

HIST/ANS 2250

The Metis Nation

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The Spider on the Turtle – The Ehap Nation

REFLECTIVE/ REFLEXIVE PAPER

It is the year of our Lord, 2023 Anno Domingo. The stubborn and insistent “secular humanism”¹, afterwards, the fallout of unprecedented academic revisionism. This revisionism “seemed doomed from the start, because the last thing [vilification, romanticism rather than being completely ignored] is not about what really happened in the past, they are fables being told to shape the future.”² Fables coalesce into stories, grow into narrative, develop into symbols. Symbolism can take shape (any shape convenient to the ideas of that current time and place and faith) transform into myths, myths grow into mythology, maturing, and integrating into the meta-narrative becoming historical fictions, taught to schoolchildren, never questioned by educators. This is the story we know; this is the story we teach. Something about a turtle. My story, something about a spider.

MANIFESTOPHELES

Thus the myths and symbols reach critical mass, whereby “self-actualization, clarification of their own values, and the dangerous idea that the ‘truth’ is whatever the truth means to that individual.”³ Then let us take these myths as the truth, moving forward [together] with “enthusiasm, convinced of the excellence of what [I] he is forced to [teach] do, the constraint of [the program⁴] the organization will no longer be felt [and] the civic [greater good] for

¹ Andrew Hartman – “A Trojan Horse for Social Engineering”: The Curriculum Wars in Recent American History”- *The Journal of Policy History* Vol. 25 no. 1 Cambridge University Press (2013): p. 122

² Paul Chat Smith. “*Everything You Know About Indians is Wrong*” University of Minnesota Press (2009): p.77

³ Andrew Hartman – “A Trojan Horse for Social Engineering”: The Curriculum Wars in Recent American History”- *The Journal of Policy History* Vol. 25 no. 1 Cambridge University Press (2013): p. 121

⁴ Hereafter the code name of the Bachelor of Education after-degree program currently being studied.

[perpetuating and endorsing] the right kind of social myths [and ultimately] will have solved the problems of man [and half-breed alike].”⁵

EHAP NATION – The Web of Destiny

This paper is a brief exploration of the truth of Canada’s ethnogenesis and identity crisis. The truth that goes down easy, the convenience of the meta-narrative is usually too convenient, and thereby survives without too much to inconvenient to unsettle what we think we know. Revisionism, even though the battle will be won with cartoonish outcomes, does speak (somewhat) to progress. I have learned enough in education to know how much I don’t know. That my personal bias makes me extremely intolerant towards stupidity. ‘The program’ does not necessarily endorse critical thinking, or deeper understanding. But we, as the next generation of educators have a unique problem to solve, we have a duty to hybridize the public school system to fit in modern day schooling with traditional beliefs. I confess before the deed, that I will promote the cartoon. I will sell the noble savage when I speak to the Sacred Teachings. “It is this extraordinary tension between the imagined past and the messy, uncooperative realities of our present is a crazy making factory running 24 hours a day.”⁶

But in the end “myths, it transpired, are stronger than anyone could have imagined.”⁷ Myths are the sum of self-actualized truths (self-aware, but rarely self-evident). The challenge posed by the truth is that truth “can be separated into psychological and physical elements [to become] an arbitrary simplification that prevents all understanding of what exactly [the truth] is.”⁸ This is the unique challenge of anyone studying the humanities, or in ‘the program’, or serving God or serving tables. We are all led by, or in pursuit of, a certain truth. This is a problem. The truth operates simultaneously in several forms. The truth can be partial, a half-truth, a limited truth, a truth out of context, or a flat out lie.”⁹ Treacherous and forbidding territory, where we find the truth.

⁵ Ellul, Jacques. *“Propaganda: The formation of men’s attitudes”* Vintage Books Random House USA (1962): p.xviii

⁶ Paul Chat Smith. *“Everything You Know About Indians is Wrong”* University of Minnesota Press (2009): p.125

⁷ Harai, Yuval Noah, *‘Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind.’* Penguin, Random House Inc. USA (2014): p.103

⁸ Ellul, Jacques. *“Propaganda: The formation of men’s attitudes”* Vintage Books Random House USA (1962): p.21

⁹ Ellul, Jacques. *“Propaganda: The formation of men’s attitudes”* Vintage Books Random House USA (1962): p.v

When I am faced with a difficult question in the classroom about identity, or hybrids, will I have the courage, or the time, to teach the truth? Is the truth about indigenous Canada mandated in our curriculum? It is, but which variant of the truth will I tell? In fact, our purview in ‘the program’ is to indigenize the classroom. Appropriately the old ways and find a new way to reinvent the old same old classroom.

