

## BOOK REVIEWS

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### *On the Edge of Empire: Gender, Race and the Making of British Columbia, 1849–1871*

Adele Perry

Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001. 320 pp. Illus.  
\$60.00 cloth; \$24.95 paper.

SARAH CARTER

*University of Calgary*

In this lively history, Adele Perry demonstrates that, despite protracted efforts to create an orderly White settler colony anchored in “respectable” gender and racial behaviours, during the years between 1849 and 1871 British Columbia was a “racially plural, rough and turbulent” place, where the inhabitants challenged the norms and values of mainstream nineteenth-century Anglo-American society. British Columbia failed to live up to imperial expectations, Perry argues, because of the persistence and resistance of First Nations and the unwillingness of White settlers. Perry contends that many British Columbians today cherish an idealized image of a “White man’s province” that never was: “In contemporary newspapers and conversations, White British Columbians often long for the days when our society was unquestionably British, when our tea and crumpets were not disrupted by Asian neighbours or First Nations demands for land and recognition. When we do so we long for a fiction of our own invention” (201).

A recognition of the significance of colonialism to BC history is central to Perry’s approach, and her study draws

on and contributes to an international body of literature that examines connections between imperialism, gender, and race. British Columbia fits within a broader context of European colonialism in that it was a settler colony where dispossession of the indigenous societies and resettlement by a newcomer population were intertwined. While this is imperial history, it is not an example of the triumph of imperialism as in this era Aboriginal peoples remained demographically dominant and socially central. Perry provides compelling evidence for the importance of gender in understanding the formation of this unique variant of colonial society. Gender figured prominently in colonial critiques of Aboriginal societies and in the efforts to remake British Columbia as a White society. The gender roles and identities in this setting departed from and challenged imperial plans and ideals. This book also makes a valuable Canadian contribution to “Whiteness” studies. These studies have blossomed over the past decade and critically examine the social construction of Whiteness, which gained its meaning from encounters with non-Whiteness.

These themes are explored in an intriguing series of topics, beginning with White men and the “homosocial” culture that profoundly disrupted prescribed gender organization. British Columbia’s White society was overwhelmingly male because the resource-extractive economy, particularly gold, attracted large numbers of young, highly mobile workers. A vibrant culture was formed among White men and was characterized by male households; same-sex social, emotional, and sometimes sexual bonds; and such practices as drinking, gambling, and violence. This culture stood in sharp contrast to the White masculine ideal of the time, which stressed self-control; temperance; discipline; and heterosexual, same-race, hierarchical unions. Although moral reformers and missionaries did not view these men as fit representatives of imperialism, these White men saw themselves as superior and shared ideologies of racial solidarity and exclusion.

Intimate relationships between Aboriginal women and White men further challenged visions of British Columbia as a respectable White settler society and were the cause of great consternation and hand-wringing. Perry concentrates on the way in which the women and the relationships were denigrated and caricatured in nineteenth-century texts. These relationships were symbols of imperialism gone awry, and they were constructed as deeply dangerous, especially for the men involved as both their morality and manliness were seen to be in peril. Perry does not write a history of these relationships, noting the difficulties with available sources, but she does argue that they were not confined to the fur trade and could be found in the city, in the country, and in mining towns, overlapping with White homosocial

culture. In characterizing these relationships Perry stresses the need to look beyond the “happy stories,” such as the long marriage of James Douglas and Amelia Connolly, that can “obscure both coercive details and the larger brutality of colonialism” (62).

Seeking to regulate, reclaim, and reform British Columbia was a fragmented collection of missionaries, politicians, journalists, and “freelance do-gooders.” Efforts to reshape White homosocial culture included missions to White men, YMCAs, mechanics institutes, and sailors homes as well as other means of replicating the political and social functions of the nineteenth-century middle-class home. For the most part the targeted group responded to these efforts with indifference. Reformers adopted a number of tactics that were aimed at regulating mixed-race relationships, including assimilation to European sexual and social norms, the discouragement of mixed-race relationships, and the segregation of colonized from colonizer (particularly in urban spaces). There is fascinating material here on the astonishingly elaborate plans for a racially segregated Victoria. All of these efforts failed, Perry contends, because both Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals resisted imported visions of a colonial society. Aboriginal people continued to live among Whites and to have extensive social and intimate contact with them.

Efforts to radically reconfigure BC society also involved schemes to attract White settlers and to encourage them to become permanent agriculturalists living in model nuclear families. There is an amusing section on the “not travel” literature on British Columbia – literature prepared by writers who had never been there. The introduction of more White women was seen as a panacea for many of the ills besetting

this edge of empire: British Columbia would finally fulfill its destiny as a stable, respectable White society. The presence of White women would compel White men to reject their rough ways and would ensure compliance with proper European gender roles. There were four assisted immigration schemes to bring White women to British Columbia, and each boatload of women was eagerly anticipated and celebrated. But these schemes too faltered as Perry argues that many of these women, like their male counterparts, frequently failed to live up to the elevated standards expected of them. Once again there was a sharp disjuncture between colonial discourse and colonial practice. Introducing large numbers of single unmarried women into British Columbia posed delicate and difficult questions, particularly as the women threatened to acquire a degree of independence. By the early 1870s, single White women were no longer seen as an "unspeakable benefit" to the colonial project: family migration was seen as a better bet.

Some themes and topics could have been further developed. While the British imperial framework is apt, one should not lose sight of the North American setting. This edge of empire had much in common with California,

for example, where there were similar reshapings of gender roles and identities, along with reformers who abhorred such behaviour and attempted to impose stabilizing customs and to import White women. The theme of the "social centrality and political agency" of the Aboriginal peoples of British Columbia could have been further developed. This is important to the central argument, and more evidence of their initiatives and responses would have permitted a richer account of cultural exchange and an enhanced sense of how the Aboriginal foundations of British Columbia helped to create this unique colonial variant. Efforts to alter gender relations within Aboriginal societies must also have been an important component of colonial plans for British Columbia.

Perry weaves together the many threads of her argument into a superb conclusion that reinforces the centrality of imperialism to BC society but that also stresses the need to appreciate the fragility of this colonial project. The book is skilfully written and nicely illustrated, and it should enjoy wide readership not only in Canada but also among scholars of the American West and those elsewhere engaged in the study of gender, race, and empire.

*Common and Contested Ground:  
A Human and Environmental History  
of the Northwestern Plains*

Theodore Binnema

Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001.  
263 pp. Maps. US\$29.95 cloth.

MATTHEW EVENDEN

*University of British Columbia*

**T**HIS BOOK IS WELL NAMED: *Common ground* because it is about a place – the Northwestern Plains – that played host to a variety of band societies of diverse linguistic, ethnic, economic, and military affiliation. Over time, different groups sought out the rich bison resource of the Plains, hunting at first without bow and arrow, and then, in the eighteenth century, obtaining (albeit unevenly) gun and horse technologies. Different groups intermingled, intermarried, and demonstrated flexibility and fluidity in the face of changing circumstances. Resource procurement cycles were developed. Groups shifted between ecological zones with the seasons, in pursuit of bison herds and hospitable environments. *Contested ground* because groups came into conflict in this shared world, seeking advantage over one another; engaging in internecine fighting over horses, guns, and trade; and reshaping the cultural geography of the region well before European groups asserted or assumed dominance. The spread of European-introduced diseases and the rivalries of the fur trade certainly destabilized relationships in the region, but they did not erode cultures nor did they introduce entirely new patterns. In the long view that Binnema

provides, fur traders appear as the latest group to arrive on the Plains, ineluctably involved, however unwillingly, within the broader scheme of military rivalry.

