contributions to the economic development and even early industrialization of the west. It also echoes Riel's, as well as other 19<sup>th</sup> century Métis writers' beliefs. Ultimately discursive, not material, change remained the focus of the committee's efforts. Despite, and perhaps because of, tensions between national mythologizing and factual correction, contradictions, and occasional circumspection, the committee's text stands out less for its historical insights, than its rousing, affective, narrative—for its articulation of a national myth.

In some contemporary criticism of Trémaudan's book, there is a sense that despite Métis appeals to recognition and integration in broader settler-society on the Prairies, the insistence on national distinction emphasizes how they may never be good enough for non-Indigenous people. Adrien-Gabriel Morice's racist screed *La race métisse: étude critique en marge d'un livre récent* is one example. A Catholic priest, and "expert" on Métis history, he takes aim at the foreword and appendix with a pedantic zeal. Perhaps sensing, and taking issue with the depth of its editorial interventions, Morice accuses members of the historical committee of "le manque de franchise et d'honorabilité" (44); "naïveté" (45); "mauvaise foi"; and of fiding it "impossible de dire la vérité" (62), which all purportedly reveal the members as "sophistes et hérétiques inconscients" (66). However, he also couches his accusations in racist language, describing the Métis oral history that L'Union gathered from Batoche and transcribed as a fabrication of "des textes de leur goût, qu'ils ont la naïveté de s'imaginer devoir être pris pour des documents" (45). He dismisses Métis voices, "[s]'il y a donc une chose bien claire pour l'historien, c'est que, à part certains cas exceptionnels de caractères plus fortement trempés, les dépositions métisses n'ont aucune valeur" (45), and one should privilege white, clerical voices in "les documents les plus vénérables ... les lettres des missionnaires" (47). In his assertion that the Métis are not a nation, since they were without a "gouvernement à eux, aucune loi de leur propre fabrique, ni

d’habitat particulier à limites; ou frontières déterminées” (10), but “une race, non pas une nation, qui vit chez les autres, sous un gouvernement établi par d’autres, sous des lois élaborées par d’autres” (11), he stifles their national and political impetus. Insisting that “la race métisse ait bien perdu de son honnêteté native et de son respectueux dévouement au prêtre” (5), Morice betrays the hurdles of articulating Métis nationalism through French Catholicism, and how such articulations threaten the clergy’s power. In his typically Catholic view, “[de] bons catholiques et bons Français” (84) submit to ecclesiastical authority. It is in this juxtaposition of inimical positions, between a subsumed position, and maintaining a national history and identity, that Morice drives a wedge between Métis national, political, and literary re-emergence, and French-Catholicism. His viewpoint seems to represent that which alienates many francophone-Métis from settler-francophone communities, and their own francophone histories and identities.

While the committee’s focus and rhetoric produce cultural and historical tensions and dissonance, this is suggestive of broader struggles facing Métis literary production. Would a text outrightly critical of French Catholicism have been published in the 1930s? Moreover, as shown, L’Union continues to operate within the tradition of earlier writers from Sara and Louis Riel, to Schmidt, and DeLaronde for whom Catholicism was central, even as it criticizes clergymen. This criticism is not a rejection of the institution, but a remonstrance of individuals. Intentionally or not, however, in its criticism the committee augurs the increasing disentanglement and waning influence of Catholicism (and Christianity) on later, literary articulations of Métis identity and experiences. Recalling that members of L’Union were often well-educated, urban, middle-class professionals, we also see how their focus on discursive concerns of the narrative of the nation might contrast with other Métis (material or spiritual) concerns across the Prairies. How might writing from road allowances or the Métis Settlements in Alberta differ? Might we recognize

Métis literary history as a tapestry of divergent experiences, trajectories, and traditions? Aside from the novelty of its publication, Trémaudan's *Histoire* holds a significant place in Métis literary history as it marks a critical, albeit somewhat covert, moment of idealized self-definition and mythologizing. The committee's writing is notable too from a stylistic point of view and how, through affective romanticism, and elegant prose, at least in comparison to Schmidt's text, as well as its selective historical emphasis, strategic circumspection, and blend of documentary and story-telling elements, it sketches a national, occasionally hagiographic, epic. In many ways, its writings are a precursor to the increasingly revisionist texts of contemporary Métis writing.

### **Shifting Ground/Work for the Rebuilding: On the Writings of Jim Brady<sup>77</sup>**

The writings of Jim Brady offer an intriguing contrast to those of L'Union's historical committee. From his work with L'Association des Métis de l'Alberta et des Territoires du Nord-Ouest in the 1930s, through his correspondence, reflections, diaries through the Second World War, his accounts of Métis history, and his Marxist-Socialist analysis of class, in the 1950s, his investments with "writing of a correct interpretation of Métis history" (Dobbin 82) also bear a striking resemblance to L'Union's efforts with Trémaudan. There are notable dissimilarities in terms of his practical and theoretical approaches, such as Brady's community work with Métis and other Indigenous peoples, his emphasis on the "national liberation of the Indian people and the Metis people in Canada" (qtd. in Dobbin 199), and his concerted criticisms of capitalism and the Catholic Church. Yet, much like L'Union's work, Brady's writings also gesture to how Métis literary production waned significantly in the 1930s and 1940s as broader intellectual energy was increasingly directed toward discursive and material improvements as opposed to literary arts.

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<sup>77</sup> The texts examined below are drawn from the James Brady Papers, which Murray Dobbin donated to the Gabriel Dumont Institute, and are hosted on their website at: [www.metismuseum.ca/browse/index.php?id=400](http://www.metismuseum.ca/browse/index.php?id=400)



Born in 1908, near St. Paul des Métis, Alberta, to an Irish father, James Brady Sr., who was a wealthy storekeeper, and a Métis mother, Philomena Archange Garneau, who was the first Métis registered nurse in the province, Jim Brady Jr. had a relatively privileged upbringing. He was raised in a Catholic and francophone setting. The grandson of Laurent Garneau, namesake of the Garneau neighbourhood in present-day Edmonton, and one-time soldier for Riel during the Red River Resistance, who “helped raise [Brady] after his mother died” (Dobbin and Cohn n.p.), Brady learned of Métis history and struggles early in his life. Despite his privilege, he gravitated to general labour where he developed keen insights in class struggles. Self-educated in Marxist and socialist theories, Brady brought new perspectives to Métis community organization and political advocacy in Alberta and Saskatchewan. He served in the Canadian Army during the Second World War and fought in Europe. He wrote throughout his life, often reflecting upon topics related to the Métis and their history. In 1952, the Labour Progressive Party of Canada printed a piece by Brady on the 1885 resistance in their paper, the *Tribune* (Dobbin 192). Brady disappeared in northern Saskatchewan, while on a prospecting trip, in June 1967.

**Preamble to L’Association des Métis’s Submission to the “Half-Breed Commission”  
(1934)**

In Alberta, in the 1930s, a new generation of Métis leaders, including Brady, helped form L’Association des Métis de l’Alberta et des Territoires du Nord-Ouest,<sup>78</sup> and contributed toward

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<sup>78</sup> These leaders, also known as the Big Four, included Brady, Norris (Métis born in the Edmonton area), Joseph Dion (enfranchised First Nation born on the Onion Lake Reserve), and Peter Tompkin (son of Plains Cree Chief Poundmaker’s daughter and a non-Indigenous man); as the make up of the leadership reveals, the association was originally composed of both Métis and non-status First Nations, and as Dobbin explains, its aims were not “narrowly nationalistic ... [as] all British subjects with Indian ancestry—whether treaty Indian, non-status Indian or Metis—were eligible for membership” (61).

the creation of the Alberta Métis Settlements.<sup>79</sup> In the preamble to L'Association's submission to the Half-Breed Commission, in 1934, Brady and Malcolm Norris co-wrote:

The history of the Metis of Western Canada is really the history of their attempts to defend their constitutional rights against the encroachment of nascent monopoly capitalism. It is incorrect to place them as bewildered victims who did not know how to protect themselves against the vicious features which marked the penetration of the white man into the Western prairies. (Qtd. in Dobbin 89-90)

As did L'Union's historical committee in its foreword, Brady and Norris argue that amended historical narratives are critical to the contextualization of present-day Métis conditions. Yet, where L'Union nationale's *raison d'être*<sup>80</sup> was to unite French-Métis-Catholics, preserve their culture and national traditions, and promote their interests, L'Association des Metis was instead "formed for the ... social interest and uplifting of the members of the Association and the Metis people of the said province of Alberta" (qtd. in Dobbin 61). In their efforts to put forward Métis historical perspectives, and counter claims of essential cultural inferiority, which made the Métis unsuitable for agriculture, Brady and Norris embraced a Marxist-socialist approach, and framed Métis losses and missteps as "more economic than cultural" (Dobbin 82). For them, the issue of poor material conditions was not the consequence of a clash of civilizations, or the dichotomy of civilization and savagery, but rather linked to the "general problem of the economic and social needs of the Canadian people" (90); that is, Métis dispossession and socio-economic hardships were the result of "the forward march of capitalism on the prairies" (90). There is some irony in

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<sup>79</sup> In December of 1934, the Province of Alberta appointed a three-men commission to examine the condition and welfare of the "Half-breed population of Alberta" (qtd. in Dobbin); their work, along with L'Association des Métis, led to the creation of the Alberta Métis Settlements in 1938. See, for more, Ens and Sawchuk (256-287), or Teillet (402-416).

<sup>80</sup> In L'Union nationale's constitution of 1910, religion, loyalty to the crown, language, and the "preservation of the cult of our ancestors and national traditions" (qtd. in Ens and Sawchuk 116), are listed as higher priorities than the "material advancement of the Métis Nation" (116).

their assertions, as even as they argue the Métis are not “victims” of the “*features* which marked the penetration of the white man” in the West, but victims of “capitalism” (90), they largely shift the source of the lack of Métis agency from one outside force to another. Although the reference to struggles against capitalism hints at historical Métis agency, it betrays some historical failure.

Brady and Norris touched on questions of racial inequality, racism, and fraud in the settler treatment of the Métis, how the subsequent “picture of the Metis as a sort of savage people has been deliberately presented by the conquerors in order to falsify issues and attempt to present some kind of justification for the treacherous way in which these original pioneers were treated” (90), but did not dwell on social aspects, or its intersection with economic conditions. In a likely strategic circumspection given their audience of Government officials, they seem to minimize criticism of “the white man” as they “show the depths of poverty to which the Metis people have been reduced ... [and] set out the economic and social measures demanded of the Government to bring economic improvement and security to the Metis population (qtd. in Dobbin 89). Although the preamble was not published, it offers a fascinating contemporaneous contrast to the historical committee’s foreword and appendix. Despite dissimilarities in language, focus, objectives, and ideological positions, these texts demonstrate shared investments in the writing of Métis history, and contribute to Métis literary history as rare examples of organized expressions of identity and concern in the limited body of Métis writing in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### **Politics of the Metis Association (1942)**

While the commission led to some success, namely the creation of the Métis settlements in Alberta, there was also failure as the commission “refused to consider ... Brady’s model or any analysis that perceived the Métis’s present situation as accruing from colonialism, problems

with scrip fraud, or discriminatory practices of the dominant society” (Ens and Sawchuk 276). Instead, Brady and Norris’s “greatest fear” came true as the settlements were created “without any provisions for self-government” (275). Might their focus on economic and class questions have caused them to overlook the influence of other cultural forces on Métis material conditions? Brady would later reflect on the role that the clergy played in subverting the commission’s recommendation away from self-government, as well as in their broader influence on the Métis:

The clergy deliver long speeches and sermons (tinged with sophistry) denouncing the Metis plans because they are based on the material side of life. The old theory that the Metis must be satisfied with clerically dictated conditions and if it gets too bad they can resort to spiritual solace is no longer tenable in an enlightened age ... [the clergy] set out to bludgeon the Metis Association. (“Politics” 1)

Though the prose has a bitter, fragmentary, coarseness to it, belying its nature as a draft, the text is insightful for its critique of the power and sway that religious institutions held over the Métis, and its severe distrust of spirituality. With echoes of Marxist opposition to religion, he expresses, if not outright atheism, a strong agnosticism in his denigration of “spiritual solace,” which Brady finds untenable and futile from a materialist perspective. This apparent rejection of not only religious institutions, but of faith and spirituality marks a significant break, even as his enduring concern for the welfare of Métis communities resonates, with earlier writers. He would temper his criticisms in a later version of this text, notably eliding his implied criticism of the “solace” of spirituality, reflecting a greater, nuanced, distinction between spirituality and religion, and also revise “clerically dictated conditions” (“Politics” 1) to “inferior position,” (“History” 1), as if conceding that the clergy may not be directly responsible for poor material conditions among the Métis, but he would strongly imply that they are partially responsible for its continuation.

In his revised “A History of the Alberta Metis Association,” Brady would home in on the problems of an educational system run by religious institutions, and how these schools were not in the best interests of the students. “The entire policy of clerical ‘humanitarians’ in Indian and Metis affairs in general is one of the most ignominious betrayal of the real interests of Indian and Metis education,” he writes. “Sixty years of clerical tutelage has induced an ignorance and passivity which has deprived the Native of the knowledge and understanding whereby he can reach out and bring into being that better life” (2). Whereas Catholicism had been a core element of mid-to-late 19<sup>th</sup> century francophone Métis education and nationalism, and was still promoted by L’Union nationale, Brady not only distrusted the Church, but described clerical involvement in education as “spiritual tyranny and terrorism” (4). While Brady’s criticism of the educational system might be perceived as a clash between classes (the elitism of the clergy versus the elitism of Métis political organizers), the issue is complicated by elements of Métis self-determination, and *internal* class differences. In contrast to other writers who often positioned divisions through language and religion (by pointedly differentiating between French-Catholic Métis and English-speaking Protestant Métis), Brady looked to instead economic and associated cultural practices as key distinguishing characteristics of contemporary Métis society. He argued that “Metis society is divided into gradations at various stages of [d]evelopment. The agricultural and the nomadic” (“Politics” 3). He would notably emphasize the notion of “Metis development” (3), and contend that only through the unity of classes, and a movement energized by the working class, but led by political organizers and intellectuals, could Métis society develop, and reverse their national “disintegrat[ion]” (“History” 3). However, calling for Métis development, Brady did not advocate for segregation, separation from settlers or from Canada, but rather demanded the opportunity to rebuild the nation from within Canadian Confederation. “We Metis are ...

[the] original Canadians” (“Politics” 3), Brady wrote, and elaborated:

We do not deny the history of traditions of our people. We are proud of our ancestors who braved great hazards to open the wilderness, to blaze trails, to clear land and found settlements. We are not only proud of the hard and heroic trail blazed by generations of Metis but we demand for our generation ... the right to build on the edifice which the early pioneers built by their hard and patient toil. (3-4)

Brady’s focus on the labour of the historical Métis—their braving, opening, blazing, clearing, and founding—resonates strongly with Riel’s account in “Les Métis du Nord-Ouest” of Métis economic development of the land. There is also a strong resonance between Brady and the historical committee of L’Union nationale’s pride in their ancestors’ and their concern for the future of the nation, as well as in their rhetoric, and in the almost romantic myth of the past that they construct. However, where L’Union advocated for their linguistic and cultural preservation, Brady’s material concerns, economic priorities, and his rejection of Catholicism, suggest that the “edifice” that he envisions the Métis building upon is culturally and linguistically different than that of L’Union nationale. This reveals a notable heterogeneity of thought within the relatively small intellectual class of Métis society in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### **The Trial and Execution of Louis Riel (1952) and Hero of the North West (undated)**

Brady also pondered the issue of the 19<sup>th</sup> century resistances and Louis Riel’s leadership, but where L’Union’s historical committee ultimately positioned Riel as a hero within a Catholic tradition, as a saint and martyr, Brady acclaimed Riel’s legacy through the rhetoric of socialist revolutionary politics. In his view, Riel’s “articles and speeches and above all his tactics in building a broad people’s government showed a brilliant understanding of the bourgeois

democratic revolutions then sweeping the world” (“Trial” 1). Brady’s aim was to “smash the mesh of falsifications that [had] ‘officially’ been woven around” Riel, and allow him to “take his place among the great heroes of all lands ... Lincoln, Robespierre, Garibaldi and Kosciusko, and the thousand names, from Spartacus who led the slave in ancient Rome to Ernest Thaelmann who rotted in a Nazi dungeon, who have risen to lead humanity forward on the road to progress and freedom” (“Hero” 1).

Despite attempting to clarify the narrative of the resistances and Riel’s actions, Brady’s lofty, hyperbolic rhetoric betrays the same tensions as L’Union’s efforts between myth-making and historical inquiry. His assertion of Riel’s “brilliant understanding” of other contemporary democratic movements, for instance, seems overstated. While Riel had a measure of success in Red River, particularly in building coalitions between different communities, he would suffer numerous reversals and defeats in the years after, and as I have shown, would also turn toward non-democratic epistemologies like Catholicism and the ultramontane movement to inform his political actions. His unrelenting references to his God-given “mission,” and attendant messianic impulses, would dilute his democratic proclivities with theocratic and autocratic inclinations. He is a frustratingly complex and complicated figure, and his writings and his actions are filled with contradictions. But through circumspection and elision, Brady reduces these complexities to hold Riel as an unproblematic, national, heroic figure. This revisionism would seem to gesture to how Riel’s narrative was becoming increasingly fluid and symbolically contested.

Even as L’Union nationale and Brady differ in their ideological underpinnings, Brady’s text on the trial of Louis Riel resonates with the historical committee’s appendix in Trémaudan’s book in the revisionist, circumspect, ways they systematically address imputations about Riel’s motivations, sanity, and religious beliefs. Countering accusations of insanity, Brady wrote “that

[Riel] should seek rest from a nervous breakdown in an asylum after the terrible ordeal of hounding and persecution that he had gone through is also understandable, but it is not any ground for the charge of insanity” (“Trial” 5), eliding the fact that Riel’s was in fact hospitalized by his own friends and family in Québec. On the question of religion, Brady wrote that

religion for Riel was part and parcel of his passionate striving for social justice, for a better world on earth for the people, not as a weapon for his own personal advancement or a means to riches and power as it was to many other religious leaders of the day. Christianity to Riel was a power for good, while for his opponents it was a convenient means to pacify the Indians and the settlers while they robbed them. (5)

Although there is some fact in his assessment that, for Riel, Christianity was “a power for good,” Brady’s insights are also idealized in a way that again elides Riel’s complicated relationship with religion: from the sense of power that Riel finds through religion following the collapse of his political career, to the personal aspects of his conviction of his messianic mission. The idea that religion was a power for “good” is also troubled by the violence that accompanied his fantasies and appeals for divine justice. There is a notable resonance between Riel and Brady in terms of messianism, not only in the desire to help, or save, the Métis (as other writers have also shown abiding concerns for Métis communities), but in their belief they can bring about this salvation, and dedicated labour toward this goal. Where Riel expresses this belief through his interpretation of Bishop Bourget’s letter and his God-given mission, however, Brady expresses it through the tenets of Marxism; recall his assertion that Métis intellectual classes must organize the working poor. Though his analysis of Riel’s religious beliefs lack nuance, his reversal, how Brady moves from the claim that “spiritual solace is no longer tenable in an enlightened age” (“Politics” 1), to asserting how “Christianity to Riel was a power for good” (“Trial” 5) seems to be made possible



due to the increasing distinction he makes between spirituality and institutional religion. Through Riel, Brady concedes that religion might be instrumentalized for the betterment of people, but he also recognizes it as a doubled edged sword that can subjugate those it is supposed to free.

In these texts, as did the historical committee's writings, Brady constructs a largely uncritical narrative of Riel and the armed resistances with little self-reflection on Métis actions or motivations (such as the reasons for which Nolin may have turned against Riel).<sup>81</sup> This suggests that for the historical committee and for Brady the "correct" (Dobbin 82) interpretation of history is less concerned with historical complexities, complications, or nuance, than the dissemination of Métis perspectives, and the development of Métis national narratives. In contrast to L'Union, Brady would reframe this national narrative through economic and socialist-theories. Their writings also gesture to the limited *literary* intertextuality of Métis writing in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (L'Union's "documents" were largely transposed from oral sources), the restricted engagements with Riel's writings, and the different manifestations (along with DeLaronde and Schmidt) of circumspection. Though there remains much work to be done in considering his position in Métis literary history, Brady's writings shed light on significant ideological shifts in mid-20<sup>th</sup> century Métis thought, and augur the repudiations of Catholicism and Christianity that mark later Métis literary production, as well as growing representation of classes across socio-economic, racial, and gender lines. However, in their materialist focus and the de-emphasis on cultural and linguistic preservation, Brady's texts also portend a critical decline in francophone cultural and linguistic expression in Métis writing.

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<sup>81</sup> Charles Nolin was a conservative Métis farmer, trader, politician, and cousin to Louis Riel through marriage. He often opposed Riel and the Métis provisional government at Red River; later, he also opposed the taking of arms in Saskatchewan and "fled to Prince Albert during the battle of Duck Lake on 26 March [1885]" (Payment n.p.) rather than support Riel and Dumont's cause. For more see Diane Payment's entry on Nolin in the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* ([http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/nolin\\_charles\\_13E.html](http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/nolin_charles_13E.html)).

## Chapter Four — Toward a Literary Resurgence: *Halfbreed* and Other Métis Writing from 1945 to 1990

Métis literary production reached a nadir in the 1930s and 40s as the intellectual labour of many Métis was directed toward less artistically literary pursuits, from writing history to material concerns, and was undoubtedly further restricted by the socio-economic challenges of the Great Depression and the Second World War. New generations of Métis writers, thinkers, and political organizers, including, increasingly, if not predominantly, women, representing a broad diversity of cultural and linguistic heritages, and socio-economic classes, would emerge through the 1950s to 80s to breathe new life into Métis literature. Tracing this literary resurgence, I contextualize shifting cultural influences, and diverging traditions through the effects of settler-colonialism, to demonstrate how early contemporary Métis literary production marks a critical turning point in the articulation of Métis identity, representation of experiences, and expression of worldviews.

I first juxtapose the careers and texts of two women writing from different experiences and positions: Marie Rose Smith, and her nine-part autobiographical account, *Eighty Years on the Plains*, published in 1948-49; and Marie-Thérèse Goulet-Courchaine (to whom I refer using her pen name Manie Tobie when discussing her writing), who wrote for periodicals in Manitoba and Saskatchewan in the 1960s. Even as their texts are marked by the socio-economic realities of settler-colonialism, racism, cultural assimilation, and language loss, from Smith's identity circumspection as an extension of *le grand silence* to Goulet-Courchaine's "réhabilitation" of Riel's image (Juéry 11), they show how Métis writing persisted through the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century.

After considering Smith's and Goulet-Courchaine's work, I examine the watershed text in contemporary Métis literature: Maria Campbell's *Halfbreed*. At once a commemoration of community and a lament at its denigration, her hugely influential memoir brought attention to the

pervasive racism and structures of white supremacy through which Métis people navigated. In framing her personal, familial, and community struggles in relation to Métis national history, and the resistances of 1869-70 and 1885, Campbell not only illustrates how policies of colonization, dispossession, and assimilation affected her generation, but shows their intergenerational effects. In terms of Métis literary history, her memoir simultaneously demonstrates a break with, as well as a return to, earlier traditions: her rejection of Catholicism stands in stark contrast to earlier writers such as Louis and Sara Riel, Louis Schmidt, or Alexandre DeLaronde, but also echoes the thought of some Métis leaders and intellectuals who showed schisms with the Church, such as Jim Brady; while her attention to Cree-Michif, epistemologies, worldviews, and spirituality resonates with oral histories and cultures. Lastly, I trace how her later texts, like her collaborative dialogue with Linda Griffiths in *Book of Jessica*, and her own *Stories of the Road Allowance People*, increasingly represent a shift away from Franco-Catholic and toward Anglo-Cree-Michif articulations of Métis narratives in contemporary Métis literature.

In the final section, I examine the initial burgeoning of Métis literary resurgence and how the late 20<sup>th</sup> century saw the opening up of Métis literature across genres, gender, languages, and class. I survey early contemporary Métis writing from academic texts, non-fiction, dictionaries, and histories. I analyze select poems from Adrian Hope and George Morrissette, which, although stylistically different, share thematic investments in Métis history and community, and remain underexamined. Finally, turning to the first novel published by a Métis writer, I consider how Beatrice Mosionier's *In Search of April Raintree*, with the story of April and Cheryl Raintree's experiences in the foster care system, and their cultural loss and recovery, produces ambiguous representations of Métis identity, but also begins to re-inscribe Winnipeg as a Métis space.

### Du “grand silence” à “la réhabilitation”: Writing from the 1940s to the 1960s

There were few texts not associated with political organizations published in the 1930s and 1940s. The apparent lack of production is not surprising given the circumstances, but literary production did not vanish. Rather it persisted, albeit in an attenuated way. It was the intellectual and literary labour of women that sustained it, portending the critical rise of female authorship in Métis literature in the later part of the century. Contrasting select works of Marie Rose Smith and Marie-Thérèse Goulet-Courchaine with those of Maria Campbell and Beatrice Mosionier allows for the study of four generations of Métis writers, producing works within a few decades of each other, and how issues of dispossession, cultural loss, and intergenerational trauma shape their literary production during this period.

#### Marie Rose Smith

Writing in Alberta during the Great Depression, Marie Rose Smith would offer in her published work a negative portrait of Métis resistances at the same time as she deemphasized, or largely concealed, her own ethnic and national identity, her relations, and her broader community connections. Born into the well-known Delorme family of St. François-Xavier in 1861, Smith was raised and educated in the Red River Settlement. As she writes, “[f]our years at St. Boniface Convent taught Liza [her sister] and me to read and write both French and English; we already could speak the Cree tongue, and during my eighty years I have kept the three languages as my modes of expression” (4: 216). At 16, she married Charlie Smith, and eventually moved to Pincher Creek, Alberta, where they raised a large family and resided for decades. She lived with her daughter in Lethbridge in her final years and died in 1960.<sup>82</sup>

Her nine-part autobiography, *Eighty-Years on the Plains*, published in the ranch-focused

periodical *Canadian Cattlemen* between 1948 and 1949, offers the general narrative of her life, from her upbringing in the Red River Settlement, her voyages across the Plains with her family, her marriage, and life in Pincher Creek. In an example of an early memory, she writes “I was too young, when we lived on the farm [St. François Xavier], to be of much use about the house, but the lessons I learned by my mother’s side were later put into use when my handmade, buckskin gloves were much sought after by the early settlers of our community, from Macleod to Pincher Creek” (1: 19). Smith writes in a formal, English-language prose that not only betrays a certain temporal distance between the events and her reflections, generalizing despite the details of her anecdotes, but also largely obscures, and reframes, the cultural contexts of her history. That is, although at times auto-ethnographic—the reference above to her mother and the buckskin gloves gestures to Indigenous women’s economic contributions and significance, women’s teachings, as well as invokes a broader Indigenous material culture—the prose collapses distinctions between communities by blurring borders, such as when she references “early settlers of our community” (1: 19). Despite occasional blurring, Smith’s narrative features some cultural markers, such as her reflections on “bead work” (2: 76), languages, relationships with other Indigenous peoples, economic activities like trading and the buffalo hunt, references to the Red River cart, and passing references to her relations, family, and her travels between Batoche, Winnipeg, and St. François Xavier, that suggest a Métis cultural landscape, even as she never explicitly names it as such. Her account of her father’s trade activities also demonstrates this circumspection:

The fur trade, indeed, was the pioneer of civilization in the north west ... Into this wilderness we were preparing to penetrate; but first we must go to St. Paul (east of Winnipeg) for a season’s supply of Prints, Knives, Guns, Ammunition, Axes, and oh, so many things, and when all would be packed and tied securely in the long train of Red

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<sup>82</sup> See Carpenter or MacKinnon for more on Smith’s biography.

River carts we would begin our journey to the camps of the Indians, where father would dispose of his many wares in exchange for piles of furs, buffalo hides, bladders, grease, and the necessary pemmican with which the Indians were so plentifully supplied. (1: 30)

While the description evokes some Métis cultural and economic practices, Smith also aligns her father with European “pioneer[s] of civilization,” and emphasizes a primarily trading relationship with “Indians” as opposed to kinship. Reflecting on her roots and noting, for instance, when her “grandfather left the province of Quebec for the great Canadian West, he found a settlement of Scotch half-breeds living on White Horse Plains, a few miles west of Winnipeg, and decided to cast in his lot with them” (1: 19), Smith maintains an initial distance between herself, her family, and other Indigenous peoples. As her biographer Doris Jeanne MacKinnon argues, “[that Smith] never described herself in terms of any degree of mixed-ancestry indicates her cautious approach to reporting her own identity” (*Identities* 7). In fact, Smith’s personal account is often subsumed in frequent digressions into ethnographic accounts of First Nations’ cultures, and careful auto-ethnographic confessions: “we made our own shoes or moccasins, beading in pretty designs the ones we wore for holiday wear” (2: 73). Smith also shows a striking restraint in romanticizing her memories—where the above noted description of her father’s trading ventures, and anecdotes of childhood experiences might initially gesture toward romantic reminiscence, she undercuts her romanticism as she remarks how “life didn’t always run so smoothly” (1: 34). Her descriptions of events themselves, from life-threatening dangers of life on the Plains, to risky river crossings, disease, to encounters with others that took the lives of acquaintances, friends, and family, seem to emphasize the hardships of the Plains.

Smith’s personal or family anecdotes are often limited to her childhood experiences, and her reliance on anecdotes from travellers, adventurers, and settlers (mostly white men) around

Pincher Creek tend not only to obscure her experiences as a woman later in life, but destabilize her narrative, and its forward narrative momentum, through their interchangeability. In moments when Smith's narrative touches on larger historical events, such as the Métis resistances, she also deemphasizes her family's involvement. MacKinnon observes that Smith "never mentioned her three 'rebel' uncles and their roles in 1869-70 and 1885" (*Identities* 20), and that despite having access to an "abundance of oral testimony" (20), reduces these affairs to brief anecdotes about Thomas Scott's execution in 1870, and Riel's return to the North-West in 1884. Moreover, Smith even cedes narrative authority, momentarily allowing her brother-in-law "George Ness ... an Englishman by birth,"—notably, one kinship link that she does disclose—to largely convey and frame the resistances as the Métis "ignorantly [taking] up arms against the government" (4: 212).