We are to teach the native experience. “And when we refuse to acknowledge this, and pretend that it's otherwise, to pretend we are [learning from] real Indians, instead of real human beings, to please an antique notion of European romanticism, we may think we're acting tough [and keeping it real] but instead we're selling out.”¹⁰

So, lies and truths are maintained by leaders and despots and tyrants and created what academics call ‘legal fictions’, such as ‘treaties’. Harari extrapolates “The kinds of things people create through this network of stories are known in academic circles as ‘fictions’, ‘social constructs’, or ‘imagined realities’. An imagined reality is not a lie. There is nothing special about lies. [...] as long as the communal belief persists, the imagined reality exerts force on the world.”¹¹ The communal belief is that we have something extreme to reconcile, and that is the truth, evident in mass graves being dug up across the country.

Let the truth be told, and there will be great pain due to the extreme traumas that come with the truths hidden away in the hearts of people who make Canadian history. And when these hidden truths become a national commission after the crimes are exposed, the revolution will most definitely be televised. But the villains in our national crime are long dead. Our need to find a villain is persistent, leaving deep wounds across our cultures that refuse to heal. This continues to salt the wounds of our survivors, while the rest of the country is shamed into a survivor’s guilt. Are the stories we tell ourselves true? “You they know there is more to be gained from hard questions than from easy answers.”¹² Resulting in this bitter medicine: “This unpleasant truth is

¹⁰ Paul Chat Smith. *“Everything You Know About Indians is Wrong”* University of Minnesota Press (2009): p.23

¹¹ Harari, Yuval Noah, *‘Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind.’* Penguin, Random House Inc. USA (2014): p.26

¹² Paul Chat Smith. *“Everything You Know About Indians is Wrong”* University of Minnesota Press (2009): p.169

why Indians have been erased from the master narrative of this country and replaced by the cartoon images that all of us know and most of us believe.”¹³

THE DISTORTION FIELDS

One can easily perceive that distortion can occur at any point in the process in the pursuit of truth. Or the permutations of truth when a student dares to have an original idea. Ideas are not born, they breed, just like the Wild Hamlets on the [sexual] frontier. Spreading ever westward, the Origin story of the Metis in British North America. The ethnogenesis resulting from the cultural synthesis is the birth of the Metis Nation, which really “may not fit our overall model [seeing the Metis segregated inside of already segregated zones]. Synthesis always involves silencing something. [This is] useful and unavoidable. This is a ‘true’ story, but not the whole truth. “Historians have become deeply suspicious of ‘Grand Narratives’ formed by synthesis [reducing] the complexity of [the Metis] situation [station and origins].”¹⁴

The truth will have exposed itself, like the chalk outline of a body on a sidewalk. You will then have to ask what had to be sacrificed for this variation of the truth to be told. “Those who would have it [the sacrifice] otherwise cherish the myth more than the genuine struggle of real human beings.”¹⁵ The truth then, is more easily understood when you consider: What is the opposite of the truth? If it is a lie, that isn’t necessarily true or helpful. What does Canada tell itself to reconcile our truths? “The true story is simply too messy and complicated. And threatening. The myth of noble savages, completely unable to cope with modern times, goes down much more easily.”¹⁶ The difficulty with the search for justice in this country for our indigenous, “smart [...] people realize early on probably even as children that the whole Indian thing is an exhausting, dangerous, and complicated snake pit of lies.”¹⁷ This can be dissuasive to the more egalitarian among us, and knowing this tends to scare off our academics. Though the movement is gaining momentum, and reinsertion into the narrative does not mean for an equal

¹³ Paul Chat Smith. “*Everything You Know About Indians is Wrong*” University of Minnesota Press (2009): p.20

¹⁴ John H. Arnold, “*History; A Very Short Introduction*” Oxford University Press, New York (2000): p.93

¹⁵ Paul Chat Smith. “*Everything You Know About Indians is Wrong*” University of Minnesota Press (2009): p.22

¹⁶ Paul Chat Smith. “*Everything You Know About Indians is Wrong*” University of Minnesota Press (2009): p.20

¹⁷ Paul Chat Smith. “*Everything You Know About Indians is Wrong*” University of Minnesota Press (2009): p.20

voice in this story, but it does mean there is a voice being heard. There are attempts being made to speak for the nameless dead. This speaks to progress.

