

Book Reviews

Seasons in the Rain, by Silver Donald Cameron. McClelland & Stewart, 1978. Paper, \$6.95.

I remember Donald Cameron (the Silver has been a later adornment) as a young UBC academic who astonished me when I was editing *Canadian Literature* by submitting an essay which actually found something new to say about Stephen Leacock. I accepted it and — as Cameron remarks in *Seasons in the Rain* — started him on what has become a professional writing career. More than a decade ago Cameron departed from academia and since then he has worked freelance as one of the brighter and more urbane writers in popular magazines like *Weekend* and *Saturday Night*.

Seasons in the Rain is a collection of pieces that mostly appeared first in such journals and which have been minimally polished to fit them into a cohesive volume. Normally such collections are not very interesting, since the writing in popular magazines is looser and the attention is nearer the surface than one expects in a book. What relaxes one's mind on a plane or after Sunday lunch is not usually durable enough to take a second and more serious reading.

But *Seasons in the Rain* does hold one's attention, and I think there are two reasons for it. One is the unity of the book, which consists of a series of pieces written around a series of returns to the British Columbian haunts of Cameron's childhood and youth. Born "accidentally" in Ontario, Cameron regarded himself as to all intents and purposes a Vancouverite, which "means I think of mountains as friendly, and I will never be at home away from the sea." But he is a self-exiled British Columbian, for in 1964 he departed and he has not returned except as a visitor. Now he lives in the Maritimes which, he contends, have values "of which B.C. knows nothing: the values of stability and rootedness, the sense of belonging to a well-defined community, the gentler, domesticated beauty of farmstead and fishing harbour." Of course, with a little searching one can

in fact find all this in British Columbia, which is why many of us stay, but Cameron evidently did not, and that is why he went, to become a dedicated advocate of Maritime regionalism.

But, as these essays show, the mountains and the seas and the rain still call him, and Cameron has made his third book a tribute to British Columbia and its people. Here we come to the second reason why *Seasons in the Rain* is more appealing than most collections of pieces gleaned from the weeklies and the monthlies. It is the mingling of humanity and humour and a certain intellectual seriousness that distinguishes Cameron from most of the other magazine writers.

There are three essays that really relate to Cameron's own feelings. All the rest are about people he visited on his return trips because in some way or another they seemed to express a truth about British Columbia and its way of life. Some of them were people he had known for decades, like the musicologist, Ida Halpern, who was his piano teacher, or the wise Chinese grocer on West 10th whom everyone in the university area knew as Angus, or Alvin Fisher, who ran the school bus in Ladner a generation ago. Others he visited because their work or their lives meant something to him, like Homer Stevens the union leader, or Len Norris the cartoonist, or Hubert Evans the novelist, or, as I realized with some amusement after I had agreed to review *Seasons in the Rain*, George Woodcock the anarchist.

There is an inevitable lightness about every treatment. A wryly personal touch, a manner at times jesting and occasionally touching on sentimentality, are mandatory in *Weekend* articles, and Cameron has both, but he also has a knack of getting at the serious core of whatever the person he discusses stands for. As I can vouch from my experience, he reads one's books and researches one's background; if I had any cavil with the piece he wrote on me it was not that he misinterpreted my ideas in any way, since he paraphrased them with skill and understanding, but rather that in interpreting conversation or perhaps in mishearing a tape, a fact or two went wrong.

We are an oddly mixed group of people Cameron writes of, but that is a fair enough illustration of the extraordinary variety of human types that have been caught up in the great ruffles of our mountains, and it gives Cameron a chance to display the breadth of his own interests — in radical politics, in writing and music (interestingly, he includes none of British Columbia's remarkable painters), in minorities like Doukhobors and Chinese, in different ways of organizing our lives than are contained in normal politics; significantly, there is not a single professional politician

in his list of names, and, as he says, "not a word about the MacMillans, the Clynes, the Woodwards, the Farrises, the Bell-Irvings."

We are all, in one way or another, people Cameron likes, which shows another of his characteristics as a writer. There is nothing in him of the smart aleck, of the cheap malice with which so many weekly journalists seek to titillate their readers and needle their subjects. He writes indeed with such manifest affection that one longs for a sharp word, a critical barb. It is the nostalgic vision of the returning native that Cameron presents, and somehow it tints us all *en couleur de rose*.

Vancouver

GEORGE WOODCOCK

The Economic Constitution of Federal States, by Albert Breton and Anthony Scott. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978. Pp. 166. \$10.00.

