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Critical Precis: Louis Riel

What is the significance of the beginning and ending?

The beginning of the comic gives context to how this conflict between the Métis and Canada started. The first page explains how the Hudson's Bay Company and Red River Settlement came to be, going back to the year 1670. The next pages show a meeting between John A. Macdonald and the representatives of the Hudson's Bay Company, with Canada buying the land that the Red River Settlement is a part of. The subsequent pages show the reaction of the inhabitants who are not happy about this. A few pages later a conflict arises, and we then meet Louis Riel. These first pages or issue as a whole give context to how the conflict of the story came to be and shows how both sides felt about the sale, as well as introduce Riel.

The end of the story is Louis Riel's execution, which shows his final moments, and what he was saying and feeling at the time. The dialogue may not be exactly what was said, but it is most likely similar to what was said by Riel. After the execution of Riel, there is an epilogue that states what happened in regards to the people close to the conflict as well as to Riel. This ending not only shows how the conflict came to an end, but also to the importance of Riel within this conflict.

Describe the Narrative voice: why does it matter to the story?

Since this story is done in the form of a comic, with many character POV's, there is not a singular POV that the story follows. If there is a necessity to label what type of narrator or POV it would be that of a third person POV. There is very little internal dialogue where the characters' internal thoughts are being shown, and when the events of the story need to be explained outside of the characters it is only done to explain certain things. An example of this could be when there is a skip in time, the date and possibly the location will be revealed in a box of text. This is to give context to where the story is located or the date and year when the events are taking place. When there is a text box to give context, it is not done by any of the characters, it is essentially done by the author, Chester Brown, since this is done in the form of a Biography. This matters to the story because this is not a character study, but a telling of the historical figure, Louis Riel, this is not meant to be non-fiction and so when the narrator speaks, it is only to give the reader context of the events that transpired. An example of this could be the epilogue, where the events following Louis Riel's execution is only explained as a list of facts, not a wrapping up of the characters, but what had really transpired in real life. The addition of the notes at the end of each issue shows the context for how the story was made with considerations to history.

Why does this story have this narrative structure?

The story is a historical one, and even though it is also a biography, the historical part is very important. With this in mind the story is about the conflict between the Métis and Canada, and documents or presents the most important parts of this conflict, so the story has a very fast pace in terms of what actually happens. The amount of text and dialogue may have the reader

take a while to go through the story, but a lot of time and years is covered over these ten issues, covering nearly two decades. The story only tells what the author believes to be the most vital parts of the conflict. The dialogue, for the most part, has to be made up, since the author, Chester Brown, does not have records of what was said for much of the story, but the dialogue is only used to give context to the events that took place, like how John A. Macdonald made his deals with the Railroad, or the plans that Riel made. This is true for the descriptions, like when the narrator will explain the year that the story is currently in, or certain terminology. The story is told in a way that only shows the most important parts of the conflict.

What Genre and Medium is the story?

This is a comic book done in the form of a comic strip. The ten issues of the story are collected into a single book, but the original issues are done in the form of comic strip, having each panel be the same size, with almost every page being six panels, with some exception to that like the page where Louis Riel is executed. There is no sixth panel since the fifth panel is when Riel is dropped to be hanged. Even though it is done in the form of a comic strip, it is still collected as a book, therefore making it a comic book, or it could be considered to be a graphic novel, but it could be either one.

The genre of this comic book is a historical biography. This is at its core a biography, since it is trying to tell the story of Louis Riel, but it is a historical biography because of what the story is portraying. Chester Brown is telling the life of a man who lived and died in the 19th century, while Brown wrote the story from the years 1999-2003. This could be considered historical fiction if you take into account that the dialogue cannot be confirmed to be said, but the story is taking events that really happened and using that to tell the story, which is why it should not be considered historical fiction. The story tells the important events around the conflict between the Métis and Canada, using Louis Riel, a key figure in these events as the catalyst for the conflict. Since every panel is given the same size, it is almost portraying that every scene in the comic book is just the events that happened in real life, giving the same weight to each panel. This gives the story the historical aspect since it is just trying to recount the major events that happened in the conflict, and since it is being told through Riel it is a biography along with being historical. This is important since it tells the reader that we are following Riel during these real-life events, that are only trying to retell what happened, not to send a message or theme across.