

Book Reviews

Bill Reid, by Doris Shadbolt. Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1986.
Pp. 192; 175 illus., 40 in colour. \$60.00.

One of the central concepts in anthropological studies of art is that in order to understand and appreciate the form of an object, it is necessary to consider the cultural context in which it was made. This approach has long dominated the way we exhibit, critique, and write about Northwest Coast Indian art, but it is being questioned by artists and, increasingly, by anthropologists themselves. Today, native artists seek recognition as *artists* first, unbounded by restrictive and outdated criteria of ethnicity or “Indian-ness.”

This book marks an important step — perhaps even a leap — toward a new art criticism that is essential for the development of both Northwest Coast art itself, as it enters the mainstream art world, and the way in which we view the contemporary work. Author Doris Shadbolt, eminent art historian and long-time personal friend of her subject, speaks of making “direct contact” with native art — approaching it “as an experiencer of art, not as anthropologist or art historian.” In making this statement, she asserts the power of fine art, from any cultural tradition, to transcend its specific context and be appreciated for its aesthetic qualities alone. Shadbolt’s approach does not deny or denigrate the vast accumulation of information about Northwest Coast ethnology, upon which we can rely “for an extension of our response into the old culture”; she devotes one entire chapter, “Looking Backward,” to describing “the containing formal world” of the northern style. The artists themselves, after all, place an emphasis on creating art within centuries-old conventions of form and composition. At the same time, they are clearly of the twentieth century, immersed in the dominant North American culture. The work of Haida artist Bill Reid and his peers has its roots in recognized styles and imagery of Northwest Coast art, but is part of new genres developing out of the contradictions and ambiguities of the present day.

“It is the attempt of this book,” Doris Shadbolt writes, “to bring some understanding of Bill Reid’s art in its slow unfolding, in relation both to its grounding in Haida tradition and his evolving inner self.” Unaware until he was a teenager of being anything other than an average Caucasian North American, Bill Reid has moved from the position of an artist/historian, learning his art by copying museum pieces, to a creator of original images in Haida and “universal” styles. His most recent works, which blend complementary elements of Northwest Coast iconography and Western naturalism, extend the definition of Haida art beyond its generally understood boundaries. Shadbolt recreates for us “that necessary process of evolution” by which Reid’s work achieved its “hard-won authenticity.” She shows us how “on the difficult basis of full historical awareness and concise choice, the only way in which some kind of continuity could happen,” Bill Reid’s entry into a near-dead ancestral tradition “was first through craft and technique, and then through an analysis of the forms, and gradually to a deeper and deeper understanding of and empathy with what they were expressing. Only in his own personal interiorization of what had once been culturally assumed could that which was universal in the old art be kept alive.”

This “interiorization” or personal assimilation of the old subjects and forms, Shadbolt implies, is essential for contemporary artists to create masterworks within the constraints of the tradition. In his best pieces, Bill Reid has resolved the artistic problem that confronted him early on in his career: “the creation of an imagery and a mode of representation that would, within the required illustrative framework, successfully bridge the gap between a mythically and iconically known and presented past and a historic present that is experienced in ‘real life’ terms.” With his emphasis on “making things well,” Reid found a “sudden aching sense of identity with the distant cousin who first lovingly made . . . the elegant line, the subtle curve, the sure precise brush stroke.” Shadbolt uses the term “deeply carved” to describe the resulting works that transcend the rules of Haida art and invest the forms with vital life. By regenerating for himself a Haida spirit and sensibility that is also universal, Reid has himself become deeply carved.

Doris Shadbolt has written a book that is long overdue in its celebration of Bill Reid the artist and its recognition of the place of native art in the evolving culture. One only regrets the relative lack of critical comment regarding Reid’s less successful works — the author tends to decline comment rather than offer “negative” judgement. Shadbolt’s portrait of Reid nevertheless extends our understanding of an extraordinary individual

whose struggles have often been overshadowed by his public superstar status. In its sensitive juxtaposition of text and Reinhard Derreth's rich photography, *Bill Reid* truly complements its subject's love of the well-made object.

