



INTERLUDE 1

Three poems in honour of the Robarts Centre

BY JESSE THISTLE

Jesse Thistle is a Métis-Cree author and assistant professor in the Department of Humanities at York University. He is the author of the internationally bestselling memoir, *From the Ashes* (Simon & Schuster, 2019). Thistle is also a PhD candidate in the history program at York, where he is working on theories of intergenerational, historical trauma, and survivance of road allowance Métis people. He won York University's Odessa Prize for the Study of Canada in 2015 for his essay, " 'We Are Children of the River': Toronto's Lost Métis History."

HALFBREED BOY

Wages, cents
Here and there
It's never enough.
We moves where the work is
Always have.
To the coast, to Prince George, or east to the Peg.
Wherever.
We Northern Saskatchewan 'breeds; we's goddamn sick of pulling them stumps,
slashing that brush, and stripping them barks
We's sick of ranching your cattle and building your fences.
Yes, that Thiessen—he cracks his welfare whip mighty hard
Ka, Ka, Ka!
Tearing strips off our backs, gettin' us a' dancing for pennies.
But I ain't dancing no more.
Nope.
And that Don Messer,
Screw him too!
He ain't got a lick on my fiddle.
'Cause I made me my own fiddle
Out of poplar and a jackknife
And Jesus taught me to be a cowboy,
And the devil: to fight.

From *Brickyard archives: Jesse Thistle* (2021, June 24) [Video]. YouTube.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vY0HKT_5gA

TEAR IT DOWN

I take your statues, your heroes,
of hate
and power
and generations of stolen land
and forced labour
and we throw it into our
oceans of love
and knowledge
and monuments fall like stacks of dominoes.
Finally, after whole forests of stone and bronze have felled,
and rains quench the Earth,
our narrative is told.
This—after worlds
and injustices
and lifetimes apart.

From *Scars and stars*, Penguin Random House (2022, p. 117).

WHAT RECONCILIATION LOOKS LIKE

I once found an eagle feather
in the parking lot of a McDonald's.
It was a little greasy
and smelled like hash browns
but I loved it.

The molted plumage was a chance to express myself
a chance to know my mother's Métis-Cree people
who'd been lost to me
way back in my troubled childhood.

I took it all over—to ceremonies
to smudge and say a prayer over
until one day
an Elder pulled me aside:
"I hate to break it to you, son. But that's not an eagle
Feather.
That's from a seagull."

This is why I never judge someone who is trying to
reconnect. We are all just trying to grab anything to find
ourselves, even greasy feathers at Rotten Ronnies.

From *Scars and stars*, Penguin Random House (2022, p. 119).