These silences, and the abundance of connections and relationships that Smith does not disclose, are striking, but they are not surprising given that, as alluded to in the previous chapter, "*le grand silence*' was the legacy of 1885" (Payment, *Free* 269). It is in these silences and its circumspection that Smith's disparate text resonates with earlier Métis writing, like DeLaronde's poetry: in their careful approaches in divulging their connections and in exploring Métis themes. MacKinnon asserts that Smith's caution in identifying herself as Métis in her writings was likely "justified given the increasingly rigid racial boundaries of Alberta in the 1930s" (*Identities* 7), and shows how uneasiness extended far beyond Batoche. Dovetailing with fear are presumably also the effects of the expectations of her intended audience. In publishing with the *Canadian Cattlemen*, Smith was not writing for Métis readers, but rather a white, Anglo-Saxon, and likely Protestant audience. Might the challenges of getting her writing published have shaped its form and content, its language, and stories? Archival evidence, which includes a "letter among her papers from the Macmillan Company of Canada, dated 22 July 1938, confirming that it was

awaiting delivery of [Smith's] manuscript for possible publication" (MacKinnon, *Identities* 35), suggests that Smith attempted to publish work a decade before her autobiography appeared in the late 1940s. Whether or not the manuscript that Macmillan requested was an earlier draft of what later appeared in the *Canadian Cattlemen*, or some other work, or if the publishers received and rejected it, or never received it at all, is unclear, but does speak to the challenges of publication. Noting the existence of multiple manuscripts (both long and short; fiction and life writing) in the Glenbow archives, MacKinnon remarks that "the reality for Marie Rose was that, if she had any hope of having her manuscripts published ... she had to write to the expectations and demands of a reading public of different ethnicity and class" (*Pioneers* 299). Smith's ceding of the narrative to her brother-in-law, as shown above, seems to be a strategic attempt to appeal to an English-speaking target audience; however, Smith's use of language in discussing Indigenous people, such as her disparaging terms and euro-centric moralizing,<sup>83</sup> speaks to more than a strategic attempt to appeal to an anglophone audience, but of her own extended experiences with white, settler culture, and a careful guarding of self. Although French-Catholic, Smith allows Anglo-Protestant perspectives to often dominate. MacKinnon argues that it is only in her unpublished short fiction that Smith offered "a supportive view of the Metis concerns of 1885 over land ... [and an] unsupportive view of government officials and Roman Catholic authorities" (322).

This proximity to settler-culture and ways of thinking is most evident in the racial logic that Smith deploys in her descriptions of Indigenous persons. While Smith's use of "halfbreed" might indicate such logic, this is complicated by the ways that the term has come to represent both a historically specific group of people (Anglo-Protestant mixed-bloods from Red River) and occasionally English-language translation of the term "Métis," and is perhaps not that notable. It

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<sup>83</sup> Smith's use of the word "squaw" does not appear to be subversive, but echoes settler-colonial usage; she also describes elements of the Sun Dance as "cruel" (3: 145).



is instead Smith's use of the term "Quarter-breeds" (7: 15) that most explicitly evokes notions of blood quantum and suggests an apprehension of Métis identity rooted in race. It contrasts with Riel's rhetorical dismissal of the obsession over "quel degré de mélange nous possédons le sang européen et le sang indien" (3: 279). Smith's terminology is reminiscent of American-style terminology and conceptualization of Indigenous identity, but it is also suggestive of a Métis national dissolution and the climate brought on by settler-colonialism following the North-West Resistance and when Riel penned his words. Moreover, it speaks, as MacKinnon asserts, to Smith's observations on class. While Smith "did maintain some of the culture of the Red River Métis, she did not wish to portray Métis people as possessing a *unified* culture and identity," as MacKinnon effectively argues, "[Smith] wished to convey the message that there were *different classes* of Métis defined more by their way of life than by their ancestral roots" (*Identities* 42; emphasis mine). Apprehended through class, Smith's description of a "quarter-breed girl, who had been educated in the convent at St. Boniface" (7: 15), thus functions not only as a racial descriptor, but hints at disparate experiences (white-passing or non-white-passing; differences in economic and cultural practices from ranching and farming to hunting and trapping; Christian, or First Nations ceremonies) through intersections of class and race. Smith's implications thus resonate with Jim Brady's analysis of class, but unlike Brady's observations, positioned against the *longue durée* of Métis history, Smith's focus on race and class averts a broader historical, or national perspective, and individualizes such experiences. Ultimately, even under its assortment of anecdotes and occasionally problematic terminology, Smith's autobiography offers a rare and important glimpse into female experiences on the Plains in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, and complexities and agonies of articulating Métis narratives in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### **Manie Tobie (Marie-Thérèse Goulet-Courchaine)**

Franco-Manitoban Métis writer Marie-Thérèse Goulet-Courchaine offers a different look back at Métis history than Smith, and approaches Métis culture, heritage, and history with more openness, and pride, but also with more distance, in her myriad writings. For Goulet-Courchaine, writing became a way to recover, reconnect, and recount history and culture. As Juéry remarks, “Vers la fin de sa vie, Marie-Thérèse Goulet-Courchaine attachait beaucoup d’importance à la reconstitution de l’histoire de sa famille” (1); this history was linked to the Red River Resistance and personally touched by early settler-colonial violence. Her grandfather was Elzéar Goulet, a Métis postmaster, and member of Riel’s provisional government. He served on the tribunal that tried Thomas Scott. Goulet was murdered in September 1870 by members of the Red River Expeditionary Force, when volunteer soldiers from Canada chased him down to the Red River and hurled rocks at him as he tried to swim from Winnipeg to St. Boniface. Goulet drowned after being struck (Teillet 245). Writing both prose and poetry, in French and English, for newspapers and journals in Manitoba and Saskatchewan, including “*L’Ami du Foyer, Le Travailleur, The Indian Record, Sunday Herald, and the Kamsack Times*” (Barkwell, “Marie-Therese” 1), but primarily for *La Liberté et le patriote*, under the pen name, Manie Tobie, she would endeavour not only to recover and piece together her family’s history, as well as Métis culture, but reflect on the cultural complexities, geographic diversity, and celebrate the natural beauty, of Manitoba.

Goulet-Courchaine’s work marks a generational shift compared to Smith’s narrative, and it suggests how changing social-climes, social and racial justice, the celebration of francophone linguistic heritage, and environment, all function to differently shape their works. Born in 1912, in St. Boniface, to Roger Goulet (who had been a member of L’Union nationale) and Lumina Gauthier, Goulet-Courchaine was raised in a Franco-Catholic setting (Juéry 3-5). She completed

her education in French, obtained “un brevet en éducation de l’École normale du Manitoba” (Juéry 5), and would teach for about 20 years in different schools across Manitoba and Saskatchewan.<sup>84</sup> She retired from teaching, and worked as an announcer for the radio station CFRG, in Gravelbourg, Saskatchewan, before complications with diabetes eventually left her blind. In 1955, she obtained “un diplôme de l’Université du Manitoba ‘for oral proficiency in French’” (6). In 1960, she returned to her childhood home in St. Boniface. She would have a leg amputated in 1966 and died on July 15, 1970.

Goulet-Courchaine’s education and career reveal a moderately middle-class position marked by personal hardships, struggles, and disabilities, but also by resilience, adaptability, and triumphs. Her resolve to learn Braille after going blind reveals not only strength of character, but hints at the importance that she placed on writing and stories. In the years ahead of Manitoba’s centennial celebration of joining the Canadian Confederation, she undertook a project of discursive, cultural, and historical recovery in the vein of L’Union nationale’s work years earlier, and would compose numerous non-fiction prose pieces. In 1965, she wrote:

Ceux qui comme moi, ont eu leur famille personnellement accablée dans la mêlée et qui ont passé leur vie à pénétrer le mystère de la première heure, vous aideront à remettre le Père du Manitoba à sa place de héros. Ces pensées me sont venues à l’idée comme un à-côté d’un travail sérieux de développement que j’entreprends en marge du centenaire, munie de notes précieuses que nous a laissé notre père, Roger Goulet. Dans ses enfants il aura continué le rêve de sa vie: celui de venger son père qu’il n’a jamais connu et qu’on a violemment assassiné à la rivière Rouge[.] (“En pensant à Riel” 5)

There is the suggestion of documentary in Manie Tobie’s words, and in how due to her personal

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<sup>84</sup> Goulet-Courchaine’s linguistic and literary abilities earned her recognition as she received “une bourse de 59 dollars de la province du Manitoba pour avoir obtenu la meilleure note en français” (Juéry 5). See Juéry’s *Manie*

relationship with the history in question, she is perfectly suited to show and guide others through the complexities of the events in question; but there is also a sense of romance and myth evoked by the hyperbolized rhetoric. What exactly is the mystery that Manie Tobie penetrates? Might it be the immediate events leading to the murder of her grandfather, the motivations of the killers, or even the broader, socio-economic, and political conditions that contextualized the resistance? Her forthright admission of her intentions to revise the popular narrative of Riel from rebel and traitor to national hero strikingly contrasts Smith's earlier negative positioning. For Manie Tobie, Riel was "un protecteur contre des injustices impardonnables" (3), and "les troupes de Wolseley, suivant assurément des ordres et ne sachant pas en grande partie le fond de la situation, [et qui] ne reconnurent pas l'immense affront que leur pénétration au pays causa au peuple qui y était paisiblement installé" (3), ignorant antagonists. In this narrative re-framing, the reference to her father's notes, and the confession that she had "écouté personnellement des récits recueillis par mon père et racontés par des témoins. Ces choses entendues, je ne les ai jamais vues en presse et j'en ai même jamais entendu parler ailleurs" ("En pensant" 3), she reveals an intertextuality, not only informed by, and speaking to, but building upon, the work and the words of her forebears. Although she gestures to the then-limited successes of Métis writing, and hints at the guarded way that Métis stories were transmitted, she also reveals the persistence of Métis oral culture.

Manie Tobie would return to the subject of Riel a number of times in the final years of the decade, and continue to position him as a hero, as had L'Union nationale, and others before her. Riel would seem to come to stand in for, or even represent the group as a whole—in a way, the rehabilitation of Riel's image served the broader aim of honouring "les nôtres comme ils le méritent" (Tobie, "Centenaire" 3). There is an almost messianic element to the power of Riel's narrative, whereby however romanticized, mythologized, or idealized, his rehabilitation becomes

a national redemption. Yet, even as her concern with francophone Métis history, stories, and culture found success in the local French-language press, when she wrote in 1970 of how “tous les documents que j’ai envoyés à la presse anglaise à ce sujet [on Elzéar Goulet] ou sur Riel n’ont jamais été publiés ou reconnus ... [and] une composition historique appelée ‘Why a Goulet Street’ m’a été renvoyée” (“Le Grand Riel” 3), she showed the difficulties in then publishing and re-framing Métis narratives from a Métis perspective in the English-language press.

Alongside texts concerned with Métis history and culture, Manie Tobie also produced prose pieces that touched on local physical and human geography, such as “Les rues de Saint-Boniface” (Tobie 62)—a mnemonic piece that reveals a deep attachment to her community and the centrality of Red River in her world—personal anecdotes, numerous poems on topics ranging from quotidian observations, religious reflections, meditations on faith (Catholicism), place (St. Boniface), and people (francophone Métis), to contemplations on nature. Métis themes formed a consistent current in her prose; as Juéry remarks, Manie Tobie’s work also fulfilled “la fonction d’historien au service de la communauté, et ce, dans la coulée d’une tradition orale” (13). Juéry points out that her work is marked by elements of rapid composition, and that writing “pour ces monstres boulimiques que sont les journaux” (13), prevented her from polishing many of her texts. Nonetheless, some of her work, like her suite of poems meditating on the seasons, shows concerted artistic effort, of which her autumn poems are some of her most polished. In fact, her poem, “Octobre,” won a contest in Paris in 1968, and was subsequently published in the journal *Revue Moderne* that same year, as well as in Gaston Bourgeois’s anthology *Poètes du Québec* (Juéry 24). Her inclusion in the anthology reveals a measure of her literary success. However, Bourgeois’s framing of her poem as a text from Québec not only obscured her Métis identity, but recognition of francophone literary production from western Canada. I reproduce the poem here:

Octobre a coloré la pourpre des montagnes  
 Et la paille jaunie de nos vastes campagnes.  
 On dirait qu'un fusain a dessiné l'ombrage  
 Que fait la branche nue au nouveau paysage.  
 En ce mois si changeant, on peut voir l'escadrille  
 D'oies sauvages, alignées, dans le soleil qui brille;  
 Mois de grappes pressées et de froment mûri,  
 Laisant traîner des fleurs où l'été a relui.  
 L'insecte s'est caché dans sa cave boueuse;  
 Le cours d'eau s'est calmé en vague douceuse.  
 Plus de vols tapageurs, plus d'abeilles et de miel.  
 Beaucoup moins sur la terre, et beaucoup plus au ciel,  
 Tu fermeras la porte à la chaude nature.  
 Et sous le vent plus frais et la brise plus pure,  
 Tu partiras aussi, comme s'éteint le cierge.  
 Mois perlé de rosaires, fais hommage à la Vierge. (Tobie 127)

Using detailed and colourful imagery to evoke broad sceneries, reinforcing the allusion to visual art representations such as landscape paintings, through reference to art materials and techniques, “[le] fusain [qui] a dessiné l’ombrage” (127), Manie Tobie crafts a vivid visual poem. Much like DeLaronde’s “La Vallée de Qu’Appelle,” Manie Tobie’s poem also possesses a vaguely Group of Seven feel, reflective of their bold, striking landscapes. Yet, unlike the largely-static images of those famous paintings, often devoid of life other than flora, Manie Tobie brings a sense of movement and change to her poetic landscape by tracing the turning of the season through the

natural migrations of fall, “l’escadrille / D’oies sauvages, alignées, dans le soleil qui brille” (127), and the retreat of insects into the ground. She offers a focused look at the non-human world through a nostalgic exploration of relations between animals (geese, insects, bees), and the natural world. The detailed imagery suggests a deep connection or familiarity—images, colours, animals, movements, and seasons, drawn from her experience and memories.

Manie Tobie’s poem resonates with DeLaronde’s aforementioned poem, as they similarly ruminate over landscapes and offer a sustained focus on the non-human world, however, where elements of circumspection appear to haunt DeLaronde’s poem, particularly in terms of explicit positioning of Qu’Appelle within a Métis homeland, and where this lack of cultural or national reference, and the absence of people evokes a certain emptiness and silence, a similar absence of explicit references in Manie Tobie’s poem reads slightly differently. Where DeLaronde’s poem foregrounds its speaker’s voice firmly through the repetition of “J’aime” (247), but otherwise maintains focus on the non-human, Manie Tobie’s poem shifts, in the final lines, toward a firmer break between the non-human and human world as her speaker imagines an unnamed person closing “la porte à la chaude nature” (307); DeLaronde’s offers a view from within nature, while Manie Tobie’s final lines suggest an outside perspective. There is also an intriguing resonance between DeLaronde and Manie Tobie’s deployment of Catholic imagery, most explicitly in their use of the word “vierge.” Where Manie Tobie’s use of “la Vierge,” pays homage to Mary, and words such as “cierge” and “rosaires” demonstrate how the poem’s speaker inhabits and evokes a French-Catholic world view, DeLaronde’s use of “vierge” is more circumspect, less of a direct reference to Mary herself, than an image within his comparative simile that evokes notions of purity. Moreover, his poetic reference to a God figure, “[I]’auteur de l’univers” (247), evokes less explicitly a Catholic world-view than Manie Tobie’s poem does, and perhaps even hints at

underlying Indigenous worldviews and spirituality. It is ultimately the contextual facets of Manie Tobie's text, such as the plethora of national and historical references across her body of work, that produce the difference between her and DeLaronde's poems—not every text needs to be a nationalistic polemic. Informed by cultural histories, Manie Tobie's rumination on the non-human world affected by the changing season emphasizes personal experience, hints at deeper relations borne through that larger history, perhaps even a disruption of that relationship between the human and non-human worlds as viewed through the closing of the door, and thus, represents a critical instance in Métis literary art.

#### **“She kicked the damn [door] down”: On Maria Campbell's *Halfbreed* and Other Works**

Maria Campbell's *Halfbreed* marks a watershed moment in Métis literature. In contrast to the writings of Smith and Goulet-Courchaine, Campbell's memoir would find a much broader audience and propel Métis narratives internationally. Arguably marking a symbolic end to *le grand silence*, her text offers a candid look at “what it [was] like to be a Halfbreed woman in our country,” including “the joy and sorrows, the oppressing poverty, the frustrations and the dreams” (Campbell, *Halfbreed* 2). Revealing the conditions that Indigenous women faced across Western Canada—from the ruinous weight of poverty to the virulent racism of settlers—and by framing her own story against “Ottawa's broken promises” (5), the dispossession following the Resistance of 1885, as well as its echoes through the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, Campbell's narrative not only marked a critical intervention in the discursive history of Western Canada, which sought to re-inscribe Métis presence, but signalled the emergence of a powerful new literary voice. Penned in an informal, even colloquial, English, Campbell's prose is direct and accessible. Although the book is not without moments of circumspection, it is notable for its compelling plotting, its auto-



ethnographic elements, haunting reflections, moments of disaffection (often directed at clergy, other non-Indigenous men, and some Indigenous men), and its occasional code-switching. In her deeply personal narrative, Campbell recounts her childhood in a road-allowance community in Saskatchewan, and examines her family's poverty, its causes, and consequences, as well as her marriage to a white man, her time in Vancouver, addictions, prostitution, followed by her return to the Prairies, and early Indigenous advocacy work in Edmonton. While occasionally blurring Métis and First Nations communities, she shows how the denigration of Indigenous peoples is related to settler-colonialism and white supremacy.

Published in 1973, in the wake of the ongoing waves of Indigenous political, social, and cultural reawakening, recovery, and re-organization, *Halfbreed* would not only speak truth about colonial realities, but inspire other Indigenous writers to follow suit. Emma LaRocque contends that Campbell's memoir forever "changed the course of Aboriginal writing ... in Canada," as it "inspired younger generations of Indigenous authors to re-inscribe the Canadian narrative," and to challenge "dominant interpretations of Canadian history" ("Contemporary" 135). Campbell "didn't just open the door for us," remarks Joe Welsh, "she kicked the damn thing down" (5). As Fred Shore notes, the "period after the Second World War ... was one of great upheaval for Aboriginal Peoples" (117); amid broader social upheavals, Black struggles against segregation and racial inequalities in the United States, the American Indian Movement was formed in 1968; in the 1960s, in Canada, First Nations political organization often grew out of movements of cultural recovery. Opposition to Canada's assimilationist White Paper of 1969, which proposed ending the legal relationship between Indigenous peoples and the Canadian state and dismantling the Indian Act ("Statement" 6), crystalized Indigenous political and social resolve. In his book *The Unjust Society*, Cree leader Harold Cardinal would equate the proposals in the White Paper

to “cultural genocide,” which sought “extermination through assimilation” (1). In terms of Métis organizing, Shore contends that “political and cultural reawakening began as an offshoot of First Nations agitation for change,” but “the Métis’ biggest problem ... was in separating themselves from First Nations political objectives” (117); not necessarily by disentangling from Indigenous communities, but by emphasizing Métis-specific concerns that reflected their particular national history and struggles with Canada.<sup>85</sup> Campbell’s memoir evidences some of the challenges of expressing Métis kinship with, while articulating distinction from, First Nations communities.

One complexity is in the term “Métis” itself as Campbell largely avoids the term in her memoir and uses the word “halfbreed” instead. At first glance, this starkly emphasizes the race-based discrimination that she suffered at the hands of white settlers and the settler-state. Though the term might indicate distancing between herself as an English- and Cree-speaking Métis and French-speaking Métis, her use of “halfbreed” also gestures to the terminological turmoil caused by Canada’s attempts to police Indigenous identity through the *Indian Act*. Shore argues that in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Métis “discovered that outsiders were adding people to their communities without their knowledge” (106), such as non-status Indians, and mixed-race Indigenous people, which emphasized a race-based definition as opposed to a national one rooted in the history and culture of the Red River Métis. Complicating the matter is how “HBC people,” the descendants and relatives of British men in the HBC and Indigenous women, who formed the English-speaking, Protestant parishes of Red River, were “unwillingly lumped in with the Métis under the catch-all term ‘Half-Breed’” (81), after Canada’s occupation of Red River. Adding to this turmoil is the shame and fear that followed 1885, which resulted, as discussed, in “*le grand silence*,” circumspection, assimilation and language loss, and, as Nicole St-Onge reveals in her

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<sup>85</sup> See John Weinstein’s *Quiet Revolution West: The Rebirth of Métis Nationalism* for more on Métis political re-organization in the 20<sup>th</sup> century; Fred Shore’s *Threads in the Sash*; or Jean Teillet’s *The North-West Is Our Mother*.

study of Métis identities in St-Laurent, Manitoba, how in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century “Métis” meant to be poor and French-Canadian (94). Campbell does not unpack these complications. Though her text gestures toward complexities of Métis diversity, it also generates ambiguity through its fluid references to the multiple identities of many of the persons about whom she writes, and through her use of English terminology.

Primarily written in English, interspersed with some Cree, and the occasional French word, *Halfbreed* approaches identity through intersections of kinship, class, language, and gender, not only detailing the diversity of her own heritage, but of other “Halfbreed families with names like Chartrand, Isbister, Campbell, Arcand, and Vandal” (*Halfbreed* 7). Born in 1940, to John (Dan) Campbell and Irene Dubuque, “on a trapline in northern Saskatchewan” (Barkwell, “Campbell” 1), Maria Campbell had a different upbringing compared to the writers examined above; she is not from the educated bourgeois class that made up the membership of L’Union nationale or her role models Malcolm Norris and Jim Brady. Opening her memoir with a brief account of Métis national history, and noting how some families “fled” north after the “Riel Rebellion” (*Halfbreed* 7), Campbell outlines her family’s provenance, from her Scottish great-grandfather Campbell’s journey to the North-West, and his marriage to her great-grandmother Campbell, “‘Cheechum,’ [who] was a niece of Gabriel Dumont” (11); her Grandma Dubuque, “a treaty Indian woman” (15), and her Grandpa Dubuque, a “Frenchman from Dubuque, Iowa ... [whose] grandfather had been a *coureur de bois*” (15). This dual opening, englobing chapters one and two, functions to situate Campbell within national and familial histories, and within the web of relations that inform the Métis as a people and nation.

Campbell’s linguistic heritage, “the Cree, Michif, and Saulteaux languages” (Barkwell,

“Campbell” 1) that she grew up speaking,<sup>86</sup> Anglo-centric literary influences from “Shakespeare, Dickens, Sir Walter Scott, and Longfellow” (Campbell, *Halfbreed* 14), as well as her rejection of Catholicism, all come to shape the form of her narrative, while her experiences with racism and white supremacy, which undergird settler-colonialism in the Prairies, shape the content of her narrative. This is not to say that these contexts do not converge across form and content, but the distinction clarifies what disparate elements represent as they intersect. It is in these ways that Campbell’s text becomes a pivot point in Métis literature that marks a turn toward Indigenous epistemologies, knowledges, teachings, traditions, languages, and marks a turn away from the French language, and encourages sharp criticism of Catholicism. Ironically, it also represents a broad shift toward, if not an embrace of, English as the new lingua franca of the West. Albeit at times auto-ethnographic, particularly in early chapters as she notes how her parents “taught [her and her siblings] to dance and to make music on the guitars and fiddles ... to use different herbs, roots and barks ... [and] weave baskets from the red willow” (18), Campbell subtly, irreverently pushes back against some of her community’s Catholic-informed social norms. In describing her community’s relationship with the Church, for instance, and how “the Halfbreeds were good Catholics and the Masses were always well attended regardless of weather or circumstances, because missing Mass was a mortal sin” (31), she portrays normalized cultural practices and beliefs, but, in emphasizing how their attendance, in spite of hardships, was due to the fear that “missing Mass was a mortal sin,” she also generates some dark humour, suggesting an absurdity in risking physical life for spiritual salvation. She develops this absurdity further in the next sentence as she describes how “[w]e could break every commandment ... during the week and be quite confident that the worst that could happen would be to say a few ‘Hail Mary’s’ when we

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<sup>86</sup> Campbell notes that her family “used a mixture of Cree and English at home” (87), in contradistinction to other families, such as “the Arcands ... [who] spoke French mixed with a little Cree” (23), and the “St. Denys,

went to confession” (31). While conceding that “Halfbreeds are very superstitious people ... [believing] in ghosts, spirits and any other kind of spook” (35), Campbell’s emphasis, via juxtaposition and subtle humour, on the inanity of church-related practices seems to be less of an indictment of the Métis, than a reflection of her own gradual disavowal of Catholicism, and criticism of the Church’s power over her community.

Initially subtle, her criticism of the Church would become more open and pointed, and sharply contrast the works of earlier writers from the Riels, Schmidt, DeLaronde, to L’Union nationale, who, although they occasionally criticized the Church, largely remained Catholic. Instead, with an affinity for, and building upon the disaffection of other Métis leaders and thinkers, like Brady and Norris, of whom, she notes, her father had been “a strong supporter” (72), she would turn away from the Church. There are differences, however, between Campbell and Brady. Where Brady’s repudiation of the Church was (initially) entangled in a rejection of spirituality, which was “no longer tenable in an enlightened age” (“Politics” 1), and informed by Marxist tenets, Campbell’s apostasy, shaped by the Church’s refusal to hold a Catholic funeral service for her mother because she had not received “the Last Sacrament before she died” (78), was a singular, personal decision that marked a turn *toward* Indigenous spirituality. Yet this turn was not immediate, or categorical, but was instead a process. When Campbell later married, she “refused to have anything to do with the Church, saying if it would not take [her] mother, it would never be good enough for [her],” and Campbell held an Anglican ceremony in a school gym. “Everyone was upset,” she writes, “but I didn’t care” (120). Despite this refusal, she would also later rely on Catholic institutions, entrusting her children to nuns at “the Providence Crèche” (151) in Calgary. Her text betrays echoes of Catholicism in its investments in Métis communities and messianic-like impulses to save her people (I touch on this further below).

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Villeneuve, Morrisettes and Cadieux ... [who] spoke more French than English or Cree” (23).

Campbell's is one of the first literary voices to represent historically underrepresented perspectives in Métis writing: the northern, trapping, hunting, working poor, Anglo Cree, urban poor, and most importantly, women. Although she is far from the first Métis woman to write, she writes from a markedly different position than do those that came before her, and in contrast to the works of earlier writers, gender and gendered experiences are central to Campbell's text as she traces her experiences from childhood, through adolescence, to adulthood, and reflects on the domestic expectations and the labours of women. After her mother died, Campbell "had to take over [the household] not only as mother but as father" (80), by feeding, clothing, and caring for her younger siblings when her father was on the trapline. Aside from the domestic expectations and struggles she faced, her text reveals some of the violence faced by young, racialized women in mid-20<sup>th</sup> century Western Canada, and how trauma accrues and fuels self-loathing. As Deanna Reder and Alix Shield show in their work uncovering an account of Campbell's rape at the hands of an RCMP officer, originally excised from Chapter 12 of the memoir, there also appear to have been limits to the extent of traumatic experiences that publishers were willing to publish.

It is in the stories of her female relations, her mother, and grandmothers, and her family's struggles after her mother's death, when "[e]verything seemed to go wrong" (80), and reflections on how her family had "never realized before what a pillar of strength [her mother] was, and how she had kept [their] lives running smoothly" (80), that Campbell demonstrates the centrality, and traditional, matriarchal status of women in Métis families and culture. However, the female pillar in Campbell's narrative seems to be less her mother than her Cheechum, who occupies an almost iconoclastic position, and who, as a constant source of wisdom and insight, models a different way of being and seeing compared to the other women in her family. Campbell's rejection of Catholicism is not simply due to her anger at the Church's mistreatment of her mother, but is

informed by the teachings of her Cheechum, who in contrast to her mother (and Grandmother Dubuque), demonstrates a strong, anti-Catholic influence. Cheechum not only “talked against” (31) the Church, but

taught [Campbell] ... that inside each thing a spirit lived, that it was vital too, regardless of whether it was only a leaf or a blade of grass, and by recognizing its life and beauty I was accepting God ... that heaven and hell were man-made and here on earth; that there was no death, only that the body becomes old from life on earth and that the soul must be reborn, because it is young; that when my body became old my spirit would leave and I’d come back and live again. (82)

There are significant divergences with Catholic theology in this passage, from the idea that non-human lifeforms have a spirit, to the indication of rebirth, or reincarnation, that suggest a broad, holistic, non-hierarchical epistemology. Campbell’s description of Cheechum “laugh[ing] when she saw the picture of the Devil turning people over with a fork in the depth of Hell’s fire” (82) seems to not only satirize Catholicism, drawing out the absurdity of its imagery, but also serves to strip away the fundamental senses of guilt and fear that informs Catholicism, and Christianity more broadly. There is a strong resonance between Cheechum’s criticism of Christianity and her criticism of colonialism. Campbell recounts an incident when she was wracked with shame at her family’s poverty after being teased for eating gophers, and said “ugly things” (50) to her parents; Cheechum took her aside, and explained to her how shame and resentment function as weapons of the colonizer. “Already they are using it on you. They try to make you hate your own people,” (51). This awareness of infighting because of internalized racism became Campbell’s “first real lesson” (51).

Throughout her narrative, Campbell shows how denigration, racism, and poverty induce

feelings of self-loathing and shame, which affect and reduce her community, and, in turn, inform her decision to distance herself from her people. Discussing marriage with a Métis man whom she “loved and wanted to be with forever”, Campbell is unable to envision a path through shame and poverty and rejects him. “Marry you? You’ve got to be joking,” she writes with a rare bit of dialogue, “I’m going to do something with my life besides make more Halfbreeds” (117). Tinged with self-deprecating humour, hinting at the limited prospects beyond childrearing and domestic labour for women with children, her words are also laden with conflicted self-hatred:

I wanted to cry. I couldn’t understand what was wrong with me. I loved Smoky and wanted to be with him forever, yet when I thought of him and marriage I saw only shacks, kids, no food, and both of us fighting. I saw myself with my head down and Smoky looking like an old man, laughing only when he was drunk. I loved my people so much and missed them if I couldn’t see them often. I felt alive when I went to their parties, and I overflowed with happiness when we would all sit down and share a meal, yet I hated all of it as much as I loved it. (117)

Campbell shows how the social and economic degradation of her community results in her own inability to envision a future, or at least, a healthy, proud future, *as* Métis. She would later marry a white man (119-20), while Smoky would move in with two white women (173). The final third of her text documents her spiraling economic, physical, and mental health conditions, domestic abuse, violence, racism, and her struggles after leaving her community, first journeying west to Alberta, then British Columbia. She would also attempt, for a time, to leave her identity behind: “My home and my people were a part of my life that I wanted to forget,” she writes, “and if calling myself French or Spanish or anything else would help I would do so” (139). She would eventually return to the Prairies, tackle her substance abuse problem, and become involved in



Indigenous organizations and activism, recognize structural causes of the deplorable conditions of Indigenous people, writing how the “system that fucked [her] up fucked up our men even worse. The missionaries had impressed upon us the feeling that women were a source of evil. This belief, combined with the ancient Indian recognition of the power of women, is still holding back ... our people today” (168). Campbell would also visit family in Saskatchewan, and reflect on how “Native people”, and ironically, “even the whites[,] have deteriorated”, describing a litany of issues from poverty, alcoholism, and violence that affected not only people but the land itself, where “[f]ires had swept through ... deliberately set by men out of work and money” (173). With echoes of Catholic influence, however, an almost messianic desire to save her people from their “horrible condition[s]” (177) propelled her community service. This impulse resonates with Riel and Brady, but where Riel’s messianism was expressed through Catholic theology, and Brady’s messianic resolve found root in Marxist-socialist theory, Campbell would express her desire, and shoulder her work, through Indigenous cultural recovery, spirituality, and language.

