



## Coalescence And Its Footprints: An Evaluation Of Joseph Boyden's *The Orenda*

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### Abstract

Joseph Boyden, a Canadian academician and author, published *The Orenda* in 2013. The story is set at the beginning of the seventeenth century in an area of North America that would later become Canada. It centres on a trio of people who originate from diverse ethnic groups: Christophe, a Catholic priest from France; Snow Falls, a small girl from the Iroquois tribe; and Bird, the village head of the Wendat tribe. The present study explores the interactions of the natives with the French people who are in the native Canadian village in the form of traders, priests, and settlers. Their interdependence among the villagers has collapsed, which generates enmity among the natives. The central character of the novel, Bird, lost his big village in a village raid by his enemies, and it lost the lives of its villagers. He escapes from his village to a remote place with his family and a few others to begin a new life free from his previous mistakes. The study revolves around the relationship of the protagonist of the novel Bird with the French people and their footprints.

**Keywords:** colonialism, cultural assimilation, native studies, intergenerational trauma, distortion in natural ways of life

Joseph Boyden's novel *The Orenda*, published in 2013, is the third novel in his series about his fictional ancestry, the Bird family. Boyden has the intention to expand his fiction on the lineage of the Bird family, but till now his intention has been satisfied as a trilogy. The other novels written by the Bird family are *Three Day Road* (2005) and *Through Black Spruce* (2008). Joseph Boyden is a Canadian writer who was born and brought up in Willowdale, Ontario, and he is residing in the same place at present. Born on October 31, 1966, Boyden is a Metis of Irish and Scottish ancestry. Boyden claims that he is indigenous to Canada and is affiliated with the Canadian government. His affiliation is in conflict with that of some activists in Canada who are of native-Canadian ancestry or of Canadian ethnic ancestry. People who are inspired by his writings accept his contribution as a writer and his involvement in the rights of the First Nations people. The First Nations people are a group of indigenous people whose tribal lineage and identities are recognised by the Canadian government.

*The Orenda* is the story about the collision of civilizations in the western and northern cardinal directions. The novel is set in the late sixteenth century, which is the time when the French people visited Canada, especially the Wendat people, which is the prominent group of people referred to in *The Orenda*. This is the time when the French settlements are making efforts to colonise and culturalize Canada. The output of their efforts and the rivalry between the Huron, or Wendat, and Iroquois, or Haudenosaunee people are the subjects of the novel *The Orenda*. The Wendat and Iroquois are Canadian tribes residing nearby but are radical enemies who enjoy the bloodshed of their enemies through violence. The events of violence between the Wendat and Iroquois are narrated from the viewpoint of the Wendat, who are backed by the French missionaries. The present study, *Coalescence and its Footprints: An Evaluation of Joseph Boyden's The Orenda* presents the collision of the French culture with the native culture and its outputs.

The French came to Canada as missionaries and traders at the end of the sixteenth century. Their primary aim in Canada is to establish trade posts in the sea bays and to settle among the natives powerfully. During this time, the English and Dutch people had the primary aim of the French. Hence, they become accustomed to the native tribes by circling their trade through them. When the traders were familiar with the settlers, there was enmity among the traders who supported another colonist. Skin trade, dried fish, and other products are the primary sources of trade, which are economically valuable and profitable businesses. After the entry of the colonists, there was a distortion in the lifecycle of the natives as they slowly departed from hunting and gathering. Once they hunted and gathered for their own needs, but now they hunt and gather their game for commercial needs. This act decreased the local population of animals and fish. Hence, the natives went into deep fishing and dense forests. More than their role as hunters, the natives collect the same from other tribal groups and barter goods brought by the colonists. This increases the financial income of the natives, and the demand for the exportation of goods increases in Canada. The eagerness to bring more loads to their trade increases enmity among the natives, and the enmity is backed by the colonists by supplying weapons. The reason for backing the natives by the colonists is to increase the trade with the natives, or their trade could be borrowed by other colonists.

The people of the Huron are the central figures of the novel *The Orenda*. They engage in trade with the French people and barter the goods brought from the French to their allies. The allies of the Huron people refer to tribal people who are closer to the Huron, especially the Iron People. *The Orenda* refers to the trade with the Iron People as "The harvest that year was bountiful, not one warrior perished to the Haudenosaunee or in fast waters on the long summer trek to trade with the Iron People so far away by the great rapids" (26). Bruce Trigger describes the lives of the Huron people in the sixteenth century in his book *Children of Aataentsic: A History of the Hurons People to 1660*. While referring to the trade business of the Huron's, Trigger states that,

Hurons country had many natural advantages. Light soil, that the Iroquoians were able to cultivate, occurred there more abundantly than anywhere else in the eastern half of southern Ontario. . . . The region was also surrounded on three sides by lakes and rivers abounding in fish at every season of the year. This proximity of fish and good soil supplied the key elements in the Iroquoian subsistence economy and no doubt explains why Hurons had lived there in considerable numbers from an early period. . . . [The Iroquois and the other tribes were attracted to the land of the Hurons because of its fertility and its] great potential for trade and commerce. (165)

The colonists worry about the natives being familiar to the other colonists. The colonists feel it is trouble for their flourishing trade when their traders barter with other colonists. Hence, they show their interest in their allies by maintaining the enmity by supplying weapons. The Wendat and Iroquois have been enemies for years, but the intensity of their enmity is also shared by the French and English. In *The Orenda*, Champlain is a French missionary and the chief of all the missionaries in Canada. He is worried about the distribution of weapons by the Dutch and English to the natives. The Wendat also worries about the circulation of weapons among the Iroquois. By this circulation, the Iroquois can easily defeat the Wendat, and hence the Wendat worries about the Iroquois combat. Until the ingress of the colonists' weapons into the hands of the natives, they fought against their enemies using native weapons. After the supply of guns by the colonists, the native weapons had to be egressed for survival.