UBC Museum of Anthropology

KAREN DUFFEK

To the Totem Shore — The Spanish Presence on the Northwest Coast, ed. Santiago Saavedra. Madrid: Ministerio de Transportes, Turismo, y Comunicaciones, 1986. Pp. 239.

This book is a collection of articles by various authors. It was produced for sale at the Spanish pavilion at Expo 86, and arrangements for distribution of the unsold copies are being made. The titles of the articles given below have been abbreviated.

The opening article "California, 17th Century," by Francisco Morales Padrón, describes both the real and apocryphal explorations of the North Pacific, the latter being important because of the influence they had on plans for subsequent voyages.

This article is followed by "Incursions into the 'Spanish Lake'" by Thomas Vaughan and E. A. P. Crowhurst Vaughan. Russian, French, and British explorations are described. The most useful part is the account of Russian exploration and establishment of trading posts in the Aleutian Islands and farther east, a subject the Vaughans have studied intensively.

Mercedes Palau's article, "The Spanish Presence," is badly translated. For example, the armament of (Concepción) included six "stone-cutters," according to the translator. These were "pedreros," small swivel-mounted guns which sometimes used stone cannon balls.

The author has confused two separate voyages through the Strait of Juan de Fuca in 1790 and 1791, and she or her proofreader are ten degrees out in the latitude of the supposed Strait of Maldonado.

Palau gives considerable space to the Malaspina voyage, which reached Alaska in 1791, including some material not readily available in English.

In "Spanish Cartography—the Corps of Steersmen" [*sic*], Luisa Martin and Lola Higuera have provided a pair of articles which would be better separated, since the subject matter differs. The translator has made one conspicuous error. The "steersmen" of the title were "pilotos," who were the navigators and often the cartographers on the ships of the

Real Armada. The error exists in the multilingual index to the 1831 *Spanish Maritime Dictionary*.

The first part of the article recounts the establishment of schools for navigators in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, at a time when the British thought the only school worth the name was the cockpit of a man-of-war. In fact, many of the "masters," as the navigators were called in England, were drawn from the merchant service. These included James Cook, who was not commissioned until he had served ten years as a master.

The second part of the article, on cartography, goes beyond its subject to describe the Spanish explorations of the British Columbia coast, repeating some of the material in Palau's article. It also describes the methods and problems of navigation and mapping. Most of the maps which are included to illustrate the article have been so reduced in scale that they can only be read with a magnifying glass. Fortunately, the quality of reproduction is so good that it is possible to do this.

José Alcida Franch's article, "The Culture of the Indians," is the least successful in the book. It is largely copied from anthropological and ethnographic works in English, some badly outdated, which the author does not seem to have understood. The reader's confidence is not strengthened by reading that Douglas Fir trees are nine hundred to twelve hundred metres high, or that the Nootka Indians used kayaks. The above opinions have been checked with Dr. Martine Reid, who would put it more strongly. Photographs of some of the Indian works of art in the Museo de América in Madrid are included. Both the artifacts and the photographs have great beauty.

"Faces in the Forest" is F. V. Grunfelt's summary of Moziño's "Noticias de Nutka," familiar through the translation by Iris Higbie Wilson (now Iris Engstrand). The article is supplemented by reproductions of paintings of plans made by Etcheverria, the artist who accompanied Moziño. They are taken from the originals, now in the Hunt Institute in Pittsburgh.

"The Journal of Tomas de Suria" is a charming commentary by Catherine Poupeney Hart of the Université de Montréal on Suria's fragmentary journal, the original of which is in the Beinecke Library at Yale. Her article is based on the 1936 English translation by H. R. Wagner.

The final article by José de la Sota, "The Nootka Crisis," gives the Spanish version of the clash between the Spanish commander Martinez and the English fur-trader Colnett, which led to a near war between England and Spain in 1789. The article is a valuable addition to material available in English.

The book was produced in a great hurry to be ready for Expo, and suffers from this. The reader has to put up with an annoying number of typographical and spelling errors, and the book could have done with more careful editing. Still, apart from Franch's article, it is an absorbing book to read, and a useful book to study.

The book is generously illustrated. It is worth buying just for the well selected pictures, drawings, and maps. This comment has been reserved until now because *To the Totem Shore* should not be looked on as a "coffee table" book, but as a work of history.