While her writing is not wholly novel in comparison to earlier writers—Sara Riel, Smith, and Goulet-Courchaine all included personal anecdotes in their writings—Campbell’s prolonged female-centrism is notable. Where earlier male writers, from Louis Riel, Schmidt, and L’Union nationale’s historical committee, among others, largely demonstrated a concerted male-centrism through the veneration of fathers, and the celebration of paternalism, informed by the tenets of the Catholic Church, which in turn obscured, subsumed, or elided female perspectives, and even female writers such as Sara Riel, Smith, and occasionally Goulet-Courchaine demonstrated some male-centrism in their self-effacing and focus on male figures, Campbell not only recognizes the “power of women” (168), but draws critical attention to men’s missteps. Aside from occasional reverential references to Norris and Brady, “who was [her] hero” and whom she invests with

almost messianic import and influence for their attempts to “demand justice for our people” (73), Campbell would generally not venerate male figures. Her narrative instead becomes a sort of accounting of historical and contemporary men’s personal and political failures. From Riel and Dumont’s defeat in the North-West Resistance, to her father’s political frustrations, when his “shoulders were all stooped; [and] he looked like an old man” (75), to her later experiences with Indigenous men in political activism and movements in the 1960s, Campbell builds a litany of male failures. Her account of Stan Daniels,<sup>87</sup> who was concerned “about the plight of Native girls on the street [and] ... bitter about what the white system had done to our men” (169), and with whom she appears to have had a falling out because “as government money became available, as well as public recognition, the seemingly inevitable changes which come to leaders happened” (169), suggests deficiency because of how power often corrupts and divorces leaders from those they represent. Campbell’s female-centric turn then seems to be as much a repudiation of these men’s failures, and their tactics and strategies, which are too closely associated with white men and settler-colonial ideologies, as it is an embrace of Indigenous women and ways of knowing.

Campbell’s turn away from European epistemologies also informs her perspectives and articulations of identity. Although she offers insights into the complexities of Indigenous identity and kinship early in her narrative, when recounting her encounter with her “brown- and black-eyed relatives ... [who] despite the fact that they were treaty Indians ... were more Halfbreed than we were” (43), she does not elaborate precisely how they were more Halfbreed—in culture, tradition, race, or biological origins—but emphasizes their historical connection to “Hudson’s Bay Scots” (43). Her description of “Indian relatives on nearby reserves” earlier in her text is another clear articulation of dissimilarities, as she remarks how “they were completely different from us—quiet when we were noisy, dignified even at dances and get-togethers. Indians were

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<sup>87</sup> A Métis from St. Paul, Alberta, Stan Daniels was president of the Alberta Métis Association in 1969.

very passive—they would get angry at things done to them but would never fight back, whereas Halfbreeds were quick-tempered—quick to fight, but quick to forgive and forget” (25). Campbell notes, however, that while her family “went to the Indians’ Sundances and special gatherings, but somehow ... never fitted in,” that they were also recognized as relatives, as “their old people [First Nations Elders] ... were good,” and even though “prejudiced ... because we were kin they came to visit and our people treated them with respect” (25). Why might First Nations have been more passive? Did disagreements really stem from the fact that “[First Nations] had land and security, [and Métis] had nothing”? (25). Might cultural reasons have contributed to differences? Much remains unsaid, hidden behind broad generalizations. Even as details function to highlight difference, aside from the initial historical framing of the first chapter, they are decontextualized and de-historicized, and seem stereotypical. It is as if her reflections on childhood experiences are bounded by the impression of others (her parents’ or her Cheechum’s influence; possibly the memoir’s editors), whereas later, Campbell seems to offer more of her own insights. Her female-centrism, and involvement in Native political and activist organizations, informs her recognition of Indigenous kinship across cultures and nations. While her expressions of broader kinships—she concludes her narrative with the admission that she has “brothers and sisters, all over the country” (184)—suggest a pan-Indigenous identity, respect for shared ancestry, and recognition of common experiences with colonialism, and thus flirts with identitary conflation, it also seems strategic. Although she does not deny specific Indigenous national identities, as she refers to Stan Daniels as a “Halfbreed through and through” who was “raised on bannock, rabbits and tea” (169), and identifies “Marie Smallface, [as] a Blood woman” (177), her text is less an explicit Métis nationalist narrative than an account of Indigenous experiences in Western Canada through the fluid identities of a Métis woman. Despite her initial claims to show the “joys and sorrows”

of being “a Halfbreed woman in this country” (2), her textual focus on “sorrows” maintains an unrelenting pessimism. Even as it demonstrates an abiding concern with the welfare of Métis and other Indigenous communities, her text also signals a critical break in language and underlying epistemologies from earlier Métis literary traditions, and produces discursive tension in its many contradictions, and its claiming of French Métis history, like the struggles for “rights” (1) in Red River in 1869, against the “prejudice of the white Protestant settlers” (1), while also turning away from, and eliding, elements—like francophone and Catholic traditions—which are not only central to that earlier tradition, but as articulated by earlier writers, played a significant role in the emergence of the nation itself.

*Halfbreed* has been the subject of much academic study. Kristina Fagan and colleagues show in their survey that the memoir’s “critical reception” (257) falls into broad categories: 1) an “expression of a pan-tribal ‘Native’ identity” (260); 2) an articulation of Métis national identity, “originating in the Red River Region of Manitoba and carried forward by the strong influence of Cheechum” (262); 3) an “example of the hybridity of Aboriginal identity” (262); 4) a case study of resistance against colonialism, as recent critics “focused on contextualizing *Halfbreed*’s acts of resistance within a particular historical place” (266); and 5) a nexus fostering community and “connecting Aboriginal people to one another” (267). Despite the breadth of scholarship on the text, Fagan and her co-authors seem to agree with Shawna Ferris’s contention that it “remains underanalyzed in the academy” (Ferris 130), arguing that “[a]fter all the critical attention that has been paid to *Halfbreed*, there is still a need for a study that traces, in historical and regional context, the variety of identities that Maria Campbell ‘does’ (and does not do) in *Halfbreed*, paying attention to how she enacts kinship and culture, and how she interacts with colonial society as well as with an emerging Native movement in Canada” (Fagan et al. 272).

Fagan and her co-authors offer yet another approach, suggesting that a “post-positivist realist” (268) reading practice that may “acknowledg[e] the multiplicity of identities that are at work in the text” (268-69). What is more, they reveal through a survey of how the text is taught in university settings that *Halfbreed* remains an important, influential work with which numerous scholars continue to engage, but that either because of the lack of a critical edition, and the text’s mid-20<sup>th</sup> century focus (which does not touch on more recent developments—either political or community organization and experiences), many scholars are turning to other Métis texts (270). Jennifer Adese argues that Fagan and her co-authors “missed the opportunity ... to conclude with an affirmation of the validity of a Métis-specific reading practice” and critiques their inability to “identify or develop ... a reading of *Halfbreed* that is connected to Métis worldviews beyond that of ‘nationalism’” (“The New People” 66). While she suggests this is a gap in the criticisms of Campbell’s text, it also speaks to broad gaps in the reading of Métis literature, which reduce cultural and linguistic diversity, trans-national histories, class, education, and other nuances into general categories. In these ways, *Halfbreed* continues to challenge easy categorization.

Prior to *Halfbreed*, Campbell co-wrote *Many Laws* (1969), “a handbook that illuminated many of the challenges that Indigenous people face when [moving] to urban spaces” (Stott n.p.) Following her memoir, Campbell penned a number of children’s books, including *People of the Buffalo: How the Plains Indians Lived* (1975), *Little Badger and the Fire Spirit* (1977), and *Riel’s People: How the Métis Lived* (1978). Campbell also turned to radio, film, and theatre. She wrote a film, *The Red Dress* (1978), and collaborated as writer and director on other film projects in the 1980s. Her foray into theatre resulted in *The Book of Jessica*, which, after a theatrical run in the early 1980s, culminated in the publication of the play with a dialogue between Campbell and the non-Indigenous leading actor (and co-writer), Linda Griffiths, as *The Book of Jessica: A*

*Theatrical Transformation* (1989).<sup>88</sup> The play is based-on Campbell's life and experiences, and the dialogue between her and Griffiths is a complex text that layers Griffiths's reminiscence and Campbell's reflections and responses (which are often transcribed from oral recordings), on their fraught collaboration. The dialogue touches on issues of colonialism and racism, and difficulties in the improvisational creative processes of producing the play. Questions of appropriation are complicated by Campbell's defence that the lead role can be played by a non-Indigenous actor due to her own non-Indigenous ancestry; however, the question of appropriation persists through the personal aspects of her life that Griffiths explores. Campbell felt at times that Griffiths was "bleeding ... [her] dry" (*Jessica* 15); and later, watching Griffiths "playing back [Campbell's] own self-hatred" (31) on stage, she struggled with the emotional and spiritual toll. Leaving aside possible contractual obligations, Campbell alleges that her continued participation in the project was rooted in her desire to serve community, stating that her "reason for doing anything, is that it's for [her] community" (69); because she is "a community worker, the work has to be useful to the community, has to be healing" (69). Even as it obscures other possible motivations, this impetus for "healing" expresses an interesting, almost utilitarian purpose for art, or committed art as opposed to art for art's sake. Elaborating, Campbell argues that art is medicine. "Art is the most powerful ... main healing tool," she states. Noting how the "artist in the old communities was the most sacred person of all" (84), Campbell gestures also to the spiritual aspects of art. I touch on art as healing in the next chapter through Jo-Ann Episkenew's literary criticism.

Campbell's *Stories of the Road Allowance People*, first published in 1995, is also an intriguing text. Unlike any other work of previously published Métis writing in its concerted representation of Métis oral storytelling traditions, this collection of eight (nine in the revised edition published in 2010) poetic stories, that range from darkly humourous tales of death and

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<sup>88</sup> See Scott and Skelly for more on Campbell's broad career.

religion, to poignant and tragic reflections on the effects of racism and colonialism, weaves together an oral history of Métis and First Nations experiences on the Prairies in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The collection also notably contrasts Campbell's memoir in its return to men's stories—in terms of both subject and content, as well as in provenance (4). Where in *Halfbreed*, Campbell's "Cheechum," was central to the transmission of history and story, in *Stories* it is "the old men who became [her] teachers" (4). Aside from its gender elements, the collection's stylistic approach is also striking. Speaking about the stories' structure and verse-like line breaks, Campbell admits that although she had no "formal training, in English," she was "aware of breath" (qtd. in Gingell, "One Small Medicine" 191) as she wrote, and sought to emphasize the orality of the stories. Beyond the line breaks, the linguistic deviation from standard English is perhaps the most apparent characteristic of the collection. Gathered from male Métis Elders largely from her community, and translated into a "Village English" ("Introduction," *Stories* 2) that resonates with the "dialect and rhythm" (4) of her village, which evokes a spoken Michif with echoes of Cree and French in its pronunciation, these stories complicate divisions between oral and literary culture.

Plains Indigenous (and not uniquely Métis) cultures are some of the stories' abiding concerns. Although "road allowance people" generally refers to the Métis, in this collection, this is not exclusive, but rather seems to refer to a broader group which include First Nations peoples, and perhaps gestures to the complex, close-knit, relations between some Métis and First Nations communities in Saskatchewan. Moreover, the stories speak to common and occasionally distinct experiences under colonialism, and the struggles of cultural loss. However, Campbell's repeated use of the term "halfbreeds" as opposed to the term "Métis," much like in her memoir, also tends to complicate the cultural landscape she attempts to portray, conflating groups (French-speaking

Métis, their English-speaking descendants, English-speaking Halfbreeds, and possibly non-status and status First Nations) under one term and obscuring particular cultural and linguistic histories. This inconsistent, but periodic conflation of diverse, yet related, groups not only generates some ambiguity in terms of the cultural histories of the persons or characters Campbell represents, but troubles the *distinctiveness* between groups, culture, and even nations.

In “La Beau Sha Shoo,” Campbell offers a recognizably Métis story, when “Ole Arcand” seems to die, visit heaven, and drink wine with Jesus, only to return with new, remarkable fiddle songs. Filled with familiar cultural and national symbols such as the “beaded velvet vest” and the “Red River sash” (51), and multiple references to the North-West Resistance, and the influences of Catholicism, the story operates within an obvious Métis cultural landscape—but one in which culture is under pressure. When the narrators wish to dress like “Ole Arcand,” and ask him where to obtain sashes for themselves, they are disappointed to learn that they cannot:

Well you know  
 he tell us dat after da big fight at Batoche.  
 Dah one where Mooshoom Gabe  
 he organize all da Halfbreeds an dey get Louis Riel?  
 Well dat time.  
 I guess after dey take Riel  
 dah soldiers dey catch up to dah peoples dat was running away  
 an dey take all dere guns an bullets.  
 An dah soldiers  
 dey take dah sashes too.  
 Boy dats funny issn it?



why would dey take dah sashes? (53)

Through Arcand, Campbell suggests that Métis cultural symbols are as dangerous to Canada as guns and bullets, and that the destruction of the Métis Nation also required the confiscation of its symbols. However, she also suggests through the narrative of Arcand's fiddle playing that some culture, particularly when informed by relationships with place and the non-human world, cannot be as easily taken away because it continually informs cultural production. Ole Arcand "got one song from dah wind at Batoche," and "anudder one / he say dat his horse he give it to him" (55), but, in a critical, and a rare and positive, acknowledgment of Christianity's persistent influence, Campbell recounts how Arcand's most beautiful song was taught to him by "dah Jesus" (62). Despite its dark subject matter, the story is humourous and hopeful.

In contrast, with "Jacob," Campbell offers a tragic story of residential school's impact on First Nations' identities and families. The eponymous character, after years in residential school, returns to his reserve to discover his parents are dead, and "nobody he knowed him cause he gots a new name" (83). Jacob eventually meets and marries a young woman and starts a family, but an encounter some years later, when a priest came with the RCMP to apprehend his children and send them to residential school, ends in tragedy when the priest reveals that Jacob and his wife have the same father. Jacob's wife commits suicide and Jacob is traumatized. For many years he is "jus dead inside" (89). The sight of his granddaughter some years later heals him, from then, "[a]n for dah res of hees life / he fight dah government to build schools on the / reservation" (90). Though it broadly demonstrates the disruptive and destructive effects of settler colonialism on Indigenous families and communities regardless of nation, with its allusion to the reservation (Campbell uses American instead of Canadian terminology), the apprehension of children for residential schools, and inter-generational trauma that these government policies and actions

engender, the story emphasizes primarily, albeit not exclusively, First Nations' experiences.

Memory and remembrance form a common thread across both stories, and the collection as a whole, as the stories often return to, and explore the processes and transmission of cultural memory. Warren Cariou argues that the stories represent “the work of memory in the creation and perpetuation of community” (“Oral Memory” 194) as they function to support and maintain community through remembrance. This function is also linked to the issue of language and the difference between oral and written storytelling, or as Campbell writes, how:

Dah whitemans  
 he can look back for thousands of years  
 cause him  
 he write everything down.  
 But us peoples  
 we use dah membering  
 an we pass it on by telling stories and singing songs.  
 Sometimes we even dance dah membering. (80-81)

Cariou contends that “the Métis way, [of] ‘membering,’ is shown to have its own strengths, or at least to represent a distinct and viable alternative to the use of books” (195); yet the viability of such an alternative is contingent upon an incomplete view of Métis language arts that is in part obscured by the conflation of different Indigenous groups. The quote above from Campbell is drawn from her story “Jacob,” which, as I showed, appears to be a primarily First Nations, and less Métis, narrative. Ascribing this story to the Métis, and suggesting that only “dah whitemans / ... / write everything down” (80), and that Indigenous people do not, obscures historical Métis literary production. For Riel, historical memory was certainly transmitted through writing as

evidenced by his essay “Les Métis du Nord-Ouest” as well as the discursive efforts of L’Union nationale and the efforts of Jim Brady. Cariou contends that it is much more “difficult to recover a storytelling tradition after an interruptive event than it is to recover a literate tradition”, because it requires “physical proximity, performance, and a shared communitarian experience” (196); however, recovering a literate tradition is also made difficult when considered alongside historical challenges of publication and dissemination, and the fact that historical Métis writing was largely penned in French, and that many Métis lost their French, thus producing additional distance between contemporary readers and historical literary production. That said, Campbell’s point about how Indigenous people pass on memory “by telling stories and singing songs” (81) resonates with class-based distinctions of Métis writing, and how through the 19<sup>th</sup> and early-to-mid 20<sup>th</sup> century, literary production was the purchase of an educated middle-class rather than the hunting and trapping classes that later formed the road allowance people. In locating these stories amid the “cultural and linguistic variation” (Neuhaus 24) of broader Métis communities and contexts of Indigenous literatures, and noting how “the collection is very much rooted” (24) in Campbell’s community, Marieke Neuhaus asserts that the collection shows “intellectual sovereignty” (26) as a form of “collective autobiography” (27). This intellectual sovereignty is rooted in the ways that Campbell “deconstructs the English language to allow for the continuation of *Métis* cultural memory on *Métis* rather than the colonizer’s terms” (Neuhaus 40).

Lastly, there is strong criticism of the Catholic Church and clergy in Campbell’s *Stories*, but through its continued presence, there is also an acknowledgement of its persistent influence on Métis communities. Pondering the treatment of Catholicism in Campbell’s tale of the Rougarou, Pamela Sing suggest that Campbell produces “[un] récit [qui] voudrait que l’influence de l’Église sur la communauté soit exclusivement négative,” but in doing so, “non seulement

dénigre-t-il le catholicisme qui, pour nombre de Métis, fait intégralement partie de leur réalité, mais aussi, en traitant d'idiots tous ceux qui croient au rougarou, il manque de respect envers plus d'un aîné" ("Mission" 205).<sup>89</sup> However, given that the "Prees ... give anudder / woman a bad name / jus to make good Catlics out of dah peoples" (49), Campbell's negative framing of the Church through the priest is less of an indictment of Métis beliefs in the Rougarou than it is an indictment of the Church and its patriarchal, misogynistic denunciation of the Rougarou, and its attendant demonization of women and female sexuality. As the narrator's mother emphasizes how "Josephine [the Rougarou] he was a good woman an / George [Church follower] he was jus a stupid man" (50), it signals a more nuanced view on Rougarous, not bounded by Christianity's Manichean rigidity, but open to more relationalities. While Catholicism is shown in a negative light in the Rougarou story, the story of Ole Arcand, in which "Jesus" gave him his most beautiful fiddle song, reveals how Campbell does not always (though she often does) portray Christianity negatively. Yet Sing's larger point on Campbell's denigration of Catholicism is apt. Given Campbell's seminal role in contemporary Métis literature, and influence on Indigenous writers in the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries,<sup>90</sup> which we can trace in the work of later Métis writers such as Gregory Scofield, there is an impression of a broader rejection of Christianity in Métis communities than is accurate. Critically, as Sing reminds us, despite "[le] nombre de ses paires [qui] la considèrent comme leur 'mère littéraire' – [Campbell] ne parle pas pour tous les Métis" ("Mission" 206). Might her periodic conflations and pan-Indigenizing language similarly demonstrate how Campbell's perspective and her particular community experiences overshadow other (linguistic, religious, and geographic) Métis communities, cultures, and realities?

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<sup>89</sup> The Rougarou is roughly a syncretic mix between European werewolves and Indigenous trickster figures.

<sup>90</sup> Campbell's influence extends beyond the literary, and her monumental contributions to Métis culture, Indigenous political and cultural advocacy, have garnered widespread recognition, resulting in numerous awards including an appointment as an Officer of the Order of Canada in 2008, honorary doctorates, and the Saskatchewan's Lieutenant

### **Recovery and Resurgence: Métis Writing in the 1970s and 1980s**

In the years following Campbell's early literary success, broader interest in Métis stories, histories, and narratives grew immensely (particularly after the Métis's inclusion along with First Nations and the Inuit as Indigenous peoples recognized by Canada in its repatriated constitution in 1982), but literary production lagged. There were limited numbers of Métis writers, working in related fields (academic, education, journalism) like Howard Adams, Emma LaRocque, Olive Dickason, and Anne Anderson. Non-Métis, and non-Indigenous, historians also played a significant role in recovering, editing, and publishing older narratives, memoirs, and poems. In this process of cultural and literary recovery, curious anachronisms arose; Campbell's *Halfbreed* for instance, precedes the publication of most of Riel's poetry, aside from a few poems published in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but also arguably opens up literary space for his recovery, and the recovery of other voices. Cultural recovery and education dominated the late 1970s and early 1980s, and out of such recovery emerged narratives of lived experiences, fictionalized semi-autobiographies like Mosionier's *In Search of April Raintree*, and the resurgence in literary production burgeoned into a Métis literary renaissance that continues in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### **Recovering the Past: Culture, Language, Stories**

I do not suggest that these categories—recovery, resurgence, and renaissance—are clear-cut, but, even as they are somewhat messy, they offer a means of conceptualizing broader trends of Métis literary production. While Adams, LaRocque, Anderson, and Dickason were working on academic, educational, and cultural texts in the 1970s, other Métis writers like Adrian Hope and George Morissette were producing works of poetry. What is more, older Métis voices were being brought into the present by the work of Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars, writers,

and editors: Louis Goulet's memoir, *L'Espace de Louis Goulet* (1976), edited by Émile Pelletier, later translated into English by Ray Ellenwood in 1980 as *Vanishing Spaces*; Peter Erasmus's memoir *Buffalo Days and Nights* (1976), edited by Irene Spry; Louis Riel's early poetry in *Poésies de jeunesse* (1977), edited by Gilles Martel, Glen Campbell, and Thomas Flanagan; as well as *The Collected Writings of Louis Riel / Les écrits complets de Louis Riel* (1985), edited by George Stanley, Raymond Huel, Martel, Campbell, and Flanagan.<sup>91</sup>

Although these texts are important in their own right, revealing a wealth of knowledge, economic activities, from Goulet's freighting, to Erasmus's work as an interpreter, and diverse experiences across the homeland, their belated publication raises issues between Métis voices—that is, they produce a tension between historical and contemporary Métis literatures in a sense because the publication of these historical Métis voices re-focuses attention on historical Métis narratives, possibly at the expense of contemporary lived narratives. They do not necessarily signal a contemporary engagement by Métis writers with historical Métis voices, and position Métis voices, narratives, and perspectives as *historical* instead of acknowledging their continued presence. Yet, their publication also marks an important step in a broad movement toward Métis cultural recovery and national reconstruction. Goulet's memoir, in particular, published by Les Éditions Bois-Brûlés, “[une] maison d'édition franco-manitobaine consacrée à la conservation du patrimoine culturel métis” (Sing, “Production” 127), gestures to the intersection between history, politics, and literature at work in Métis letters. This trend of recovering older Métis voices would often maintain male-centric perspectives, but Mary Jordan's book on Sara Riel's correspondence with her brother, *To Louis From Your Sister Who Loves You Sara Riel* (1974), Jock Carpenter's book on Marie Rose Smith, *Fifty Dollar Bride* (1977), and René Juéry's study of Marie-Thérèse

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<sup>91</sup> Numerous academic and creative works by non-Indigenous writers, from Margaret Arnett MacLeod and W.L. Morton's book *Cuthbert Grant of Granttown* (1963), Rudy Wiebe's novel *The Scorched-Wood People* (1977), and

Goulet-Courchaine, *Manie Tobie: Femme du Manitoba* (1979), also brought women's writing and experiences to light.

Contemporary Métis writers would generally endeavour toward cultural and national recovery in different ways, emphasizing contemporary presence as they worked in academic, educational, or broader community settings. Howard Adams would take a polemic approach in *Prison of Grass* (1975), interweaving a scathing historical account of the Métis's dispossession following the 19<sup>th</sup> century resistances, with some reflective personal anecdotes detailing his own struggles with white supremacy and racism in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. Borrowing rhetorically from Black social justice movements, such as the Black Panthers, and informed by the work of Frantz Fanon, Adams would challenge dominant settler-written histories of the Métis. He would also critique Indigenous "cultural nationalism" (170) for the risks it posed in diverting energy away from the struggle of national liberation, and criticize "fair-skinned Métis [that] have integrated into the mainstream ... [and who] have denied their Métis background" (175), warning that the idea of integrating into mainstream society reinforces rather than challenges white supremacy. Emma LaRocque would contest the concretized and racist representations of Indigenous people in popular media and offer suggestions for how to better approach Indigenous topics in her book, *Defeathering the Indian* (1975). Olive Dickason, after a long career in fashion journalism, would turn to academia; in 1977 she became "the first scholar in Canada to receive a PhD in Indigenous history" (Cohn n.p.). Her dissertation, "The Myth of the Savage and the Beginning of French Colonialism in the Americas," would be published by the University of Alberta Press in 1984. Her hugely influential textbook, *Canada's First Nations: A History of Founding Peoples*, was published in 1991.<sup>92</sup> Anne Anderson would take another approach, writing some 93 books on

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George Woodcock's biography of *Gabriel Dumont* (1978), to name a few also influenced Métis literary production.  
<sup>92</sup> See Heather Cohn's entry in *The Canadian Encyclopedia* for more on Dickason, including a longer list of her

Cree language education, local Indigenous culture, communities, and familial histories, and a variety of historical stories, myths, and legends (Barkwell, “Anne Gairdner”).<sup>93</sup>

Although not examples of creative writing, these texts, and others produced by these writers and thinkers, would contribute to Métis literature by fostering greater knowledge and familiarity with Métis history and Indigenous languages, and arguably adding to that parallel canon of non-literary texts crucial for the interpretation of Métis literary texts. However, they would also signal a broader shift toward the English-language in Métis literature. This is not to say that there had been no texts produced in English before, but it does reveal how contemporary Métis literary production would reassert itself primarily through the English-language. Aside from Goulet’s memoir, and other texts on the Métis produced by Emile Pelletier, the work of Henri Létourneau, exploring French-Canadian and Métis stories, in *Henri Létourneau Raconte* (1980), and Marcien Ferland’s work with Métis songs, such as Falcon’s “La Grenouillère,” and with Auguste Vermette in his memoir *Au temps de la Prairie: l’histoire des Métis de l’Ouest canadien racontée par Auguste Vermette, neveu de Louis Riel* (2000), there is little Métis literary production in French in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, and scant creative or artistic literary production. This is not surprising given the concern expressed half a century earlier by Guillaume Charette about the effects of English language dominance, not to mention government policies of assimilation, and the consequences of integration, that reduced the French language, among Métis and non-Métis, to a fraction of what it once was on the Prairies. Where in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century literary expressions had been at its core articulated in French, contemporary Métis literature would re-emerge from the forgotten years, through the social justice movements

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academic publications. See the Olive Dickason Collection, <http://www.metismuseum.ca/browse/index.php/13135> hosted by the Gabriel Dumont Institution for more on her career, including newspaper articles, and other writings.



of the 1960s, to re-affirm, and re-articulate Métis narratives in English. Francophone Métis writing has not resurged the same way that Anglophone Métis writing has, and remains largely relegated to local journals and newspapers. Although French texts about the Métis exist, few are authored by francophone Métis writers. The resurgence of Métis writing in English parallels the political re-organization of Métis communities: articulated primarily in English, with English as the new lingua-franca.

### **The Germination of Contemporary Métis Literature**

Whereas we might see the early 1970s as a sort of “heyday in [Indigenous] publishing” (183), Greg Young-Ing argues that a “rash of books [by Indigenous writers in the early 1970s] did not manage to [then] carve a respectable, ongoing niche for Aboriginal literature in the Canadian publishing industry” (183). What followed was a dramatic decline in the publication of Indigenous authors in the late 1970s and early 1980s. However, alongside writers in academic, educational, or community settings, Métis creative writers continued to produce.

#### **Adrian Hope**

In Alberta, Adrian Hope, who had long been associated with the Métis Association of Alberta, being its president from 1960 to 1967, penned poems in the 1960s that touched on themes of Métis history, identity, and experiences, with a particular focus on northern Alberta. These were eventually published by the Alberta Federation of Metis Settlements Associations in 1982 as *Stories in Rhyme*. Stylistically, Hope’s poems display limited technical range, prosaic imagery, and a forced, rigid, and often repetitive rhyme scheme. However, thematically, the

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<sup>93</sup> While not complete, this list gestures to the surge of texts about and by Métis. Other notable contributions include Métis political leader Harry Daniels’s *We Are the New Nation: The Metis and National Native Policy* (1979), and

poems offer a notable scope of topics and concerns in comparison to other Métis texts from the 1960s and early 1970s. As Campbell did in her memoir, Hope opens his collection with a narrative of the Métis Nation: “They started a new nation / With equality for all. / But Ottawa’s oppression / Finally made it fall” (6), and through anaphoric use of “they,” strikingly emphasizes the collective nature of the nation, though, for Hope, the nation seems built on a more traditional conception of racial hybridity, the Métis emerging “[f]rom Indian and the white man” (9), than a distinct culture. In contrast to many earlier writers, Hope does not exalt Riel as a martyr or as a messiah, but describes him as “an educated man” and “a patriot, a leader,” and ironically refers to the cause of his hanging as a ““misdeed”” (8). While his deemphasis on Riel might be read as circumspection, a careful broaching of a sensitive topic, the constant anaphora of “they” suggests that, for Hope, the story of the nation is less about individuals than it is about the collective.

Hope touches on issues of “oppression,” and racism, writing that “Because my skin is darker / Even if my eyes are grey / To get a job it’s harder / And smaller is my pay” (22), but he does not dwell on such issues with as much intensity as other writers. Demonstrating a certain pragmatism, he urges Indigenous people to “remember ... don’t try to defend / The old ways like it used to be. / Just stay in school and don’t be a fool” (17). Paired with his deemphasis on Riel, who is only named once in the collection, Hope’s pragmatism makes clear how he does not rely on messianic figures, but instead encourages the Métis to help themselves. Hope moves away from darker themes, focusing not on deprecation and the “the white man who breaks the rules / For his own gain” (26), but writing cheerful poems of Indigenous spirituality, customs, and experiences with the non-human world. Aside from the odd reference, like “a wooden cross” or “Judgment Day” (36), there are few allusions to Christianity, and with references to “the Great Spirit” (26), Hope evokes an Indigenous spirituality throughout his collection.