The time scale of this study is broad, from about AD 200 to 1806. This leads Binnema to consult a wide range of evidence and interdisciplinary research. He has examined ecological studies carefully, made his own judgments about the quality of current research on bison migration, synthesized focused archaeological studies into a broad panorama, and explained all of this varied material clearly. This is no small feat. While Binnema's time scale is broad, so too is his spatial scale. The Northwestern Plains region has doors: at different points Binnema traces the connections between groups tied to Missouri agriculturalists and fur traders on Hudson Bay. While he points to the many groups drawn to the Northwestern Plains, he also attends to those centrifugal forces that drew them away or tied them to peoples beyond.

At the heart of this book is an attempt to redress long-standing approaches to Aboriginal history on the Plains. Tribal histories, Binnema suggests, pay insufficient attention to interaction among groups. Each group,

he argues, had porous boundaries. For example, Saukamappee (Young Man), whom David Thompson met in the 1780s, was a Cree-born Peigan leader whose life traversed the Plains and crossed the divide between the pedestrian and equestrian eras as well as the time before and after the introduction of guns. A tribal or group-centred history cannot properly explain his complex political and ethnic provenance. According to Binnema, Saukamappee, and others like him, must be understood within the context of the shifting set of group relationships that gave form and meaning to his life. Binnema also insists on the importance of attending to conflicts on the Northwest Plains. Warfare happened. It is important to analyze it and to seek to explain it rather than to ignore it. To do otherwise is to do an injustice to the humanity and complexity of Plains peoples. In general, Binnema would like to transcend a "culturalist" approach and to emphasize environmental, economic, and political factors. He would also like to analyze the motivations of individuals within a broader tapestry of events rather than simply to focus on group interaction and structural changes. In the background one senses the influence both of Richard White's *Middle Ground* and Arthur Ray's *Indians in the Fur Trade* – two works that Binnema praises and selectively emulates.

Binnema succeeds unevenly with this ambitious agenda. He has convincingly demonstrated how groups interacted and overlapped, but he also shows how group identities could become fixed and potent during moments of military engagement. And, with regard to the later period, owing to the paucity of source material he can provide only a limited analysis of individual motivations and events.

This is an important book that will set the terms of discussion for early Plains Aboriginal history for some time to come. Its weaving of human and environmental themes is particularly revealing, innovative, and important. I suspect that this aspect of the book, rather than the recounting and analysis of the numerous military conflicts in the eighteenth century, will mark its importance to a general readership. The book could be used in undergraduate seminars to good effect. Unfortunately, the maps have not been well reproduced, and the Aboriginal maps are hardly discussed. Interested readers will have to turn to an intriguing essay about Aboriginal cartography that Binnema has published elsewhere.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Theodore Binnema, "How Does a Map Mean? Old Swan's Map of 1801 and the Blackfoot World," in *From Rupert's Land to Canada: Essays in Honour of John E. Foster*, ed. Theodore Binnema, Gerhard Ens, and R.C. Macleod (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2001), 201–24.

*Patterns of Vengeance: Crosscultural Homicide in the North  
American Fur Trade*

John Phillip Reid

Pasadena: Ninth Judicial Circuit Historical Society, 1999.

248 pp. US\$39.95 cloth.

*Contested Empire: Peter Skene Ogden and the Snake River  
Expeditions*

John Phillip Reid

Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2002. 258 pp. US\$29.95 cloth.

THEODORE BINNEMA

*University of Northern British Columbia*

ANYONE INTERESTED in fur trade history should take note of these two intriguing studies for, by asking new questions about how law functioned in places without formal machinery for the enactment and enforcement of law, John Phillip Reid offers original and provocative reinterpretations of legal and fur trade history. Reid's unsentimental studies challenge many widespread assumptions about fur trade and western North American history.

It is not surprising that Reid puts law at the center of his analysis; his training is in law, not history. Reid's skill as a historian, however, is apparent in both books. His conclusions, if not unassailable, are well supported and significant. In *Patterns of Vengeance* Reid examines evidence from the long and varied history of the North American fur trade to argue that traders throughout North America usually relied upon aboriginal concepts of law and vengeance, not principles of European or common law, after aboriginal people killed non-Native traders. *Contested Empire* is not about

aboriginal law. It examines a historical-legal curiosity: the Oregon Country during the period of joint British and American occupation from 1818 to 1846. Like *Patterns of Vengeance* it scrutinizes the operation of unwritten law. In this period, neither the British nor the American government made or enforced law for Oregon, or even established a system for resolving disputes in the region. Neither sent officials to the region. How, under such conditions, did the British and Americans regulate their activities and their interactions? Reid answers this question by examining one of the more controversial fur traders, Peter Skene Ogden. He argues that the mountain men maintained order because of a general "lawmindedness" that they shared. Researchers working in the fur trade era of British Columbia history ought to read these two important books.

In *Patterns of Vengeance*, the more ambitious, Reid delineates patterns in all of North American fur trade history. Because its bold generalizations are based on extensive but shallow

research in published primary and secondary sources, many specialists will find fault with Reid's conclusions. However, researchers should welcome *Patterns of Vengeance* in the spirit Reid intended – as a preliminary exploration designed to open up a new field of inquiry, not as the last word on the topic (21). *Contested Empire*, a more focused and definitive book, relies on intensive research in published and archival sources. Here Reid is more unequivocal, and his interpretive flair evinces itself in different ways, but both books are bold and original.

*Patterns of Vengeance* is organized thematically. Twelve chapters deal with various aspects of vengeance and retribution that traders took after Natives killed one of their own. Much of the evidence is gathered from published Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) records, and much of that relates to what is now British Columbia. Readers interested in the HBC and British Columbia will find particularly intriguing the argument of Chapters 8 and 9 that the HBC (and companies generally) were more likely to take vengeance against Indians, and were generally swifter, harsher, and more efficient in their vengeance, than non-company traders. By adhering aggressively to patterns of vengeance dictated by Indian law, says Reid, the HBC actually averted escalating cycles of violence that plagued regions where traders and trappers did not have the power and organization to respond as Indian communities expected. If Reid is successful, researchers will now delve deeper into the unpublished documents to explore the questions he has raised. These researchers would at least add nuance to our understanding of such dynamics, but they would very likely revise Reid's arguments sub-

stantially. Even so, *Patterns of Vengeance* will have served its purpose.

*Patterns of Vengeance* has its weaknesses. In some cases Reid attacks decades-old studies that hardly represent today's scholarship, disparagingly quotes recent scholarship which he really does not refute, or refutes arguments that scholars have never believed anyways (see 22, 118, 121). He explains very well why we should not use the words *steal* or *murder* but he always substitutes them, distractingly, with words like *conversion*, *appropriation*, and *homicide*. Simple words like *take* or *kill* convey his meaning just as well.

Fundamentally, *Patterns of Vengeance* explores the nature and function of indigenous law in cross-cultural contexts, a subject of great relevance in Canada and the United States today. Reid's insights are valuable, but his book raises many questions. Curiously, Reid avers that "there is no need to make a fuss over words" (67). He does, however, state that "Indian law" cannot be law according to a narrow definition of that word (41). He then proposes other definitions of law, Indian domestic law and Indian international law. But how is a skeptic going to respond to an argument that Indian law existed only if we redefine *law*? Furthermore, if fur traders and Indians did share concepts of law, perhaps they also shared ideas of what constituted a crime. Maybe there was such a thing as murder. Perhaps it would be useful to think about whether certain "homicides" might be more precisely labeled as murder, feud, or warfare. It might be worth fussing over such distinctions if aboriginal law is to be taken seriously.

That Reid's study is a flawed is understandable. The task was enormous and the existing literature scant. Much

contemporary research into aboriginal law is centered on oral evidence, but it would be a shame if this book did not encourage scholars to examine documentary evidence to investigate the existence and the nature of aboriginal law before states asserted their own jurisdiction.