Vancouver

JOHN KENDRICK*

* Author of *The Men with Wooden Feet — the Spanish Exploration of the Pacific Northwest*, the reviewer has since been engaged on historical research for the Canadian Museum of Civilization and other institutions.

The Subarctic Indians and the Fur Trade 1680-1860, by J. C. Yerbury.
Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1986. Pp. 200.
\$22.95.

Perhaps the most significant events affecting research on the early history of Canada in areas outside the St. Lawrence-Great Lakes watershed were the microfilming of the magnificent Hudson's Bay Company Archives (completed in 1966 for records up to 1870) and their transfer from London to Winnipeg in 1974. These events marked the beginning of general accessibility to an enormous source of data, giving scholars the opportunity to write history in exquisite detail. Besides innumerable articles and theses, a number of significant books have appeared, based in large part on these archives. Bishop's *The Northern Ojibwa and the Fur Trade* (1974), Ray's *Indians in the Fur Trade* (1974), Ray and Freeman's "*Give Us Good Measure*" (1978), Francis and Morantz's *Partners in Furs* (1983), and Krech's *The Subarctic Fur Trade* (1984) would all have been impossible twenty years earlier. Yerbury's work is the latest addition to this growing list of books on the fur trade and related changes in native life. Using the Hudson's Bay Co. archives, with methods as well as some of the concepts developed by his predecessors, Yerbury does for the Chipewyan and their neighbours in the subarctic what the others did for the Cree on the Eastmain, the Ojibwa in northern Ontario, and the Assiniboine and the Cree on the Plains and adjacent Woodlands.

After a brief review of earlier work on his topic, interwoven with comments on the nature of ethnohistorical research, Yerbury lays the chronological foundations for his work. Basically it follows the model proposed by Ray and Bishop in 1976 with modifications to accord with the specific history of the western subarctic. Based as it is on a thorough understanding of the documented history of the area, rather than oral history or speculation, this is a definitive framework composed of three eras (pre-historic, protohistoric, and historic). The last era is subdivided into five well-defined periods. The protohistoric (1680-1769) and the first three periods of the historic era (1770-1860) each form major chapters in the book. The formulation of such a framework and a discussion of the developing fur trade within that framework was one of the major aims of the book and one that was admirably achieved. In fact Yerbury's discussion is so convincing that it will become a standard reference in place of the *Subarctic* volume of the Smithsonian *Handbook of North American Indians* (1981).

The last chapter pulls together a number of themes on the nature of Athapaskan culture change: changing economic conditions, adaptations to a changing resource base, and changing social organization. These changes are convincingly attributed to the expanding fur trade and accompanying calamities such as the spread of diseases.

The overall strength of the book is the thoroughness with which the aims of the book have been treated, the convincing way in which the arguments have been presented, and the detail in which evidence has been documented. In view of this comment, any criticisms I have become a matter of personal preference. The organization of the book and the manner in which the discussion proceeds are tailored to an audience already well versed in the subject. I would have preferred an early chapter (after the Introduction) on prehistoric ecological relations that would form a basis for the subsequent chapters. Enough archaeological work has been done by now in the subarctic to trace the broad outline of geographical distributions, settlement patterns, and seasonal changes in subsistence strategies. Graduate students, for example, who have read the book found it useful to read the last chapter on culture change before they worked their way through the development of the fur trade. I would also like to have seen a more detailed discussion of exactly what constitutes "dependency" on European trade goods, at what point dependency is reached, and what the evidence for it is. This word implies so much and is used far too loosely. The early wars between the Chipewyan and Cree are another matter that needs additional discussion. One is left with the im-

pression that these wars had something to do with the fur trade. What is not explored is whether such a conflict could have had prehistoric roots similar to Chipewyan-Inuit animosities or many of the early antagonisms in eastern Canada. There are a number of minor points, none of which seriously detract from the book.

The graphs and tables are all clear and to the point, but what the book needs is more maps. Changing locations of native groups are not well illustrated even though Yerbury has done some of the better work on the Chipewyan. The precontact distributions (Figures 1 and 15) changed greatly over time and are eminently mappable. In fact the entire subject of the book is an eminently geographical one, yet the geography of the fur trade is left too much to the imagination of the reader. Since Ray's *Indians in the Fur Trade* served in part as a model for this work, the omission of so much that is geographical is surprising.

