

The Trade

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ABSTRACT

There is much literature and commentary on Canadian Indigenous history and culture. The poem, "The Trade" discusses Indigenous history, focusing on Indigenous dealings with North American colonizers. Originally a Native Studies 201 Winter 2020 creative assignment, this poem describes the advent and settling of European colonizers as well as more recent occurrences such as residential schools, among others. "The Trade" discusses these events from a broad perspective, and afterwards explores their relevance to the author's own personal history and future experiences. Through this poem, my goal is to inspire readers to reflect on their own identities in relationship to the past as well.

Fur for Metal, flesh of livestock sold
a deal with white men, a story of old
So cold, the truth they did withhold
listen to this story, it is one that must be told.

This red maple land was built on trade
with circumstances that felt like an unjust raid
Till one day it became an endless tirade
a path laid for history to be made.^{4,8}

A culture from far beyond the shores
strange ships arrived; a sort rarely seen before
These people, these aliens, were hungry for more
with time, their true feelings were brought to the
fore.^{4,8}

They made their way to a new abode
as they brought with them their mighty load
Men with profit as their hidden code
arrived claiming to be friend, not foe.⁸

Upon the land lived different tribes
varied, yet special, they all lived community-lives
Land is a gift in Indigenous eyes
for unity with kin was their greatest might.⁸

No man hungry, no woman without shelter
sacrifice for all and collaboration was their delta
Earth was treated with respect—Future would not
suffer
the People of the Place of Flint truly understand
the word "Mother."⁸

"Tante ohci kiya?" The Nehiyewak ask
A question to the soul that begets a task:
Remember your origins, remove your mask
remember your history and ancestor's past.⁸

To the Inuit, names are ethereal yet real
They are a beautiful story of strength and of skill
They are harmony and balance expressed in will
an identity, a name, was a very big deal.^{1,8}

So different, so varied, yet flames were lit
of unity in diversity like with the Tlingit
So many nations, more than you could ever meet
together, in war or peace, they all fit.^{8,9}

These people had beautiful stories
that reminded little ones of their identities
Of history and myth, spirits, and experiences
between tribes they traded, for their varied neces-
sities.⁸

Then, the boats approached near
and the colonizers interfered
It was not because they cared
profit-driven, the art of fur trade soon appeared.^{6,8}

With their guns and metal,
pots and kettles; these were all highly incremental
With many attempts to settle via “winged vessel”
intent on their desire to fur-peddle.^{6,8}

These newcomers took action
made alliances their bastion
Companies they did fashion, and enacted their
passion
fueling their desire for fur from dead bison.^{6,8}

Over and over did Europe scorn
those without fair skin, those “colony-born”
All the while asking for fur coats very worn
while the darker-skinned ones thought they had
won.^{3,8}

At first, the newcomers requested, “Treaties!”
This was long before the birth of the nation “Metis”
Indigenous laws had long existed for peace
while wampum belts were made to share histo-
ries.^{3,8,12}

Gusweñta was the first treaty agreement
The conditions for this treaty were considered set
Peace and friendship forever, that’s what it meant
a symbol of Haudenosaunee and Dutch mutual
respect.^{8,12}

For years and years, this was what was said
till the wars between the British and the French
Bled into what was agreed over the years
treaties began to exist to protect European interest.⁸

As time passed, the newcomers desired land
land was to be shared, it was not a commodity or brand.
When the newcomers, via treaty, made their demand
the people did not know to take a stand.^{2,8}

Years passed after the Douglas Treaty,
then came the Manitoba Act in eighteen-seventy
No more bison, the Metis did see
the fur trade faltered, so did the economy.^{2,8}

The people were forced to sign
eleven treaties so that they would survive
Hope to retain benefits and rights
the only choice in sight.⁸

The rules changed
the newcomers stayed,
Adjustments must be made
to the new laws that were laid.^{4,8,10}

To stifle Indigenous worldview
came the birth of residential schools
Power, not order, to force upon something new
this act was ruthless, and many times, cruel.^{4,5,8,11}

Children were mistreated, poorly fed, and unfairly beaten
Many of them were ill from terrible diseases
Sent home to die in the hands of their relatives,
and others suffered unspeakably bad things.^{4,5,8}

In this new society of hate and spite
Unity and brethren remained the Indigenous might,
To adapt and provide, many did fight,
terribly maltreated, some fought for their rights.^{8,10}

Looking back on the European-First Nations Trade,
Looking beyond the mistreatment-shade
is a story so familiar it would make you afraid
of power and people and the promises they’ve
made.^{4,6,8}

The world now appears with a different face,
It claims to be more inclusive of culture and race
I admit I may not be here if the past were erased,
nevertheless, grave misdeed was the case.

I too have experienced much of the same,
Ebony-skinned ancestors can make a claim
about other men thirsty for power, those willing to maim
guns akimbo with wild less-than humans to tame.

Gain everywhere and everything
To get resources they fancied, to Africa they
came.
at all costs, lives, territories they saw no sin
as they felt little guilt and had very little shame.⁷

In the past, Canada has been a haven, a protective
shell
At other times, this village has been hell
humanity too has risen and fallen as history tells
we are same in blood with costly family quarrels.

Therefore, today,
I forgive those people who remain,
and all those who chase power and gain.
if I did not, the hate would drive me insane.

I'm here now,
and in a few days,
I will be able to say,
I am Canadian true and true
on my citizenship oath day,
but I would be a fool not to remember,
the history of this red maple nation
and those who came before.

I would be mistaken to think
that Canada is a nation without any kink,
perfectly perfect, a paradise, sometimes, of injustice,
it reeks,⁸
as my fealty to this nation, I bring.
I would be a fool not to remember
the centuries long exchanged
that framed the nation that I live in today
that framed Canada in the biggest of ways.

Today, I choose to remember
The Trade.

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