

Many of the settlement issues concerning this dry region were being addressed as early as the 1920s, but there was (and perhaps still is) little political will to admit that the region is overpopulated in terms of what the landscape could support. As a result only the best soils or irrigated sites could be (and still are) successfully farmed. The settlers ultimately altered the landscape causing the destruction of much of the region, devaluing it in terms of agriculture, ranching, wildlife, and ecosystem services.

Jones's book is a lasting description of the agricultural settlement of the Palliser's Triangle that shows a cyclic pattern of hopeful development followed by bust. The only exception to the lessons outlined in *Empire of Dust* is the oil and gas boom (and bust) that began in the 1950s, which effectively increased the regions carrying capacity, but merely in economic terms. Its account of thousands of people fleeing their farms as a result of drought and over-optimistic views still holds lessons for us today as we enter yet another dry year compounded by a serious BSE scare. The lessons are especially true when we look into the crystal ball of climate models that suggest a prairie landscape changing at a rate not witnessed in recorded history.

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The False Traitor: Louis Riel in Canadian Culture, by Albert Braz. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003.

Riel was hung as a traitor on November 16, 1885, but the fervor surrounding the man, and the circumstances of his death, has not abated. Albert Braz takes us on a journey of literary and artistic opinion that follows Riel's journey from traitor to Canadian icon. *The False Traitor: Louis Riel in Canadian Culture* is unique in that it is not a book "about" Louis Riel. It does not "directly" examine the life of Riel, nor his place in Métis and Canadian history, yet through its presentation, it does. It does not examine historical events outside of their context within the developmental stage of Canadian nationhood, and yet through its examination, it does.

Braz states that this book was not written to "identify the great masterpieces on Riel" but to trace the transformation of his person in Canadian literature, and "to show how society comes to terms with competing narratives when it transforms into a national hero someone it had hanged as a traitor" (11). In doing this, Braz is successful. Braz examines the portrayal of Riel as traitor to Confederation, French-Canadian Catholic martyr, bloodthirsty rebel, new world liberator, pawn of shadowy white forces, prairie political maverick, Aboriginal hero, deluded mystic, alienated intellectual, victim of western industrial progress, and father of Confederation (3), discussing the liberality taken by novelists, poets, playwrights and artists as they present the man, Riel. Braz includes examples of how Riel's own writings were expropriated and taken out of historical context by other authors, and how portrayals are made of him as an unseen third party, or as a caricature that can be no one else. Braz includes Riel's own written works as he discussed the people and events familiar to him, using this as an aid to give context and comparison to the writings of others.

Braz questions why the imagery of Riel in both historical and non-historical

literature changes so radically over time and ethnic-cultural boundaries, positing that “most of the purported representations of the politician-mystic are less about him than about the authors and their specific social reality” (3), and are likely “excursions into the author’s own time as much as the subjects” (5). Six chapters portray the various images of Riel, and each portrayal is discussed within the context of a particular time and place. Chapter One is entitled “The Red River Patriot: Riel in His Biographical and Social Context,” and focuses on Riel’s construction of himself and the Métis nation. As it does so, it proposes that neither entity can be considered a constant. Chapter Two, “The Traitor: Riel as an Enemy of Confederation,” traces a predominantly English, nineteenth-century image of Riel as a nation-wrecker. Chapter Three, entitled “The Martyr (I): Riel As an Ethnic and Religious Victim of Confederation,” concentrates on Riel as a martyr, examining portrayals by nineteenth-century French Catholic writers from Quebec who claim it was the bigotry of English Canadians for which Riel was hung. Chapter Four, “The Go-between: Riel as a Cultural Mediator,” centres on post-World War II writers who portray Riel as an intermediary among the ethno-cultural, religious, and regional groups in Canada. These writers use Riel as a bridge between themselves and Aboriginal people in a move to “indigenously” themselves. Chapter Five, “The Martyr (II): Riel As a Sociopolitical Victim of Confederation,” continues in part from Chapter Three, but instead of viewing Riel as a victim of English-Canadian ethnic or religious ethnocentrism, it identifies Riel and the Metis people as casualties of the ideology of Canadian progress. Chapter Six, “The Mystic/Madman: Riel as a Para-rational Individual” presents what may be the most interesting discussion within the book, addressing the claiming, or disavowal, of Riel’s mental state by both supporters and non-supporters. In the conclusion, “Riel: Canadian Patriot in Spite of Himself,” Braz re-examines the diversity of representation experienced by Riel throughout the past 150 years. He addresses several possible reasons why this man, who occupied such a brief place in Canadian history, has become a Canadian icon, pondering the possibility that it “reflects a change in consciousness that has culminated in non-Aboriginal people increasingly seeing themselves as Canadians” (17).

This book is an asset to any library as a reference text, for though it is not directly about Riel, the analysis of information provides the reader with glimpses into Riel’s personality, and the effect his presence had on an emerging Metis and Canadian nation. It is invaluable also because of its examination of the changing consciousness of predominantly Euro-Canadian writers and artists, who use Riel as the medium through which they are able to voice social and political concepts. What would improve the readability of this book, however, would be the provision of translations for the many French quotes and phrases Braz includes. A number of books have been written “about” Riel, but this one is unique in that it explores Riel through the literature and art of a growing nation.

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