The Subarctic Indians is a substantial contribution to the fur trade history of Canada. As the first detailed treatment of all the Subarctic Athapaskan groups it will provide a basis for further treatment of particular themes and native histories.

York University

C. E. HEIDENREICH

Canada's Colonies: A History of the Yukon and Northwest Territories,
by Kenneth Coates. Toronto: James Lorimer & Company, 1985. Pp.
251, paper.

Professor Coates has undertaken an ambitious task in covering a truly vast subject — the history of the northern territories from aboriginal time to the 1980s — in a brief 230-page, 60,000-word span. The treatment, accordingly, is selective, the subjects and examples cited reflecting the author's own interests and areas of research, and also the availability of published secondary materials. The focus is on the Yukon Territory, which received half or more of the space, including not only the obligatory review of the Klondike gold rush (the subject of his chapter 3) but also most of chapters 4 on the interwar period ("The Doldrums in the Middle North") and 6 on the Second World War ("The Army's North"). Furthermore, the treatment readily slips into Yukon aspects and illustrations in the remaining historical chapters, "The Early Fur Trade," "Boom and Bust in the Arctic," and "The Bureaucrats' North." For example, the emphasis in the Arctic chapter is on "West Side"

Herschel Island-based whaling rather than on the far larger, longer lived and more significant "East Side" whaling operations in Davis Strait and the waters beyond. The work also tends to slight topics that have not previously been exposed in the scholarly literature. The large, important theme of northern transportation and communications, for instance, is almost completely neglected, apart from a quite full account of the building and postwar management of the Alaska Highway, which was the subject of a scholarly conference held in Fort St. John, the proceedings of which Professor Coates edited. In general the book does not seem to give the District of Mackenzie or the Arctic regions their fair share of the limited space available. Still, all in all the author must be commended for a largely successful effort in covering so much of the territories' history in his short, readable book.

As the title indicates, the author stresses the "colonialist" nature of the territories' economic and political evolution. Though his understanding of northern economic realities prevents him from espousing the doctrine of regional under-development so dear to the theoreticians, in his concluding chapter "Whither the North" he adopts their favourite prescription of more government spending on the region. Not that he has been blind to previous shortcomings; numerous instances are cited in the later chapters. The federal government is portrayed as contributing to the unstable boom-and-bust character of economic activity by encouraging development in propitious times, then turning tail and abandoning its programmes whenever "regional resources declined in value or when southern promoters lost interest." Instead, he feels, the north does need "the assistance, perhaps even protection, of a more benevolent federal state, one that would represent the interests of the region rather than looking at its resources as a "quick fix" for the [national] economy." Such involvement would be larger scale and more consistently applied than in the past, would incorporate local participation in decision-making, and would be in tune with the possibilities and needs by "applying the north's resources to sustain a moderately-sized population and bring some semblance of stability to a very unstable region."

On the political side the author criticizes distant and remote control by past and present administrations, and decisions based on considerations external to the region. Instead he calls for greater local autonomy to give northerners a larger voice in decisions that concern them, as well as a means for protecting their distinct identity and interests. His solution seems modest, not requiring legislation but a will to introduce changes, as by appointing northerners to boards and committees and involving them in

all negotiations concerning northern interests. Though he is careful not to rule out eventual provincial status, the author points out that present divisions among residents make it inopportune, and besides, "it is not at all clear that provincial status is in the north's best interest."