Finally, Hope also wrote from a position of relative privilege compared to some writers, with ready access to Métis-owned lands through the Alberta Métis Settlements:

Have you ever been to Kikino  
 When spring is in the air,  
 With birds' gay songs afloat,  
 And the sun shines everywhere?  
 As the Lone Pine Creek goes roaring by  
 Beneath the big blue sky,  
 Oh! I'm glad I live in Kikino,  
 When spring is in the air. (67)

This poem has an almost idyllic aspect to it that is notably not rooted in the past, but rather is in the present—the poet, or speaking voice, *continues* to “live” with and within nature. It reveals a less urban Métis experience that simultaneously resonates with but also contrasts road allowance experiences as it articulates a sort of comfortable familiarity, and more certain relationship with place and even collective ownership. Also, in contrast to other “nature” poems like DeLaronde’s “La Vallée de Qu’Appelle” or Manie Tobie’s “Octobre,” it inscribes, through “baseball games” and reference to “town” (67), this territory with much more human activity and community; that is, it more explicitly interweaves human and non-human worlds.

### **George Morrissette**

In Manitoba, George Morrissette, the child of Ukrainian parents, but adopted-son of a Métis family in St. Boniface, would not only turn to poetry, but pursue a formal education in the arts. He earned a Bachelor of Fine Arts from the University of Manitoba in 1960, and following

a brief stint at the CBC, moved to New York to pursue a Master of Fine Arts. As J.R. Léveillé explains, Morrissette began to write poetry in 1971, and found some success with texts published “[dans] plusieurs revues littéraires, comme *NeWest Review*, *Arts Manitoba*, *Prairie Fire*, [and] *The Pemmican Journal*” (365). He wrote three collections of poetry from the late 1970s to early 1980s: *Prairie Howl* (1977), *Up Against the Sky* (1979), and *Finding Mom at Eaton’s* (1981). Borrowing literary techniques, themes, and even aesthetics from Allen Ginsberg and other Beat poets, Morrissette produced postmodern texts, reflecting economic, and cultural alienation, not only as an urban working-class subject, but as Métis under postmodern capitalism. I reproduce here an excerpt from *Prairie Howl*:

Though Louis Riel was a distant uncle  
 she [Morrissette’s mother] rarely spoke of him (unlike today)  
 Careful about that force around the Tabernacle.  
 Careful. When it speaks you must follow

& he poet priest

New York gone starving hysterical mad in Montana  
 called back to these wars that never want to end  
 that voice that gladly makes you give yourself away

held up the Crucifix against the coming  
 of Chicago & jumbo jets & boating at Waskau  
 led us to take this on head on with pitchforks  
 & flint guns

& will do so today

& now waking in a coulee with our dead

& now having to feed the kids

& Crucifix still in hands handcuffed

& gumbo Regina forever accursed

& how later beerbellies farting on car seats. (9)

In part a lament over his adoptive father's death in St. Boniface and litany over alienating horrors of modernism, and marked by the counter-culture movement and drug-experimentation sweeping North America in the late 1960s and early 1970s, *Prairie Howl* is a lengthy, multi-part poem that relies on stream of consciousness techniques to portray grim, lived, experiences in Regina and Winnipeg. In the above excerpt, Morrisette reproduces the narrative of Riel's return to Canada and his leadership of the North-West Resistance through both the intimation of family lore, his mother's "distant uncle," and the impassioned, hyperbolic language of Ginsberg and the Beats, in his description of Riel, "poet priest" as "gone starving hysterical mad" (9). Morrisette not only collapses past and present, but seemingly alludes to Riel's visions, with the compelling imagery of Riel holding the crucifix against symbols of modern society, such as "Chicago & jumbo jets & boating at Waskau" (9). Morrisette also introduces a measure of criticism of Riel, particularly in the suggestion that Riel led the Métis against the forces of modernism with only "pitchforks / & flint guns" (9). Through the anaphoric repetition of an ampersand at the start of numerous lines, the narrative seems to branch into new perspectives, accruing the lived-experiences and struggles of multiple Métis individuals. In juxtaposing images from after the resistance, while some awoke in coulees surrounded by their dead, and others were "handcuffed" in "Regina forever accursed," with the ugliness of "beerbellies farting on car seats" (9), he draws a link between the cruelties of

the past and the melancholic present. He would explore similar themes in much of his work.

In contrast to *Prairie Howl*, Morrissette would offer in “Le violon en Saint-Boniface” a more celebrative text “conçu en langue orale métisse ... [et] transcrit par l’auteur” (Léveillé 366). It was originally penned for the short film *Le Métis enragé* (1986). This French-language poem stands out in part because of its novelty; as Léveillé notes, “bien que bilingue, Morrissette écrit presqu’exclusivement en anglais” (365), which is suggestive of the dominance of English across the Prairies and its effects on Métis literary production. However, in describing a musical competition at *Le Festival du Voyageur*, a yearly celebration of francophone culture and fur trade history, Morrissette turns his attention positively toward francophone Métis culture and reaffirms the continued significance of St. Boniface in the French-Métis cultural imaginary:

violence violoneuse  
 du lac Winnipeg en tornade tonnerre  
 tempête arctique sur la prairie  
 effrayante, déchirante  
 fait sauter ce violon  
 oublie les règles  
 donne-les-y le diable en métis  
 au moins qu’on danse  
 dansez toujours! (“Le Violon en Saint-Boniface” 369)

The short lines and alliteration impart the poem with musical qualities, and staccato effect, as if each syllable were a beat, reproducing the driving rhythms of the violins, and the stomping feet of the musicians. The imagery resonates not only with Maria Campbell’s “La Beau Sha Shoo,” in the suggestion that the music is born(e) of and on the winds of Lake Winnipeg, demonstrating

again how Métis culture is shaped through relationships with land and place, but also with Campbell's claim in "Jacob," in which Indigenous memory is often evoked through dance. The resonances of the poem are multiple—from its context in a celebration of fur trade history, to the reproduction of such long held winter gatherings where dance and music featured, which even Louis Riel wrote about: "Cet hiver dans les fêtes / ... / Après souper, la danse; / Le violon" (4: 229)—and though brief, offers a rich, robust representation.

Morrisette produced one more collection of poetry, *Michif Cantos* (2000), which Lise Gaboury-Diallo describes as having "une thématique dense et complexe" (89), but it received limited publication.<sup>94</sup> Gaboury-Diallo mentions that although unpaginated, the text contains 158 pages. I have not been able to locate a copy to examine. However, Gaboury-Diallo reproduces, in her article, a pair of French-language poems from the collection. I excerpt here a stanza from "Le pique-nique des Purs, 1946" (d'après Homer, L'Iliade):<sup>95</sup>

Le monde avec le sourit ironique, les Purs

jasaient, leurs cris culbutaient la prairie

« on est des purs Métchifs! »

ceux du sang qui coulent avec le sang

de toutes ceux qui ont jamais venus à la prairie. (Morrisette qtd. in Gaboury-Diallo 96)

Set during a gathering in St. Vital, "où le petit Riel courait dans les saules" (96), in 1946, in the wake of the Second World War, and likely organized by L'Union nationale, the poem explores themes of Métis community, cultural persistence, joy, celebration, memory, and identity. In this stanza, Morrisette turns the term Métis upside down, contradicting its historical meaning of

<sup>94</sup> Gaboury-Diallo notes that the text was self-published, "faite à la main" (95), and limited to 50 copies.

<sup>95</sup> See Gaboury-Diallo's "À la découverte de deux poèmes métis de George Morrisette" which reproduces the two French-language poems in *Michif Cantos*, "Le pique-nique des Purs, 1946" and "Les maisons de guerre," and also demonstrates Morrisette's dense, and complex, uses of themes.

mixedness, by ironically emphasizing a purity of identity—it is not a denial of mixedness, as the last two lines reveal, but an acknowledgement of the singular identity that grew from that origin. The subtle allusion to Falcon’s “La chanson de la Grenouillère” with “culbutaient” further emphasizes this origin as more explicitly nationalist, rather than racial, and moreover, also reveals a rare, and unique evocation of the bard in comparison to other contemporary Métis writers who tend to stop at Riel in their retrospective reflections of national historical figures. Gaboury-Diallo argues that, while the collection as a whole exhibits ambivalence about Métis identity, in his French-language poems, Morrissette “souligne très peu cette ambivalence ... et il se peut que c’est parce qu’il ne ressent pas le besoin de convaincre le lecteur francophone des intérêts de la culture métisse française” (90). Nuancing Gaboury-Diallo’s point, I would add that ambivalence is also reduced in the French-language poems through the collapse of distance produced by Morrissette’s use of vernacular French and French-Michif, which evokes Métis identity, and the specific cultural history—one linked to place “à côté de la rivière Seine / aussi près de la Rouge où Riel courait comme enfant” (qtd. in Gaboury-Diallo 96), only a few miles upriver from where the English had tumbled in Falcon’s song—that it seeks to conjure. In this verse alone, Morrissette reveals how he is a complicated and underappreciated writer.

### **Beatrice Mosionier and *In Search for April Raintree***

Fictional work by Métis writers in the late 1970s and early 80s was rare. Mennonite and Métis writer Sandra Birdsell wrote two collections of short fiction, *Night Travellers* (1982) and *Ladies of the House* (1984), which were later published as one volume in *Agassiz Stories* (1987), but Métis-specific stories were largely absent from her work.<sup>96</sup> Although Birdsell would write

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<sup>96</sup> Birdsell clarifies that her father was “a French-speaking Cree Métis” and her “mother a Low-German speaking Mennonite who was born in Russia.” She also “recall[s] hearing [her] paternal grandmother speaking a language



numerous novels in the 1990s and 2000s, her work has been generally taken up by Mennonite literary scholars, rather than by Métis ones. In contrast, Beatrice Mosionier would pen the most notable work of fiction of this early period of contemporary Métis literature.

Mosionier's semi-autobiographical novel *In Search of April Raintree* (1983) is the story of two Métis sisters, April and Cheryl Raintree, and their journey through foster care as they are separated from family, disconnected, and deprived of their cultural heritage, and their struggles to accept and reclaim their identity. Told from April's point of view, the narrative opens on the precipice on the Raintree family's dissolution, with April reflecting on her early childhood, her family's move from Norway House to Winnipeg, and demonstrating the social consequences of colonialism, revealing her parents' experiences with tuberculosis, addictions to "medicine" (2) or alcohol, and poverty (which have higher rates of incident among Indigenous communities than non-Indigenous communities). Her parents' identities are reduced to racialized concepts as April describes her father as "of mixed blood, a little of this, a little of that, and a whole lot of Indian," and her mother as "part Irish and part Ojibway" (1). After a description of their unsafe living conditions—an unknown man masturbating in the open at night after a party where "people were sprawled all over the place" (4-5); her mother's infidelity, and her subsequent physical fight with another woman (5); the arrival, and illness of their baby sister, Anna (6-8)—April and Cheryl are taken by government officials and placed in foster homes. Tracing the Raintree sisters' divergent paths, the narrative touches on themes of racism, trauma, and assimilation. April first lives with the Dion family in the fictional town of St. Albert, south of Winnipeg, along the Red River. In a recent article on the novel, Jennifer Lahn argues that while April "feels loved . . . , [she] is being . . . converted to French Catholicism, with neither homage nor even recognition being given to her cultural or spiritual Métis heritage" (137). However, given the particularly French Catholic

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[she] now know[s] to be Mechief [sic]" (n.p.).

cultural and spiritual heritage of the Red River Métis, as I have shown in this dissertation, Lahn's assertion seems overstated, even more so in light of cultural conditions in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century which often discouraged openly nationalist Métis identification. Regardless, once Mrs. Dion falls ill, April is moved to the DeRosier family, where she is greeted with scorn "you half-breeds," accuses Mrs. DeRosier, "you love to wallow in filth" (Mosionier 34).

In contrast, Cheryl's placement with the MacAdams family, and the openly proud Métis matriarch, Mrs. MacAdams, seems exceptional. Despite receiving positive reinforcements of Métis identity through multiple letters written by Cheryl (which I examine in more detail below) that profile significant Métis figures like Louis Riel, recount historical events, such as the Battle of Seven Oaks, and which hint at a broader Métis national reawakening, through belittlement and despair April gradually dissociates from her identity, and, having the ability to pass as white, she comes to reject her heritage. "I can't accept being a Métis" (111), she admits to Cheryl. Cheryl attends university, and begins to "work at the [Indian and Métis] Friendship Centre" (124); April marries a white man, and leaves Manitoba. However, her husband's affair and her mother-in-law's racism eventually drive her back to the Prairies. In an alley in downtown Winnipeg, April is mistaken for Cheryl and raped; she is later made to re-live that trauma in court at the trial of the accused. She moves in with Cheryl and finds that her sister is not well emotionally. Cheryl eventually commits suicide. Going through her sister's belongings, April discovers her sister's journal, which traces Cheryl's growing dismay at the plight and denigration of First Nations and Métis in Winnipeg. April also learns of Cheryl's traumatic encounter with their father which shook the foundations of her pride in their Métis identity, and contextualizes her use of drugs and alcohol, her turn to prostitution, and suicide. April's narrative culminates in the decision to care for Cheryl's young son and, as "the denial had been lifted from [her] spirit" (233-34), to accept

her Métis heritage. Through this plot-heavy narrative, Mosionier repeatedly juxtaposes ideas of integration and white passing-privilege with racialized experiences, the sisters' limited agency as they struggle to reconnect with Indigenous heritages, reveal and reflect upon some of the multi-generational traumas and effects inflicted by settler-colonial policies of family separation, such as those that informed the 60s scoop. Aside from broader commentaries on social issues, like Campbell's did a decade earlier, Mosionier's text represents an important gendered perspective that presents experiences not only at the community, but individual level: how despite limited agency, urban Indigenous women live and wrestle with physical, sexual, and mental violence, and trauma, systemically amplified by settler-colonialism. The narrative explores their choices, their success, and their failures.

Identity is one of the central threads through which the narrative moves. Some Métis literary scholars have argued that the text often approaches identity using racialized logics of mixedness and idealized versions of 19<sup>th</sup> century narratives of national Métis exploits. "With its protagonists seduced by terms like 'Native' and 'Halfbreed,' and confused by colloquial metaphors such as 'mixed-blood' and 'part-Indian,'" writes Janice Acoose, "the text does not successfully illustrate Métis cultural identity" (228). Emma LaRocque takes the critique a step further, noting that "there are no Red River or any other Metis community cultural markers in the novel" ("Contemporary" 136). Pushing back against LaRocque's unequivocal claim, I would stress that Mosionier includes fragments, which hint at elements of Métis culture, such as April's attempt, when she and her sister were both still in foster care, to remind her sister of their "family life" before their seizure, how their "Dad always laughed and joked ... [and told] lots of stories; how [they] would all go out to visit [their] aunts and uncles ... how Dad would bring out his fiddle and play while everyone danced jigs" (47). Although decontextualized, these reflections

on storytelling, visiting, and dancing to the fiddle, certainly allude to Métis culture. To Acoose's and LaRocque's point, these gestures are limited, infrequent, and often obscured by an identity turmoil that conflates mixedness, not to mention economic circumstances, and deprecation, with Métis identity. "Being a half-breed meant being poor and dirty," writes Mosionier in a passage voiced in April's perspective, "It meant being weak and having to drink. It meant being ugly and stupid. It meant living off white people. And giving your children to white people to look after. It meant having to take all the crap white people gave" (44). In some ways, this identity turmoil, which overrides both historically and community-based definitions of Métis identity, resonates with L'Union nationale's warning in the late 1920s about Métis national dissolution, and the risks of linguistic and cultural loss, and assimilation. In other words, it is a contemporary lived reality brought upon by the debilitating and pervasive effects of racism. Rather than failing to "illustrate Métis cultural identity" (Acoose 228), the text succeeds in representing the reality of cultural loss—both as exacted by outside forces and the protagonists' and secondary characters' choices—and severed connections for urban Métis (and other Indigenous peoples more broadly). April's confusion is not simply rooted in a shame of being, but in not knowing, in that identity void that has been created, and then overwritten by the denigration imposed by settler-colonial society, and in contrast to Cheryl, her unwillingness to reconnect, and choice to pass as white.

Cheryl's attempt to fill her identity void via a literary education of Métis history, and in her reading and writing, not only speaks to her desire to reconnect, but resonates with broader movements toward cultural and identity recovery. Through their youth, she gifts April a book on Riel, who is "Métis, like us" (40), and sends April excerpts of essays she penned on buffalo hunting, Seven Oaks, and the Red River Resistance, among others. "She wrote about the Métis with such pride" (75), notes April. Aside from the thematic elements of recovery, Mosionier's

use of historical sources also links her text to earlier writers, from L'Union nationale's historical committee to Louis Riel, through a political and literary tradition. Cheryl's turn toward, and the comfort she finds in, historical texts reveal the power of such narratives. Yet, in a narrative echo of the limited success of L'Union's work with Trémaudan, and their desire to disseminate "un récit simple" (Comité, Avertissement 20) among Métis youth, Cheryl's overreliance on historical texts to construct her identity ultimately proves problematic. Mosionier does not name all the texts that Cheryl encounters—one is "*Canada: The New Nation*" (82), which was published in 1906—but they presumably do not include Trémaudan's book, as it was only translated into English in 1982 and Cheryl does not seem to read French. Relying on texts that use idealized "romantic stereotypes" (Acoose 233) forms an unstable foundation for Cheryl's reconnection with inter-generationally denigrated and traumatized communities and family. After years of searching, when she locates and meets her father, she is "horrified and repulsed" by the sight of an old, broken, drunk, dirty man, and her "dreams to rebuild the spirit of a once-proud nation are destroyed in this instance" (Mosionier 223). The trauma of this encounter undermines her mental health and leads her down a path of substance abuse, self-loathing, and prostitution. In contrast, April is less affected by historical narratives. After reading Cheryl's essay on "Riel and Dumont" (94), April admits that "it had no big effect on me ... why dwell on it [the past]? What concerned me was my future ... White superiority had conquered in the end" (94). Although they have little initial effect on April, Cheryl's letters and essays serve a dual purpose to historically contextualize the contemporary narrative as well as demonstrate their disconnection from Métis culture and communities, and their different survival strategies. Mosionier's text simultaneously illustrates the importance of historical Métis narratives, and their limitations, as they reveal the chasms between historical and contemporary lived experiences.

Almost forty years after its publication, *In Search of April Raintree* continues to resonate as its themes of Indigenous struggles against settler-colonialism, racism, misogyny, and poverty, among others, remain “unfortunately, relevant today” (Lahn 136). In a published interview with Aubrey Jean Hanson, Katherena Vermette reflects on Mosionier’s work, and how it influenced her own path as writer because it was “a seminal work . . . that not only spoke about this place [Winnipeg / North End], but spoke in a voice that was so close to [her] own experience” (qtd. in Hanson, *Literatures* 54). Moreover, the text still offers a complex commentary on the traumas of identity and decolonization. Hanson states, for instance, that it “engages its readers in April’s struggles with internalized colonialism and racism as she variously escapes and confronts the social contexts that overdetermine her identity as Métis” (“Through White Man’s Eyes” 27), or as a Métis woman more precisely. Yet in depicting this struggle with internalized colonialism, Mosionier’s text risks re-inscribing negative stereotypes. Acoose argues that “journeying through [this narrative] may leave readers with mis-informed notions about the Métis” (235) because the decontextualized struggle against colonialism largely obscures specific, and easily recognizable, elements of Métis culture, and demands that readers do much of the work of contextualizing, and educating themselves on Métis history, culture, and contemporary perspectives beyond those offered in the text (235). Mosionier also published a young-adult version of the novel in 1984, which having excised the more graphic violence and language, was adopted into the Manitoba school curriculum, but this has not diminished the real need for a guided reading which properly contextualizes the narrative to avoid re-inscribing negative stereotypes, nor reduced the work’s wide influence.

*In Search of April Raintree* marks a significant turning point in early contemporary Métis literature; it was not only one of the few literary texts produced by a Métis writer in the eighties

to be published, but it also signaled a shift in style and content. As Greg Young-Ing contends, many of the books published in the 1970s “tended to be ... political in content and angry in tone” (183), but texts produced a decade later, although fewer in number, “began to develop styles of writing that would carry the unique Aboriginal Voice into contemporary literature” (183-84).<sup>97</sup> Going forward, texts like Mosionier’s would greatly inform future Indigenous literatures. For Vermette, the novel notably possesses “a non-style, because it’s very conversational. [Mosionier is] not playing into any aesthetic. She’s not playing with metaphors. She’s telling a story. It’s life story. So much of Indigenous story is telling life story” (qtd. in Hanson, *Literatures* 57).

LaRocque notes that “[c]oming to accept the distinctive nature of Métis culture and heritage ... , a form of ‘returning home’ ... [became] a consistent theme in Metis (or metis) writing of the twentieth century” (“Contemporary” 136), and Mosionier’s novel would (perhaps ironically due to its imprecisions) exemplify a growing trend toward issues of self-identification and acceptance. Although the text broaches these themes in ways which resonate stylistically and structurally with “life writing” in Métis literature, from the “documentary” value of Falcon’s songs to the non-fiction texts of writers in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early-to-mid 20<sup>th</sup> century, *In Search of April Raintree* also marks a figurative and literal return home as April and Cheryl reclaim their Métis identity at the heart of traditional Métis territory. It is a return to Red River. However, as Mosionier shows through the challenges with which April and Cheryl struggle, it is often an unwelcomed homecoming to this traditional, but transformed space. By re-inscribing that space, and resonating with past and future Métis writing, *In Search of April Raintree* begins to reclaim Red River (urban Winnipeg) as a Métis place, both real and imagery.

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<sup>97</sup> Although best known for her debut novel, Mosionier has had a long literary career, working for Pemmican Publications (an affiliate of the Manitoba Métis Federation) for a time, and writing a number of children’s texts through the 1990s, another novel, *In the Shadow of Evil* (2000), and a memoir, *Come Walk With Me* (2009).

## Chapter Five — After Campbell: The Flourishing of Métis Literature

Métis literary production increased dramatically since the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, as a new generation of writers, working in growing numbers of genres and forms throughout the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, arose to broaden Métis literature, even as Maria Campbell, and to a lesser extent Beatrice Mosionier, cast large shadows as preeminent literary and cultural figures. Writers like Joanne Arnott, Gregory Scofield, Marilyn Dumont, and Rita Bouvier, whom Emma LaRocque describes as a “second wave” (“Contemporary” 138) of contemporary Métis literature, would variously share cultural and linguistic affinities with Campbell, while also diverging from her in critical ways, as they increasingly re-articulated Métis identity with greater historical specificity. A subsequent generation of writers, whom we might describe as a “third wave” of contemporary Métis literature, emerged in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century with Katherena Vermette and Cherie Dimaline at the forefront. Vermette’s work in particular demonstrates a keen awareness of earlier Métis writing and builds on the ideological shifts of writers like Dumont and Bouvier toward ever firmer articulations of Métis identity and stories, rooted in specific places, events, persons, and experiences. While acknowledging her influence, Métis writers would increasingly step out from Campbell’s shadow as they elaborate on contemporary experiences and expressions of Métis national identity, history, and relations with other Indigenous peoples and settler-Canadians.<sup>98</sup>

Even as questions of identity, heritage, and history link these successive, overlapping, waves, differences arise not only in their articulations, or how they approach such themes, but in how they *come to* approach them. As previously noted, LaRocque claims that a sort of returning home, an “arduous process of self-acceptance” (“Contemporary” 136), forms a consistent theme

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<sup>98</sup> Though an imperfect description, literary generations offer a useful shorthand to distinguish between writers (and social and cultural climates) of different decades. “First Wave” contemporary writers like Campbell and Mosionier forged a path for later writers like Scofield and Dumont, just as these writers have in turn helped and inspired newer writers like Vermette and Cherie Dimaline.



in Métis writing in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century; however, as I show through brief readings and analysis of Arnott, Scofield, Dumont, Bouvier, and Vermette's works, this process of "returning home" differs not only between second and third wave writers, but also among second wave writers. I complicate LaRocque's initial contention by showing how the road home, so-to-speak, is diverse and circuitous. Where some writers, though informed by the writings and cultural influence of previous generations, approach and articulate Métis identity in occasionally contradictory terms, others emerge from a more consciously developed place in the process of self-acceptance, and express their identity with greater historical specificity. Part of this process involves re-framing Métis identity as a cultural and national one as opposed to a racial category. Refracted through an array of texts interwoven with personal, familial, and community histories, both inside and outside of the Métis homeland, this process of return informs a broad re-inscription of Métis presence, and contributes toward the building of a Métis literary space and community. In the growing awareness or acceptance of cultural histories, the recovery of traditional experiences, and in distinguishing, but not fully disentangling their writings and shared histories from pan-Indigenous literatures, or at times non-Indigenous writing, contemporary Métis writers produce a body of literature that, though not immediately distinct, increasingly displays the outlines of a reconstructed Métis national tradition. As writers re-story Métis historical and contemporary narratives and re-shape Métis literature in ways which resonate in meaning, if not in form and content, with historical literature, and re-emphasize family, community, and nation, along with relations between place and non-human kin, we might ask: what does "home" look like now? What has been recovered? What is remembered? Conversely, what has been lost, forgotten, or deemphasized in comparison to earlier writings?

### **“Returning Home”: Métis Writing from 1990 to 2010**

Following the “heyday” (Young-Ing 183) of Indigenous literary production of the 1960s and early 70s, and its decline in the late 70s and early 80s, Indigenous literature germinated once more in Canada. Jeannette Armstrong points to Indigenous poets from a variety of nations, such as “Beth Brant, Beth Cuthand, Lenore Keeshig-Tobias, and Emma [LaRocque, who] rose ... breaking literary trail for an increasing number of new Native poets” (xix). What followed, in the 1990s, was “an era of literary proliferation,” argues Armstrong, “reinforcing an appreciation of Native cultural diversity” (xx). Indigenous literary nationalism—a reading and writing ethic that not only distinguishes, but encourages the use of cultural contexts of specific Indigenous nations as a framework to interpret their literature—was burgeoning, but the production and reception of Indigenous writing tended toward an umbrella of pan-Indigenous representation. Even as some “first wave” writers like Campbell, Mosionier, Morrissette, continued to produce texts, “second wave” writers like Arnott, Scofield, Dumont, and Bouvier, among others, emerged and penned a number of poetry collections through the final decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Scofield and Dumont, in particular, stand out for their wide-ranging and award-winning texts which variously explore personal, contemporary, and historical Métis experiences in western Canada.

Despite the Indigenous “literary proliferation” of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, and the apparent growing “appreciat[ion] of Native cultural diversity” (Armstrong xx), non-Métis readers (both Indigenous and non-Indigenous), literary critics, and some Métis writers themselves, made little distinction between Métis and First Nations literatures, in part, because Métis as a category of identity was often understood and articulated in terms of mixed-blood or mixed-race instead of one which recognized a distinct nation and people. As LaRocque notes, “none of the ‘Native Literature’ anthologies published between the late 1980s and the 2000s has a ‘Metis literature’

category, though all of them include or analyze authors of Métis or ‘mixed’ ancestry” (“Contemporary” 138). A sense of confusion marked the interpretation and criticism of Métis literature. Jo-Ann Episkenew argues that in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century “the icon of the confused and alienated Halfbreed” became “canonized” (“Socially” 57) in the interpretation and criticism of Métis writing. The combination of “confus[ion] and alienat[ion]” that accompanied this “icon,” and rising theories of mixedness and hybridity, also destabilized Métis identity, in the sense that it sowed turmoil or disorientation which in turn allowed non-Métis individuals and communities to claim belonging. This trend continues in the 21<sup>st</sup> century with so-called eastern métis.<sup>99</sup> The effects of identity uncertainty were multiple and created the conditions for mis-recognition and mis-representation such as in the cases of Joseph Boyden,<sup>100</sup> and Gwen Benaway,<sup>101</sup> whose claims to Indigeneity have been questioned. Episkenew contends that much of the bewilderment about Métis identity stems from “racist oppression that is the legacy of colonialism” (“Socially” 57). In contrast, she notes in her reading of *Halfbreed*, that “despite the complex legal issues that profoundly influence the social and political context in which [the memoir] arises, [Campbell’s] Métis family does not experience the confusion and alienation that scholars take for granted” (58). Yet, Episkenew does not touch on the fact that while not all Métis experience “confusion,” some did, as some writers promulgated mixed-race definitions, and even Campbell occasionally blurs Métis and First Nations communities in her writing. Ultimately, where Episkenew contends

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<sup>99</sup> See Gaudry and Leroux’s article “White Settler Revisionism and Making Métis Everywhere: The Evocation of Métissage in Quebec and Nova Scotia” (2017) for more; see also Leroux’s book *Distorted Descent* (2019).

<sup>100</sup> See Jorge Barrera’s “Author Joseph Boyden’s Shape-Shifting Indigenous Identity.”

<sup>101</sup> Winner of the Governor General’s Literary Award for English poetry for her collection *Holy Wild* in 2019, Benaway, who claims “Anishinaabe and Métis descent” (Benaway), was later challenged by a group of Indigenous writers for her shifting identity claims in an open letter posted to Twitter. The group, comprising Alicia Elliott, Terese Mailhot, Nazbah Tom, Joshua Whitehead, and Tyler Pennock, requested “accountability regarding Gwen Benaway’s identity, people, and privilege” (@GB20209) and challenged her assertions of identity by tracing “contradictions and discrepancies about her identity and lived experience” in her published author biographies. Niigaan Sinclair notes that “[i]n response, Benaway closed her Twitter account and has never published anything since” (“Indigenous”).

that confusion marked the interpretation and criticism of Métis literature, I suggest that it also shaped its production. Where for some writers like Arnott, Scofield, and Warren Cariou who came to their Métis identities later in life, issues of identitary disorientation marked their texts in ways which initially produced contrasting, ambiguous, conceptions of Métis people and national identity, for other writers, who grew up with greater cultural awareness, such as Dumont and Bouvier, the process of “returning home” entailed navigating and articulating the complexities in their existing sense of belonging and connections with Métis communities and other Indigenous peoples, as well as labouring toward specific textual representation.

### **Joanne Arnott**

Reflecting on her heritage a few decades after her first works were published, Manitoba-raised, West-Coast based, Joanne Arnott writes that, when younger, she had been “oblivious to ... [her] family’s historical context” (“Small Birds” 326). In *Native Poetry in Canada*, an anthology co-edited by Jeannette Armstrong, Arnott explains that “Native identity was not talked about when [she] was growing up ... there was anxiety about mixed ancestry and flat-out denial for many years” (282). Her early work is representative of damaged communities. Various marked by the wounds of child and sexual abuse, incest, racism, and other injuries whose causes can be traced through intergenerational traumas rooted in identitary ruptures, oppression, and shame, and demonstrating only a slight awareness of Métis culture and history, her early collections suggest less an immediate recovery or return home, than an initial taking stock of cultural loss and severed community connections. Specific cultural markers and histories are obscured behind articulations of Indigenous identity that rely on conceptions of mixed-ness, and often biological mixed-ness: “I am a person of mixed Native and European ancestry,” she writes,

“I know lots about my European ancestry and almost nothing about my Native heritage: this is one impact of racism. I was raised in a white community as a white-working class person. As children, when I or my sisters or brothers attempted to talk about our relationship to or similarities with Native people, we were punished” (*Waves* 76).

In her poem “Manitoba Pastoral,” Arnott subverts the pastoral genre, and its idealized representation of rural life, introducing elements of gritty realism as she deftly unmasks the violent misogyny that pervades her childhood. I reproduce the poem here:

In a peculiar way, he favoured her.