The famous confrontation between Peter Skene Ogden and US trader Johnson Gardiner at the Weber River in today's Utah in 1825 lies at the center of *Contested Empire*. During that confrontation, Gardiner prompted twenty-three freemen to leave the HBC's Snake River Expedition. Reid's interpretation of the confrontation is unique and compelling. It certainly puts to rest the stereotype that the confrontation symbolized what happened when lawless American mountain men met law-abiding HBC men (122). Reid seeks to unravel the legal aspects of the confrontation, but *Contested Empire* is not just a legal history. Reid shows a keen understanding of the world of the HBC freemen. He argues convincingly that the freemen who "deserted" the HBC did not do so to avoid their debts – most of them paid their debts immediately, or afterwards. More than anything else, the confrontation of 1825 showed how ineffectively the HBC competed with the Americans in the Snake River country. But Reid explains that the confrontation was a significant turning point. Only a year later, even before its officials adequately understood the causes of the desertion, Ogden faced American competitors again and prevailed. Deserters were trickling back.

Although *Contested Empire* is not a biography, Reid offers a compelling, incisive, and insightful portrait of Ogden. Rather than blackball or whitewash Ogden, Reid portrays him in shades of grey. According to Reid,

Ogden, the son of a Montreal lawyer, was intelligent and wise enough to realize that if he remained in Lower Canada, his explosive temper and his violent tendencies might well put him on the wrong side of the law (16-18). In the employ of the North West Company (NWC) Ogden became one of the most feared and hated enemies of the HBC. Not surprisingly, then, after the NWC and HBC merged few HBC traders wanted Ogden around. But HBC Governor George Simpson, Ogden's Machiavellian equal, perceived Ogden's determination to remain a fur trader and decided that Ogden had better be on his team. Ogden's intelligence, energy, and determination had earned him a place in the new order. In this sense, the Snake River Expedition was the perfect place for Ogden. It existed in part to extend the employment of some of the officers, *engagés* and freemen who might otherwise have caused the post-merger company problems. The HBC wanted many of these men and their families away from its trading posts but not in the service of its competitors. Despite his reputation for ruthlessness, however, Ogden found the men of the expedition difficult to control, and his flawed leadership nearly cost him the expedition. Reid's interpretation may not make Ogden any more likeable, but it makes many of his actions more understandable.

The Snake River Expedition was supposed to make a profit while destroying the beaver stocks south of the Columbia River. The HBC used similar methods wherever it faced significant competition. Reid explains that the "fur desert" strategy was founded upon the logic that fur traders were the vanguard of settlement. Officials believed that if the beaver was extirpated, American trappers and



traders would abandon the Snake River country and Americans would never settle there. Part of the Oregon Country might be lost but the country north of the Columbia would remain firmly in British and HBC control. This strategy, Reid argues, had its ironic flaws. On one hand it was remarkably successful. The HBC did drive American trappers and traders out of the business. Instead, the Snake River Expedition itself provided some of the geographical information that American settlers needed. Furthermore, rather than retreat from Oregon to trap and trade elsewhere, many trappers settled in Oregon's Willamette Valley. Thus, ironically, "the mountain men, driven from their mountains, frequently became the original settlers; when they did not, they were often the ones who guided the settlers" (203). The Oregon country was lost not because the

strategy had been poorly executed, but because the logic behind the policy was flawed.

*Patterns of Vengeance* and *Contested Empire* are valuable additions to the historiography of the fur trade. Anyone interested in the operation of indigenous law, or in violence during the fur trade, should read *Patterns of Vengeance*. *Contested Empire* moves well beyond legal history to offer fascinating reassessments of the Snake River Expedition and Peter Skene Ogden, topics of great interest to historians of British Columbia. More generally, both books show that, when driven by new and important questions, scholars still tease valuable insights out of familiar documents. We are fortunate that this noted legal historian has turned his gaze to these intriguing questions.

*The War on Weeds in the Prairie West:  
An Environmental History*

Clinton L. Evans

Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2002. xvii, 309 pp. Illus. (some col.).  
\$29.95 paper.

TINA LOO

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AS CAROLYN MERCHANT points out, domination is a useful concept for understanding relationships among people and between people and the environment. Readers could ask for no better elaboration of this claim than Clinton L. Evans's *The War on Weeds in the Prairie West*. Exemplifying environmental history's interdisciplinarity, the book is informed by

everything from postmodern theory to botany, and it raises important questions about how we do history and how we understand our relationship to nature.

Evans begins by arguing that historians need to be more attentive to the role of the environment in shaping human activity. While the natural world certainly was a material and imaginative obstacle to what people

did and what they thought they could do, Evans insists it was also an agent of change, actively responding to human and non-human incursions and assaults and “displaying patterns of ‘learned behaviour’” (xiii). For instance, the plants that Evans studies competed for resources with other plants, provoked changes in agricultural practice, grew shorter and thicker stems after repeated mowing or grazing, and developed resistance to herbicides. Given this, Evans argues that, in order to make sense of the past, historians must “confront their anthropocentric biases” (viii) and broaden their concept of agency to include both “human and non-human sources of causation” (xiii).

Lest readers of *BC Studies* get the wrong idea, *The War on Weeds* is not a manifesto for plants’ rights; rather, it is an argument about the changing relationship between a particular group of plants and people over a century and a half. From 1800 to 1945 Canadian farmers and the country’s agricultural establishment developed a deeply adversarial relationship with weeds. Their attitudes and practices stood in marked contrast and were, in many instances, a direct repudiation of those they had learned in Britain. A distinctive “blindly oppositional” culture of weeds first emerged in Ontario and gained its fullest and most vitriolic expression in the Prairie west. There, it manifested itself in draconian legislation – noxious weed laws that by the 1940s “rivalled various war measures acts” (110) in terms of the emergency powers they granted the state – vast and costly government bureaucracies devoted to weed inspection and education; and, by the mid-twentieth century, a higher proportion of herbicide use than anywhere else in the world (186).

Evans argues that this North American culture of weeds was rooted in the particular environmental, social, and

economic circumstances of farming in Ontario and the Prairie west, which made it difficult, if not impossible, to practise the techniques of “good husbandry” that had been developed in Britain over the course of 500 years. As he shows, the exigencies of frontier farming in Ontario meant that the bulk of farm labour was expended clearing trees rather than weeds. Moreover, stump-ridden fields precluded any ploughing before sowing or row-cropping, and the high cost of labour meant that hiring hands to weed was beyond the means of most farmers. Thus left to establish themselves unchallenged, Ontario’s weeds also benefited from the necessity of cultivating a cash crop and the absence of markets for other produce – factors that worked against effective summer fallowing and crop rotation. All told, environmental and economic circumstances in Ontario favoured the cultivation of weeds as much as, or perhaps even more than, they did wheat.

The situation on the Prairies proved to be even more favourable to “weed-friendly farming” (78): there, the absence of forest cover and the presence of the railway facilitated the spread of weeds, as did the National Policy, which lent state sanction to wheat monoculture. At the same time, the importance of Prairie commercial agriculture to both regional and national prosperity heightened the weedy threat. But, as committed as they were, both government weed inspectors and farm instructors realized that legislation and education alone could not win the war: the enemy would only be repelled with the active co-operation of ordinary farmers. Thus, despite the findings of their own research into the benefits of crop rotation, government bureaucrats chose not to call attention to farmers’ own complicity in creating the weed problem

and, instead, kept their sights firmly set on eradicating these “arch-enemies of Canadian agriculture” (132). In so doing, the state allowed weed-friendly agricultural practices to go unchallenged. Indeed, as Evans shows, not only did the state policy facilitate the kind of poor husbandry that had created the weed problem in the first place but, in its support of herbicide development and use, it also actively sanctioned a practice that was environmentally questionable.