Canada's Colonies sets out to give the native peoples a more prominent place and more sympathetic treatment than earlier studies have done. The book mainly concentrates, however, on the activities of the non-native sojourners — explorers, traders, missionaries, policemen, road-builders, miners, oil seekers, and the rest — while depicting the natives in the largely passive role of reacting to those activities. Natives' actions or conduct are not criticized, but the federal government is made into a whipping-boy. The pre-1940 policy of exercising limited control over Inuit, he charges, was impelled not by "humanitarian impulse" but simply as "a cost-effective means of administering Inuit affairs." On the other hand, its massive post-1945 involvement reflected "national priorities rather than a specific response to northern problems," was aimed at promoting "assimilationist values," and was applied in ways that irrevocably damaged the native's socio-cultural *persona*. Aid programmes such as housing and education were designed on inappropriate southern models, were inadequate to the need ("overcrowding was endemic"), while the handouts "undermined native self-esteem." In sum, they were "paternalistic and disruptive" and fashioned an environment in which white sojourners "shouldered the natives aside." He saw signs of hope, however, in the spreading co-operative movement and the formation of native rights groups, as well as in the emergence in southern Canada of church-promoted native support groups and scholarly northern environmental organizations.

In such a short work, brevity gives rise to occasional slips (for example, lumping musk-ox hides, polar bear pelts, and white fox furs as "exotic" furs). The book also is marred by typographical and spelling errors, no doubt originating in the publishing process: *Erbus*, Odgen, Tyrell, Turgetil, Netsikik, Artic, "I. O." (O. S.) Finnie, Malcolm Macdonald; feasibility, ot, philisophical, infuence, etc. But, to repeat, this slender volume is a valiant, largely successful effort that will reward the general reader or student desirous of learning more about Canada's northern territories in brief, readable form.

London, Ontario

MORRIS ZASLOW

Law & Justice in a New Land: Essays in Western Canadian Legal History, ed. Louis A. Knafla. Calgary: Carswell, 1986. Pp. xvii, 379.

Overheard at a Carswell's display recently, a distinguished academic lawyer with an international reputation, upon seeing this book: "Now, that is something new!" He clearly was not amazed at the title, that law and justice might be novel to any new land; rather, he appeared dumbfounded by the sub-title's suggestion that western Canada possessed any legal history at all. It's not old enough or instructive enough!

That may help to explain why, in fact, there has been so little legal history here. (Eastern Canada can explain its own dearth in its own way!) The primary point is that the makers of legal history — the litigants, lawyers, legislators, judges, and police — work in a world that thinks one case at a time. Most have yet to see any need for synthetic studies of what they and their predecessors have accomplished. Second, the doers of legal history — the academic, popular, antiquarian, even journalistic writers — have been too thin on the ground. Rewards are few and the competitive distractions for their leisure are too many. Those who venture into doing legal history often become intimidated by original legal evidence that can be technically daunting and inaccessible. Third, the gatherers of legal history — specifically librarians, archivists, and records managers — have only recently arrived professionally to expedite research problems.

None of this suggests some magical minimum age after which any land can begin to have a legal history. Societies will have it whenever they work at it and support those willing to gather and do it. In fact, without legal history we remain only technocrats, groping from case to case, relying on intuition rather than reason, never pausing to reflect or understand the law and legal systems we inherit and bequeath.

Still, who needs legal history? This collection of essays, truly a first for Western Canada, goes a long way toward answering that question. It complements the Ontario orientation that David Flaherty's two excellent volumes offer (1981, 1983), under Osgoode Society sponsorship. This book's support came mainly from the Alberta Law Foundation and the University of Calgary. It originated there at a conference (25-27 April 1984), organized by Professors Louis A. Knafla (History) and John P. S. McLaren (Law). All but two of the nine papers given there are published here; and five other essays, including a most helpful bibliography for Western Canadian legal history (by Dr. Janice Dickin McGinnis), have been added. So we have here a most professional introduction to our

subject, with reader access aided by careful indexes and a good choice of maps and photographs.

Graham Parker sets a broad scene by trying to define "Canadian Legal Culture" in the first essay. That word culture always raises more problems than it covers, just as the older word *zeitgeist* did and as the currently fashionable *mentalité* does. These words urge a vocabulary that sucks spirit out of reality, launching language into an ether of symbolism, concepts, values, motives, and (heaven help us!) feelings. Apply this to law and we end up with disembodied talk of themes, trends, and traditions, where there are no disputants, remedies, rules, and courts. At its worst, this sort of "history of ideas" never bothers with first doing the hard structural and substantive reconstructions of past laws and past legal systems. Fortunately Parker neither creates nor chases such legal chimeras, probably because he is brought to earth by the need to define what is "Canadian" in our legal culture. He paints a good synthetic portrait of "colonial governors and judges," gives a sharp lawyer's view of "the cultural cringe" (being Canada's preference for "English precedent over its own"), and then measures the impact on law made by "the myth of the Mounties" and by "the triumph of discretionary justice." Everyone will be impressed by Parker's reading range and witty, gritty way of playing with vital legal issues. As Parker's postscript admits, the essay remains "Ontario-centric," but that should make it all the more provocative for westerners.