She got to hold the chickens

while he cut off their heads.

While I cooked and washed the dishes,

she dragged the honey bucket to the bush,

it was heavy as she was.

When he worked at the mushroom farm,

she had to wash his clothes out by hand, night

after night, getting the shit out.

One summer we went to a barbecue

held by a neighbour, to honour his mother.

She arrived before we did, in tears

and bruises because her boyfriend

couldn't tolerate her being honoured

in any way. Her son was enraged.

A little guy, he started drinking right away  
singing "Hit the Road, Jack" over and over,  
Jack was the boyfriend's name.

After we had arrived and once  
the guys were sufficiently tanked up  
he said Okay, let's go, we're gonna kill  
the motherfucker. The men  
piled into trucks and started driving  
away. My father grabbed my sister  
said, They're going to a kill a man. You have to  
come with me. We have to stop them. Off she went,  
and they all ended up at our farm,  
gang-raping my sister. The rest of us  
women and children  
passing time  
watching the sun go down  
waiting  
for the men. (Arnott, *Cradle* 28)

With grim, even gruesome imagery, Arnott not only reveals the economic realities of working-class life which require the labour of children, and impose uncomfortable, and often gendered, responsibilities on the young, but through casual references, showing how normalized violence and obscenities have become, she foreshadows the much darker violence to come. Misogyny and

gendered violence are introduced in the second stanza with the image of the woman arriving with bruises and tears. The line about the boyfriend being unable to “tolerate [the neighbour’s mother] being honoured in any way” (28) seems to pose unasked questions: why cannot the man tolerate women being honoured, and what are the roots of this misogyny? There are few cultural markers present in the poem aside from the trappings of working-class life like labour, community meals (the barbecue), and alcohol use. In a later reflection on the cultural and stylistic influences that might speak to the cultural milieu of the poem (not to mention her larger poetic oeuvre), Arnott states that “the poets who inspired [her] ... were the singers, both folk tradition songful southern Manitoba, settler and Métis without distinction, and the Roman Catholic Church (oral and hymnal)” (“Small Birds” 327-28). However, there is little sense of Catholicism or Métis culture in the poem itself, except through the ideas of sacrifice, sufferance, and patriarchy. Where God sacrifices His son for the sins of mankind, the “father” in Arnott’s poem, sacrifices his daughter. There is dark resonance with the first stanza, in which grim duties are imposed upon the girl, as Arnott reveals how, through sexual violence directed toward women, the girl is yielded up to appease the men’s rage. That distortion of Catholicism is echoed in the subversion of the pastoral and the sublime in the final lines, where through the juxtaposition of the candid description of sexual violence, the “gang-rap[e]” (28), with the romantic image of women and children watching the sun set, Arnott produces a terrible and uncomfortable irony.

Although outsider violence against Indigenous women is sadly prevalent (see *The Final Report of the Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls*), violence from within Indigenous communities and families is also common. It is a theme that Maria Campbell alludes to when writing about the “system that ... fucked up our men” (*Halfbreed* 168) and which recurs in later literary works, like Vermette’s *The Break* and *The Strangers*. Importantly,

recognition of inter-generational causes and traumas which incite such family violence and abuse is not absolution, but reveals an awareness of systemic issues which affect Indigenous peoples, and communities beyond individuals. In her prose poem “Like an Indian: Struggling with Ogres” (*Cradle* 68-70), Arnott approaches such recognition, gesturing toward ruptures which contribute to trauma, and the intergenerational loss of knowledge, culture, traditions, and stories. “Pushing against the wall of absence and silence ... I can tell you that my Dad’s mum was also Native, as are we, her descendants. But all these people died, you see, all the older ones were gone before I arrived and the middle generation, prematurely elder, was intensely unprepared to take on the job” (68-69). Arnott’s work confronts and unpacks such traumas, and reveals a haunting journey to rebuild her individual sense of self as well as re-situate herself amid broader community. “We struggle to unsilence ourselves,” she writes, “and to stop silencing each other” (70).

### **Gregory Scofield**

Though taking a different path, Gregory Scofield journeys toward a similar destination in his writing. He would, in seven collections and a memoir, published over twenty-five odd years, write about a range of issues from urban Indigenous experiences, to love poems honouring queer and gay sexualities, reflections on his heritage, his maternal kin, and their experiences of racism and misogyny, re-storying Louis Riel’s life, and confronting violence against Indigenous women. In 2016, Scofield was awarded the Latner Writers’ Trust Poetry Prize for his “embrace [of] the musical, the documentary, and the experimental” (Donaldson et al. n.p.) in his body of work. Greatly influenced by Campbell’s work, acknowledging *Halfbreed* “as one of the most important books of [his] life” (*Thunder* 116), Scofield would demonstrate and build on similar cultural and linguistic affinities as he pushed Métis poetics in new directions through an intensive use of Cree



language and stories, incorporating non-textual elements in his work, emphasizing orality, and song. Also coming to his Métis identity later in life, Scofield contrasts Arnott's experience of "silence," with reflections on "authenticity," rooted in the conflation of mixedness with Métis, and emphasis on racialized identities. In his memoir *Thunder through My Veins* (1999), which traces his childhood experiences with poverty, the foster system, and other challenges, he writes of learning about and accepting himself. Initially apprehending Métis identity through notions of mixedness, Scofield rejects his Métisness because of a perceived lack of purity or authenticity, "the Métis weren't Indians at all, but Frenchmen pretending to be Indians. They had no culture or language and nothing to be proud of. At least the Indians, no matter how ragged and poor, had an interesting culture" (64), but he does not deny being Indigenous. He "decide[s that] Aunty must be wrong about us being half-breeds. We were *Nay-he-yow-wuk*—Crees!" (65). The revelation is framed by shame suffered in his high school class on "Canadian history in social studies" (64). For Scofield, later coming to understand and position himself as Métis means not only filling and writing over the gaps from his social studies class, and the ruptures from the traumas inflicted on his family, but moving from understanding Métis identity through mixedness to more national and cultural definitions. This difficult process involved reconnecting to community. In "God of the Fiddle Players," a poem from his debut collection *The Gathering: Stones for the Medicine Wheel*, Scofield writes of this early reconnection:

I have to ask a friend about being Métis, what there is  
 To be proud of. Because she's an elder, she says just  
 Watch, listen. Later, we join the pilgrimage to the  
 Graveyard [at Batoche], go to the museum. (48)

The answer suggests first that experiencing, seeing, hearing, and participating are most necessary

in learning and being part of the community, rather than relying on memorization of historical facts or abstract concepts; and secondly, that Métis identity is still rooted in particular political and cultural histories as alluded to by the reference to the “Graveyard” at Batoche. This active participation in remembering resonates with Jennifer Adese’s appeal for peoplehood, or “*how Métis are Métis*” (“The New Peoples” 59). Like Arnott, Scofield admits in this early collection that he “writes to heal” (82). Although not the sole focus of his writing, learning to be Métis is threaded throughout his work. Deploying a melancholic romanticism in his second collection, *Native Canadiana: Songs from the Urban Rez* (1996), Scofield writes of also going to Red River like a pilgrimage:

In that part of the country

*our homeland*

I went back and dug in the prairie soil.

There among the buffalo bones and memories

an ancient language sprang from the earth

and wet my parched tongue.

In that part of the country

we were always *katipâmsôchik*

and our displaced history

is as solid as every railroad tie

pounded into place, linking

each stolen province. (*Native Canadiana* 55)

Part of a longer poem titled “Policy of the Dispossessed” which reflects upon the loss of land, “language” (53), and the “death of our nation” (54), this last stanza employs powerful, affective

imagery in its summation of settler injustices against the Métis and dwells upon the relationship between language and territory. Evoking the ways that language, and identity emerge like a wellspring from enacting relationships with the land, Scofield suggests an embodied experience as “solid” as, if not more, than the imposed structures of settler-colonialism, represented by the “railroad tie” (55). The act of digging recalls a rooting through the past to understand the present.

The use of the Cree, “katipâmsôchik,” which he notes means “The People who Own Themselves” (55, footnote) and is a historical description of the Métis, signals an important recognition of relationships (between Métis and Cree), and Métis sovereignty,<sup>102</sup> and roots the Métis to the Plains prior to Canadian settlement. However, the Cree in relation to Red River is curious in its selectiveness; that is, “[digging]” around Red River, one might expect to uncover a host of Indigenous languages from Saulteaux, Dakota, Nakoda, to Michif. Although a significant gesture, it is only part of the story. In this poem, which creates a litany of loss under the weight of Canadian settler-colonialism, and threads family experiences through the history of the Métis nation, the lack of reference to Michif seems like a missed opportunity, if not an outright elision of the francophone culture of Red River, that flattens linguistic diversity and class experiences, and recasts historical events through a contemporary Anglo-Cree lens. The lack of nuance might speak to the challenges of reconnection, language loss, and the holes and gaps still needed to be filled, to the depths of his deracination, but does so by emphasizing certain elements over others.

Scofield returns throughout his work to themes of Métis history, heritage, and identity with growing knowledge and subtlety. His 2005 collection, *Singing Home the Bones*, continues the process of digging in the soil, by examining, imagining, and re-storying the experiences of his forebears (both Indigenous and non-Indigenous). It is divided in three parts and purports to

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<sup>102</sup> Catherine L. Mattes provides “the people who stand on their own” as a similar, but alternative translation for katipâmsôchik (1); a more common translation for “people who own themselves” is the word Otipemisiwak.

converse with (or address) the dead, the missing, and the living. In the poem “Women Who Forgot the Taste of Limes,” he addresses his “*ni-châpan* [ancestor] *Mary*” (10). Sorting through his forebear’s bones reverentially, ceremonially, he conjures up possible experiences, and evokes and juxtaposes historical and contemporary hardships; memory becomes an undergirding theme. Scofield wonders if pulling her remains from a “bag of rattling bones” will allow his ancestor to appear in the “clouds” and articulate their losses, to “name ... / each river-lot stolen” (10). There is a palpable sense of anger as he reflects on the power of the bones to not only evoke memories, but affect the present through their teachings and ability to denounce the historical mistreatment of Indigenous people:

Or if I take *ki-tâpiskanikan* [your jawbone]

place it scolding on Portage and Main

will all the dead Indians

rise up from the cracks, spit bullets

that made silent our talk? (11)

The anger dissipates, however, in the next stanza as he returns to memory and the “ghosts / who share [his] house and the words” (11). Sinclair and Cariou posit that the poem is “a meditation about the hardships and dangers that contemporary Aboriginal women continue to experience” (313). Though the poem reads as a commemoration of (mostly historical) Indigenous women’s struggles, there is a sense of disconnection. While grounded in references to the “Red [River]” (10) and other Winnipeg landmarks, and buttressed by allusions to historical narratives from the fur trade to territorial dispossession, the memories are not only imagined, but conflated into one, pan-Indigenous term: “Indian” (11). Importantly, it is not that the experiences are imagined that

imparts a sense of disconnection—imagination is not only part of the craft of writing after all, but also in Benedict Anderson’s view, building communities and forming nations—rather it is the repeated pleading, and the anaphoric use of “if” that creates uncertainty. Each “if” opens a fresh wound, emphasizes another loss, underscores another part of his ancestor’s history that remains unknown. Paired with the pan-Indigenizing thrusts, despite the use of Cree, the poem’s appeal for the “ghosts” to fill the gaps of memory, not only generates a sense that much remains unknowable, but also risks inscribing contemporary identitary ambiguities upon these “ghosts.”

In his 2011 collection, *Louis: The Heretic Poems*, Scofield turns toward national history as he re-imagines and portrays the historic Métis leader. Divided into four parts, it presents Riel as a boy, exiled leader of the Red River Resistance, as spokesman of the North-West Resistance, and as martyred statesman. Focalized in large part through Riel’s voice, the poems re-narrativize his personal and political life. Scofield attempts to provide an intimate portrait of Riel while also chronicling the dispossession of the Métis and reflecting on pan-Indigenous resistance to settler-colonialism. Notably, Scofield exhibits a critical, but not always successful literary engagement with Riel’s poems. Through textual, paratextual, and intertextual references to Riel’s words, he increases the verisimilitude, and imparts a greater sense of Riel’s voice, but as I show below, he occasionally also creates dissonance.

Riel’s imagery guides Scofield’s thematic explorations in “Marie-Joseph’s Recitation of Names,” which I partially reproduce here:

Little boy open to your ears

What I say who you are

In the blood

My blood

The blood of my grandson Jean-Louis Riel  
 Your father  
 The one whose mother Marguerite Boucher  
 Is my daughter[.] (14)

An ironic tension runs through this poem (and the collection as a whole) as Scofield attempts to explore intimate sides of Riel, as “husband, father, friend and lover, poet and visionary” as stated on the back cover. Drawing from a translated excerpt of Riel’s poetry, in which Riel writes of his pride in “Le Sang Sauvage [qui] en moi rayonne” (4: 178), Scofield not only includes an excerpt as an epigraph, but also uses “blood as ... a thematic framework” (Tétreault, “Dissonance” 37) to undergird the poem. Voiced through Riel’s Chipewyan great-grandmother, and also purportedly “translated from Chipewyan to English,” the poem foregrounds Riel’s genealogical connection to the North-West: “[o]pen to your ears what I say / Who you are in the blood / You are in the blood” (*Louis* 13). While Scofield’s use of blood imagery might function as a metonym to evoke kinship, perhaps as “strategic essentialism” (Andrews 8) to reclaim Riel’s story as an Indigenous one, it also tends to emphasize a biological as opposed to cultural identity, which in turn risks reinscribing a Métis-as-mixed narrative.

In “The Revolutionary” (33-35), which features a rallying address to Riel’s countrymen, “va chier! I say to [Macdonald] and all / his puppets of Parliament” (33), a parody of the Lord’s Prayer, code-switching, and concludes with a translated stanza from Riel’s “Le peuple Métis-Canadien-français,” Scofield generates multiple incongruities. I partially reproduce the parody:

â-haw kisê-manitow  
 mâmaw-ôhtawîmaw  
 give us this day our daily oranges;

and forgive them their trespasses,  
 as we forgive those  
 who trespass against us;  
 and lead us not into war.  
 but deliver us from theft. (34)

While structurally similarly to the Lord's Prayer (*Le Notre Père*), the parody diverges from its source through its focus on and references to material concerns. Scofield's Riel does not request forgiveness for himself, but for his antagonists; he also seems to demand that God, or the Great Spirit, take sides in a territorial dispute. Although the direct appeal resonates with Riel's writings in terms of thematic elements of divine retribution (see Braz's "The Vengeful Prophet" for more on how revenge is a recurring motif in Riel's writings), and Riel writes of "la justice de Dieu" (4: 30) in his early poetry, and later asks "Jésus-Christ" (3: 300), to deliver "[son] pays natal ... de l'oppression" (3: 301), there is an inconsistency in the parody. Where Riel's divine implorations are almost always articulated through Catholic theology, and often appeal directly to canonical figures, from God, Jesus, to the saints, Scofield's parody appeals to the Great Spirit. The use of Cree in the parody indigenizes the prayer, and draws Riel out from the Euro-centrism of English and French, but it also generates "dissonance through historical inaccuracy when compared with the historical Riel" (Tétreault, "Dissonance" 42) as it de-emphasizes Riel's conservative Franco-Catholicism. Despite erudite references to biblical figures such as the "paralytic of Bethsaida" in the poem "The Infinity of Maybe" (25-26), with little consideration of the attendant theological or philosophical questions that they raise, and with which Riel would likely have been familiar, the representation ultimately feels like a muted façade of Riel's religious identity.

Returning to the first section of “The Revolutionary,” Scofield’s use of the expletive “va chier!” which brings to mind the presence of French in Red River, clashes with Riel’s religious identity and character. Even in his most vehement writings, Riel might denounce, but does not curse or use vulgarity. Scofield also generally limits the presence of French to section titles and the occasional word in the collection. While this choice resonates with the claim that Riel has been largely transformed into an “English-speaking [hero]” (Braz, *The False Traitor* 198), this is tempered by the use of Cree. These incongruities are rooted in cultural estrangement, what Braz calls the “considerable alienation by contemporary Métis from [Riel’s] linguistic and cultural heritage” (201). Perhaps to mend such incongruities, Scofield turns to Riel’s poetry, giving him the final word with the last stanza. However, even this effect is subdued as the stanza from “Le peuple Métis-Canadien français” is mediated through an English-language translation drawn from *Selected Poetry of Louis Riel*, which is edited by Glen Campbell, and translated from French by Paul Savoie. For comparison, I reproduce both the translated and original stanzas:

<i>Manitoba, still a sapling,</i>	Le Manitoba si précoce
<i>Dibbled by deft hands in firm ground,</i>	Est grand, parce qu’il l’a fondé
<i>With sacerdotal nurturing</i>	Sous le beau frein du Sacerdoce
<i>Its taproot is secure and sound.</i>	Qui l’a toujours si bien guidé.
(Qtd. in Scofield, <i>Louis</i> 35)	(Riel, <i>Collected Writings</i> 4: 319-20)

A major difference between the original and translated versions is the vehicle through which the extended metaphor travels, and subsequent effects of diverging allusions and symbolism. While both versions acknowledge the influence of clergymen and the Church, Riel’s original notably emphasizes the significance of clerical guidance and moderation as opposed to nurturing. What is more, the surrounding imagery varies considerably: Riel’s poem draws on horsemanship,



which resonates with historical Métis mobility—it recalls the buffalo hunt, cart trails, open prairies, and hints at an expansive Métis homeland. In contrast, the English-translation draws upon sedentary, horticultural allusions that impart more Eurocentric conceptions of community and settlement. Scofield’s inclusion of Riel’s words through translation, while “perhaps an attempt to . . . draw readers closer to Riel the man, [seem] instead to reveal how this cannot be more than suggestive” (Tétreault, “Dissonance” 43). There is also irony as where Riel’s poem openly names its subject in the title, Scofield’s poem instead allows an epigraph from John A. Macdonald, which refers to the “impulsive half-breeds” (qtd. in Scofield 33), to name the Métis. From its reliance on the epigraph to identify its subject, to the dominant focus of the parody on deliverance from “theft” (34), and the settlement allusions of the excerpt from Riel, “The Revolutionary,” centres territorial, rather than cultural or linguistic dispossession in its re-storying of the Red River Resistance.

With poems evoking sexual and physical desires—“Oh, how I will eat her,” he writes about Riel’s wooing of Marie-Julie Guernon, “I will make her wait / on the tip of my tongue” (21)—and reconciling embodied desires with a deep and austere Catholicism, and later poems, conjuring philosophical, and religiously-parodic musings, Scofield imparts a sense of intimacy, of approaching unknown parts of Riel, but ultimately, these moments collapse under the weight of familiar narratives of Métis resistances and issues with accurate representation of Riel’s voice. Scofield foregrounds Indigenous worldviews by means of code-switching, and the juxtaposition of Métis and Cree voices against Macdonald’s overarching antagonism and colonialism, but also de-emphasizes Riel’s French-Canadian-Métis nationalism and linguistic affinities, especially in comparison to the historical figure’s own writings. Paired with the tendency to understate Riel’s intimate connection to Red River—Scofield skips Riel’s childhood in the settlement altogether—

and a dearth of Métis cultural or political markers, from governance structures of Plains Métis buffalo-hunters, to French-Michif linguistic heritage, Riel is made “to stand in for Indigenous people in general” (Tétreault, “Dissonance” 36) as Scofield produces “a generalized vision of Indigenous resistance to settler colonialism and collapses disparate histories and strategies, cultures and differences, into a binary of settler-Indigenous conflict” (35). Although his portrait of Riel is often discordant, and tends to blur “ethnic, cultural, and linguistic articulations of Métis identity” (29), Scofield’s re-articulation of the figure offers some insights into contemporary investments in a broader Indigenous solidarity. Even as it evidences a cultural and linguistic gulf between generations of Métis writers, Scofield’s use of Riel’s writings as *literary texts* stands out for how it seeks to creatively bridge historical and contemporary Métis literature.<sup>103</sup>

In his 2016 collection, *Witness, I Am*, Scofield blends contemporary concerns with established narratives as he gives voice to the issue of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls through the re-telling of traditional Cree stories. A theme of “returning home” appears explicitly in the poem “Since When.” Thinking back on his own journey, and how in 2006, he “became the 389 thousand, 785<sup>th</sup> person / to name [himself] Metis” (74) on the Canadian Census, Scofield expresses confusion, defiance, or outrage, over the growing numbers of self-identifying Métis: “hold up, hold up / how is it the seats on this train / tripled in capacity” he decries, and then locates this surge in how they “appear the little m metis / the accent é Mé-tis / a 91% growth in the size of our population” (75).

Scofield ironically turns the theme of “returning home,” on its head, celebrating his own belonging, “I’m Gabe [Gabriel Dumont] stepping on their toes” (74), he pens, “I’m Louis [Riel]

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<sup>103</sup> For a more robust analysis of *Louis: The Heretic Poems*, see my article “Reading Scofield through Riel: *Louis: The Heretic Poems* as Dissonance.” Also, it should be noted that despite its dissonances, the collection includes important representations of Métis women, such as “The Sewing Circle” (65-68), which honours some of the women present at Batoche during the Resistance, and which has been selected by Project Bookmark Canada to

stepping on their toes” (74), while questioning the return of others to the identity. He repeatedly denies association with others claiming Métis identity, stating “but I’m no little m Metis / I’m no accent é Mé-tis / but a stand-my-ground Metis / lay my bones at Batoche Metis” (75). In laying claim to a specific nationalist identity, however, he implies that “the little m” and “the accent é” are somehow disingenuous. Might this be an echo of Campbell’s influence? Although skepticism over “the little m” makes sense due to its association with mixed-raced definitions that rely on a long-ago Indigenous ancestor, and the growth in such self-identification in eastern Canada as outlined by Gaudry and Leroux, the issue over the “accent” is puzzling. Associating the “accent é” Métis with the “little m” through juxtaposition, and then insisting on a division between the “accent é” Métis and “Metis,” without the accent, Scofield not only ironically elides francophone Métis history—even as he repeatedly claims it with reference to Dumont, Riel, and the armed Resistances, which were organized and led by French-speaking Métis—but diminishes it.

Jennifer Adese contends that “Scofield’s individual dislocation renders difficult his early articulation of his identity as Métis” (“The New People” 69); however, I would argue that some of his later articulations are also problematic. They reveal an ambivalence or discomfort with some aspects of Métis history, like francophone linguistic heritage, while at the same time laying claim to other aspects, such as the historical and nationalist Métis resistances, that are intimately interlinked. In these ways, Scofield shows how he “emerg[ed] from a generation influenced by Campbell” (Reder, “Canadian” 58), and perpetuates an Anglo-Cree-centrism in his writings. His apparent discomfort might speak to ongoing processes of “coming home,” and how “home” may no longer be the same, as it is irrevocably altered by the violence of settler-colonialism, but also by the decisions of many Métis—from the embrace of English, to the selective recovery of other traditions. Scofield’s identitary return is thus a remaking of home, ironically similar to historical

models in some ways, but vastly dissimilar in others. Might this also be in part what Guillaume Charette warned about a century earlier? Even as they heal, the scars of identitary dislocation and cultural loss mark Métis writers and their work.

### **Marilyn Dumont**

Marilyn Dumont is one of the most important Métis writers of the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. She has, over the course of four poetry collections and one novella, written on a wide range of topics from racialized and gendered experiences in small-town Alberta to larger, urban spaces, meditations on the relationships between Métis and other Indigenous peoples, and between Métis the Canadian state, and reflections on Cree-Métis culture, languages, and history. Having grown up with greater identitary and cultural certainty than many other Métis writers who have come to their identity later in life, she focuses less on identitary dislocation in her writing than on navigating the complexities of her position as she works to define, represent, and carve out space for Métis writing.

With its wide-ranging poems that touch on personal and family stories in Alberta, on personal relationships, relations with other Indigenous communities, ruminations over common experiences, reflections on struggles against settler-violence, white supremacy, and misogyny, and portrayals of Métis identity, in aesthetically compelling, technically adept ways, Dumont's debut collection, *A Really Good Brown Girl* (1996), stands out as one of the most significant Métis literary works of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. Winner of the 1996 Gerald Lampert Award for best first book of Canadian poetry, heavily anthologized, and named a Brick Classic in Canadian poetry in 2015 with more than a dozen printings, it remains an influential text in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. I trace a few thematic threads below, focusing on articulations of Métis cultural persistence and

resistance, gendered experiences, language, national history, and identity through close readings of some of the collection's most influential and frequently anthologized poems.

Cultural persistence and resistance form overarching themes in the collection, explored through a variety of cultural practices and relationships. The collection opens, for instance, with a poem that first grounds Métis cultural persistence through the living experiences and practices of Dumont's own family. Reflecting on the continuance of Métis culture via specific practices from hunting, when her father and brothers dragged "a bloodstained canvas / heavy with meat from the truck onto our lawn," to music, and how when "guitars came out / and the furniture was pushed up against the walls / ... we'd polish the linoleum with our dancing" (12), Dumont shows how they are still Métis. She also reveals how such practices are viewed as evidence of difference, if not criminality, in the eyes of settler-canadian law with regards to the harvesting of the moose. "At supper / eleven of us would stare down a pot of moose stew, bannock, and / tea, while outside the white judges sat encircling our house," Dumont writes, "And they waited to judge" (11). More than a sign of difference, however, she suggests that such actions, which also evidence lower economic status, mark her family in the eyes of settlers as less than. The image of the white judges "encircling" the family as they gather for supper produces menace as though, if the family's cultural differences are not guarded, or economic conditions minimized that the judges might not only criticize, but take action against them. Dumont describes how her family is careful when donated "cardboard boxed / ... [are] anonymously dropped at [their] door, spilling with clothes" waiting until they were "away from the windows and doors / to the farthest room for fear of being seen" (11) before opening them. There is some identity circumspection in the act of hiding, like Alexandre DeLaronde's or Marie Rose Smith's, and a careful guarding of self and the spectre of shame, but unlike the previously examined writers, in Dumont's poem, the

circumspection is also informed by experiences of poverty. Dumont hints at the association of common Métis experiences and poverty, which, together with shame, comes to impel the act of hiding. Despite these moments of circumspection, she shows how through her family's cautious navigation through settler society and the inimical climate of mid 20<sup>th</sup> century Western Canada, and in their subtle resistance to the hegemony of settler-culture, Métis culture persists.

However, Dumont also shows how moments of resistance against misogynistic settler-culture and destructive stereotypes are often constrained. For instance, in "Squaw Poems" (18-19), writing about experiences of a young, racialized, Indigenous woman, and reflecting on her limited choices as her burgeoning sexuality brings scrutiny and judgement in the eyes of settler society, which would label her either pejoratively as "squaw" or an idolized "Indian princess" (19), the speaker "learned" to "never [move] in ways that might be interpreted as / loose. Instead, [she] became what Jean Rhys phrased, 'aggressively / respectable.' [She'd] be so god-damned respectable that white people / would feel slovenly in [her] presence" (18). Yet, as shown in a reflection on the murder of "Helen Betty Osborne" (20),<sup>104</sup> the difference between "squaw" and "Indian princess" (19) is not only a matter of "respectability" (18) but of life and death: "Betty, if I start to write a poem about you / it might turn out to be / about hunting season instead, / about 'open season' on native women" (20). Linking discursive and physical sexual violence with the debasement of Indigenous women, Dumont not only draws attention to issues of missing and murdered women as a plague of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but traces its roots to the white supremacy of early fur traders, and the experiences of female ancestors: "left behind for 'British Standards of

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<sup>104</sup> A young Cree woman from Norway House, Osborne was murdered in 1971 in The Pas, MB by four white men. The men were only partially charged and tried nearly a decade and half later. A subsequent Public Inquiry into the Administration of Justice and Aboriginal People found that racism, sexism, and indifference toward Indigenous people by settler-dominated society not only prolonged the case, but created the conditions which allowed the crime to occur. In 2000, the Government of Manitoba formally apologized for the failures of the justice system. For more: see the inquiry's report: <http://www.ajic.mb.ca/volumell/chapter1.html>.

Womanhood,' / left for white-melting-skinned women, / not bits-of-brown women / left here in this wilderness, this colony" (20). Dumont's allusion to George Simpson, governor of the HBC during the early-to-mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, with reference to his words, "bits-of-brown," also brings to mind the commodification of women; Simpson would refer to Margaret Taylor in 1826 as "the commodity" (qtd. in Fast n.p.). Using such intertextual references and allusions, Dumont reveals how denigration is not casual misogyny, but a systemic dehumanization, interwoven into settler-culture, which allows for Indigenous women to be preyed upon.

In "The Devil's Language," Dumont expands her attention from physical to cultural and discursive violence as she reflects on the effects of settler education and linguistic assimilation:

I have since reconsidered Eliot  
and the Great White way of writing English  
standard that is  
the great white way  
has measured, judged and assessed me      all my life (54)

Dumont gives a sense of exhaustion in the face of endless measuring, assessment, and judgement as though every moment must be dedicated to not only proving one's worth, but also avoiding an illustration of difference which may lead to belittlement and segregation. She seethes against the placement of English above her family's traditional languages, and the assimilative actions of its proponents, how "the Great White way could silence us all / if we let it / its had its hand over my mouth since the first day of school" (54) leads to language loss. With the image of a hand over her mouth, Dumont shows how cultural and linguistic violence is also physical, having profound effects on her sense of being; a physical silencing of hers and other Indigenous voices. Between assimilation on one side, and segregation—expressions of Indigenous experiences in English

being “shelved in the Native Literature section” (54)—on the other side, she seems to advocate for a third, more nuanced, path for the articulation of Indigenous voices. Although not beholden to English, but not wholly rejecting it either, she recognizes its limitations: “you can’t make the sound / of that voice that rocks and sings you to sleep / in the devil’s language” (55). Through these final lines, she suggests that Indigenous peoples need their traditional languages to convey their experiences and worldviews. For Dumont, this is initially the Cree that her father speaks (54). This language, and related linguistic and cultural concerns, form a recurring thread in this collection, and in her subsequent texts, both in terms of thematic focus, but also through strategic moments of code-switching. In the above noted “Squaw Poems,” for instance, Dumont uses Cree numbers, “peyak,” “niso,” “nisto” (18), “newo,” “nitayan,” and “nitotwasik” (19) to enumerate each section. In her third collection, *that tongued belonging*, she writes of how “the nerve of Cree remains / in mouths that have tasted a foreign alphabet too long” (1), but there is a sense of resignation at the loss, as the language remains largely forgotten by younger generations, and causes a ghostly, psycho-semantic “ache / like a phantom limb” (2). In her fourth collection, *The Pemmican Eaters*, Dumont reflects on the intersection of language and national identity as she evokes the cultural contexts of the North-West Resistance. In this historical focus, she describes the development of Michif, “la lawng of double genetic origin”, emerging from prolonged contact of “FrenchCreeOjibway” families in “wintering camps”, and becoming “neither Cree, Salteaux nor French exactly, but something else / not less not half not lacking” (10).