Like all good books, *The War on Weeds* raises more questions than it answers – in this case, questions about science and capitalism. I would have liked Evans to draw out his argument about the role of science and scientific experts in shaping agricultural practice – as well as policy – a little more fully, linking it to the interdisciplinary literature on the history of ecology. How did the experts’ emphasis on eradicating and then managing weeds square with the ecological notion of the “balance of nature” that emphasized the interconnectedness of organisms and the important place and role each played in an ecosystem? Second, although Evans identifies the demands of commercial agriculture as one of the reasons why weeds flourished on farms in Ontario and the Prairie west, he does not engage with the larger debate in environmental history about the relationship between capitalism and environmental change and degradation. It’s not that capitalism is responsible for weeds (!) but simply that market-driven farming, along with all the other factors Evans discusses, exacerbated the weed problem by favouring monoculture. In addition, the importance of

commercial farming also shaped how people defined and addressed the weedy threat. It is hard to imagine that state resources would have been devoted to fighting weeds to the extent they were had farming not been so central to Canada’s economic health.

These small concerns aside, *The War on Weeds* stands as a key contribution to the environmental history of North America and, in particular, to our understanding of the relationship between people and the environment. Postmodern theory has led many scholars to ask questions about the utility of classifying the world in terms of “nature” and “culture.” While some scholars argue that the boundary between the natural and the cultural is arbitrary, Clinton L. Evans makes the case that the notion of such a boundary is not useful at all. Weeds are both cultural and natural, and they are best understood as cultural artifacts, being as much the products of human imagination and practice as they are of photosynthesis (16). To insist that they are more the result of culture than they are of nature is to be anthropocentric and to deny their status as independent historical agents. Conversely, to insist that weeds are simply plants whose biology predisposes them to flourish in certain kinds of environments is to deny the links between the cultural and the natural – a denial that allowed farmers to douse their fields with herbicide without changing how they farmed. If the war on weeds tells us anything, it is that solutions to environmental problems will only come when we dispense with the nature/culture dichotomy.

*Playing the Pacific Province:  
An Anthology of British Columbia Plays, 1967–2000*

Edited by Ginny Ratsoy and James Hoffman

Toronto: Playwrights Canada Press, 2001. 520 pp. \$45.00 paper.

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WHAT IS A BC PLAY? A play set in British Columbia? What if it lacks specific geographical or cultural referents? Does a BC play nevertheless reflect a certain postcolonial, west-of-the-Rockies sensibility, a peculiarly British Columbian state of mind? Must it have been written by a British Columbian? One who was born here? Or lived here when (s)he wrote it? Ginny Ratsoy and James Hoffman wrestle with these questions like Quebeckers at referendum time or sportswriters deciding whether Barbados-born Stephen Ames, usually referred to as “a resident of Calgary,” should be given boldface Canadian status in the golf scores. In Ames’s case the solution is simple: when he scores well, he’s Canadian. In the case of the seventeen plays collected in Ratsoy and Hoffman’s splendid new anthology, the verdict is much the same. Despite their agonized efforts to theorize a descriptive matrix of *pur laine* “uniquely British Columbia drama,” the editors maintain sufficient flexibility to include noteworthy plays and playwrights with any BC connections at all.

In light of recent anthologies from Newfoundland, the Maritimes, Manitoba, and the North, a BC play collection seems necessary just to maintain public relations parity with other provinces and regions. Indeed, one of its valuable functions is to showcase British Columbia’s rich and varied theatrical

history. “Once ‘inordinately depressing,’ the theatre scene in Vancouver is now one of the nation’s most vibrant,” announced a 2002 *Globe and Mail* article.<sup>1</sup> *Playing the Pacific Province* makes clear that vibrant theatre has been a hallmark of the province for thirty-five years, and it does so in an exemplary manner.

In addition to useful bibliographies and production photos for each play, Ratsoy and Hoffman, faculty members at University College of the Cariboo, Kamloops, provide trenchant introductions, many intercut with new interviews: with playwrights John Lazarus, John Gray, Peter Anderson and Phil Savath, Morris Panych, Sally Clark, David Diamond, Joan MacLeod, Betty Quan, Colin Thomas, Marie Clements, and director Pamela Hawthorn. In contextualizing each play the introductions also construct a composite theatrical history of modern British Columbia. They chronicle, for example, the development of theatre for young audiences in relation to Dennis Foon’s *Skin* as well as the emergence of queer theatre in conjunction with Thomas’s *Sex Is My Religion*. They offer histories of the Caravan Theatre with Anderson and Savath’s *Horseplay* and of the Firehall Theatre with Clements’s *The Unnatural and Accidental Women*.

<sup>1</sup> Alexandra Gill, “Lotusland in the Limelight,” *Globe and Mail*, 15 June 2002, R9.

The plays themselves are delightfully heterogeneous. A few canonical works anchor the collection: George Ryga's *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe*, Sharon Pollock's *The Komagata Maru Incident*, Gray's *Billy Bishop Goes to War*, Betty Lambert's *Under the Skin*, and MacLeod's *The Hope Slide* – all but *Billy Bishop* firmly grounded in local history and culture, and all widely produced across Canada. Other major playwrights are represented by lesser known works: Lazarus's clever *Babel Rap*, a staple of student productions; Panych's marvelous first play, *Last Call*; Margaret Hollingsworth's monologue, *Diving*; Sally Clark's bleakly funny *Ten Ways to Abuse an Old Woman*. Perhaps most interesting are the plays that readers might be meeting here for the first time: Beverley Simons's *Crabdance*, once considered a masterpiece but now largely ignored; *Horseplay*, a witty Brechtian script nicely complemented by Caravan Theatre's unique production style; Sherman Snukal's long-running 1980s comedy, *Talking Dirty*; the smart and moving *Sex Is My Religion*. Race and ethnicity loom large in *Rita Joe*, *Komagata Maru*,

and *Skin*; in Diamond's land claims play *NO XYA*, created in collaboration with Gitxan and Wet'suwet'en chiefs; in Quan's *Mother Tongue*, a meditation on language and family; and in *The Unnatural and Accidental Women*, whose awful story of the deaths of Aboriginal women in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside is as fresh as the daily news.

As with all anthologies some obvious candidates for inclusion are missing, among them Tom Cone, Rod Langley, Nicola Cavendish. The most glaring omission is Gwen Pharis Ringwood, British Columbia's pre-eminent playwright until the arrival of George Ryga. Although she did her best work pre-1967, she continued writing plays into the 1980s. And why begin with 1967 anyway? Although reasons are suggested, the date is never clearly justified. Still, seventeen plays is a treasure trove. With all but two of the writers still living, and eight of the plays authored by women, *Playing the Pacific Province* promises continued vitality and diversity in BC theatre for years to come.

### *Faces in the Forest: First Nations Art Created on Living Trees*

Michael D. Blackstock

Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001. 224 pp.,  
Illus., maps. \$44.95 cloth.

KATHRYN BUNN-MARCUSE  
*University of Washington*

**I**N RECENT YEARS, a multidisciplinary approach to the study of Aboriginal cultures has become a common model in museum exhibits and academic volumes. Most often,

this is accomplished through the participation of scholars and artists from varied backgrounds and fields. Rarely is it found in a single-author work. Michael Blackstock's *Faces in the*

*Forest* is a much richer volume than its book jacket classification – “Native Studies” – suggests. Blackstock’s training as a forester and his Gitksan heritage inform his methodology at least as much as does his familiarity with both art historical and anthropological methods – a familiarity gained during his MA studies at the University of Northern British Columbia. This book is an expanded version of his master’s thesis; it explores Northwest Coast tree carvings, oral history, and the concept of landscape as well as proposing a new model for the preservation of “trees of Aboriginal interest” within forestry practices in British Columbia.