This is my fourth year in school. Studying in the North among the indigenous. My very own child is a status Indian in Canada. She will know the advantages of having status. I pray she does not ever have to encounter the prejudice that persists in Canada. It saddens me to think of the persistent systematic racism that permeates the Canadian identity. I am maturing as an historian, and in order to shape a better future, “[do I allow myself to] get away with misusing or abusing history, in pursuit of truths that are not what they seem?”¹⁸

This long opening monologue has led me to the discovery of a very important historical truth, one that speaks for itself. I have found a new understanding of the importance and the necessity of the Metis Nation. These were children of two worlds, able to provide language skills, logistics, mercenary and military support, and necessitated Canadian law being rewritten for being born as children from the colony, and children born of the colonizers. I had a great discovery while studying Metis identity, now more important and personal to me than ever. As my daughter is a little Metis girl. Wynter Rowan Duke is a cross-cultural phenomenon, and she will continue the legacy of the Metis children of Canada.

The Metis have a situational identity, their inheritance from the explorers, officers and agents of European expansionism.

The Metis, of their own self-actualization and design “captures the integrative nature of this cultural traffic, the ways in which imperial institutions and structures connected disparate points in space into a complex mesh of networks.”¹⁹ This makes the Metis then, by definition, living and active nodal points “being constantly remade and reconfigured through concerted thought and effort.”²⁰ To whom the Metis Nation aligns its loyalties to seems as flexible as to

¹⁸ Margaret MacMillan, “The Uses and Abuses of History” Penguin Canada (2009): p. 35-36

¹⁹Ed. Nicole St-Onge, Carolyn Podruchny, Brenda Macdougall “Contours of a People – Metis Family, Mobility, and History” University of Oklahoma Press, Norman Publishing (2012) p.63

²⁰ Ed. Nicole St-Onge, Carolyn Podruchny, Brenda Macdougall “Contours of a People – Metis Family, Mobility, and History” University of Oklahoma Press, Norman Publishing (2012) p.63

whom owed allegiance reciprocally to the Metis; no one. Not the inhabitants of the Turtle, nor the descendants of the King.

The Metis Nation was, in its youth, a people created from colluding forces, governance and the HBC, versus militant factions as triggermen for the NWC. “Choosing to blame all the troubles and machinations of the NWC, they saw the Metis merely as mixed-blood children of NWC servants who had been manipulated by NWC officers to do their dirty work.”²¹

WHAT A TANGLED WE WE WEAVE

Thinking of the Metis Nation as company mercs may be a historical fiction, so I prefer to think of the Metis as children of the Great Spider, Ehap. For the Metis formed a network within a network, a web “fragile and [...] easily broken, but [...] also dynamic.”²²

THE GIANT SPIDER EHAP

I try to avoid Creation stories. They are not my birthright, and when I spin them, I unintentionally paint the cartoonish image of indigenous culture so many of us are guilty of. To even say the words Turtle Island or speak the words ‘we are on treaty 5 territory’ tends to be meaningless and hollow. Used more as lip service than as genuine discourse. “I am not one to believe in traditions simply because they are traditions, I believe in the legacies that multiply human freedom, not in those that cage it.”²³ Despite my obvious appropriation of this Creation Story, I find it speaks to the ethnogenesis of the Metis Nation. The metaphor of this nation is a finely spun web, intricate, elaborate, tied by connections of family, kin and obligation, “woven in surprising and complex patterns and multiple dimensions, hard to see.”²⁴ This Creation story is owed to the Swampy Cree:

²¹ Ed. Nicole St-Onge, Carolyn Podruchny, Brenda Macdougall “Contours of a People – Metis Family, Mobility, and History” University of Oklahoma Press, Norman Publishing (2012): p.104

²² Ed. Nicole St-Onge, Carolyn Podruchny, Brenda Macdougall “Contours of a People – Metis Family, Mobility, and History” University of Oklahoma Press, Norman Publishing (2012): p.63

²³ Paul Chat Smith. “*Everything You Know About Indians is Wrong*” University of Minnesota Press (2009): p.24

²⁴Ed. Nicole St-Onge, Carolyn Podruchny, Brenda Macdougall “Contours of a People – Metis Family, Mobility, and History” University of Oklahoma Press, Norman Publishing (2012): p.62

