

poetry of:

“...whether they took treaty or not,
they were subject to the laws of the Dominion.”

– *REPORT OF THE COMMISSIONER FOR TREATY No. 11*

H. A. CONROY

a

Matthew James Weigel

chapbook

from the last spike forward

*On the sloping sides of the great valley and on the flats below the coyotes
barked and howled at night, but on top of the bank we taught... we were
the University of Alberta; and we felt sure that the future belonged to us,
not to the coyotes.*

– R.K. Gordon, *University Beginnings in Alberta*

It is the same world now as then – but changed²

as Lord Strathcona punctuated³, land

Dominion surveyed, lots in trade⁴, river

starvation, scrip, no remain, buffalo

with speculation shadowing the⁵. loss

So, to me oh muse, of empty space sing

for Rutherford and Tory and our school⁶,

of whatsoever things are true⁷, the pipe⁸,

of within the classic vein poetry

where intuition, felt expression, dream

are metered in the structure of the line,

and verse might serve exclusion through its form.

How now, as then, the Treaty, the intent

accessibility of text, and rights

established are then modified by hand

as met the printer formally in type⁹,

contrasting so with so agreed, spirit

exist as such translations can't exist,

when words connect with words and where they live.

Where English in the jargon as a tool

subsurfaces¹⁰ extraction and removes

from comprehension our engaging self

and tangles as distracts it all away.

How might relationships community

so built on of a word understanding

as whatsoever things are, be kept true

within collections in the below, earth

within a building named for Rutherford¹¹,

beside the river lot of the Garneaus¹².

And how then have we parchment in this school,

of Treaty, when those signing were denied?¹³

My Poem for March 19th

My great-great grandmother Marie Fabien
was defrauded of her Métis scrip by two thieves in Edmonton.
Her husband James Balsillie told the “Halfbreed Commissioner”:
“I wish to be treated as others have been treated.”¹⁵

The investigation into this fraud was not concluded in their favour.

So, this is my poem today
for this day,
March 19th,
when in 1885

Louis Riel established the provisional government of Saskatchewan,
two months before it was taken away.

Disputations of firewood collection¹⁶
of rights of access to land,
resulted in dozens of petitions to Ottawa.
They sent to Ottawa petitions,
and Ottawa sent them police.

And still they call this rebellion.

The Railroad took militia provincials
from Nova Scotia, Quebec, and Ontario,
the government put them in uniform
in uniform they were Canadian.

The government sent police to collect Riel.

James Balsillie from Winnipeg at Fort Providence signed,
signed Treaty as witness,
a Treaty that did not include him.

The commissioner for Treaty 11 Hank Conroy
who became that “Halfbreed Commissioner”
said:

“Whether they took treaty or not, they were subject to the laws of the Dominion.”¹⁷

This is the Treaty James Balsillie signed, as witness,
as the Treaty it did not include him.

Or Marie Fabien, whose scrip was defrauded from her,
by two thieves in Edmonton.

~~eoda~~ pehonan

In Edmonton where I am waiting
am waiting of place reflecting
ofness
of in place
of this space
this English language function of displacement
disconnective
speech text decontexting
wording such to speak me anyplace.
But here, and breathing at a creek pace
guest on land of Papaschase,
and feeling present in this body beaver built with people
I river inclinate,
amiskwaciy-wâskahikan waiting.

end notes

1. Picture of JAR Balsillie, Marie Fabien, and children. Author's ancestors, 1924
2. Inversion of EJ Pratt's first line of 'Toward the Last Spike'
3. Lord Strathcona drove the last spike of the CPR. Namesake of the city in which the University of Alberta was established. HBC land commissioner, involved in the transfer of Métis land during time of famine caused by loss of the buffalo (M. Dumont, *The Pemmican Eaters* 2015)
4. The Métis river lot system was replaced by the Dominion Land Survey grids
5. Land speculators closely followed scrip commissions to buy land from Métis (M. Dumont, pers. comm.)
6. The University of Alberta was established by Rutherford (Alberta's first premier) and Tory (the UofA's first president), in the city 'south of the North Saskatchewan River' -- assumed to mean Calgary in exchange for the provincial capital to be situated in Edmonton. But in fact given to the city of Strathcona before amalgamation into Edmonton
7. The UofA motto
8. Treaty 6, the territory on which the University sits, was conducted under pipe ceremony, as such only that which is true might be spoken (R. Price, *Spirit of the Alberta Indian Treaties* 1987)
9. When Treaty 8 parchments were delivered to the signatories a decade after promised, only then was it made clear there were discrepancies between the Treaty as conducted, and recorded by the government (L. Cardinal, pers. comm.)
10. Debate continues as to the spirit of the Treaty regarding transfer of land as relates to subsurface rights as opposed to soil rights for farming by settlers (R. Price, *Spirit of the Alberta Indian Treaties* 1987)
11. The Treaty 6 parchment discussed is kept in Bruce Peel Special Collections
12. University land is partially on that river lot once belonging to the Métis family of Laurent Garneau, Lot 7
13. Treaty 6 parchments were never delivered to the signatories as promised (L. Quirk, pers. comm.)
14. P. Berton, *The National Dream* (1970)
15. JAR Balsillie's Métis scrip claim and investigation (National archives)
16. G. Dumont, *Memoirs*
17. HA Conroy, Report of the Commissioner for Treaty 11