The foreword, by Antonia Mills, sets up the important nature of Blackstock’s work, particularly with regard to the Gitksan community. First Nations communities can use documentation of forest art and other culturally modified trees in land claims and forestry practice negotiations (xvii). Thus Blackstock occupies a middle ground between (1) an unwavering acceptance of and respect for cultural knowledge and *adaawk* (Tsimshian oral history) and (2) a defensible academic position. The presence of the Gitksan is felt throughout the book; Mills relates how Blackstock’s thesis defence took place in the village of Kispiox in front of family, chiefs, and elders. His commitment to their concerns and his respect for the knowledge the elders shared with him shines brightly throughout the text. Blackstock pondered the consequences of publicizing tree art and worried that interest in the topic might endanger the artworks. His decision to publish stemmed from his desire to provide the knowledge he had gained to younger generations of First Nations as well as from his desire to make

professionals aware of tree art so that it can be protected from logging (156). His allegiance to the secret and sometimes sacred nature of tree art results in his offering detailed discussions of the artworks without revealing their exact location. This lack of specificity is not inherently problematic. Of course, one wants to witness firsthand the carvings that Blackstock discusses and illustrates, but the poor quality of the images and the black-and-white reproductions that appear on the recycled paper on which the book has been printed are less than satisfying. Given that the carvings are the heart of Blackstock’s study, this is a distinct drawback. The volume would have been much improved with good quality photographs illustrated on glossy stock. One can see just how much is lost when one compares the alluring full-color image on the dust jacket with the image of same tree presented in a black-and-white illustration within the text (131).

Blackstock prefaces his text with a detailed discussion of his methodology and the ways in which art historical and anthropological theory can be combined with a First Nations perspective and oral history. He developed his model through personal experience, research, and a sensitivity to his own cultural epistemology and the difficulty of presenting it within an academic discourse (xxi). The first chapters of the book present Blackstock’s “preparations” for understanding. Each preparation addresses issues related to tree art: the nature of Gitksan art; the literature on tree art; the meaning of crests, poles, masks, and dolls; and finally the role of the sacred tree as an artistic medium. Chapter 3 takes a tour of tree art sites, mostly in British Columbia with brief stops in the Yukon and Manitoba for comparative

purposes. Most interesting in this section is Blackstock's comparison between the tree art's original purpose and its "second journey of meaning," which it has undertaken in recent years. Interviews with elders provide a glimpse into both these worlds: traditional purposes and the little known but important role that these trees can play in generating a renewed understanding of First Nations cultures and their need to protect their lands. The final chapter reflects on Blackstock's journey and provides his vision for a new forestry model, which includes an artist's respect for the trees. It is here that Blackstock's multidisciplinary

approach is most apparent. While the contrast between land-use plans, artists' reflections, and elders' stories is sometimes jarring, the text proves that "Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK)" can be integrated into forestry practices. This is shown in how Blackstock uses TEK to bolster his new vision for a sustainable management plan. *Faces in the Forest* is a revealing text that discusses a little known art form, and it also offers scholars an important model when attempting to accord First Nations knowledge the agency it deserves within academic discourse.

### *All Amazed for Roy Kiyooka*

Edited by John O'Brian,  
Naomi Sawada, and Scott Watson

Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2002. 160 pp.

Illus., US\$15.95/CND\$19.95 paper.

DAVID HOWARD

*Nova Scotia College of Art & Design*

ROY KIYOOKA is one of the most important yet most under-analyzed Canadian artists of the postwar period. Kiyooka, who was born in Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan, in 1926 and who died in Vancouver, British Columbia, in 1994 at the age of sixty-eight was an accomplished artist in a variety of media, including painting, performance, music, poetry, sculpture, photography, and film. He was also widely known as one of Canada's most important studio instructors, influencing generations of young Canadian artists during a teaching career that spanned over five

decades, beginning at Regina College in the late 1950s and ending with his retirement from the University of British Columbia in 1991. However, his career did not have the kind of spectacular visibility enjoyed by those artists associated with the Painters Eleven or the Regina Five. As Roy Miki, one of the contributors to *All Amazed for Roy Kiyooka*, notes: "Though a central figure in whatever artistic localisms he moved in – from the important Regina years of the late 1950s, to the initial Vancouver years of the early 1960s, and through the Montreal years that led to the Expo

'70 assignment, to Halifax, and back to Vancouver – he always remained that singular figure, 'of' but 'not of' the artistic and literary movements that would eventually be identified as the 'nation'-based cultural mainstream" (74). This book is one of the first to begin the process of examining Kiyooka's entire corpus. While, at 160 pages (composed primarily of four essays and a conference transcript), the book is frustratingly short, it provides future writers and researchers with numerous provocative and stimulating insights.

Sadly, the book is the seventh and last issue of a short-lived but remarkable BC arts journal called *Collapse*, which was an outgrowth of the Vancouver Art Forum Society (founded in 1994). Published as a volume dedicated to the remarkable career of Roy Kiyooka, its contents are drawn from a conference held in the artist's memory at the Emily Carr Institute of Art and Design from 1 to 2 October 1999. The conference organizers emphasized the need to bring together the worlds of poetry and art located within Kiyooka's work and, as a result, have combined serious scholarly inquiry with transcripts of his poetry. This helps to highlight the dialogue and rich interplay between the different media that are central to a fuller understanding of Kiyooka's work. Kiyooka, who abandoned painting as his primary form of expression in 1969 because of "the fucken [sic] art game," could easily be subsumed under the over-simplistic rubric of the disenchanting modernist who abandons the co-opted forms of abstract formalism for a more heterodox approach – one that seemingly points to a radical rupture between modernism and postmodernism.

However, while a self-described postmodern who turned his back on "progress," Kiyooka was also averse to

the bankrupt pre-empting of critical thought that such lazy categorizing is prone to promote. In Sheryl Conkelton's chapter, for example, the tensions and continuities within Kiyooka's work, especially between his earlier large colour field paintings and his later photography, are explored in such a way that one can begin to see the series of themes and lifelong aesthetic commitments that resonate through his oeuvre. Rather than seeing his career as crudely divided into an earlier modernist phase and a later post-modernist phase, what one begins to see is a very complex critical attitude towards modernity, whereby the very fragments and discontinuities in his work and career become an interesting allegory of the relationship between art and society at the end of the twentieth century.

Roy Miki's well-crafted chapter explores the subtle interchange between the personal and historical specificities of Kiyooka's art, as made manifest in his poetic work and which remains "concealed," as Michael Ondaatje has noted, in the formal complexities of his majestic abstract paintings. The criticality of Kiyooka's art, especially his photography, is developed in a fascinating chapter written by Scott Taguri MacFarlane, who focuses upon his photographic project at Expo '70 in Osaka, Japan. Finally, Henry Tsang's chapter focuses upon his memories of participating in some of Kiyooka's studio classes at UBC in the 1980s.

While Kiyooka's career has not garnered the same public visibility as have the careers of some of the artists and groups with whom he associated over the course of his life and work, his legacy may yet demonstrate that he was one of the most astute and critical artist/intellectuals that Canada



has produced in the last half of the twentieth century. This book is both a valuable research tool and an important stepping-stone towards esta-

blishing the full breadth of Roy Kiyooka's contribution to Canadian culture.

### *Sights of Resistance: Approaches to Canadian Visual Culture*

Robert J. Belton

Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2001. 398 pp. \$59.95 hardcover with interactive CD-ROM and website <[www.uofcpress.com/Sights/](http://www.uofcpress.com/Sights/)>.