Most readers of this journal are aware of "economic imperialism." Fewer readers are likely to be aware of "economics imperialism." In the latter case the analytic assumptions and deductive reasoning of the discipline of economics are applied to political, legal and social questions. The study of politics, law and society is being reassessed in the face of such initiatives, which have burgeoned in the last two decades.

This eagerly awaited book by two Canadian economists is an example of "economics imperialism." It is also an example of theoretical inquiry on the most important research frontier in the scholarly field, namely the analysis of constitutions. Constitutional arrangements are seen as the crucial factors affecting the operation of governments, and in turn the behaviour and welfare of citizens, groups and private corporations.

The book is, thirdly, an example of one of three thrusts of research on constitutions. The traditional approach of economists in making policy prescriptions is to assume that government can affect policy changes in the light of citizen preferences at zero cost. This is structurally the same as assuming that constitutions cede complete authority to a benevolent despot. A second approach is to assess constitutions directly in the light of ethical criteria about individual welfare in a just society. And the third approach, typified by the Breton and Scott work, is to evaluate constitutional arrangements by the degree to which they economize on the scarcity of resources available in any society. Put more intuitively, Breton and

Scott, as well as other works, prefer constitutions that make governments efficient.

The basic model in the book assumes that a constituent assembly or constitutional convention will assign various functions of government between national, provincial and other levels so as to minimize the costs of policy making and implementation to both citizens and governments. Four kinds of costs are identified, two each for the citizenry and the government jurisdictions. Citizens will wish to minimize the cost of signalling to government their dissatisfaction with current policies, as well as minimize their migration costs to another jurisdiction as a result of their "frustration." Governments will wish to minimize administration costs or the costs of setting up their own institutions and running them, as well as co-ordination costs in dealing with other governments. Once the constituent assembly has assigned functions to different levels of government in such a least-cost manner, and so determined the degree of centralization in any state, the net investment in signalling and mobility (by citizens) and in administration and co-ordination (by governments) will be zero.

The remainder of the book consists of analytical elaborations on this basic model, and of applications of the model to recurring problems in public finance, such as the degree of centralization necessary for governments to provide redistributive, stabilizing and other functions in a least-cost manner.

Unfortunately the book contains two major analytical flaws which will limit its appeal to scholars in the field. First, the authors ignore "the monopoly problem" in deriving the least-cost division of powers between levels of government. An assignment of functions to one level of government or another can yield a structure of stable monopolies unconstrained by any or all of the four cost considerations. Even the elaborated model, in which a representative assembly of elected politicians and their bureaucrat advisers assign functions, can yield a similar structure.

Secondly, citizens are assumed to invest in political participation (signalling and mobility) solely as a function of their desire to reduce their loss in welfare as a result of differences between their preferred and actual levels of public goods (or tax prices for these goods) provided by governments. This assumption ignores investments by citizens for tangible private benefits, including rent seeking. These latter investments are likely, *ceteris paribus*, to render unstable any assignment of functions.

In conclusion, the book is an interesting addition to a rapidly growing field of academic inquiry. It is not a book for the general reader; it presumes a knowledge of a large body of literature and much of the exposi-

tion is mathematical and diagrammatical. It is a book that many economists should read if only because it proves, once again, that neither scale economies nor spillovers are necessary or sufficient conditions for centralized political systems. But it is also a book that, because of its flaws, will do little to advance our knowledge about an optimal constitution for any society.

University of Victoria

MARK SPROULE-JONES

Indian Fishing: Early Methods on the Northwest Coast, by Hilary Stewart.
Vancouver: J. J. Douglas, 1977. Pp. 181.

Hilary Stewart's latest book is an accomplishment that can perhaps only be fully appreciated by someone who has similarly attempted to slog his way through the forest of northwest coast ethnography in pursuit of some topic. Her topic is fishing and she has assembled for us a very satisfying collection of material. More than this, as with her *Artifacts of the Northwest Coast Indians* volume, she has built her presentation around drawings and sketches that are faithful representations of museum objects, and illustrations from published sources, or plausible reconstructions of implements and techniques where pictures have until now been lacking.

For this reviewer the illustrations alone are worth the purchase price. They have a fascination which is difficult to define, but it is comparable to what one experiences in the works of Eric Sloane and C. W. Jeffreys. The various fishing devices — hooks, harpoons, weirs and traps — are presented with such devoted attention to detail that there is an almost irresistible urge to set about manufacturing them. I have no doubt that some readers will succumb.