Dumont’s turn toward the national, her related articulations of concern for community, and her expression of Métis identity are not limited to her latest collection, but rather also form an important section of her initial collection. In “Letter to Sir John A. Macdonald,” a significant poem which is also republished in her latest collection, *The Pemmican Eaters*, Dumont declares



and claims her identity by rebuking a historical antagonist:

Dear John: I'm still here and halfbreed,  
 after all these years  
 ...  
 after all that shuffling us around to suit the settlers,  
 we're still here and Metis. (52 *Brown Girl*)

In contrast to Campbell and other previous writers, Dumont uses “halfbreed” ironically, to echo Macdonald’s words. Where Macdonald wrote of his wish to see “half-breeds ... swamped by the influx of settlers” (qtd. in Bruyneel 715), and later revealed this desire to be a refusal of their national identity, arguing that “If they are Indians, they go with the tribe; if they are half-breeds they are whites” (qtd. in Gaudry, “Métis” n.p.), Dumont rebuts his argument by showing that while they have been “shuffl[ed]” around, the “Metis” (*Brown Girl* 52) have not been swamped, but persist as a people. Crucially, she arrives at this assertion of national identity after first demonstrating, through the opening sections of the collection, how she, her family, and her community are Métis. Her declaration emphasizes how it is the Métis themselves, and not outsiders, who will define who the Métis are. This is an interesting contrast to how Scofield allows Macdonald’s term “halfbreeds” to define the Métis in “The Revolutionary” (*Louis* 33-35). In “Letter,” Dumont’s rebuttal of Macdonald’s historical assertions demonstrates how resistance forms a continuing thread, not only in how the Métis have resisted assimilation (albeit with great cost), but through the continuance of political resistance: “Riel is dead / but he just keeps coming back / in all the Bill Wilsons yet to speak out of turn of favour” (52).<sup>105</sup> Although dead, Riel returns as a symbolic figure of Indigenous resistance to inspire new generations of Indigenous

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<sup>105</sup> A First Nations leader who successfully negotiated an amendment to the Canadian Constitution, enshrining “Indigenous title to traditional lands and treaty rights as well as equality of Indigenous women” (Tennant n.p.)

leaders. While not mentioned in the poem, such leaders presumably include Jim Brady and Maria Campbell, two figures to whom the Métis have attributed messianic qualities, some similar to Riel's, such as their overarching desire to save the Métis people, while others diverging, such as in their unique approaches—Brady's Marxist-socialist informed practices; Campbell's (re)turn to Indigenous languages and spirituality—which suggests that while Riel “keeps coming back,” he returns in different ways, shaped by contemporary contexts.

Despite the self-assured identitary assertions above, in “Circle the Wagons,” Dumont reveals a complicated picture of Métis identity and expression, caught between homogenizing pan-Indigenous symbolism and the diverse histories and realities of urban Indigenous people:

There it is again, the circle, that goddamned circle, as if we thought in circles, judged things on the merit of their circularity, as if all we ate was bologna and bannock, drank Tetley tea, so many times ‘we are’ the circle, the medicine wheel, the moon, the womb, and sacred hoops, you’d think we were one big tribe, is there nothing more than the circle in the deep structure of native literature? (57)

While Dumont pushes back against the circle, she does not wholly reject the symbol, but takes issue with how its ubiquitous symbolism appears to subsume broader diversity. In the wake of Indigenous literary nationalism, this reads like a call for greater specificity. Renée Hulan claims that “by playing with the circle, both formally and thematically, Dumont affirms that it is a sign whose symbolic value can vary” (87). However, while showing its variety, Dumont seems to suggest that its overuse diminishes the value of the circle, and that it has become a restricting metaphor for authenticity. In the collection's opening poem, for instance, the image of the white judges, “encircling” the family, imbues the symbol with menace. Hulan argues that in Dumont's text, this “cultural myth — the strategy of western settlers faced with Indian attack — is turned

back on the colonizing effects of literary reception and cultural critique” (87). With this allusion, the circle becomes here a metaphor for defence, though perhaps an unintentionally ironic one as historically the Métis also used similar tactics, forming circles with their carts to defend against attacks from largely other Indigenous peoples. This raises the question of what exactly is under pressure, and what is the source of the pressure. Is the circle prevalent because readers demand recognizable symbols, or is it ubiquitous because of Indigenous writers defining their indigeneity through such symbols? Are the Métis inside or outside of the circle? Kristina Fagan relays an anecdote of when she co-taught a Cree and Cree-Métis literature course with Maria Campbell, in which the “poem [proved] challenging and controversial. Campbell admitted that, while she understood the frustration expressed by Dumont’s speaker, the poem’s disrespect for the powerful and spiritual Cree symbol made her ‘a bit angry’” (Fagan and McKegney 32). For Campbell, it seems, the Métis are not only inside, but subsumed by the circle, and all their diversity—linguistic, economic, and spiritual differences—collapsed under the symbol, and a primarily Cree symbol at that. Dumont contests the ability of such symbolism to fully represent diverse “urban” (*Brown Girl* 57) identities. Yet in this push, she also writes “[t]here are times when I feel that if I don’t have a circle of the number four or legend in my poetry, I am lost, just a fading urban Indian” (57), and admits that in avoiding such symbolism issues emerge regarding recognition and authentic expressions of not only Métis, but through her use of “urban Indian,” of a broader Indigenous identity altogether.

Authenticity forms the thematic core of one of the more heavily anthologized poems from the collection. Through a prose-like free-verse scene sketch, “Leather and Naugahyde,” offers a critical reflection on inter-Indigenous relationships. I reproduce the poem here:

So, I’m having coffee with this treaty guy from up north and we’re

laughing at how crazy ‘the mooniyaw’ are in the city and the conversation comes around to where I’m from, as it does in underground languages, in the oblique way it does to find out someone’s status without actually asking, and knowing this, I say I’m Metis like it’s an apology and he says, ‘mmh,’ like he forgives me, like he’s got a big heart and mine’s pumping diluted blood and his voice has sounded well-fed up till this point, but now it goes thin like he’s across the room taking another look and when he returns he’s got ‘this look,’ that says he’s leather and I’m naughahyde. (58)

Themes of belonging and authenticity intersect as Dumont offers a reflection on the sometimes-fraught relationship between Métis and First Nations peoples by identifying points of tension around definitions and race. Although initially displaying shared cultural similarities—the use of the Cree word “mooniyaw” differentiates the speaker and second character from non-Indigenous people—Dumont wedges open the shared similarities to reveal a hierarchy of Indigeneity against which the Métis are judged. When the man raises the question of origins, the speaker recognizes how it seems to be less about relationality, than positionality, or “status”—which likely refers to the federal category of “Indians Status” under the Indian Act. The speaker’s “apolog[etic]” (58) admission of being Métis suggests that the Métis are somehow below “status” and, conceivably, non-status Indians—this lower-class status, brings up issues of shame, related to the denigration, dispossession, and national dissolution of the Métis, and even questions over their indigeneity as the reference to “diluted blood” raises the spectre of blood quantum and mixed-raced definitions of Métis identity. However, Dumont crucially shows how these are imposed on the speaker, and embedded in the man’s “mmh” (58), not expressed by the speaker herself. This definition seems

to influence the man, and he withdraws, holds her at arm's length, his voice becoming "thin" as he measures her indigeneity based on racial conceptions, and ultimately judges her indigeneity as implicitly inferior, as though she were "naughahyde," and he, "leather."

Dumont shows throughout the collection how recurring senses of shame, inauthenticity, and doubt, grounded in theories of mixedness and denigration, are repeatedly imposed upon the Métis by outsiders, and become barriers through which they must break time and again. In each attempt (each poem and collection), she discursively widens the breach, not only solidifying her own identity in the face of those who would (and have historically) attempted to deny and destroy the Métis, but in demonstrating the specificity of Métis indigeneity, is cementing a Métis literary space. Although differing from other post-1990s writers like Arnott and Scofield, in the ways that her collection arguably begins in a different place culturally and experientially, and occasionally diverges thematically from earlier generations of writers like Campbell, Dumont's poetic "return home" is also ongoing.

Dumont would continue to explore issues regarding Indigenous experiences and culture in her following collections, *Green Girl Dreams Mountains* (2001), and *that tongued belonging* (2007), but in different ways, revealing shifts in focus and emphasis in her considerations. In the second collection, for instance, Dumont offers a similarly structured text to her first book, with multiple thematically separated sections. The first section again grounds Dumont's experiences through reminiscences of family life, with poems about her siblings, her mother, and her father. While reflecting on various traumas of settler-colonialism, from poverty, alcoholism, and shame, and evoking a melancholic longing, Dumont emphasizes her maternal relationship and language, writing of how "yesterday while giving a / poetry reading, I thought of how [her mother] spoke Cree I felt loss / and wondered if I ever would" (26). Dumont also explores, in other sections,

her experiences away from her home territory; living in Vancouver, but always drawn to the Prairies, to the kinships there; the complexities of romantic relationships and her embodied desires; and her complicated relationship with the English language as a poet, and a teacher.

In her third collection, *that tongued belonging* (2007), Dumont returns again to similar thematic explorations, but approaches them through a more concentrated examination of women, both historical and contemporary, and their experiences. Abandoning the formal segmentation of poems through sections, she instead offers a more rhizomatic consideration of Métis culture, in effect touching on issues of spirituality, religion, language, kinship, visiting, territory, and the labours of women as she systematically grasps toward “history not so much denied as ignored” (6). Although there are still personal poems, addressing issues of romantic desire and fractured, embodied experiences, and the realities of being in other territories, Dumont’s third collection also gestures toward specific considerations of Métis histories—like in the poem “this, is for the wives” of HBC Governor in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, George Simpson, “whose names were not important enough to mention” (3). Such moments of historical recovery anticipate her intensive examination of Métis history in later writing.

Dumont would explicitly address Métis national history in *The Pemmican Eaters* (2015). Her fourth collection stands out as a monumental Métis text. Notably eschewing narrativizing its military engagements and political machinations as she re-stories the North-West Resistance, Dumont rather contextualizes the period by culturally, linguistically, and geographically locating the Métis as a post-contact Indigenous people. She also initially situates herself in relation to the historical period by reflecting on her own family connection to Gabriel Dumont. With echoes of LaRocque’s concept of “coming home,” Dumont writes of “family pride [that] would stem from recovering the knowledge of [their] lineage” during the era of the “women’s and civil rights

marches, the publication of Maria Campbell's memoir *Halfbreed*, the standoff at Wounded Knee ... The opportunity for recovering [their] Aboriginal ancestry could not have been better" (3).

Intersectional explorations of kinship between the human and non-human, geography and mobility, economic and cultural practices, appear throughout her suite of poems on the bison and culminate in "Les Animaux," in an affective lament over the near-extinction of "the brothers that fed and clothed us / and gave us reason to dance / gone, and now the prairie is mute" (15). There is some potentially unintentional irony as in the epigraph to a previous poem, she quotes Gabriel Dumont saying that "I [he] wanted to treat them [Canadian soldiers] as we would have treated buffalo" (13), suggesting that the relationship is not a utopic one, but holds some violence. The reference to "brothers" reveals less of a fraternal relationship, than respect for the material and cultural sustenance the bison provided. In "These Are Wintering Words," Dumont considers how bison hunting, and the practice of over-wintering on the prairie, influenced the emergence of Michif, "language right from the cow's mouth" (16). In "Not A Single Blade," Dumont expands her evocation of Métis kinship with the non-human world, recounting Gabriel's stealthy evasions around Batoche following the Métis defeat at the hands of the Canadian army, not only showing his skill as a woodsman, hunter, and tracker, but his relationship with the land through familiarity with the geography, the flora and fauna, as well as ascribing a protective agency to the land itself as "not a single blade [of grass] / betrayed [him]" (26). In her suite of poems about beading, she further collapses the borders between the human and non-human, and explicitly centres women's experiences and cultural practices in the art of their craft. She also underlines the spiritual nature of creation, as in the quiet, meditative practice of bead-working, a bead becomes a seed becomes a berry becomes a prayer. Juxtaposing the meditative resonances of bead-work, "each bead-berry clasped / to the next seed in prayer / Miyo Saint Anne—" (33), with the act of creation, where

“her sisters, the flowers / her brothers, the berries / emerge from her beadwork” (39), Dumont draws attention to the multiple symbolisms of beads, from allusions of rosaries, to the pregnant, life-giving roundness of Saskatoon berries, and underscores the centrality of women in Métis culture (the “circle” also returns without being named). In these rhizomatic explorations of Métis history and culture, which function “almost as an ethnosymbolic re-evocation of the myths and traditions of nineteenth-century Métis, fleshing out that which has been frequently overlooked or forgotten in older ... retellings of the resistances” (Tétreault, “Literary Resistance” 13-14), *The Pemmican Eaters* becomes a monument to the processes of historical cultural recovery.

Despite diverging from traditional narratives of the resistances, Dumont implicitly and explicitly acknowledges the significance of Riel. He not only looms over the collection, but as June Scudeler notes how the text “ends as it began: with two poems about Riel” (183), Riel also frames the book. Meditating on “Louis / [and] the way he kept envisioning / what was inside the dimness,” Dumont offers, in “Otipemisiwak,” a glimpse of Riel as mystic and visionary, but one which she links explicitly to the national concerns of “the Free People” (8). This dimness could refer to the growing presence and pressure of settlers, or evoke moments before his death; and Riel’s vision, focused on an unarticulated pinpoint within that darkness, might represent some Métis future in the face of early colonization, which he “dreamt of it ascending” (8), or it could be an allusion to a possible afterlife. There is an introspective abstraction in the poem as Dumont juxtaposes historical affect and imagery “Gatlin gun sorrows” with non-historical objects “birch bark” (7), which imparts her representation of Riel with a prophetic idealism. Buttressed by the rhizomatic exploration of cultural contexts, Dumont returns to Riel at the end of the collection, and in the final stanza of “Our Prince,” addresses his cultural and political legacies:

They will regret taking our prince



our prophet, the one among us gifted,  
 our seer  
 because when they look across these plains  
 they will see the monuments built to him  
 the days named after him in recognition  
 and when their children ask  
 what Louis did  
 they will have to answer. (61)

While Dumont presents Riel as a political visionary and mystic, she concentrates upon the legacy of his death, demonstrating some of the ways that he “keeps coming back” in the monuments and recognition of his contributions, but also on the shame of his killing. There is an interesting mix of perspective, as it is at once an address to Riel—the speaker lamenting over his death almost as a loved one would speak over a gravestone—and an indictment of settler history. Dumont then reverses the trope of shame that marks Métis writing as the speaker focuses on the stain left upon settlers and their descendants, as it is “they” that will be affected by the shame of their ancestors’ actions as they confront a legacy of colonialism, and then “answer,” and atone for its horrors.

Dumont’s representation of Riel is relatively brief and limited. Even in her “Requiem” for Riel, in which, to the tune of Hank Williams’s “Cold, Cold Heart” (57), she laments the historical leader’s fate, the narrative focus culminates repeatedly, at the end of each stanza, on the transgression of the “nation [Canada and its inability to] just admit ‘n’ see its cold, cold part [culpability]” in the unjust killing of Riel and damage to the Métis Nation. Although Dumont positions Riel as a visionary, and arguably as a martyr, there is little direct engagement with his writings, and compared to his writings, his Catholicism seems de-centered. This is not to say that

Catholicism is wholly ignored as it is interwoven throughout *The Pemmican Eaters*: the allusion to the Lord's Prayer in the title of "Notre Frères"; references to religious symbolism in the bead poems; hints of its importance to Riel with reference to the "Feast of St. Joseph" in "Louis' Last Vision" (62); and the affective evocation of nation and religion through the juxtaposition of imagery with "the infinity symbol flying there beside the cross / St. Antoine de Padua church with its bullet holes" (62). However, these are relatively sparse, balanced by a larger strategic restraint in such allusions and associations. In comparison, where Scofield explores similar terrain with incongruous parodies of Riel's religion, Dumont maintains distance. While she does not engage with Riel's writings, or praise Catholicism as do some writers (from Schmidt to Goulet-Courchaine), she does not renounce it either like others (Brady and Campbell). Instead, de-centering, but still recognizing its presence, she consigns it to a supporting element of the cultural contexts of the North-West Resistance period. As Dumont demonstrates through her family's annual pilgrimages to Lac Ste. Anne (4), Catholicism persists into the 20<sup>th</sup> century; but in her earlier texts on contemporary Métis experiences, she also shows how the influence of institutional religion has greatly diminished by the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. Ultimately, her approach to portraying Métis realities—the juxtaposition of contemporary experiences with the recovery of historical knowledge—reveals a distinct literary practice, signals a major contribution to Métis literature, and shows how the process of "coming home" is complicated and ongoing.

### **Rita Bouvier**

Emerging at the tail end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Rita Bouvier offers an intriguing contrast to other post-1990s Métis writers. Incorporating memories, experiences, and crucially, language from her childhood in the Île-à-la-Crosse region of northern Saskatchewan, into her writing,

Bouvier evokes a robust sense of Métis identity not approached and recovered later in life, but that rather shaped her perspectives from a young age. Her literary production arguably begins at a different place than those of her peers, particularly in comparison to Arnott and Scofield. Her use of Michif also notably exemplifies the troubling of unilingual English by Indigenous writers, particularly Métis ones. As Pamela Sing points out, Bouvier was one of the only writers in the 1990s to textualize “du mitchif dans une publication littéraire” (“Production” 133).<sup>106</sup>

In her first collection, *Blueberry Clouds* (1999), Bouvier “write[s] experience / a Métis woman / a contemporary woman / in the process of becoming” (64), suggesting that although she begins from a different place culturally, her sense of being, identity, and belonging are changing, and continually developing. Musing on when her “moshom” told her how “wealth was a measure / of all our relations” (19), Bouvier shows how traditional Cree conceptions of relationality like *wahkohtowin*, not only formed an important part of her early historical awareness, but shaped her worldviews. This sense of kinship would extend to the land itself as Bouvier reflects on how the “land is power / land is transcendental,” at once abstract and concrete as “land is a spiritual base / land is an economic base” (41). To Sing’s point, although Bouvier incorporates Cree and French, and reflects on language, there is a sense that multilingualism is difficult to evince:

I was born  
 into the world  
 speaking Mechif  
 a language  
 whose base is Cree  
 with a whole bunch

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<sup>106</sup> In her article “Production littéraire,” Sing details how older Métis writers, such as Guillaume Charette, Henri Létourneau, and Maria Campbell had previously also used some French-Michif in their texts, but that by the 1990s,

of French thrown in

for good measure

*Kipaha la porte!* I say. (37)

Whether it is through language loss, distance, or alienation, English dominates. Even as Bouvier incorporates important moments of code-switching, often using Cree words for family terms, and traditional philosophical concepts and expressions, her inclusion of Michif is limited, and betrays a decline in usage. Michif may be a cultural element with which she grew up, but not one which seems to represent her contemporary experiences.

In her second collection, *papîyâhtak* (2004), Bouvier turns increasingly toward broader—national, historical—narratives, and expands upon her sense of self, family, and community with attention to larger Indigenous communities. She addresses the complicated relationship between the Métis and other Indigenous peoples in her poem “nipîkiskwân,” juxtaposing similarities and differences, to voice contradictions and uncomfortable truths: “I speak, of oppressive forces / we replicate in our actions / to silence difference —,” she writes, “suppressive rule / among the poorest / of a people on the land” (26). Through the “we,” which “replicates” the assimilationist behaviour of settlers, Bouvier seems to suggest that Indigenous Peoples themselves are complicit in erasing differences between Indigenous groups. She writes in the fourth stanza:

I speak, of nationalistic hymns

we sing in our desire

for harmonious living

First Nation — Metis Nation

a false sense of being

one, with each other

in our mother's home. (26)

Although it is not clear to which “hymns” Bouvier refers, there is an irony in how she suggests that “nationalistic” songs somehow seem to erase difference. This ambiguity highlights a sort of falsity with which she expands upon as the stanza progresses. She identifies a fiction, or least an insufficient differentiation of groups, in the articulation of First Nation and Métis kinship. That is, without denying historical relationships, and common ancestors, she also seems to push back against the conflation of Métis and First Nations. While they use very different imagery, there is a strong thematic resonance between Dumont's “Circle the Wagons” and Bouvier's poem as the poets contemplate the nuances of simultaneously claiming kinship and distinctiveness.

Reflecting upon Métis history in later poems, as though attempting to illustrate difference between Métis and other Indigenous peoples, Bouvier reveals wariness over historical narratives. Whereas Dumont evokes Riel's constant return, how he “keeps coming back” (*Brown Girl* 52), Bouvier is irked by how he dominates Métis discourse. “I want to scream. listen you idiots, / Riel is dead! and I am alive!” she writes. This frustration, experienced during an “academic” conference, speaks to a lack of engagement with present-day communities, and the “life of a living people” (28). She senses how her own voice and her family's history are being ignored. Despite this frustration, she does not call for the dismissal of history, but rather, as evidenced by poems which reflect on historical figures and events, like “Remembering Old Man Oulette” (30), wherein she describes how Oulette “stayed behind in the trenches” (30) at Batoche as Canadian soldiers overwhelmed the lines, she perceives how such stories subtend and persistently inform present-day Métis's sense of national identity. Even as this took place “a long time ago / and we are here today”, Bouvier recognizes that because “our children curious / ... / will ask the right questions” (31), such stories will continue to circulate and shape future generations.

### **Toward the Third Wave of Contemporary Métis Literature: A Brief Survey**

Poetry dominates the texts examined above, but memoirs and other non-fiction writing also persisted as important genres in the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, with texts by writers such as Arnott, Scofield, James Tyman, Helen Francis, Sharron Proulx-Turner, and Cariou, among others. Some notable texts include Elmer Ghostkeeper's *Spirit Gifting: The Concept of Spiritual Exchange* (1996), which, dwelling on the harmony of living with the seasonal cycles of plants and animals on the Paddle Prairie Métis Settlement, straddles the line between memoir and academic treatise, and provides an interesting contrast to texts marked by thematic elements of recovery and return.<sup>107</sup> Herb Belcourt's *Walking in the Woods: A Métis Journey* (2006), which relates his personal narrative, and his family's ongoing involvement in the fur-trade, offers an assured reflection of his cultural roots through the "traditions of Lac. Ste Anne" (30) as it situates his family amid the community. Not only do the ways in which he "anchors his story in ... the community" (Adese, "The New People" 70) and locates himself amid broader kinships stand out, but how he extends his obligations and ethics of kinship to the production of the book (72) itself, including chapters penned by family members. It was "a family effort" (Belcourt 21).

Unlike poetry and prose works of non-fiction, fiction, both short and long, remained limited in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. Cariou, who would later come to identify as Métis as is partially documented in his memoir, produced a collection of two novellas; Sandra Birdsell wrote stories and novels as mentioned; and in the United States, Louise Erdrich would pen a number of novels through the 1980s into the 2000s, that occasionally touched on Métis themes in North Dakota.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> The text began as his thesis for a Master of Arts in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Alberta.

<sup>108</sup> Métis writing in the United States is complicated because the Métis are not recognized federally. However, some writers (Harroun Foster, Michel Hogue) have shown that Métis communities existed historically, but also shaped contemporary communities. Erdrich's maternal grandfather, Patrick Gourneau, served as the tribal chairman for the

In Saskatchewan, Joe Welsh wrote *Jackrabbit Street* (2003), a remarkable collection of short and flash fiction that takes up Métis experiences in humorous and sombre tones. The text stands out not only for how, like Campbell, Dumont, Bouvier, and Belcourt, Welsh writes from within the community, and offers less of an identitary dislocation than an assured expression of community connections and experiences, but also for how he stylistically represents a mid 20<sup>th</sup> century Métis cultural landscape. In “The Making of a Half Breed Bandit,” the story of would-be train robber Rocky Poisson, Welsh writes:

Well boy. The train it come an’ it stop at the station an’ after a few minutes it pull out. An’ you won’t believe it. Hey hey maudit crapeau! Before it get going too fast, that crazy bugger Poisson he’s chasing after it on that poor old horse. He has his hanky wrap around his face an’ have his six-shooter out an’ he start to shoot at the train. Pan! Pan! Pan! But a little gun like that it’s not going to hurt a train. But never mind. It’s a goddam freight train he’s trying to rob! An’ that poor horse he’s getting tired pretty fast but Poisson he don’t care. So all at once the train diver, he throws a lump of coal an’ it hit Poisson on the head an’ knock him off the horse. (10)

Welsh presents the scene with a mix of slapstick comedy and gallows humour as the protagonist, Poisson, attempts to overcome economic hardships to maintain a romantic relationship by taking outrageous action. Sing argues convincingly that what makes the humour work, and what “transforms [the stories] into celebratory pieces ... is the language used” (“Intersections” 110).

Welsh evokes a strong orality with his text through stylistic choices—numerous deviations from standard English through elisions, ungrammatical verb forms, misspellings, and the inclusions of

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Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians for several years; the Turtle Mountain Reservation consists of Plains Ojibwe and Métis people. Although Erdrich touches explicitly on Franco-Métis history and culture in some of her later works such as *The Plague of Doves* (2009), Métis culture and themes are threaded throughout her earlier work. “Métis influence asserts a strong cultural role, and fiddle dances, the French language, and the Catholic church and

Cree and French linguistic elements—that affirm the accents, vernacular, and cultural markers of Michif speaking communities, much like how his suggested literary influence, American novelist John Steinbeck evokes the American South in *The Grapes of Wrath*.<sup>109</sup> Sing describes Welsh’s use of language as “liberating” (111). In reflecting on select texts in Métis literary history, from Schmidt’s memoir, to Campbell’s *Stories*, and Welsh’s *Jackrabbit Street*, Sing argues that there emerges in Métis writing a “poetics that partakes of a[n] ... irreverent disregard for standardized English” (“Intersections” 96). To clarify, the inclusion of Michif in Métis texts “contributes to the fashioning of a textual space within which the subject can negotiate a continual, self-defined trajectory” (103). In other words, “[Cree] Michif and Michif French” (111) disrupt otherwise unilingual textual spaces of Canadian English or French in ways which not only become “rich sources of an emergent creative expression of place and identity that validates a people and culture that have been all but forgotten” (111), but moreover, “[have] the potential to reinscribe a space that, to the Métis, feels like a *homeland*” (112).

Similarly, in a study on the use of Cree and Cree-Michif in English-language texts by Cree and Cree-Métis writers, Susan Gingell concludes that it represents “a moving toward self-government of the tongue,” and a “coming home and claiming or reclaiming kin, territory, space, and place in contemporary Canada” (“Lips’ Inking” 56). Even as these examples suggest how a Métis literary identity might emerge through the intersection of historical awareness, linguistic representation and recovery, geographic representation and kinship, language survival remains a critical concern. The great majority of Métis texts by the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century are produced in unilingual English. Adese argues that the “foundation provided by shared understanding of kinship allows for the continued transmission and regeneration of distinct Métis consciousness”

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schools are omnipresent” (87), writes Connie Jacobs.

<sup>109</sup> Welsh includes a quotation from Steinbeck’s novel, *Cannery Row*, as an epigraph to his collection.



(“The New People” 64), but, due to language loss, this regeneration diverges in significant ways from historical Métis writing, and moreover, aside from some of Riel’s broader political visions, contemporary Métis writers largely ignore (intentionally or not) historical Métis writing.<sup>110</sup> Beside issues of circulation and reception, the relative absence of engagement with historical writing by contemporary Métis writers is curious, and this elision suggests some discomfort with historical voices. Contemporary writers do not often, or easily, reconcile historical articulations of Métis attachments to Catholicism and their participation in “la mission civilisatrice” (Comité, Avertissement 28). In light of a broad (re)turn to, and recovery of Indigenous spirituality, culture, and kinship, as spurred by Campbell, the omission of some historically central cultural elements implies that the processes of recovery can be limited.

### **A Literary Home: Métis Writing since 2010**

Recently a new generation of writers has flourished in the spaces opened up by the struggles, tenacity, and community of early contemporary writers. Whereas a few earlier writers exposed challenges in accepting their identity, heritage, and associated issues, some later writers demonstrate a deeper awareness of their history, culture, and traditions, if not of historical Métis writing. The processes of recovery certainly mark recent writing, as Jesse Thistle’s memoir *From the Ashes* (2019) and its themes of returning home attest, but as the works of Katherena Vermette illustrate, there is a big difference between stories of personal identitary recovery and narrative engagements with historical Métis events and figures. From Scofield’s and Dumont’s works to

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<sup>110</sup> This brief survey offers only a partial glimpse of Métis literary production in late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, and acknowledges that other writers like Sharron Proulx-Turner, Lorraine Mayer, Ian Ross, Andrea Menard, and Darrel Racine produced poetry, non-fiction, children’s books, and plays. Educational and cultural organizations such as the Louis Riel Institute in Manitoba and the Gabriel Dumont Institute in Saskatchewan also published “literary, cultural, and educational resources in print, audio, visual, and multi-media formats” (GDI). I have focused this chapter on the more canonical, and influential writers and texts, but note that there remains much to explore in contemporary Métis literary criticism as well.

Vermette's recent texts, re-storying historical narratives emerged as a trend, and contemporary Métis narratives are increasingly undergirded by greater awareness of Indigenous traditions.