In *The Orenda*, Champlain upholds the rhythm of rivalry between the Huron and Iroquois. While learning about the increase in the supply of guns by the English to the Iroquois, Champlain says that "The British are fools for being so easy with their gifts of destruction. Mark my words. Their allies, the Iroquois, when they are in the position of power to do so, will turn against their friends" (123). He further asks the Wendat people to treat the enemies of the French as enemies. This shows that the colonists are interested in the disintegration of the natives to imply colonial law in the native land. Champlain organises a gathering with the Wendat village head, Bird, and other prominent people of the village. During the organisation's dialogue with Bird and his people, Champlain goes as follows:

We have friends in common," Champlain continues, "and we have common troubles. The Dutch to the south care nothing for you, and the English would be happy to see you wiped from this world." ... "The English and the Dutch give our common enemy their weapons, and their weapons put a great fear into our bodies ...". "You are our brothers, and so we ask you to gift us those." He points to a musket being held by a soldier behind Champlain. "The only way to battle our common enemy and win is to be allowed to fight that enemy on common ground". (*Orenda* 120,121)

Bird is able to recognise the intentions of the French and their Catholic missionaries. His villagers are not aware of the footprints of the colonists' decisions. Though Bird is aware of the same, he is in a situation where he cannot overturn the decision made by the colonists or organise power centres against the colonists. Champlain fears the collision of trade alliances with his allies. As he says, "The Dutch to the south care nothing for you, and the English would be happy to see you wiped from this world" (*Orenda* 121). The colonists are more powerful than the natives because they have weapons of mass destruction. The colonists behave friendly with the natives to learn about their lives and to study their strengths on social and communal levels. This study helps the colonists understand that the natives are weak in social and communal stages, and the colonists can effortlessly distort the combats of the natives at any cost. More than the effortless war, the natives have indigenous weapons, mostly bows and arrows. But the colonists freely used guns, which have the ability to pierce three people with a single shot.

The natives are not aware of using muskets, and they were totally untaught about using muskets. But the colonists have skilled infantrymen, and the colonists are good at propelling volleys of musket fire at any confrontation. The natives need to be trained to propel gunfire by the colonists. Champlain is not concerned with protecting the Wendat people by supplying guns. Instead, he needs to hand guns to the Wendats to protect his alliance with them, or else the Wendats would join the British or Dutch colonists to protect themselves from the Iroquois. Hence, Champlain hands a musket to the village head, Bird. The events related to handling the musket for Bird, as referred to in the novel *The Orenda*, are as follows: "Champlain walks to Bird. 'You are a great warrior,' he says, handing the musket over. 'I can see that you have suffered in battle.' He points to Bird's missing finger. 'And great warriors need great weapons. So, I give you this as a sign of my friendship and as your brother. Tomorrow I will have my greatest warrior show you how to use it'" (*Orenda* 121). Barbara Graymont, in her writing *The Iroquois (Indians of North America)*, speaks about the order by Governor Peter Stuyvesant permitting guns to their allies to survive any confrontations. Barbara refers to the governor's approval as "Governor Peter Stuyvesant... approved the sale of four hundred guns directly to these Mohawk friends. Any Mohawk attack on the French or their Indian allies would benefit the Dutch, who were rivals of the French in the fur trade" (Graymont 45).

Handing weapons to the natives does not support them in confronting their combat; instead, it increases the intensity of enmity between adversaries. Hence, when the Wendat are skilled at firing with muskets, their enemies, the Iroquois, will try to advance their armaments to confront the Wendat. Therefore, this situation creates a crisis among the natives and will create a fear of inconvenience among their allies. More than the competition for dominance in trade, it was a

struggle between the colonists and the natives to hold on to important positions. The natives tried ingenious methods to increase their wealth by capturing trading canoes and conducting village raids. They needed to strengthen their military since other tribal groups had started to buy guns in large quantities to make theirs stronger. The Iroquois and other tribes followed the seasons for trade and canoe routes to raid their canoes to gather items to be delivered to the colonies so that the captured products could be sold to their adventurers. This prevented them from having to invade an entire community. This tactic gained popularity and was successful for the majority of the most powerful tribal communities. As a result, the tribes concentrated on acquiring rifles and other deadly weapons, which helped them increase their fighting capacity.

Increase in warfare among the Wendat and the Iroquois helps them to punish their enemies graphically when caught alone or as crew. In some occasions, the whole villagers are killed by a raid. The people who escaped from the raid are forced to live in remote areas to escape from the survey of their enemies. *The Orenda* can be further delivered on esotericism, ecocriticism, and humanism.

### References

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