The organization and emphasis of the book are apparent from the principal chapter headings: "Hook, Line and Sinker," "Spears and Harpoons," "Nets and Netting," "Traps and Weirs," "Cooking and Preserving Fish" and "Spiritual Realms." As can be readily seen, most of the book deals with the technological aspects of fishing, although there is also a useful section concerned with the ideology — with the beliefs — of these fishermen. The volume could equally usefully have included a section on the social organization of fishing activity. Admittedly there are many references to people and society within the text, but specific attention to social arrangements associated with the various fishing technologies might have led the author to include descriptions of such social units as the distinctive reef net camps of the Straits Salish with their captains and

hired crew, or the traditional spring, village aggregations of the several Southern Kwakiutl groups at the Kingcome Inlet and Knight Inlet eulachon fisheries. The social dimension is as much a part of northwest coast fishing as are technology and beliefs.

This one small reservation aside, *Indian Fishing* is a work I shall refer to and shall refer others to many times in the coming years.

University of Victoria

DONALD H. MITCHELL

Pioneers, Pedlars, and Prayer Shawls. The Jewish Communities in British Columbia and the Yukon, by Cyril Edel Leonoff. The Jewish Historical Society of British Columbia. Victoria: Sono Nis Press, 1978. Pp. 255. \$15.00.

Records of a community are various: they may be conscious in written, pictorial or monumental forms; or unconscious in artifactual or archaeological forms. Historians have, somewhat too slowly, come to accept this variety and to use it to enlarge the often unpromising range of their sources. For groups bound together by family ties, clan and religion the pictorial record is especially valuable. What the members *looked like* is often more expressive of the reality of the group than any description that can be devised.

Thus the decision of Cyril Leonoff and the Jewish Historical Society to publish a photographic record of the Jewish communities in British Columbia from what are obviously very rich photographic archives, as a possible stimulus to the writing of a full-scale history, was a good one. Here the pictures of the pioneers in community building and business enterprise, industrious farmers, gold prospectors, mill operators, shopkeepers and merchants, doctors, soldiers, aviators, war heroes, pedlars and junkmen, rabbis, judges, lawyers, politicians, musicians, artists, writers, athletes and general pillars of the community remind us of the astonishing variety and versatility of the Jewish communities in British Columbia, as well as of the pathos of the circumstances both of their coming to the province and often of their sojourn here. They provide a vivid and enlightening record.

But there is an uncomfortable disharmony between the photographs and the narrative of this book. The author-editor has undertaken real research for his text, ensuring a high standard of reliability. Yet that text is only a catalogue of names and accomplishments — inclusive and not selective — of the “this is great uncle Otto at the barbers’ convention”

genre so often produced by the "folk-festival culture." Mr. Leonoff is much more than an amateur and has done a great deal of work which might have enabled him to produce a really superior pictorial-textual chronicle of the Jewish community. It is a pity that he did not see his role as giving design and shape to this potentially fascinating record of one of British Columbia's most interesting constituent communities.

University of British Columbia

JOHN NORRIS

Briefly Noted

The Journal of William Sturgis, edited by S. W. Jackman. Victoria: Sono Nis Press, 1978. Pp. 136; *illus.* \$5.95.

Professor Jackman has written a succinct and helpful introduction to the journals of a young American seaman who was in the otter pelt trade in the early 1800s. Sturgis later became a successful ship-owner in Massachusetts. His observations provide some interesting insights into traders and Indians alike, and are quite remarkable considering that they are the work of a seventeen-year-old. Jackman's notes are unfailingly helpful, if a trifle patronizing at times.

The Land of the Brave, by Winnifred Glover. Belfast: Blackstaff, 1978. Pp. 94; *illus.* £3.95.

The Ulster Museum has a small but interesting collection of North American Indian material. This book is a catalogue of the collection. Some thirty of the items are from the northwest coast. The photographs are particularly good and the notes, although brief, quite useful.

Exploring Vancouver 2, by Harold Kalman and John Roaf. Vancouver: UBC Press, 1978. Pp. 300; *illus.* \$7.95.

This is a revised edition of these authors' justly acclaimed pictorial tribute to Vancouver. The walking tours are nicely defined — as are those to be done by car — and the photographs and brief comments are models of their kind. The narrow shape of the book is unsettling at first, but for a handbook of this sort it turns out to be particularly successful. The book offers a great deal of insight into the fabric of the city, and into the remarkable capacity of the authors to find pleasure in some of the most joyless monoliths that disfigure the Vancouver landscape.