Although the process of recovery occurs in poetry and memoirs, we also trace this rising trend in the formal emergence of fiction. Historically, this has been an under-produced genre in Métis literature. Relatively few works of fiction were produced by Métis writers prior to the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The reasons for this trend are likely in part socio-economic and in part cultural—long form fiction in particular takes time to produce. This is a luxury that the vast majority of Métis people did not have. Aside from Smith, most early Métis writers focused on writing non-fiction, often in the service of their communities, correspondence, or poetry. The cultural elements are likely twofold: the first is influence of First Nations narrative forms such as the Cree categories “âtayôhkêwina” and “âcimowina,” which Robert Innes defines as “ancient stories” and “stories of more recent times” (31); the second is the persistent influence of oral culture. Together, these elements suggest a predilection toward non-fictive narrative elements. Armand Garnet Ruffo approaches this idea when he remarks on the prevalence of the “documentary/autobiographical mode of writing” (qtd. in LaRocque, “Contemporary” 140) in Métis writing. From Falcon's songs, to Riel's letters and poetry, the writings of L'Union nationale, Manie Tobie's reflections, Campbell's memoir, and Mosionier's semi-autobiographical novel, documentary-like modes link these works. Reflecting on her own writing, and Mosionier's influence on her work, Vermette mentions in an interview with Aubrey Jean Hanson that “Indigenous story is telling life story” (qtd. in Hanson 57). With better economic conditions (in comparison to road-allowance era and great depression related poverty), a more robust writing community, tempered literary tradition, the production of fiction (short and long form) increased significantly during the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Aside from Vermette, other fiction writers include Cherie Dimaline, who wrote three story

collections, *Red Rooms* (2011), *The Girl Who Grew a Galaxy* (2013), and *A Gentle Habit* (2015), before turning to longer forms. Her novel *The Marrow Thieves* (2017), which blurs young-adult, adult, and science-fiction together, earned numerous awards, including the Governor General's Award for English-language children's literature in 2017 and was featured on Canada Reads in 2018. Her novel *Empire of Wild* (2019) garnered media attention in both Canada and the United States, and Dimaline released *Hunting by Stars* in 2021, a sequel to *The Marrow Thieves*. Other books produced include Lisa Bird-Wilson's *Just Pretending* (2013), *The Red Files* (2016), and *Probably Ruby* (2020), Aaron Paquette's young-adult fantasy novel *Lightfinder* (2015), Maia Caron's historical novel *Song of Batoche* (2016), Jenny Ferguson's collection of flash fiction *Border Makers* (2016), Carleigh Baker's short story collection *Bad Endings* (2017), and Chelsea Vowel's collection of speculative fiction *Buffalo Is the New Buffalo* (2022) to name a few. These texts mark a significant formal development in Métis literature.<sup>111</sup>

### **Katherena Vermette**

Among her peers, Winnipeg-based, Katherena Vermette stands out as a multi-genre writer, producing award-winning texts in verse and prose, children's literature, and rendering vivid both historical and contemporary Métis narratives through graphic novel forms. Her Governor-General Award-winning debut collection of poetry, *North End Love Songs* (2012), promptly established her as an important literary voice. Using sparse, near minimalist, language, Vermette evokes human and non-human voices from one of Winnipeg's most culturally diverse but poor neighbourhoods, as well as emphasizes the experiences of young Indigenous women. In

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<sup>111</sup> This inventory is not complete, but it shows the "explosion" or renaissance in Métis literary production. Post-2010 Métis writing would also see the rise of, and experimentation with, other genres such as graphic novels and podcasts. Other non-fiction books published during the last decade include Tenille Campbell's *#IndianLove: Poems*

“Pritchard Park,” for example, Vermette writes of a mother and her daughters at a park:

she sits  
 on the far park bench  
 exhales cigarette smoke  
 and cold  
 her fingers trace  
 the rough  
 lines others have carved  
 into the wood (16)

Through concrete details from the smoke, the cold, the wood carved by others, Vermette grounds the scene with an arguably dirty realism, and imbues her characters with depth of experience and connection—these are not small, but rather tough lives. The account of the woman running her fingers along the carved wood, brings to mind a sort of mimetic, almost palimpsestic, action that evokes the notion of following the traces of others’ footsteps. The roughness of the wood hints at the struggles of past women—likely the misogyny, racism, and poverty, that Vermette explores elsewhere in the collection—and how this woman faces similar challenges. Vermette also offers a sense of hope with the image of the woman’s daughters seemingly rising above such challenges, as the “youngest” swings “until her feet kick the sky” while the eldest “thumps / her boots across the frozen / play bridge” (16).

However, this sense of hope is tempered by harsh realities of Indigenous experiences in the North End of Winnipeg. Although she evokes a sense of serenity, and kinship with the non-human world in some poems, where “elms surround us / like aunties / uncles / cousins” (52), and

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(2017) and *Nedi Nezu* (2021). Métis writers published in magazines, journals, and anthologies include Julie Lafrenière, Suzanne Morrissette, Samantha Marie Nock, and Kai Minosh Pyle among others.

in the Red River, where “waves fold / into each other / like family” (53), Vermette also mourns human losses. In “Wayne,” the speaker broaches the death of her brother, and how “after he died / and the world twisted / like a rag rung out” (61), she dwells on the magnitude of his loss.

Vermette’s follow-up work, a novel titled *The Break* (2016), also explores contemporary urban Indigenous experiences, but focuses on the traumas and violence suffered by Indigenous women (from outside and within Indigenous communities), and the challenges of healing from such ordeals. The narrative revolves around a brutal physical / sexual assault when one young, Indigenous woman, Phoenix, attacked another, Emily, and via multiple, shifting perspectives, explores characters’ various connections both leading to and dealing with the consequences of traumatic events. One notable thread in the novel which contrasts with her earlier work is how Vermette narrativizes broader identitary issues, and utilizes the narrative’s multiple, shifting perspectives and points of view to approach, portray, and reflect on specific Indigenous identities and self-definitions. When Tommy, the policeman investigating the assault, is encouraged by his non-Indigenous spouse to obtain his Métis “card” (73), and begins to reflect on how, even as membership in Métis organizations, such as the Manitoba Métis Federation, fall outside of its domain, Canada’s Indian Act and its policies of policing and classifying identity, status, and its echoes of blood quantum, still affect Indigenous identity, and particularly those with *multiple* Indigenous identities: “[His mom] was almost full blooded, but never had status ’cause her dad was Métis. They did that back then. If you were a woman and married outside your community, they just took away your status card. Even if his mom had it, she would’ve lost it again when she married his white dad” (73-74). A few lines later, Tommy recalls how his mother had “wanted [him] to identify as Métis, like her dad, like her. She thought it was a safe choice” (74). In such moments, Vermette demonstrates how Métis identity is complicated by government policies that

often discriminate on the basis of gender, the processes of assimilation, the desire for safety or security, and the complexities of Indigenous families and relations across nations. In a later scene, when Tommy stops by his mother's apartment for dinner, he "tells her everything" (297) about the investigation, unable to hide his shock at the discovery that the perpetrator is a young, Métis woman, Phoenix. "How can it be a girl, Ma?" he asks (297). While his mother raises the effects of inter-generational trauma through a personal anecdote, how "kids that are messed with get messed up," and how sexual violence is "about power" (298), the conversation turns toward questions of identity, belonging, and connection. Tommy laments how "we were never around your family" (300). In juxtaposing Tommy's identity dislocation through disconnection with Phoenix's violent, destructive behaviour, Vermette suggests that the effects of identity loss, broken families, and trauma are varied and multiple.

In an earlier passage, Vermette reveals Phoenix's family history, how her "Grandmère was born in the French part of town and never spoke English until she was grown up. Her *père* was a member of the Union Nationale Saint-Joseph and so proud about who he was, even when it was dangerous to say you were Métis" (236-37): her mention of him shows how Phoenix's disconnection is cultural. Recalled in a moment of sorrow, Phoenix's reflection gestures to the intergenerational effects of language and cultural loss, and how historical pride, and resistance, become worn down, eroded. Later in the scene, as she is depicted thinking about the death of her grandmothers, and this loss permeates the story, Phoenix sneaks into her uncle's house, where she "curls up" (239) on the basement floor to sleep. The scene resonates strongly with Joanne Arnott's observations on the unpreparedness of those younger generations left behind to step into the role of elders (*Cradle* 69). Vermette shows how intergenerational ruptures negatively affect contemporary Métis and other Indigenous youth. In this way, the eponymous *Break*, which

Vermette describes as a utility corridor, “a piece of land just west of McPhillips Street” (3) where electric transmission lines cut through an urban space, becomes less about that physical space, than those intergenerational ruptures.

In her other recent works, Vermette turns increasingly to historical and national Métis narratives, often exploring these narratives through their relationship to place and culture. Her 2018 poetry collection, *River Woman*, approaches such narratives by weaving language and geography, experiences, and her own family history in Red River. In “When Louis Riel Went Crazy,” for instance, she touches on a lesser-known historical event in a way which connects to broader narratives, and reveals specific, personal resonances:

after the Red River “Rebellion” of 1869

Louis Riel went crazy

he ran off and hid

in a bush along the Seine

a land that jutted

out into the stream

a place everyone called

Vermette’s point (84)

There is an almost narrowing effect, as the perspective focus moves from the larger narrative—the “Rebellion”—onto specific locations, from the Red River to the Seine, to a point of land on the Seine. Noting that “everyone called” this location “Vermette’s point,” not only centres Métis historical experience, not to mention her own personal familial history since the area was next to the “prideful home of [her] great- / great uncle and aunt” (84), but emphasizes how before this place became Manitoba, before Canada took control, that this territory had a history, and that this

history is not abstract. Rather, it is linked to the web of intimate experiences, families, and events that still resonates through contemporary connections. Later in the poem, Vermette reverses the focus, expanding the perspective as she reflects that “when Louis Riel was hanged in 1885 / my great-great uncle had no land” (85), and underscores the magnitude of this loss:

and Métis homesteads were dissected  
 bisected  
 halved  
 quartered  
 over and over again until  
 nothing was left[.] (85)

The words themselves evoke a gruesome sort of post-mortem, as though Canada were a butcher carving up the corpse of the Métis nation, and Canadian colonialism voraciously consumes their lands. Vermette switches metaphors, writing of the “ribbon lots” being rolled up and sold off like “rug[s]” (85), then used up, like cigars, “smoked / ‘til they were spent” (86). Despite the dizzying shift in imagery, there resonates across the metaphors the irrevocability of consumption, which echoes with Riel’s vampiric reference in his diatribe against Macdonald. Through the processes of cutting, rolling, smoking, Vermette suggests a finality to it, as though the harm that has been done cannot be undone.

In the second half of the poem, the perspective shifts again, focusing less on the historical events themselves than, perhaps through their effects, on contemporary experiences in Winnipeg. Vermette again connects past and present through the palimpsest of names. Noting that despite the attempted wholesale erasures of colonization,

our names are scattered



seeds all over this

mother land

fathers' names

sons' names (87-88)

Declaring that “there is still a place called Vermette / just southeast of Winnipeg” (87), Vermette reveals remnants of Métis presence. Although she lists street names and other designations like “Tourenne / Turenne / Traverse” (88), from in and around Winnipeg as examples, among which she does not fail to note, “Riel / Riel / everywhere Riel” (89), by declaring that “this city is a graveyard” (88) and equating these names to memorial markers, but also recalling the life-giving possibility of seeds, Vermette hints at what might grow from these “dead names breathing / thin dusty life” (89). In the end, however, the poem becomes an ironic and bitter lament: “we [Métis] are intertwined within / this city / as if we belong / as if we are honoured” (89). This territory is marked by Métis history, but the fact that the Métis struggle to “belong,” and are “honoured,” with palimpsestic remnants, or by the recognition of their historical presence via street names, while they remain politically, economically, and socially marginalized, exposes the long-term consequences of dispossession and colonialism, and the limits of discursive restitution. The “seeds” have yet to grow.

Vermette further explores historical Métis narratives in her young-adult graphic novel series, *A Girl Called Echo* (illustrated by Scott B. Henderson and coloured by Donovan Yaciuk). Across the narrative arc of its four volumes, *Pemmican Wars*, *Red River Resistance*, *Northwest Resistance*, and *Road Allowance Era*, Vermette offers a look at these respective events through the eyes of a present-day young Métis woman. While navigating her way through high school, and the dynamics of a broken family, the protagonist, Echo, is cast back in time, witnesses, and

participates in these seminal moments. In this way, Vermette re-stories history and demonstrates how these were not singular occurrences, but rather, part of a wider sweep of Métis experiences. In the first volume, Echo joins in the camp life of buffalo hunters (20-29) before the conflict of the fur trade wars and nascent Métis nationalism culminates in the Battle of Seven Oaks. In the second volume, she witnesses the efforts of the Métis-led provisional government at Red River, the arrival of Canadian troops under Colonel Garnet Wolseley, and the beginnings of the Métis's westward exodus. In the third volume, Echo is drawn to Batoche. She weeps over the Métis dead following the Battle of Duck Lake (23), then later takes part in the defense of Batoche even as Canadian soldiers overwhelm the Métis in their final assault (36-38). A great sense of loss and national dissolution is rendered visible in a series of panels in which the town literally dissolves around a weeping Echo (42), and provides glimpses of the many forms of Métis's dispossession. In the fourth and final volume, in the wake of Riel's trial and execution, Echo follows some Métis back to Manitoba as they settle in Ste. Madeleine, only to see them dispossessed again as the town is burned to make way for a cattle pasture; she follows them once more to Red River as they settle in Rooster Town, a small road-allowance community on the outskirts of Winnipeg, where again the Métis are pushed out. Scattered, the community dissipates into urban spaces.

These graphic novels are more than a simple re-telling of past events, as they re-story, and even re-store, narratives. As her name implies, Echo is not simply a witness to such events, but a testimony of their occurrence. It is through this connection between individual and national histories, and between the historical and the contemporary that Vermette renders the witnessing of this history personal. An extended subplot of kinship mending undergirds all four volumes. In between moments of witnessing history, Echo visits her seemingly estranged mother with whom she begins to speak about and uncover their heritage. By the third volume, Echo's mother offers

Echo their family's "genealogy chart" (43), which reveals names and dates of ancestors eight generations back, including the name of familiar characters that Echo has encountered on her journey, such as Marie (Volume 1), Benjamin (Volumes 2, 3 and 4), and Josephine (Volume 3 and 4). I have argued elsewhere that "[t]hrough her growing and complex knowledge of Métis history, Echo demonstrates how the repercussions of historical struggles, dispossession, and settler-colonialism continue to affect the Métis ... [and] how these repercussions are also personal and familial—the story of the Métis Nation is rooted in the kinship of its people" (Tétreault, "Literary Resistance" 16). The way Vermette mirrors Echo's burgeoning awareness of historical Métis narratives and her family's history in the arc of her emotional development "suggests an emergent confidence and empowerment—a coalescing sense of being, place, and belonging—that [not only appears to] allegorically represent the nation itself ... [but] to re-establish the foundation upon which both the self and the nation might flourish" (16).

In the fourth volume, in a scene where Echo and Benjamin discuss how Echo comes to visit and inhabit the past, Vermette introduces the concept of "blood memory" (29). Benjamin, her four-times great-grandfather, explains that "[i]n your blood, it's something we call blood memory, bone memory. It is powerful medicine. All we have is in you" (29). Although the idea of blood memory seems to address Echo's time-jumping by grounding her experiences in a sort of genetically embedded bank of memories, the conceit also raises the spectre of biological essentialism, and risks re-emphasizing biological definitions of Métis identity, which historically relied on concepts of mixedness. Vermette appears to approach "blood memory" in a similar way that Scofield does, in *Louis: The Heretic Poems*, where his use of blood imagery seems to deploy what Chadwick Allen identifies as the "blood/land/memory complex" (16). This "expansion of [N. Scott] Momaday's controversial trope blood memory," writes Allen,

makes explicit the central role that land plays both in the specific project of defining indigenous minority personal, familial, and communal identities (blood) and in the larger project of reclaiming and reimagining indigenous minority histories (memory) ... [It] attempt[s] to seize control of the symbolic and metaphorical meanings of indigenous “blood,” “land,” and “memory” ... from definitions of authenticity imposed by dominant settler cultures[.] (16)

Where Scofield’s use of blood imagery is problematic because of how the collection initially “generates a racialized portrait of Riel’s origins that collapses cultural distinctiveness under the weight of blood” (Tétreault, “Dissonance” 40), in Vermette’s *Road Allowance Era*, the issue of “blood memory” (29) seems tempered because it is buttressed by three previous volumes that construct and demonstrate Métis identity through the cultural and political history of its people. That is, in first demonstrating how the Métis emerge through their culture, politics, and actions, Vermette initially produces a less-biologically or racially emphasized portrait of the nation. Yet, in subsequently rooting Echo’s story beyond kinship, and relationality, and through an explicitly biological reproduction, and direct descentance—albeit perhaps as a means of gesturing toward intergenerational trauma—Vermette also cannot wholly escape biological determinism and the problematic implications of racialized identity construction that blood (bone) memory evokes.<sup>112</sup>

While Echo is troubled, angered, by the repeated struggles, and the constant betrayals by Canada and settler-society that her ancestors faced, the series concludes on a hopeful note. “You have the strength of all your ancestors behind you. You can do anything” (42) states her mother. Importantly, Vermette does not position Echo as a saviour, or a messianic figure who will save the Métis, but as someone who can join the communal struggle, since, as her mother points out, “we’ve [already] won most of our land claims” (41). Rather, with significant echoes of earlier

writers from the Riels to Adrian Hope who advocated for Métis education, Vermette holds up education, both formal and cultural, as a remedy that will allow Echo, who seems to stand in for contemporary generations of Métis youth, to contribute toward a broader kinship mending, and the rebuilding of not only her own family, but of her community, and her nation in her own way.

Possessing many parallels with her graphic novel series, Vermette's most recent, and the 2021 Atwood Gibson Writers' Trust Fiction award-winning novel, *The Strangers*, offers a dense, historically, and culturally informed, multigenerational saga of a Métis family in Winnipeg. Set in the wake of her previous novel, *The Strangers* is a loose sequel that traces the story of four Métis women: *The Break*'s antagonist, Phoenix, and her experiences in prison; her sister Cedar's experiences in foster care and then living with her non-Indigenous father in suburban Winnipeg; their mother, Elsie and her struggles with trauma and addictions; and grandmother, Margaret and her encounters with racism and defeats. Although the three younger women's stories are set contemporaneously, and Margaret's story is largely set 15 years before, both private and national histories form a critical backdrop to the narrative as the women struggle to survive in a settler-dominated society. While the novel has stylistic resonances with earlier texts, the clear, straightforward prose is reminiscent of Mosionier's *April Raintree*, and thematically echoes Campbell's *Halfbreed*, particularly through Vermette's reference of Elsie's reflection on the "generations of Stranger women, and her useless men" (120), it is perhaps in her work's concerted representation of Métis history in Manitoba that Vermette stands out. It is in these histories that she shows an increasingly deeper awareness and knowledge of specific Métis experiences. In contrast to *The Break*, where Phoenix's "grandmère" (236), Angélique, was initially described as the daughter of a member of L'Union nationale métisse, in *The Strangers* Vermette drops the affiliation as she revises Angélique's past, and positions her as having grown up in "a shantytown" (*The Strangers*

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<sup>112</sup> Vermette also introduces "blood memory" (284) in a similarly problematic way, in her novel, *The Strangers*.

62), likely the road allowance community of Rooster Town, which existed on the southern tip of Winnipeg in the early to mid 20<sup>th</sup> century (around present-day Grant Park Mall), instead of in the “French part of town” (*The Break* 236), which refers to St. Boniface, St. Vital, or St. Norbert. Margaret later elaborates: “In her mother’s childhood, they were Métis stuck in a city they had created but now were all but pushed out of. Their home was little more than a shack, and they never had two pennies to rub together” (315). Since members of L’Union nationale were mostly middle-class professionals and farmers, as discussed previously, there would have been class-related, and geographic, differences between them and the people of Angélique’s “shantytown” (62). Vermette’s revision hints at greater nuance in her attempt to accurately represent specific Métis communities, and how this particular narrative is *not* the story of the Métis middle-class.

Yet, in her attempt to broadly represent and draw upon various experiences, Vermette occasionally links historically disparate communities. In *The Break*, she describes Angélique’s husband (Margaret’s father), Mac, as “Métis too but half-breed Ojibwe ... [who] spoke English” (237), suggesting an Anglo-Protestant background, or kinship with the English-speaking parishes of Red River. This seems further implied in *The Strangers* by Elsie’s reflection on how “Grandpa Mac used to say all Métis were quiet like them. Thoughtful, he called it ... them Strangers have always been quiet people. The kind who stare out windows and never have to fill up space with silly small talk” (107). This generalization is jarring in light of some previous writers’ portrayal of Métis exuberance; recall Maria Campbell’s description of the difference between her family, and their “Indian relatives on the nearby reserves ... [who were] quiet when we were *noisy*” (*Halfbreed* 25; emphasis mine). The dissonance of Vermette’s generalization is amplified by Mac’s expanded history and connection with the community of “Ste. Madeleine” (324) and revelation of his French-speaking “Maman” (324). Much like Echo does for contemporary Métis

youth, Mac and Angélique become universalizing stand ins for historical Métis experiences as Vermette seems to accord them with almost the entirety of Métis history in Manitoba. Albeit somewhat minor, these conflicting, or at the very least, unusual, particularities gesture to how Vermette still occasionally ignores (intentionally or not) separate, distinct histories, as well as historical tensions and divisions between, even as she attempts to unite, Métis communities.

Despite such lacunae Vermette's *The Strangers* and her graphic novel series *A Girl Called Echo* are culturally significant representations of Métis people through the longue-durée of their cultural and political development. Her work marks the culmination of an ideological shift started by earlier writers such as Marilyn Dumont and Rita Bouvier away from occasional pan-Indigenous confluences like those of Campbell and Scofield, and the mixedness evoked in the writings of Mosionier and Arnott, toward clearer articulations of Métis people, identity, and experiences, rooted in specific places, events, and persons. Vermette's representation of kinship, however, the effects of territorial dispossession, and of political resistance tends to de-emphasize cultural elements like language and religion. Although Echo's ancestors often speak French, and moments of code-switching represent a French Michif history, her life in present-day Winnipeg unfolds largely in English with little influence of French or Michif. Similarly in *The Strangers* internal cultural diversity becomes minimized through a de-emphasis on language: Angélique learns to speak English, and French language skills vanish in subsequent generations. Vermette also de-emphasizes Catholicism. Much like how Dumont positions religion in *The Pemmican Eaters* as a supporting element of the cultural contexts of 19<sup>th</sup> century Métis, as opposed to a central pillar of identity as expressed by many historical Métis writers, Vermette offers in the *Echo* series an occasional priest, a church, Riel holding a crucifix (*Road Allowance* 10). Rather, with echoes of Brady's and Campbell's ideological influences, Vermette implicates the clergy in

the dispossession of the Métis with the illustration of a priest alongside government officials at a scrip commission (16). Unlike Dumont, who shows how the influence of Catholicism persisted through the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Vermette's portrayals of Echo's, and the Stranger family's, present-day, 21<sup>st</sup> century lives as largely devoid of Christian symbolism, reveal a critical break with the Church. Through them, Vermette's texts re-articulates Métis identity primarily via kinship (with family, community, territory, and other Indigenous peoples), and political struggles.

Although this glimpse at contemporary Métis writing is limited in scope, addressing only some of the most significant texts of the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, it gestures toward the incredible surge in literary production over the last three decades, which continues to accelerate. This surge also reveals critical formal and ideological shifts between historical and contemporary Métis literatures: where the French language dominated historical Métis writing, English became the dominant language of contemporary Métis writing, despite the occasional code-switching of Indigenous languages (primarily Cree, Ojibwe, and Michif). French has become largely relegated to historical representation—either as a reference in contemporary texts, such as Scofield's *Louis* or Dumont's *The Pemmican Eaters*, or part of a recovery of historical voices, such as in Auguste Vermette's *Au temps de la prairie*, edited by Marcien Ferland (2000). As I have shown, English-dominance in contemporary Métis literature reflects that not all Métis have francophone heritage, but also how many of those with francophone heritage have lost most of their French. While I do not suggest that all Métis have lost their French, even limited present-day usage is generally not represented in contemporary literary production, and may reflect the reality of broader language usage, not to mention the dominance of English in the western Canadian publishing landscape.<sup>113</sup>

Similarly, representations of a shift away from Catholicism, and the embrace of First



Nations spiritualities and ceremonies, suggested in the writings of Campbell and Scofield, and the strategic distancing from Catholicism of Dumont, and Vermette, capture only a portion of the complex and varied relationships with Catholicism that many contemporary Métis communities continue to experience. In her dissertation on Métis and Chicana/o children's literature, Danielle Lamb reveals for instance that “more than half of the [Métis] picture books that [she] examine[s] make reference ... to this faith [Catholicism]” (127); and Chantal Fiola also shows in her books, *Rekindling the Sacred Fire* (2015), and *Returning to Ceremony* (2021), that while some Métis in Manitoba are returning to Indigenous spirituality, there remain “high rates of Catholicism among Red River Métis families” (*Rekindling* 3).

Aside from these cultural shifts, the ruptures between historical and contemporary Métis writing are also in part textual. In other words, with the exception of Riel, who appears primarily as a political leader, visionary, and martyr, though notably as a poet in Scofield's *Louis*, there is limited formal connection between historical and contemporary Métis writing. Paul Chartrand gestures toward this phenomenon when he writes about the “resurrection” (4) of Falcon's songs, revealing their attenuated reach and influence. Of the writers and texts examined in this chapter, only Vermette seems to reference Falcon, and then only paratextually by including the opening verses of “La Grenouillère” in the appendix of *Pemmican Wars*. Emma LaRocque argues that “most contemporary Metis writers and scholars seek to deconstruct the West's stereotype of the itinerant hybrid and to ... re-root the Metis with home(land), community, culture, and agency” (“Contemporary” 140), but between navigating the significant, and often traumatic, cultural, economic, spiritual, and linguistic ruptures that occurred between historical and contemporary realities, I contend that cultural “re-root[ing]” is selective and strategic. Representing historical

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<sup>113</sup> Non-literary, Michif language texts have been published by Métis-run educational and cultural institutions. One example is an anthology of traditional Métis stories, *Stories of Our People / Lii zistwayr di la naasyoon di Michif: A*

and cultural complexities can even generate tension, or dissonance, as evidenced in Scofield's representation of Louis Riel. Katherine Durnin argues that the "very naturalness of being Métis in Western Canada—the feeling of a people who 'know who they are'—is often lost in literary representations ... that revolve around forcing Métis characters into race-based and hierarchical binaries that make it impossible to reflect an even-handed respect for their dual heritage" (327). She warns that in the embrace of indigeneity, and reclamation and representation of Indigenous women, certain aspects of historical Métis culture, informed by their European heritage may be lost or forgotten in contemporary Métis literary production.

Durnin suggests that the literary "abjuring [of] their white 'fathers' ... and embracing their Indian 'mothers' as the most authentic and uncompromised part" (326) of Métis identity, which leads to the "re-indigenization of the Métis" (327), risks eliding diverse cultural heritages and flattening literary representations. Building on Renan's claim that "[le] culte des ancêtres est de tous le plus légitime; les ancêtres nous ont faits ce que nous sommes" (50), Durnin argues that "only memory ... has the power to bind people together into a collective identity" (324), and that through a strategic forgetting and elision of European influences, such as language and religion, Métis self-identification, as expressed in writing, has swung like a "pendulum of values attached to race" (325) from emphasizing European to First Nations ancestry. This embrace and rejection work in step with Renan's contention that the essence of a nation is that "que tous les individus aient beaucoup de choses en commun, et aussi que tous aient oublié bien des choses" (38). Even as Durnin provides crucial insights on the development of Métis literature and identity through the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, tracing growing emphasis on Indigenous ancestry, and the problematization of European ancestry, her focus on pre-Métis ancestors and the metaphor of the "pendulum" swing of racialized articulations of Métis identity obscure some critical nuances. The pendulum

creates two poles, two inalterable positions between which the pendulum swings, which in turn seems to re-emphasize mixedness; the position of the pendulum becomes a measure of mixedness. What is more, it elides subsequent cultural and political development.

To Durnin's point, in the concerted emphasis of cultural and linguistic kinship with other Indigenous peoples, and the de-emphasis of European cultural ancestry and influence, some Métis writers risk estranging fundamental elements of historical Métis distinctiveness, as they re-shape contemporary conceptions of historical Métis identity. That is, Métis writers seem to reify the metaphorical pendulum's poles by continuously using shorthand references to European fathers and Indigenous mothers, instead of emphasizing *Métis* parents. However, I would suggest that the recovery of historically under-represented voices and traditional Indigenous ways of knowing also represents a form of healing, a corrective of sorts, a fleshing out, that expands what has been the focus on men in early Métis literature (like the male-centrism of Falcon's songs or Riel's writings), not to mention diverse geographic and class representations. Might the rejection of "whiteness" (325) Durnin reads into contemporary Métis literature as a swing of the pendulum reflect some pre-Métis European actions and ethos? Might the embrace of "Indianness" (325) be in part an echo of the Freeman, those late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century fur traders who remained in the North-West following the end of their contracts with fur trading companies, married First Nations and Métis women, and began to establish a buffalo trading economy (Teillet, *The North-West* 29-36)?<sup>114</sup> Might the literary embrace of "Indianness" not be in part a respectful reflection that the Métis Nation shares territory with their maternal (Indigenous) kin?<sup>115</sup> I bring up these possibilities to show how historical positions were not monolithic, but robustly complex and

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<sup>114</sup> Embrace and rejection seem interwoven in Métis history; whereas the Freeman seemed to embrace (and transform) Indigenous ways of living in the North-West, and perhaps reject some aspects of their own European heritages, others, including HBC officers like Sir George Simpson did the reverse, rejecting their Indigenous wives, and affiliations with Indigenous communities in favour of re-embracing European ideals and women.

human. While certainly deemphasized in contemporary Métis writing, European heritage has not been forgotten and moreover, the Métis are continually reminded of it by others. Rather, this reckoning or accounting of heritage and kinship is part of the process of “returning home.” When looking back on the history of Métis literature, it is important to recall that there is no singular experience. Métis literary production represents enormous geographic, economic, and cultural diversity. This is the power of literature: to hold multiple, often conflicting, truths.

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<sup>115</sup> I use maternal here like Riel does to refer to First Nations relations.

### Conclusion — The Discomfort of Contemporary Métis Literature

The history of Métis literature in many ways parallels the history of the Métis Nation itself, emerging in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century with Pierre Falcon's nationalist anthem, and growing through Riel's prodigious writings during the resistance periods in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, only to then dwindle under the increasing dominance of Canadian settler-colonialism and the English language in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Métis writing persisted through the work of individuals and organizations dedicated to the—albeit increasingly romanticized, revisionist, and laudatory—preservation of Métis histories and culture like L'Union nationale métisse Saint-Joseph, whose efforts culminated with the publication of A.H. de Trémaudan's *Histoire*. Despite such attempts, the unrelenting weight of settler-colonialism and the embrace of English irrevocably altered Métis literary production and articulations of Métis identity. Literary production did not vanish in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, but was kept alive and then reinvigorated by the work of Métis women. Maria Campbell's *Halfbreed* marked a re-emergence of Métis literature, but one, altered by the traumas of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early to mid 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, and preoccupied with efforts of cultural recovery and de-colonization, that diverged from historical Métis writing in important ways. As I have shown throughout this dissertation, Métis literary history offers a significant—if conflicting and contradictory, but also fluid and celebratory—record of how Métis people have articulated and represented their identities, experiences, and relationships. It offers insight into how they see themselves, their communities, and the world. However, as I demonstrated, impelled through outside pressures, and individual decisions, contemporary Métis literature not only diverges from, but reveals a discomfort with, historical Métis writing. Vermette's *The Strangers* seems to both exemplify and narrativize many of these tensions.