DAVID MILLAR

*University of Victoria*

**B**ELTON'S BOOK/CD is a significant step forward in Canadian art history and pedagogy. Like his predecessors (Russell Harper [1966], Barry Lord [1974], William Withrow [1972], Paul Duval [1972], Douglas Fetherling [1987], and Gerald McMaster [1992], to name only a few), he provides a sumptuously illustrated critical overview. Unlike them, he covers a range of art from fine to commercial, folk, Native, and queer; architecture good and bad, colonial and postmodern; photography, performance, and media (omitting only film and broadcast television). Unlike them, he claims no canonical status for his choices and allows the reader/student access to a diversity of competing critical theories besides his own. The lavish illustrations (almost 100 in the colour section, indicated by a palette icon beside the text or monochrome reproduction) are juxtaposed with italicized quotations from contemporaries of the artists as well as later theorists and Belton's own comments, which are based on decades of teaching and are intended to provoke critical thought rather than to

invoke closure. The CD contains the whole book in hypertext, allowing instant cross-reference to pictures, text, and any part of the scholarly apparatus as well as to online discussions at <http://www.uofcpress.com/Sights>. This alone is a significant achievement, but there is more.

Structurally, *Sights of Resistance* contains Belton's introduction to visual poetics, explaining his pedagogical principles in exercises that help one to discern form, content, and context online at his website <http://www.arts.ouc.bc.ca/fiar/hndbk/hom.html>, followed by a historical survey of Canadian visual culture, its chronology from 5000 BC to 2000 AD, and a hundred case studies with full scholarly apparatus.

In one of them, Shelley Niro's 1962 photograph "Rebel," her fortyish Mohawk matron poses (mock-odalisque) on the trunk of a Nash. Belton comments that "'Rebel' also operates as a verb, deriving from the Latin word meaning 'renew the war.' The injunction opens a site of 'resistance' ... The viewer is solicited, in effect, to make war on white sexist oppression" (296). Our White-man response to

this lovely joke from the rez may be puzzlement – is this Art? Jane Gallop’s theory of the “erotics of engagement” (suggests Belton) characterizes our culture-bound response as “a search for meaning driven by the fear of castration – that is, the critic’s powerlessness [against the full humanity of the aware subject]” (296). He aims this Lacanian critique lightly, but deftly, at conventional ways of seeing. A Mohawk would already know that woman’s assent must never be taken for granted because in sex, peace, and war she has the final say. No odalisque this, subject to the masculine gaze.

The selections and interpretations in *Sights of Resistance* seek to make you aware of cultural blind spots: regional, ethnic, colonial or historicist, class- or gender-based. Through juxtaposition of images, opposition of theories, deconstruction of power positions, Belton’s approach(es) force(s) readers to examine their own position(s), as well as the cultural clues in the work itself, in order to construct new questions and to create a network of possible meanings. This is very fine pedagogy.

Each of the 100 works selected is accompanied by its provenance, a glossary of critical theory, footnotes, and bibliography. Controversy in social history and aesthetics is emphasized, not reduced to a univocal judgment. *Sights* is thus a model of critical inquiry, intercultural comparison, and discovery. What is most exciting is that the CD hypertext (illustrations, glossary, notes, and bibliography) allows computer-literate students to make their own links and to have their own online discussions, thus constituting an electronic common room limited in neither time nor space.

The glossary for “Rebel” alone cites sixteen theoretical terms, ranging from “Althusserian” to “scopophilia” (found

on the CD or website), while the bibliography points to fourteen different studies, including McMaster’s *Indigena*, Edward Said, and Alfred Young Man (in the printed version as well as the CD). The entire hypertext glossary may be viewed either at *Sights*’s website, or in Belton’s ongoing *Words of Art* at <http://www.ouc.bc.ca/fiar/glossary/gloshome.html>.

*Sights*’s regional coverage avoids the usual aporia. Selections include the North, Atlantic, Ontario, Quebec, and the West. British Columbian readers will find, among other things, a 3,600-year-old Sechelt stone sculpture of astonishing power and ambiguity (20, 86, 114-5), clues to pre-Columbian sacred exchanges between Aboriginal cultures in the symbols on a Naskapi skin (138, 118-9), a Micmac cradle (142, 176-7), and Frances Hopkin’s 1869 painting of her voyageur canoe (143, 178-9). You are invited to look for meanings in a CPR Banff poster (152, 230-1), an Ogoopogo apple box (155, 242-3), the snapshot of a Vancouver boatperson (“Tran duc Van” 166, 312-3), or the Ismaili mosque in Burnaby (164, 298-9).

*Sights of Resistance* is particularly rich in invitations to make your own comparisons between works – inter-regional, intercultural, and over time. For instance, the Mohawk “Rebel” of 1982 may be compared with Francis Lennie’s 1934 mountain-woman sculpture “Repose” and Harold Kells’s 1935 semi-porn art deco “Grecian Nocturne” (237). It points to clues such as the absence of real women and Aboriginals in Napoleon Bourassa’s 1904-12 “Apotheose de Christophe Colombe” – blind spots that have particular importance in the Québécois nationalist *survivance* ideology of that period but that persist today in Euro-American high culture at large.

*Challenging the Conspiracy of Silence:  
My Life as a Canadian Gay Activist*

Jim Egan (compiled and edited by Donald McLeod)

Toronto: Canadian Lesbian and Gay Archives and  
Homewood Books, 1998. 157 pp. \$15.00 paper.

BECKI ROSS

*University of British Columbia*

JIM (JAMES) EGAN emerged as a Canadian gay icon in the 1990s. He challenged the federal government's refusal to grant him, and his partner, Jim Nesbit, pension benefits under the Old Age Security Act. In 1995, after eight years of lower court wranglings, the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that the government had infringed on the rights of queer folks enshrined in the Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms but that this infringement was justified. However, the court also ruled that "sexual orientation" must be read into the charter as a ground of discrimination analogous to religion, gender, and race: a solid step forward for queer Canadians.<sup>1</sup> Egan and Nesbit interpreted the Supreme Court's decision as a partial victory – "a black cloud with a silver lining." Indeed, the ruling subsequently paved the path to subsequent pro-queer decisions involving same-sex equality rights (though same-sex marriage is still prohibited). Honoured for his tireless activism, Jim (with his lover Jack) was a marshall at Lesbian and Gay Pride Day in Vancouver and Toronto in 1995. Though he and Jack escaped the swirl of activist Toronto

for a more bucolic British Columbia in 1964, Egan never lost his edge. From 1981 to 1993 he worked as an openly gay city councillor for Comox-Strathcona on Vancouver Island, near his home in Courtney, British Columbia – a period during which he and Jack also hosted a monthly drop-in for gay Islanders in their home.

What is less well known is the early stirring of Jim Egan's passion for social justice in Toronto after the Second World War. This is the strength of his memoir, *Challenging the Conspiracy of Silence*. As Donald McLeod notes in his Preface to the book, Egan began his crusade against discrimination twenty years before the first gay organization was formed in Toronto in 1969 – the University of Toronto Homophile Organization. Egan's was, to cite McLeod, a "lone voice in the wilderness, and his actions were nothing less than revolutionary" (11).

Jim Egan was born in Toronto in 1921. As a young boy, he was an "omnivorous reader" who lacked any interest in sport. A dark-haired, lean, and tall young man, he worked as a laboratory technician, assisted biologists in the production of vaccines, joined the navy for two years until the end of the Second World War, and later specialized in the preservation and sale of marine biological specimens. Through travels in the 1940s, Egan learned about the

<sup>1</sup> For more on this case, see Donald Casswell, *Lesbians, Gay Men, and Canadian Law* (Toronto: Emond Montgomery, 1996), 371-411.

lively gay underworld in London, Hamburg, and Sydney. Returning to Toronto in 1947, he explored the small, loose web of local gay spaces: parks, cafes, public washrooms, bathhouses, hotel beverage rooms, and private house parties. At the bar in the Savarin Hotel on Bay Street, Egan met Jack Nesbit. Within two weeks, they'd moved in together – a loving union that would last fifty-two years.