“[...] the emergence of the first man and woman on earth [attributed] to the Giant Spider, [or] Ehap, who noticed the couple looking at a different dimension of life below them and admiring its beauty. Ehap offered to take them to that dimension by weaving a basket for them, and he lowered it down by spinning one of his strings. He warned the couple not to look down while they were being lowered or they would suffer a great tragedy. In all versions of the tale, the couple manages to resist looking down until they are close to their destination. When they look [...] a [painful] moment of origin. Like Ehap’s humans, we will never easily land on earth or be able to see clearly the progression and recognizable instances of Metis ethnogenesis.”²⁵

Metis communities followed a pattern in country, by the Wild Hamlets with their migrations inland for profit. It is my belief that these children of two worlds were instruments of great importance, their unique abilities to walk in both worlds and endure hardships and deprivation, a migratory people, nomadic and necessary. “[...] the key spatial expression of Metis life in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was mobility. This kind of [economy] result [ed] in spatial organization along networks of travel for a variety of [specialized] purposes.”²⁶

The Metis grew self-aware after the fact, a kind of singularity. History speaks to the birth of the Metis Nation, and the present speaks to the continued misconception of a people born in a state of constant mobility. Status will be lost should a Metis further mix-breed after two generations.

This paper owes mention of the separate and distinct tribe, led by “Cuthbert Grant, Bosonais Pangman, William Shaw and Bonhomme Montour, the four chiefs of the half-breeds.”²⁷ According to George Simpson, who through marital connections (to Lord Selkirk) was

²⁵ Ed. Nicole St-Onge, Carolyn Podruchny, Brenda Macdougall “Contours of a People – Metis Family, Mobility, and History” University of Oklahoma Press, Norman Publishing (2012): p.62

²⁶ Ed. Nicole St-Onge, Carolyn Podruchny, Brenda Macdougall “Contours of a People – Metis Family, Mobility, and History” University of Oklahoma Press, Norman Publishing (2012): p.62

²⁷ Ed. Nicole St-Onge, Carolyn Podruchny, Brenda Macdougall “Contours of a People – Metis Family, Mobility, and History” University of Oklahoma Press, Norman Publishing (2012): p.105

put in charge of the HBC in 1820, appointed lord and governor after a decade of corporate warfare with the NWC²⁸ kept a ledger of HBC employees,

“No. 31, Grant, Cuthbert. A half-breed whose Name [*sic*] must long recall to mind some horrible scenes which in former Days [*sic*] took place at Red River settlement in which he was principal actor. [...] we allow his a saly [*sic*] of £200 p Annum [...] this appointment prevents him from interfering with the Trade on his own account which he would do in all probability; it moreover affords us his great influence over the half breeds and Indians of the neighborhood which is convenient inasmuch [...]”²⁹ as he kept the peace between rivals, he was made a company man after the Red River Rebellion. He was a Chief among children of both worlds, and his notoriety saw him well paid, maybe even bought out. In the name of corporate peace.

Clearly the Metis were used tactically by both NWC and the HBC, but I believe their allegiance was to no one. The Metis continue to owe their allegiance to no one. Clearly, they were a threat to the Charter, and then the Dominion, given the persecution of the Metis that I will not name (because everybody knows it), who had the wisdom to write a declaration of autonomy, sovereignty, and self-governance for his people.

A sovereign nation for les enfants du pays, mais qu'elle surprise. What vision and naïveté incroyable. No wonder he was hanged. Knowing this adds to the challenges of 'the program', where educators are to create an environment inclusive to incorporate the medicine wheel, and the old ways. This can be a disservice to the indigenous where the inclusion is make-believe, but at least there is a demonstration made in the name of reconciliation. I suppose that is progress, but it tends to feel forced.

²⁸ Wakentin, Germaine *“Canadian Exploration Literature”* 2nd Edition, Voyageur Classics, Books That Explore Canada, Dundurn Press. Toronto Canada (2006) p.514

²⁹ Wakentin, Germaine *“Canadian Exploration Literature”* 2nd Edition, Voyageur Classics, Books That Explore Canada, Dundurn Press. Toronto Canada (2006) p.525

I believe we are part of the Ehap Nation, each of us on our own strand in the incredibly complex web of life. We are children of the Great Spider, riding the back of a Giant Turtle, together. No matter what or who we are, no matter where we are or where we aren't from.

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