The remaining ten essays are admirably anchored in western issues and evidence. Appropriately, the person who inspired this enterprise, then organized and edited the book itself, has contributed its most central and synthetic essay. Louis Knafla has always been a doer, a no-nonsense scholar who has probably forgotten more law and history than most of us will ever know. Here he offers a forty-seven page summary that should be required reading for all lawyers and students, entitled "From Oral to Written Memory: the Common Law Tradition in Western Canada." It is a swift survey for the nineteenth century's spread of settlers' law, first in Assiniboia, then in British Columbia and the Prairies. Knafla next identifies a series of fascinating characteristics in the common law on the frontier: the adaptability of Common Law as Municipal Law, the tenacity of judges for a Rule of Law, struggles for Judicial Independence, provincial identification with Royal Prerogative vis-à-vis expanding federalism, and finally an all too brief mention of Fundamental Law in the thinking of settlers and natives. Much of this Knafla consciously borrows from English legal history, making it a general mold imposed on all the other essays to give an overall shape to the book. He in fact has little to

say about the "oral memory" suggested by his title (for which, see Michael Clanchy's book, 1979), so his evidence is entirely literal and that of the settlers. But this does not detract from the substantial survey that he provides.

Explorers, traders, and first settlers in western Canada needed neither law nor military might. Until the 1890s they remained outnumbered by the many scattered, pliant bands and families of native Indians. To their credit, neither Europeans nor Indians tried to even their scores by force, as did their U.S. neighbours. This did not necessarily mean that either or both resorted to law, as the routine for resolving disputes and punishing criminals. Order took priority over law, both before and after the treaty phases had tried to balance the rights of Indians with the realities of settlement. By 1900, as three superb essays in this book make clear, only the ambiguities and contradictions were in place, concerning "Aboriginal and Indian Rights."

All three authors are sympathetic to an existence of Indian rights and each speaks largely to British Columbia. Thomas Flanagan sets out three models for argument: (1) "that natives constituted sovereign nations . . . endowed with full ownership of the land" and treaty-making status; or, (2) "the positivistic view that natives have only such rights to land as are explicitly granted to them by the sovereign;" or, (3) that "aboriginal title [exists only] as a usufructuary right of occupancy." Douglas Sanders, in "The Queen's Promises," examines *R. v. Wesley* (1932) and *R. v. Samson* (1957), two Alberta cases that set the stage for modern "politicization and litigation of Indian rights questions." The third essay, "Indian Resource Rights and Constitutional Enactments in Western Canada, 1871-1930," by Nigel Bankes, offers a meticulous, lawyer's reconstruction of the law, based on a broad variety of original evidence.

The next three essays are rooted in British Columbia's records and mark the high point of interest for provincial readers. Each is written by an experienced professional. Hamar Foster builds a solid base for the B.C. Supreme Court, 1871-85, with his reconstruction of the Thrasher case. David Williams applies his keen eye and lively pen to "The Administration of Criminal and Civil Justice in the Mining Camps and Frontier Communities of British Columbia" during the late 1850s and 1860s. Then Wilbur Bowker examines "The Sproule Case: Bloodshed at Kootenay Lake, 1885," which monopolizes 110 pages in the Supreme Court of Canada Reports. All three essays are less testimony to the roughness of frontier justice than to the adaptability of English common law process. And all three also make good stories well told.

This collection ends with three shorter essays that focus on social dimensions to applied law in Alberta. Each relies heavily on legal archives, when analyzing the uses and abuses of law with regard to "Male Homosexuality . . . 1890-1920" (written by Terry Chapman), "Female Crime in Calgary, 1914-1941" (by Elizabeth Langdon), and "Urban Relief . . . 1930-1937" (by Peter Sibenik). The former luridly details anecdotal evidence for vaguely, ambiguously defined offences in law; and the latter shows how precisely defined laws could be made flexible in the face of mounting social pressures during "the Depression."