Whereas Métis writing in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century was largely produced in French,

by the late 20<sup>th</sup> century Métis writers worked almost exclusively in English, and the influence of Catholicism on Métis writing had waned significantly, in some cases in favour of a decolonial (re)turn to Indigenous spirituality, particularly in Campbell's work and on the work of those writers whom she has influenced. On the one hand, the growing emphasis on Indigenous cultural heritages serves as a corrective of sorts, as a reclamation of historically ignored perspectives and experiences; on the other hand, this emphasis can obscure the cultural focus of historical Métis writing, as well as historically diverse experiences, and inter-community tensions and conflicts. Whether through a lack of historical and cultural knowledge, the consequences of cultural loss, or wilful forgetting and even rejection, French and Catholicism are increasingly de-emphasized and sometimes vilified, in contemporary Métis writing. Despite trends in contemporary Métis writing toward cultural and historical recovery, as I have shown, such efforts appear strategically limited as significant aspects of Métis history and literary history remain problematic. Although some contemporary writers claim, reflect on, and recount the history of the two 19<sup>th</sup> century resistances against Canada, they tend to de-emphasize, even ignore, inter-Indigenous conflicts like the Battle of the Grand Coteau, and inter-Métis antagonism, not only between historical francophone and English-speaking communities, but also between different francophone Métis communities. Inversely echoing the revisionist efforts of L'Union nationale, contemporary writers impose an ironically idealized romanticism on the past, emphasizing Indigenous kinship, unity, and collective resistance against incipient settler-colonialism. Despite increasingly nuanced and precise representation of Métis specific histories, which contextualize present-day experiences (socio-economic conditions and cultural realities), Métis writers elide uncomfortable historical Métis enthusiasm for European ideologies and culture in some historical communities. How do contemporary Métis writers reconcile the devotion, expressed as late as the mid 20<sup>th</sup>

century by some writers such as members of L'Union nationale, for “la mission civilisatrice,” European-style education and religion, participation in the Canadian Confederation, and the industrial development of the North-West? I do not suggest that the Métis were wholly complicit in settler-colonialism, particularly given their experiences with territorial and cultural dispossession, and genocidal policies of assimilation through the late 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, but contemporary Métis literature tends to underexplore complexities and conflicts in Métis history that complicate current narratives of Métis identity and nationhood.

In many ways, Vermette's latest novel, *The Strangers*, gestures toward these very issues, perhaps unintentionally through the conflation of historical communities as I show in Chapter 5, but also purposefully through some narrative tensions between present-day Métis communities. *Strangers* is more than a family name or designation but a characterization that speaks to various cultural and community estrangements and dissolution. The family stands in for broader and common experiences, demonstrating how many Métis have become estranged from their past. This alienation takes many forms—from a sense of not belonging, having been pushed out or pushed aside from the physical spaces they built, to the cultural loss of language and religion, to the complex emotions and suspicions toward other, recently returned Métis and their claims of belonging. Issues of cultural and identity recovery, appropriation, estrangement, of inclusion and exclusion, and the question of who gets to decide who belongs, converge in powerful ways through characters and their dialogue. In one scene, Phoenix's great uncle Toby visits his sister-in-law Genie, and their conversation turns to how “Renee” or “Raven,” an ex-relative in-law, has begun claiming a Métis identity despite her ability to pass as “a white girl” (110). Toby labels her a “born-again brown” (110), who has (re)turned to the identity because she thinks she “can get something now” (111). The implication is that Renee's approach now affords her unearned

benefits, ostensibly only earned through the inability to pass. The scene resonates with Renan's, and L'Union's writings, on the unifying power of suffering on the nation, how "la souffrance en commun unit plus que la joie" (Renan 50), as Toby and Genie appear to ascribe the struggles and pain of being unable to pass as a more authentically Métis experience. Although this risks re-evoking and reifying racialized definitions of Métis identity—that the Métis are Métis simply because they are mixed-race—the reference to "brown" functions as an acknowledgement of how some Métis, and their expression of identity, and their experiences, have been undeniably shaped by racialization, not necessarily that to be Métis one must be brown. Vermette troubles this line of thought in the same scene, however, as Toby and Genie reflect on their experiences compared to those "families [who] probably tried to breed it [Indigenous racial signifiers] out for generations" (111), and they ironically complicate their suggestion of some racial essentialism by revealing their own desires to pass. "I always wished I could pass ... Margaret was like that ... [l]ooked all the way French, almost" (110), says Genie. The admission in turn suggests that passing might alleviate racialized experiences, prejudice, assaults, and so on, but it does not definitively erase one's Métis identity. Toby's assertion that Renee's identity return is motivated by economic benefits seems to underscore the transactional nature of identity, and its complicated intersection with notions of race—for both Renee, and Genie and Margaret—but it also troubles the idea of cultural recovery. What impels (and what has impelled) Métis cultural recovery? What are its possibilities? Conversely, what are its limits and how is it guided?

Genie and Toby do have a legitimate concern regarding Renee's identification, which is problematized through the reference to her "Great-Grandfather [who Renee claims] was a Métis shaman" (110). Genie scoffs at the idea: "have you ever heard of such a thing?" Is Renee a non-Indigenous person illegitimately claiming an Indigenous identity? Is she mixed raced non-status



First Nations, with links or not to Red River, claiming a Métis identity? Or is she a person with legitimate Métis heritage who is struggling to reconnect, and doing so in problematic ways? Are Genie's and Toby's concerns over Renee's identity shift founded, and grounded in a protective reflection of Métis identity, or are they begrudging projections of their own discomforts? These are questions Vermette seems to return to time and again; issues of passing, identity, conjecture, and distrust reappear throughout the novel, forming important thematic threads that link multiple characters and generations. When Phoenix meets a "blonde" social worker, when at the hospital to give birth to her son, and the woman informs Phoenix that she is "Métis too" (16), Phoenix notes that "she didn't look it ... [and moreover] thought she must be one of *those* Métis, the ones who only said that when there was something to get for it" (16), and Phoenix betrays her position and perspective (if not also expresses self-hatred and ignorance), by making a broad assumption based only on the woman's appearance and apparent class position. Later in the text, Margaret rages at her perceived inability to pass (253) despite intensive efforts to do so. Vermette does not provide clarity in these scenes, but rather, through contextual density, informed by an increasing awareness and intertextual use of Métis history and literary history, and contemporary discourse, she juxtaposes these issues and questions in ways that hint at deeper, internal complexities.

Although further unpacking these themes is beyond the scope of this conclusion, I would argue that Vermette's text demonstrates how Métis literature seems to be moving toward greater, critical, self-reflection and consideration of internal diversity and tensions, as well as to demand a greater awareness of Métis literary history for its critical examination. Not every person sees or has articulated being Métis, or what makes a person Métis, the same way; also, despite efforts at cultural recovery, and narratives of national history, because of historical assertions, as well as ongoing racialized experiences, racial definitions of Métis identity persist. While occasionally

conflating disparate historical communities and experiences, Vermette's novel notably evokes, represents, and narrativizes multiple discomforts that resonate with Métis history and literary history—from the complexities of cultural recovery and national re-building, from the occasional transactional nature of identity, to uncertainty or suspicion of new Métis, tension around race and class, language, and religion, to alienation from one's own history, culture, community, family, and self. Recalling Jonathan Kertzer's assertion that literature "makes the nation both possible and impossible, imaginable and intolerable" (12), we see how contemporary Métis writing, in its alienated discomfort with historical Métis writing and elements of Métis history, participates precariously in a national re-construction in ways that not only trouble the historical Métis nation (through its contemporary disavowal of central aspects of that historical nation), but also in turn troubles the contemporary nation by rooting it in a strategically limited representation of the past. Campbell's anti-Catholicism, for instance, although rooted in her personal experiences, presages a broader shift in Métis cultural and political landscapes. This anti-Catholicism represents more than a challenge against the power which the church held over Métis communities, but functions as a repudiation of its ideological underpinnings: the euro-centric "mission civilisatrice" (Comité 28) that has become associated with policies of assimilation, abuses, and residential schools, and so on. It is a recognition of how Christianity served as a tool of settler-colonialism, enabling, and actively participating, in the dispossession and eradication of Indigenous peoples. Contemporary disavowal or rejection of this historical participation, however, is not a reckoning with legacies of past Métis support of "la mission civilisatrice" from Isbister, through the Riels, to Schmidt, and DeLaronde. It appears difficult for present-day writers to imagine, reconcile, and represent how the 19<sup>th</sup> century Métis golden age, prior to Canada's purchase of the North-West and the Métis armed resistances, was in large part driven by Franco-Catholic Métis (and some English-

speaking communities), who articulated Métis nationalism in concert with, and participated in, Christian proselytizing, and supported the proliferation of European style education.

I have presented works of Métis literature that have enabled the tracing of multiple thematic elements, from articulations of identity, to expression of concern for community, nationhood, culture, both language and religion, along with some reflections on Louis Riel and the armed resistance of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but I recognize that this canon remains fluid. While I touched on some aesthetic aspects of Métis writing and poetics, from its elements of orality, to the documentary-style verse and prose that links multiple generations of Métis writers, there is work yet to be done in tracing specific literary and cultural influences (not to mention outlining the parallel canon of non-literary Métis texts that contextualize Métis literary production and the interpretation of Métis literature), and further considering Métis poetics. LaRocque points out how Métis writing is “contestatory in its beginnings ... [and] involves a re-collection of scattered parts, both personal and communal” (“Contemporary” 134), but she frames her claim in terms of Métis literary resurgence in the mid-to-late 20<sup>th</sup> century. Her assertion that Métis aesthetics are “marked by mixing, transgression, and a reinvention of genres, languages, tropes, and techniques” (134) is compelling, but also vague, and seemingly based on a canon that ignores a great deal of historical Métis literary production (particularly in French), and leaves a number of questions unanswered: which elements are mixed, how are they mixed, and what exactly is transgressed? How are genres being reinvented? Which genres? Are the ways in which languages, techniques, and tropes are used contemporarily evidence of ruptures or resonances with historical Métis writing and language arts? LaRocque does perceptively cite Armand Ruffo regarding the existence of a “documentary/biographical mode of writing” in Métis literature, one that bridges

historical and contemporary writers, and “can be traced back to the likes of Louis Riel” (qtd. in LaRocque, “Contemporary” 140). Documentary modes can be found in Vermette’s admiration for “life story,” through memoirs in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and the considerations of personal, community, and national histories in Métis letters, to Falcon’s songs in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Documentary and biographical modes shape, and have roots in, Métis storytelling beyond literature. As I have shown with Falcon’s songs, and the rise of literacy in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Métis literature begins in the intersections of Métis writing and oral cultures, but storytelling remained a primarily oral form as early Métis writing was focused on more political or economic concerns, correspondence, and later, formal poetry. How might have concurrent oral traditions influenced or shaped the emergence of storytelling in Métis literature? In Métis oral tradition, for instance, “stories ... [often] connected listeners to their ancestors’ efforts to maintain their status as a self-sufficient, independent Indigenous nation” (“Oral Tradition” *Indigenous Peoples Atlas of Canada*). However, not all stories were (auto)biographical or documentary, as they included “lii koont and lii atayoohkaywin (legends and fairy tales) and lii zistwayr (stories)” (Oral Tradition), and historically served “educational, spiritual, and healing functions” (Episkenew, *Taking Back* 192). Yet even as oral and written storytelling appear to share many elements, from healing to the documentary mode, to shared narratives, myths, histories, and so on, and written storytelling resonates with Cree narrative forms, and often evokes orality and oral culture, Métis literature is not an unequivocal transcription of oral stories. More work is needed in parsing out the complex relationships and intersections between Métis storytelling, literature, and oral culture. Although an unattributed article in the *Indigenous Peoples Atlas of Canada* on “Oral Tradition” argues that “Métis stories [in the oral tradition] are not ‘make-believe.’ They are an integral component of

the Métis worldview” (Oral Tradition), it remains unclear what “make-believe” means. Does it refer to fanciful storytelling, or more imaginative, or fictional storytelling? Are stories that rely on “make-believe” not also reflective of the worldviews of the cultures that produced them? Might Métis literature, and particularly more creative, fictional, prose forms not only possess, but use elements of “make-believe”? While I pointed out that Métis fiction was an unproduced genre of writing until the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, due in part to economic conditions, as well as the influence of Cree narrative forms, like “âtayôhkêwina” and “âcimowina” (Innes 31), might the implied aversion to “make-believe” as articulated above have also partially influenced, or even delayed, the emergence of fictional genres of Métis writing? As this section has shown, there remain questions about the connections between documentary/autobiographical modes of storytelling, creative writing, and the writing of fiction in Métis literature. Elements of “make-believe” that Métis literature seem to borrow most are the abilities to imagine and envision, and which inform not only contemporary sub-genres like Indigenous futurisms, but resonates with historical Métis writing and storytelling, as pointed out by Paul Chartrand, in his reflections on the resurrection of Falcon’s “Chanson de la Grenouillère” as a place of envisioning, or arguably evidenced by Riel’s imaginative envisioning of the future of the nation. Métis literature broadly continues to operate as that place, where through imagination, narrative, cultural representation, and historical awareness, and echoing common practices and roots with oral storytelling, Métis-ness is not only recovered, and represented, but concertedly re-envisioned.

I would suggest that the line between Métis literary texts (more creative texts of verse and prose, both fiction and non-fiction) and non-literary Métis texts is perhaps mutable, porous, and also open to interpretation as texts engage in a self-conscious fashioning of a Métis national literary tradition. Although some significant works, such as Chris Andersen’s *“Métis”: Race*,

*Recognition, and the Struggle for Indigenous Peoplehood* (2014), are clearly academic writing, others, like Jean Teillet's history of the Métis Nation, *The North-West Is Our Mother* (2019), trouble the distinction by echoing narrative strategies that emphasize myth-making (much as in the vein of L'Union nationale métisse's work with Trémaudan). However, despite this occasional blurring, I have shown through this dissertation how the texts most significant to a Métis literary tradition include Pierre Falcon's "La chanson de la Grenouillère"; Louis Riel's "La Métisse," and "Le peuple Métis-Canadien-français" (to name a few poems) and his essay "Les Métis du Nord-Ouest"; Maria Campbell's *Halfbreed*; Beatrice Mosionier's *In Search of April Raintree*; a selection of Gregory Scofield's poetry; Marilyn Dumont's *A Really Good Brown Girl* and *The Pemmican Eaters*; and Katherena Vermette's multiple works, but perhaps most critically her graphic novel series, *A Girl Called Echo*, her latest collection of poetry, *River Woman*, and her novel, *The Strangers*, which possess a haunting resonance with Falcon's most famous song, as they dwell on that same place and space which he sang about some two hundred odd years before, and, though it has been irrevocably altered, occupied, settled, and developed, remains home.

Although possessing a more robust history than is perhaps typically acknowledged, and despite its flourishing since the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Métis literature remains relatively small;<sup>116</sup> but through increasing literary recognition, from circulation, to literary awards, which evidences literary quality, Métis literature also demonstrates incredible value. As contemporary trends toward cultural recovery and the narrativization of Métis history continue, I expect Métis literature to develop even greater representation of internal diversity, and literary and historical awareness and engagement. While a large-scale revival of French usage in Métis literature seems

unlikely, the possibility of a modest increase in French-language literary production exists. What is more, I expect that the linguistic disruption of English-language texts through the vernacular use of Cree, Cree-Michif, and French-Michif will also persist, if not increase. The production of both short and long form fiction is also likely to increase, and holds promise in terms of its literal and figurative representational and disruptive possibilities: the power to not only represent, examine, convey, and question Métis history, but also envision Métis futures. Thematically, I hope for the increased production of complex narratives, particularly ones that engage with still underexamined experiences and contradictions in Métis history which might trouble or nuance prevalent national narratives, such as studies of complex, morally or ethically grey characters, and historical figures, historical fictions of the Métis golden age, internal diversity and inter-community antagonism, post-resistance era struggles and experiences, *le grand silence*, more diverse contemporary narratives, stories of passing or compromising decisions, more nuanced representations of Métis spirituality, with both Indigenous and non-Indigenous epistemologies, a reckoning with Catholicism, but also Métis joy, Métis futures, gender and sexuality, and even more Métis-specific genre fiction, poetry, graphic novels, and other multi-genre forms of literary production to name only a few possibilities. Is there room for Métis villains, antagonists, and anti-heroes? What of Métis atheism? Recalling Durnin's metaphor, is there room for the representation of multiple positions on the pendulum's spectrum? In light of the work yet to be done in re-considering Métis literary history and the contemporary direction toward ever greater literary production, and its discursive effects on the Métis Nation, it remains critical to continue to study how, in writing, Métis people have historically perceived themselves, how they perceive themselves now, and how they will perceive themselves and the world in the future.

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<sup>116</sup> "Small" in the sense of its volume of production and its reach, but also in the sense as employed by scholars of world literatures such as Pascale Casanova, and how "'Small' literatures have generally had a very strong link with

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## Appendix

## Selkirk Papers (1818) / Library and Archives Canada

<p>Voulez vous ecouter chanter          Une chanson de verite (bis)          Le 19 de Juin dernier          La bande des Bois Brules          Ont arrives comme une Bande des Guerriers</p> <p>En arrivient a la Grenouilliere          Nous avois fait trois prisonniers (bis)          Trois Prisonniers des Orguenis          Qui sont ici pour piller notre Pays.</p> <p>Sur le point de debarquer          Deux de nos gens sont arrives (bis)          Voila les Anglois          Qui viennent nous attaquer</p> <p>Tout aussitôt nous avons devirés          Et nous avons été le rencontrer (bis)          J'avons cerné la Bande des Granadiers          Ils sont immobiles ils sont tous demontes</p> <p>Nous avons agis en gens d'honneur          Nous avons envoyés un Ambassadeur (bis)          Le gouverneur voulez vous arreter          Un petit moment nous voulons vour parler.</p> <p>Le gouverneur qui etait enrage          Il a dit a ses soldats a tirer (bis)          Le premier coup que l'Anglois a tire          L'ambassadeur a manqué d'être tué</p>	<p>Le Gouverneur qui se croyait Empereur          Il a agi de rigueur (bis)          Avoit vu passer tous ces Bois-Brules          Il a parti pour les effroyer          Etant parti pour les epouvanter          Il s'est trompé et il s'est fait bien tuer</p> <p>Il a fait bien tuer          Une quantité de ces Granadiers (bis)          J'avons tues presque toute son armée          Dessus la Bourde 4 ou 5 qui sont sauvés</p> <p>Oh! Si vous aviez vu tous ces Anglois          Et les Bois Brules apres (bis)          De bute en bute les Anglois culbutés          Et les Bois Brulés j'etais des cris de joie</p> <p>Et qui a compose la Chanson          C'est Pierriche Falcon ce bon garçon (bis)          Elle a été faite et composer          Sur la victoire que nous avons gagnée.</p>
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## Version LaRue (1863)

<p>Voulez-vous écouter chanter,  Une chanson de verité: (bis)  Le dix-neux de Juin, la bande des Bois-Brûlés,  Sont arrives comme de braves guerriers.</p> <p>En arrivant à la grenouillère,  Nous avons fait trois prisonniers:  Trois prisonniers des Arkanys,  Qui sont ici pour piller notre pays.</p> <p>Etant sur le point de débarquer,  Deux de nos gens se sont écriés:  Deux de nos gens se sont écriés:  Voilà l'anglais qui vient nous attaquer.</p> <p>Tout aussitôt nous avons deviré,  Nous avons été les rencontrer:  J'avons cerné la bande des grenadiers,  Ils sont immobiles, ils sont tous démontés.</p> <p>J'avons agi comme des gens d'honneur,  J'avons envoyé un ambassadeur:  Le gouverneur, voulez-vous arrêter  Un petit moment, nous voulons vous parler?</p> <p>Le gouverneur qui est enrage,  Il dit à ses soldats: tirez.  Le premier coup c'est l'anglais qui a tiré,  L'ambassadeur ils ont manqué tuer.</p>	<p>Le gouverneur qui se croit empereur,  Il veut agir avec rigueur:  Le gouverneur qui se croit empereur,  A son Malheur, agit trop de rigueur</p> <p>Ayant vu passer tous ces Bois-Brulés,  Il a parti pour les épouvanter:  Etant parti pour les épouvanter:  Il s'est trompé, il s'Est bien fait tuer.</p> <p>Il s'est bien fait tuer  Quantité de ses grenadiers;  J'avons tué presque toute son armée,  Quatre ou cinq se sont sauvés.</p> <p>Si vous aviez vu tous ces Anglais,  Tous ces Bois-Brûlés après,  De butte and butte les Anglais culbuttaient,  Les Bois-Brûlés jetaient des cris de joie.</p> <p>Qui a compose la chanson,  Pierriche Falcon, ce bon garçon.  Elle a été faite et composée  Sur la victoire que nous avons gagnée.  Ou:  Elle a été faite et composée,  Chantons la gloire des Bois-Brûlés.</p>
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**Hargrave Version (1871)**

<p>Voulez-vous écouter chanter une chanson de vérité!</p> <p>Le dix-neuf je juin les “Bois-brûlés” (half-breeds) sont arrivés Comme des braves guerriers. En arrivant à la Grenouillère (Frog Plain) Nous avons fait trois prisonniers Des Orcanais! Ils sont ici pour piller notre pays.</p> <p>Etant sur le point de débarquer Deux de nos gens se sont écriés Voilà l’anglais qui vient nous attaquer! Tout aussitôt nous nous sommes devirés Pour aller les rencontrer.</p> <p>J’avons cerné la bande de Grenadiers, Ils sont immobiles! Ils sont demontés! J’avons agi comme des gens d’honneur Nous envoyâmes un ambassadeur. Gouverneur! voulez-vous arrêter un p’tit moment! Nous voulons vous parler.</p> <p>Le gouverneur qui est enrage, Il dit à ses soldats—Tirez! Le premier coup l’Anglais le tire, L’ambassadeur a presque manqué d’être tué. Le gouverneur se croyant l’Empereur Il agit avec rigueur. Le gouverneur de croyant l’Empereur A son Malheur agit avec trop de rigueur.</p>	<p>Ayant vu passer les Bois-brûlés Il a parti pour nous épouvanter. Etant parti pour nous épouvanter, Il s’est trompé; il s’est bien fait tué, Quantité de ses grenadiers.</p> <p>J’avons tué presque toute son armée De la bande quatre ou cinq se sont sauvés. Si vous aviez vu les Anglais Et tous les Bois-brûlés après! De butte en butte les Anglais culbutaient. Les Bois-brûlés jetaient des cris de joie!</p> <p>Qui en a composé la chanson? C’Eest Pierre Falcon! Le bon garçon! Elle a été faite et composée Sur la Victoire que nous avons gagné! Elle a été faite et composée Chantons la gloire de tous ces Bois-brûlés!</p>
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**Version Lafrenière (1970) (Fonds Létourneau) – taken from Chrétien and Papen’s “Le voyage...” (62)**

<p>Voulez-vous écouter chanter          Une chanson de verité?          Le dix-neuf novemb’e dernier          Les côteaux ... (?)          Là-bas du garganique (?) ont été          Pour piller not’ pays</p> <p>Tout aussitôt nous avons deviné          On l’a été les rencontrer          Nous avons cerné          Les « garganaïses » (??) qu’elles sont ici          Pour pller not’e pays (bis)</p> <p>On l’a agi comme les gens d’honneur          On l’a envoyé-z- un ambassadeur.          « Mon gouverneur,          Voulez-vous arrêter-z-un petit moment?</p> <p>Je voudrais vous parlez. »          Le gouverneur était enragé          A dit-z-à ses soldats : « Tirez. »          Le premier, c’est l’Anglais          Qui l’a tiré l’ambassadeur.</p> <p>« Mon gouverneur,          Voulez-vous arrêter-z-un petit moment?          Je voudrais vous parlez. » (bis)</p>	<p>Si vous avez vu tous ces Anglais          C’est comme du bois brûlé après. (bis)          Chantons la gloire que nous avons gagnée          C’est la victoire, j’entends des cris de joie</p>
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## Version Lavallée/Ferland (1979)

<p>Voulez-vous m'écouter chanter?  C'est une chanson de dévérité.  C'était le dix-neuf de jan (juin) darnier,  Les caups (coups) l'ont arrive  En mil huit cent seiz'  La band' des Bois-brûlés il' ont arrive  Comm' des braves guerriers.</p> <p>On a y-été à la Gornouillèr'  Nous avons fait fair' trois prisonniers;  Trois prisonniers.  Voilà l'Anglais qui l'est ici  Pour piller not' pays.</p> <p>Quand aussitôt nous avons déviré,  On a y-été les rencontrer  Quand on a vu mais tous ces Anglais,  On était démonté.  On était en bandonnance (abandonné) aussi.  — Mon gouvarneur! Voulez-vous arrêter  Un pétit moment?</p> <p>Le Gouvarneure s'creyait l'empereur.  I'-a dit-z-à ses soldats: « Tirez! »  Le premier, c'est l'Anglais  Qui a tiré l'ambassadeur :  Le-r-a manqué tuer.</p>	<p>On s'est arrange mais comm' des gens d'honneur;  On a-enweyé-z-un ambassadeur.  Sé vous aviez vu mais tous ces Anglais,  C'était tout comme du bois brûlé.  En butte en butt', les Anglais culbutaient  Comm' les Bois-brûlés jétant des cris de joué.</p> <p>Sé vous aviez vus mais tous ces Anglais!  N'avaient yinqu' cinq ou six dé sauvés!  Le Gouverneur criant-z-en ses soldats:  — Laissons-les allez!  I'-emporte'ront des novell's.</p> <p>Elle a 'té composée, la chanson  Sur la victoir' qu'on l'avait gagnée,</p> <p>C'est Pierrich' Falcon, que cé beau garçon,  Qui a compose la chanson</p>
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**“Li Lord Selkirk au Fort William” or “La danse des Bois-Brûlés” (Chartrand 16-7)**

<p>Un Héraut Allons, vite accourez Rats-musqués, Bois-brûlés Au Fort William un Milord fait régal.</p> <p>Allons donc, dépêchez, Vous saut’rez, vous dans’rez, Y a musique, et vous aurez beau bal!</p> <p>L’Ordonnateur McNabbs, que McGil’oré Entre nous soit placé; Je veux qu’il brille en ce fameux régal :</p> <p>Avec lui, retenez Vous saut’rez, vous dans’rez Y a musique, et vous aurez beau bal!</p> <p>Allon gai, McKenzé Venez de ce côté Vous prendrez part à ce petit régal:</p> <p>Et puis si vous l’voulez, Vous saut’rez, vous dans’rez Y a musique, et vous aurez beau bal!</p> <p>Oh ça! Docteur, entrez, Ici vous assiérez, Point d’humeur sombre en ce joyeux régal!</p> <p>Docteur, vous chanterez, Vous saut’rez, vous dans’rez</p>	<p>Belle Troque! Avancez Ah! Fraser! Un tel nez Est bein celui d’un courier de régal!</p> <p>Ça, morbleu, vous boirez, Puis après vous dans’rez; Y a musique, et vous aurez beau bal!</p> <p>Ça, Meurons, accordez, Préludez, commencez, Et jouez-nous quelque air un peu jovial!</p> <p>Messieurs les Bois-brûlés, Vous saut’rez, vous chant’rez Y a musique, et vous aurez beau bal!</p> <p>Les Bois-Brûlés Que vous avez de bonté, Milord! D’honnêteté! Quand pourrons-nous vous rendre un tel régal?</p> <p>Milord Allons, vous vous moquez, Dansez Matchicotés, Y a musique, et vous aurez beau bal!</p> <p>Les Bois-Brûlés Allons! Point tant d’façon, Sautons donc, dansons donc; Que l’diable emport’ Milord et son régal!</p> <p>Qu’avec vous tous ses Meurons Sur leurs maudits violons</p>
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Y a musique, et vous aurez beau bal!	Cent ans durant il danse un pareil bal!
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**“Li Général Dixon” or “Ballade du Général Dickson” (Chartrand 19)**

C’est à la Rivière-Rouge, Nouvelles sont arrivées, (bis) Un général d’armée Qui vient pour engager.	Adieu, mes officiers, Vous m’avez tous laissé. (bis) On marqu’ra sur le papier Dickson pauvre guerrier.
Il vient pour engager Beaucoup de Bois-Brûlés (bis) Il vient pour engager Et n’a point d’quoi payer.	Bourgeois de compagnie, Je dois vous remercier (bis) De me faire ramener Au fort de Mackenzie.
Dit qu’il veut emmener Beaucoup de Bois-Brûlés (bis) Ils sont en renommée Pour de braves guerriers.	Je dois vous remerciez Puisque avec vos derniers (bis) J’ai pu me faire guider Par deux des Bois-Brûlés.
Vous, Monsieur Cuthbert Grant, Maître de régiment (bis) Mes épauettes d’argent Je vous en fais présent.	Qui en a fait la chanson? Un poète du canton : (bis) Au bout de la chanson, Nous vous le nommerons.
Moi, Général Dickson Je cherche ma couronne (bis) Je cherche ma couronne, Chez Messieurs les Espagnols.	Un jour étant à table A boire et à chanter (bis) A chanter tout au long La nouvelle chanson.
Ville de Mexico, Beaucoup de Généraux, (bis) Aussi de canonnières Qui vont vous couronner,	Amis, buvons, trinquons, Saluons la chanson (bis) De Pierre Falcon, Le faiseur de chansons.



**“Les Tribulations d’un roi malheureux” (Chartrand 22/MacLeod 36-8)**

<p>1. Est-il rien sur la terre De plus intéressant Que la tragique histoire De McDoug’ et ses gens? Je vous la conterai ; Veuillez bien m’écouter.</p>	<p>5. Il paraît que l’orage, Dans son gouvernement, Durant tout le voyage, Eclata fort souvent, L’union qui rend plus fort Était loin de ce corps.</p>	<p>9. Étonné de l’audace De ces hardie mortels, Il emploie les menaces Pour vaincre ces rebelles; Mais cela fut en vain, Il ne put gagner rien.</p>
<p>2. Sur notre territoire, Devenu ses États, Il venait ce bon père, Régner en potentat, Ainsi l’avait réglé Le Ministre Cartier.</p>	<p>6. Mais, malgré la tempête Cameron à son bord Voulait décrire la fête Qui l’attendait à port; Et la voir imprimée Avant qu’elle fut passé.</p>	<p>10. Obligé de reprendre Le voie du Canada Il lui faudra attendre De l’argent pour cela; Car, pour manger ici Il prend tout à crédit</p>
<p>3. Le Coeur gros d’espérance, Partant du Canada Il dit: “J’ai confiance Qu’on vivra bien là-bas, Ah! Quel bonheur! Ma foi! Je suis donc enfin Roi!”</p>	<p>7. Ce ministre fidèle Étant loin de prévoir Qu’elle ne serait pas telle Qu’il avait cru la voir— Funeste illusion! Quelle déception!</p>	<p>11. Aujourd’hui sa couronne Est un songe passé; Le trône qu’on lui donne C’est un trône percé, Mais il dit qu’à présent Il est bien suffisant.</p>
<p>4. Comptant sur les richesses Qu’il trouverait chez nous, Il eut la maladresse De ne pas prendre un son, Même pour traversez Un pays étranger</p>	<p>8. Déjà de son royaume Le sol il va toucher, Quand tout à coup un homme Lui défend d’avancez, Lui disant « Mon ami C’est assez loin d’ici. »</p>	<p>12. Aujourd’hui que va die Monsieur le Gouvernement? Sera-t-il noir de rire Quand il verra ses plans Déjà tous culbutés Par les Bois-Brûlés?</p>