

**Louis 'David' Riel: 'Prophet of the New World'.** THOMAS FLANAGAN.  
Toronto: University of Toronto Press, © 1979. ix, 216 p. ISBN 0 8020 5430 7. \$15.00.

Thomas Flanagan's biography of Louis Riel attempts to inject new life into a familiar issue. Students of Riel are aware of G.F.G. Stanley's portrait of the métis madman who led frontier resistance to the westward advance of white settlement and political control. Flanagan counters that Riel was a legitimate religious figure; indeed he was the founder and leader in 1885 of what was "as much a religious movement as a political uprising" against the Canadian state. Flanagan compares Riel's "new religion" and métis responses to conditions in the North West with millenarian movements examined in Norman Cohn's *The Pursuit of the Millennium* (New York, 1957) and Vittorio Lanternari's *Religions of the Oppressed* (London, 1963) in order to find support for the claim that Riel's behaviour in 1885 was "typical of millenarian leaders".

Riel's preparation for religious leadership is traced back to his response to political disappointments experienced in eastern Canada after 1870, guilt feelings about forsaking his intention to enter the priesthood, his failure to launch a subsequent law career and to win the hand of Marie-Julie Guernon. By late 1875, Riel was beginning to take refuge from guilt and rejection by those outside métis society in a dawning awareness of his religious mission as "David", "Prophet of the New World". Although Flanagan states at the outset that he does not intend to challenge those who are convinced Riel's religious ideas confirm his insanity, he does ask them to entertain a rival interpretation that requires that a distinction be made between Riel's unconventional religious beliefs and other ideas we might consider to be insane. Leaving aside the question of insanity, the glimpses of Riel's "inner world" which Flanagan provides are the book's strength.

Flanagan has discovered much that documents the "prophet's" extravagant ideas in the Riel collection at the Provincial Archives of Manitoba and in several Quebec religious archives. Riel believed he was a prophet of God sent to prepare the chosen métis people for their religious inheritance. He was convinced that the métis were destined to inherit French Québec's Catholic mission in the new world when, some 457 years in the future, liberals in the province forced the Church to relocate in Manitoba. After an additional 1876 years Riel thought Christ would return to meet his Church in Manitoba and establish his kingdom.

Whether Riel's ideas can best be understood as millenarian is open to question. His thinking is too twisted, its meaning too elusive to fit any intellectual framework comfortably. In one breathtaking example, Flanagan reveals that in 1876 alone Riel saw himself not only as a prophet, but also one who, as their "messiah", would found a new kingdom in Poland for the Jews, become "king of all nations without exception", was a pope, infallible, and equal but loyal to the pope in Rome. Hard upon that comes his denunciation of the pope and revelation that the papacy had passed from Pius IX to Bishop Bourget of Montreal. In the next chapter we read of Riel's plans for a Catholic theocratic republic in the North West under American leadership. Further on, we find he also claimed to be a descendant of Louis IX and thus heir to the French throne. A puzzled reader may be forgiven for concluding Riel's thought defies explanation. The less charitable may still doubt his sanity.

The second part of Flanagan's argument rests upon the connection he makes between Riel's millenarian ideas and the Rebellion of 1885. Flanagan contends the Rebellion was a millenarian outburst inspired by Riel's religious doctrines as well as a political revolt. This interpretation is already shaken by doubts about the millenarian content in Riel's thought. Flanagan's explanation of the Rebellion is in deeper trouble when it cannot be reconciled with what is known about the rebels. It is significant that Riel did not share what Flanagan calls his "secret doctrine" with the people of the North West before 1885. They, not he, initiated the overtures which resulted in his return to Canada in 1884, and

there is no evidence brought forward at this point in the book to suggest anything like millenarian enthusiasm prompted their decision to approach Riel, or to follow him later into open revolt. Flanagan is unable to convince the reader that Riel preached millenarian ideas or that his religious pronouncements were clearly understood or taken seriously by very many people in the North West. Riel's chaotic "inner world" and the prosaic unfolding of events over the winter and spring of 1884-85 resist Flanagan's overarching millenarian interpretation.

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**Tomslake. History of the Sudeten Germans in Canada.** ANDREW AMSTATTER. Saanichton, B.C.: Hancock House, 1978. 183 p. ill. ISBN 0 88839 002 5 \$9.95.

*Tomslake* alone does not represent the history of the Sudeten Germans in Canada. The history of northern Saskatchewan settlements (Meadow Lake and Loon River) and concentrations in certain Canadian cities (Edmonton, Toronto, Hamilton and Montreal) is not included. *Tomslake*, rather than being an objective historical study, is the subjective study of a Sudeten German settler—or, as Bonar Gow states in the Introduction: "the first attempt by a Sudeten German Canadian to record and publish his pioneer reminiscences".

Throughout, Amstatter purports to accurately describe historical events, but he clearly makes subjective statements. The conflicts between the Sudeten Germans and the Czechs, on the one hand, and the Nazi Germans on the other, are over-simplified. The complex events of the break-up of the Hapsburg Empire, World War I, the newly created state of Czechoslovakia, and the interwar years, are also given inadequate coverage. The book does bring to light the irony of the initial requirement that Sudeten Germans had to register as enemy aliens in September 1939. A paranoid and racist regime in Ottawa quickly forgot that, only a year before, they had fled Czechoslovakia because of Nazi persecution. Many of these political refugees were at first rejected by the Canadian forces because they were seen as a threat. The same Canadian government, fighting for freedom and democracy, was able to herd over 20,000 Japanese Canadians into internment camps in the British Columbia interior.

Archivists, historians and researchers of every kind will regret the lack of footnotes or equally sufficient references. Anyone interested in researching any aspect of the book will have to start virtually at the beginning. The references mentioned in the book's Acknowledgement and Notes on Sources are clearly inadequate. Amstatter seems not to even have looked at related government documents. He fails to list basic works on the Hapsburg Empire and Czechoslovakia by A.J. May, Z.A.B. Zeman and R.W. Seton-Watson. Internal Sudeten German Canadian materials would also undoubtedly shed light. Anniversary issues of regular Sudeten gatherings (Sudetentreffen) were published, yet Amstatter only mentions one—*Thirty Years*. One only hopes that the sources used will be preserved and stored in adequate archives. While Sudeten Germans—many past Social Democrats in Czechoslovakia and CCF'rs in Canada—are part of a wider paternal Western society, it is still frustrating to continually have the Sudeten German women merely referred to as the wives of certain named men, or mentioned in patronizing comments such as: "The women of the settlers carried a heavy load and deserve credit for the success of the settlement." Sudeten German women, like men, have names of their own and did more than supplement the work of the men.

Despite evident shortcomings, *Tomslake* is still a welcome work. Amstatter himself describes the book as "neither a personal story nor a complete account of their experiences". While it is definitely not a complete account, it is largely a personal story—the story of a group of Sudeten Germans as seen through the eyes of Andrew Amstatter. The