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Sommario/riassunto

Although relatively few First Nations joined the 1885 Métis insurgency, the Canadian government reacted punitively, instituting draconian "Indian" policies whose ill-effects continue to resonate today. The Winter Count traces these developments alongside another narrative - the debate over the sanity of Métis leader Louis Riel. Dilys Leman weaves original poems and reconstituted archival texts, including medical reports, diaries, treaties, recipes, even a phrenological analysis, to create a montage that both presents and disrupts official history. Her narrative questions politically expedient myths that First Nations were allies of the Métis, would rise again in greater numbers, and needed to be scrupulously controlled to secure the opening of the West. Leman evokes the voices of historical and imagined characters to convey a political landscape teetering into lunacy and a government obsessed with its own vision of nation-building. We hear a bureaucrat extol the merits of the pass system, a court interpreter's ludicrous translation of treason felony into Cree, and Dr Augustus Jukes agonizing about his role on the secret medical commission tasked with reassessing Riel's sanity, which would determine if he could be executed. The Winter Count is a cautionary tale about moral responsibility. As Leman laments, our failure to be accountable human beings will surely haunt us: "Laudable pus / Political speeches / This water / brought too late / to a boil / Lance and forceps / rattling / their pot"