Professor Knafla and these contributors have now given us a start. It remains to western Canada's lawyers and informed laity to try the book and to judge it for the understanding it offers. Let no one be surprised that western Canada's legal history has an abundance of valuable lessons, laughs, victims, and laudable characters. The evidence from our courts, police, correction services, and legal profession awaits anyone willing to turn their hands and mind to making sense of our system.

University of British Columbia

DELLLOYD J. GUTH

Vancouver: Soul of a City, edited and with an Introduction by Gary Geddes. Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1986. Pp. 328.

Vancouver: Soul of a City is a beautiful book, well made, designed and printed. But it is more than beautiful; it is a richly interesting collection of literary and para-literary responses to Vancouver by some of Canada's leading writers and a number of lesser known figures whose poems, essays, or stories provide a breadth and perspective not usually found in anthologies.

But before I go on to say what *Vancouver: Soul of a City* is and what can be found within its covers, let me first suggest what this collection is *not*. It is not an awed *festschrift* on the occasion of Vancouver's centenary; it is *not* a miscellany bubbling with serendipity and mindless optimism; it is *not* a selection of all the pretty things that might be or (have been) said about "supernatural British Columbia"; it is *not* Expo '86 propaganda! If you want a coffee table hard-back singing the praises of Sacred B.C., of Indian crafts, fantastic gardens and the glories of urban development, a kind of verbal, glossy advertising gimmick, do not buy this book.

What this book does offer is far more valuable, and it is for this reason that I put it ahead of various books hastily assembled for Vancouver's

birthday. In his introduction, "City at the End of Things," Gary Geddes, who grew up in Vancouver, confesses that the volume is, in part, the answer to a lifetime's personal questioning: "I begin to wonder if Vancouver exists, if I exist. What is this strange landscape of memory, half urban pastoral, half Bosch nightmare . . . ?" By asking the question in this way Geddes supplies the general parameters, at least, of the answers contained in this volume, for Vancouver is both dream-like in its beauty and appalling in its soul-destroying ugliness, and this collection captures the city in all its phases. Moreover, Vancouver is a place, as Geddes notes, where Social Credit "anti-intellectualism and hatred of the imagination" defy the writer to attempt a "Poetics of Cities"; it is an infernal place "where chancres blossom like a rose" (Lowry) and the artist is "being absorbd by th private sector" (bill bissett). And yet, out of its many stunning contradictions — perhaps because of them — this city at the end (or is it the beginning?) of things has inspired a wealth of verbal responses, all interesting, some deeply moving, and each a unique testimony to a *topos* of the imagination that exists only in words.

There are just under ninety selections in the volume, ranging from Indian mythologies and an eye-witness account of the 13 June 1886 fire that razed the fledgling town, to short stories and poems by such writers as Alice Munro, Margaret Laurence, Al Purdy, Dorothy Livesay, and Frank Davey, from lyric descriptions of the ocean, Stanley Park, the magnificence of spires and streets, to savage indictments of urban brutality and the boom and bust mentality of a late twentieth-century frontier culture. Geddes has organized his selections from the work of over fifty writers in nine thematic sub-divisions such as "Real Estate in Paradise," or "Acclimatizing the Muses," but there are echoes and capillary links among sections that are, for me, more compelling than these tidy categories. Thus, Helen Potrebenco's punchy "Woman Driver" and Robin Belitsky Endres' fascinating "Integrated Circuits" reclaim the city for women from the unconscious sexism of Rudyard Kipling's "Cities, Like Women, Cannot Be Too Careful" or Eric Nicol's "Home Town" and from the pervasive maleness of the drunks and "boom men," or the down-and-outs of Norman Levine's "Vancouver."