In careful detail, Egan describes the dangers faced by Toronto's gay demi-monde in the 1940s and 1950s. He notes how homosexuality was perceived as a sin, a sickness, and a sex crime, and how police routinely entrapped men and laid charges of gross indecency. Most gay men and women remained deep in the closet, fearful of police arrest, job loss, rejection by family and friends, and denied housing. Egan chronicles the homophobic coverage of gay life in the mainstream press and the scandal sheets, luridly entitled *Hush*, *True News Times* (*TNT*), and *Justice Weekly* (the precursors to modern-day pulp tabloids *National Enquirer* and *Star*). Headlines flashed: "Queers Flushed from 'Love' Nest" and "Unparalleled Orgies of Perversion Exposed." In 1949, enraged by the anti-homosexual "gross inaccuracies and libels" in the mass media, Egan commenced a furious, voluminous letter-writing campaign that lasted fifteen years. Ironically, he was able to convince the publishers of *True News Times* (in 1951) and *Justice Weekly* (in 1953) to run columns that he had written in order to educate readers about gay stereotypes, gay bars, the Kinsey Reports (1948, 1953), and amendments to the Canadian Criminal Code regarding gross indecency law (which criminalized homosexual sex between consenting adults). I admire how Egan penetrated the media's silence and lies through letters and articles he wrote

for the *Globe and Mail*, *Toronto Telegram*, *Saturday Night*, and *Toronto Daily Star*, among others. And yet I would love to learn more about why he endorsed an essentialist (as opposed to social constructionist) view of a "homosexual personality" and of homosexuality as genetically determined – concepts energetically debated today.

In Chapter 5 Egan reflects on "gay characters" in Toronto in the 1950s and early 1960s. I found the profiles entertaining and informative, but I wondered about the absence of lesbians and bisexual women in the lives of Egan and Nesbit, and the barriers to friendship between gay men and women. I also wondered about the queer men and women of colour who encountered the double jeopardy of homophobia and racism.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, Egan's frank observations on a class-stratified gay (male) culture were refreshing. Noting that he and Jack belonged to the "lower orders," he relates the ranking of "your opera queens and highly educated university types at the top, and the ribbon clerks at Simpson's at the bottom" 70. As much as Egan's recollections are generously sketched, I would have enjoyed more extensive comment on the couple's non-monogamy (after the

<sup>2</sup> For pioneering efforts to consider the history and present of queers of colour in Canada, see Makeda Silvera, "Man Royals and Sodomites: Some Thoughts on the Invisibility of Afro-Caribbean Lesbians," in *Piece of My Heart: A Lesbian of Colour Anthology*, ed. Makeda Silvera (Toronto: Sister Vision Press, 1991); Wesley Crichtlow, "Buller Men and Batty Bwoys: Hidden Men in Toronto and Halifax Black Communities," in *In a Queer Country: Lesbian and Gay Studies in the Canadian Context*, ed. Terry Goldie (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp, 2001), 69-85; and *Forbidden Love*, NFB documentary, dir. Aerlyn Weissman and Lynn Fernie, 1992.

first monogamous twenty years); Jim's thoughts on the vexed relationship between feminism and gay liberation; and his views on ever more complex queer identities, communities, and political priorities in the 1990s. Also, Jim's lover Jack Nesbit is a shadowy presence in the book, and I found myself yearning for insights into Jack's passions as a hairdresser, marriage counsellor, gardener, and dog lover.

Egan acknowledges the homophobic social climate of the 1950s. But I wish he had more to say about a culture steeped in Cold War hysteria and in images of heterosexual married bliss, the baby boom, nuclear families, and suburban consumerism.<sup>3</sup> TV sit-coms *Leave It to Beaver* and *The Honeymooners*, and magazines such as *Redbook*, *Good Housekeeping*, *Better Homes and Gardens*, and *Chatelaine*, peddled rigid (and unequal) gender roles, rewarded heterosexuality, and normalized Whiteness. Happily, Egan's personal reflections on the postwar era are richly contextualized when read alongside two recent social histories: Mona Gleason's *Normalizing the Ideal: Psychology, Schooling, and the Family in Postwar Canada* (1999) and Valerie Korinek's *Roughing It in Suburbia: Reading Chatelaine Magazine in the Fifties and Sixties* (2000). Moreover, I'm curious about why Egan tells us nothing about the federal government's campaign to purge "alleged" and "confirmed" homosexuals from the civil service and the Departments of

National Defence and Foreign Affairs in the late 1950s. In *Challenging the Conspiracy of Silence*, he makes brief reference to similar, McCarthy-led campaigns inside the US State Department, but the shameful targeting of queers as threats to Canadian "national security" is oddly missing from his oeuvre.<sup>4</sup>

In spite of my unanswered questions, this book is a testament to the power of community-based initiative. The Lesbian and Gay Community Appeal granted editor and compiler Donald McLeod much needed financial support, and, as co-publisher, the Canadian Lesbian and Gay Archives supplied not only access to valuable memorabilia but also funds. McLeod succeeds in stitching together Egan's own words from numerous audio- and videotaped interviews, and from Egan's own writings housed at the Canadian Lesbian and Gay Archives and at the Metro Toronto Reference Library. The book's black-and-white photographs are especially provocative, as are the covers of early gay magazines *Gay* and *Two*, and copies of letters to and from Egan. An appended chronology of Jim Egan's life, together with three checklists that catalogue Egan's publications and correspondence between 1950 and 1964, smartly round out McLeod's compilation.

Jim Egan died in March 2000 in Courtney at the age of seventy-eight. His relationship with Jack Nesbit lasted fifty-two years, and their mutual affection and respect is captured in a moving tribute: *Jim Loves Jack: The*

<sup>3</sup> See Joanne Meyerowitz, *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994); Doug Owsram, *Born at the Right Time: A History of the Baby Boom Generation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996); and Joy Parr, *Domestic Goods: The Material, the Moral, and the Economic in the Postwar Years* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999).

<sup>4</sup> See Gary Kinsman, "Constructing Gay Men and Lesbians as National Security Risks, 1950-1970," in *Whose National Security? Canadian State Surveillance and the Creation of Enemies*, ed. Gary Kinsman, Dieter Buse, and Mercedes Stedman (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2000), 143-53.

*James Egan Story* (1996) by filmmaker David Adkin.

In 2002 urban lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth tend to take for granted queer magazines like *Xtra West*, rainbow flags, the *Queer as Folk* TV series, Dykes on Bikes at Pride events, Toronto's Pussy Palace (women's night at the steambath), the Pink Pages (telephone directory), and queer studies in colleges and universities. Less concerned about the right to marry than the schedule for Vancouver's annual "Out on Screen" queer film festival, youth might be quick to discount the

efforts of a White, gay, high school dropout named James Egan who dared to disrupt the profoundly anti-homosexual ideology of religious leaders, psychiatrists, journalists, and cops more than half a century ago. Yet by dismissing or forgetting James Egan's contributions, we perilously ignore a chunk of the foundation upon which we stand. To me, Egan's extraordinary belief in the power of homo self-acceptance and equality rights for all makes him a queer hero, worthy of remembrance.

*Blueprint:  
Black British Columbian Literature and Culture*

Edited by Wayde Compton

Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2001. 315 pp. Illus. \$24.95 paper.

SNEJA GUNEW  
*University of British Columbia*

THIS IS AN EXTREMELY important collection and is well served by its editor, Wayde Compton. The title itself, with its pun on both "blueprint" and the "Blues" (that defining art form for the Black diaspora) avoids any easy essentialist gestures, as is illustrated by the following statement at the end of Compton's introduction: "Much of the uniqueness of the work in this anthology is exactly the result of the shifting patterns of migration and the absence of a sharply defined regional tradition. If an aesthetic is in development, it may be best to view it – from the ground floor – as provisional rather than as a progression towards an essence" (37).

