



The False Traitor: Louis Riel in Canadian Culture

Albert Braz

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The nineteenth-century Métis politician and mystic Louis Riel has emerged as one of the most popular - and elusive - figures in Canadian culture. Since his hanging for treason in 1885, the self-declared David of the New World has been depicted variously as a traitor to Confederation; a French-Canadian and Catholic martyr; a bloodthirsty rebel; a pan-American liberator; a pawn of shadowy white forces; a Prairie political maverick; a First Nations hero; an alienated intellectual; a victim of Western industrial progress; and even a Father of Confederation.

Albert Braz synthesizes the available material by and about Riel, including film, sculpture, and cartoons, as well as literature in French and English, and analyzes how an historical figure could be portrayed in such contradictory ways. In light of the fact that most aesthetic representations of Riel bear little resemblance not only to one another but also to their purported model, Braz suggests that they reveal less about Riel than they do about their authors and the society to which they belong. The most comprehensive treatment of the representations of Louis Riel in Canadian literature, *The False Traitor* will be a seminal work in the study of this popular Canadian figure.

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