My only criticisms of *Vancouver: Soul of a City* stem from this matter of organization. The divisions Geddes uses draw attention to themselves without always providing a relevant or meaningful context for the work included there. Why, for example, place Phyllis Webb's poem "Prison Report" in the eighth section called "Hotline"? Pat Lowther's devastating poem "Hotline to the Coast" provides the section title, but it cannot (and

should not) be stretched to provide a context or direction for the other works gathered here. There is, also, an irritating absence of dates, even in the lengthy list of acknowledgements, so that the reader has no way of knowing when George Bowering's poems were written or when Kipling described his visit to Vancouver. Since the selections interact with others in so many ways across time and textual space, the arbitrary confinement by sections, on the one hand, and the careless attitude towards dates, on the other, are puzzling and frustrating.

These problems, however, are far outweighed by the feel, texture, variety, and quality of the writing contained in the volume; every reader will have her favourites. Mine include Emily Carr's incomparable "Sophie," an exquisite first-person narrative by "Sophie's Emily," an excerpt from Irene Baird's sadly neglected 1939 novel *Waste Heritage*, Bill Bissett's "HELP ium being absordb by th private sector" — a funny, savage dramatic polylogue on the state of existence in beautiful socred british columbia — and Earle Birney's important poem "the shapers: vancouver."

Although the strength of *Vancouver: Soul of a City* is in its voices and in its stern refusal of sentimentality and centenary expedience, it is Birney's poem that best answers Geddes' introductory questions about existence:

walking alone now
 in the grandiloquent glitter
 we are lost for a way
 for a line
 bent for the mere eye's pleasure
 a form beyond need
 is there a rhythm drumming from vision?
 shall we tower into art or ashes?

it is our dreams will decide
 & we are their Shapers

(V, 288)

It is the fictions, the poetics of Vancouver, that make us real; therefore *Vancouver: Soul of a City* is less about Vancouver, finally, than it is about the human capacity to express that soul in words.

Teach Me To Fly, Skyfighter! by Paul Yee. Toronto: James Lorimer and Company, 1983.

Children from different cultural backgrounds for the most part encounter formal education through the images and experiences of the dominant society. The same may be said of the language environment of classrooms. New material is mostly taught with examples from non-familiar areas of experience. Very seldom does the immediate cultural environment of minorities feature as part of the body of literature to which they are exposed.

Given the plural character of Canadian society, where prevailing conceptions of childhood have tended to be ethnocentric and middle class, Paul Yee's *Teach me to Fly, Skyfighter!* addresses a definite void. Four very well conceived and imaginatively written short stories capture the lived worlds of minority children, in familiar cultural territory.

The scene is Strathcona, one of Vancouver's oldest inner city settlements, and adjacent to it, Chinatown. Successive phases of Asian and European immigrants have passed through the area and left their imprint.

Ethnicity and class are carefully intertwined in Yee's stories. There is a holistic treatment of the working class lives of Chinatown's residents. The texture of the social reality of Chinatown's east side environment comes alive. Younger children encounter older relatives and learn their history, and inter-generational differences are sensitively portrayed. The issue of cultural identity is dealt with in a multilateral way. Variations of the Chinese experiences from that of newcomer, and the rural immigrant, to the Hong Kong city slickers serve to undermine stereotyping. Details of daily nitty gritty of children's after-school lives with both parents working long shifts, riding through periods of unemployment, living in small spaces, and assisting in the family grocery store after school serve to draw out commonalities in survival.

Common human experiences of immigrants are open for sharing. Among these are being an outsider, not fitting in, having problems with a new language, fear of reading in front of groups because of one's accent, fear of non-acceptance by one's peers, wanting to be part of the group and good at sport.

Astutely, the book does not avoid stereotypes of other groups in the area, such as the common perception by the Chinese-Canadian kids of those from a neighbouring project as "problems." Instead, a situation is constructed in which the pupils discover that pinning the blame for a fire on someone who lives in the project is false. It serves to break down the

stereotype and elevates the suspect to somewhat of a humane and sensitive hero.

This is a fine example of how literary works can and must provide the point of departure between all groups of the school community, based on a deeper respect and understanding for each other.

It provides many opportunities for children to discuss and analyze. Above all, the self image of children is enhanced in that they see themselves and their neighbourhoods embodied in an otherwise alien book culture. For many working class non-English speaking children such works serve to demystify writing, by providing a bridge between their ordinary lives and the printed page.

University of British Columbia

KOGILA MOODLEY