When I first arrived in Vancouver in 1995 and was familiarizing myself with the extent of the presence of different cultures in the city, I was often told that, unlike eastern Canada, here there was a dearth of Black people and that this appeared to have been the case throughout the history of British Columbia. *Blueprint* effectively challenges this perception.

The collection begins with the controversial figure of James Douglas, sympathetically situating his writings and his dilemma (in relation to the acknowledgment of his "blackness") within the ideologies of his times. As Compton expresses it in his own poem "JD" at the end of the book (272):

O James Douglas,  
 Our own quadroon Moses,  
 Should I place a violet on your grave  
 Or hawk a little spit  
 For your betraying ways?  
 O white man, black when out  
 Of favour ...

The collection also evokes the fluctuating histories and circumstances of British Columbia's Black residents. In Compton's words:

From the time of the first arrivals in the nineteenth century, BC's black history has been one of continuous exodus, immigration, settlement, exploration, desertion, miscegenation, communitarianism, integration, segregation, agitation, uprooting and re-rooting and re-routing ... If there is a unifying characteristic of black identity in this province, it is surely the talent for reinvention and for pioneering new versions of traditional identities that such conditions demand. (20)

As befits its stated intention of paying respect to the orature at the heart of Black cultures everywhere, the anthology comprises an eclectic mix of genres, ranging from letters and journals to oral histories (for example, relying heavily on the collection of oral accounts collected by Daphne Marlatt and Caroline Itter in *Opening Doors: Vancouver's East End* (Victoria: Aural History Program, 1979)). As readers would expect, the anatomy of racism is a prevailing motif, and one notes the reiteration of distinctions made between the versions that proliferate in the United States and Canada as exemplified in Dorothy Nealy's extract: "In the United States, the Americans are so blatant about the racial prejudice. You can fight it, because they call you

'nigger' and they segregate you out loud and clear. But the racism in Canada is so subtle, and so elusive, you can't really pin it down" (116). In the contemporary period one is constantly struck by the performative nature of many of the offerings. There is always the sound of a distinctive voice, as in the poetry of Mercedes Baines: "I push through the sea of white eyes staring at / me on the bus / as if I were some strange fruit / as if my vulva was hanging outside of my skirt whispering exotic / welcomes" (213); or of Nikola Marin, "Was it wolf or coyote who mounted me? She was the chicken I wanted to steal by night / He is Eshu. He is primal energy. He is trickster. Some people call him the Devil" (261); or the extract from David Odhiambo's *diss/ed banded nation*, "he's swept into a heavy crush of the doped hastening towards fetid warehouse parties – raves – n' line-ups in front of hot nightclubs; others nosing to cinemas or restaurants or returning from lectures about the exotic n' obscure" (233).

Wayde Compton has expressed the hope that the publication of *Bluesprint* will initiate a dialogue and generate a more informed debate around the history of the Black presence in British Columbia. The occasion was a symposium at Green College (University of British Columbia) in which Compton, together with Kevin McNeilly, was interviewing George Elliott Clarke, himself one of the pioneers of Black literature in Canada. Judging from the ubiquity of *Bluesprint* in bookstores across Vancouver, and the fact that there were enthusiastic reviews in the *Georgia Straight* as well as a centre-page spread in the Spring issue (2002) of *BC Bookworld*, one hopes that his desire will be fulfilled and that the book will reach those beyond the academic world. Indeed, one hopes

that this collection will help to overcome the usual rifts in communication that divide the academic world from the general public. The distinctive contributions of British Columbia's

Black residents certainly deserves wider recognition, and it has its eloquent testimony in this dynamic collection.

*NFB Kids: Portrayals of Children  
by the National Film Board of Canada, 1939-1989*

Brian J. Low

Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2002.  
288 pp. Illus. \$29.95 paper.

REBECCA COULTER

*University of Western Ontario*

**I**S THERE A CANADIAN BOOMER alive who cannot recall those school days when the Bell and Howell 16 mm. projector came out and earnest documentary films about salmon fishing in British Columbia, wheat farming in Saskatchewan, and fruit growing in the Niagara were shown? Through the efforts of classroom teachers, ever grateful for classroom resources of any kind that might hold the interest of students, the National Film Board (NFB) has been a ubiquitous presence in the lives of Canadian children. Now Brian Low convincingly demonstrates that the NFB, for its part, had a deep and abiding interest in children.

The film collection housed in the NFB Archives is clearly a very rich source for social historians and, if nothing else, *NFB Kids* serves to highlight this fact. In an impressive display of research, Low viewed 250 films that contain substantial portrayals of children and that, over a fifty-year period, have provided evidence of "transitions in ... imagery and

narrative" (2). He argues that three different, though overlapping, approaches to children can be found in NFB films but that, in all cases, the purpose was to promote "practices and principles expected by childhood experts to produce desirable outcomes" (16).

In the earliest period, 1939 to 1946, when John Grierson was in charge of the NFB, films were geared towards the goals of progressivism. The need for improvements in the conditions of rural education and an emphasis on cooperative group efforts to enhance community life were central themes. Young people, under the suggestion and direction of adults, were portrayed as learning about, implementing, and benefiting from cooperative team projects of various kinds.

Within this context, readers of *BC Studies* will be interested in the chapter that describes how the children of Lantzville on Vancouver Island became participants in the 1944 film, *Lessons in Living*. Designed to promote the acceptance of an activity-based pedagogy leading to acts of social



responsibility, this film recreated in docu-drama style an event that was reported to have taken place in Alberta two or three years earlier. Indeed, a very similar tale of the way in which children, through a school project, revitalized a whole community can be found in Donald Dickie's 1940 text, *The Enterprise in Theory and Practice*, although here the story is told by a female school teacher who actually did it and not a male official from an education department.

If, during the first period, children were portrayed as capable of actively participating in the redemption of society, during the second period, 1947 to 1967, they were portrayed as having to be saved through the tenets of the mental hygiene movement. According to Low, a new emphasis on child-rearing and on building autonomous youngsters is evident, and the focus of films shifts to individual psychological development and a concern for personal happiness and group acceptance. Low argues that, during this period, adults (especially parents) began to lose their authority and power while experts of various kinds prescribed methods for bringing up independent children. Parents, particularly mothers, were blamed if children experienced problems with eating, friendships, behaviour, or other aspects of their lives.

By the third period, 1968 to 1989, NFB films were portraying children free from family controls. It is no wonder then, Low argues, that the emphasis shifted to troubled youths and to social issues such as drug abuse, incest, family violence, mental illness, and suicide. Using an unacknowledged

structural-functionalist analysis, Low claims that families and communities were now marked by "disequilibrium." For the most part, Low seems to feel that this disequilibrium resulted from the loss of male power and authority in the family and society – a loss that was brought on by the (male) mental hygiene experts and the ideas of the early twentieth-century Swedish author Ellen Key. Furthermore, Low takes the position that children were captured by the feminists of Studio D, who promoted democratic family forms and who valued girls. According to Low, these feminists ensured that, during this third period, "females emerge[d] to ideological dominance" and that even "veteran male film-makers" succumbed to the hegemony of Studio D and "adopt[ed] the principle of featuring girls in strong leading roles" (204). One shudders at the horror of it all.

*NFB Kids* has much to recommend it. Although the many descriptions of film content grow tiresome, Low is working with the considerable challenge of converting moving images, recorded sound, and verbal narrative to paper. He alerts us to a wonderful source for historical research and provides a ground-breaking study with links to a limited portion of the key literature on the history of childhood and youth. This book should encourage further studies that make use of the sophisticated theoretical insights of cultural and film studies in order to more fully situate the NFB and its children within the full complexity of their social context.

*Paper Shadows: A Chinatown Childhood*

Wayson Choy

Toronto: Penguin, 1999. 352 pp. \$18.99 paper.

*The Chinese in Vancouver: The Pursuit of Identity and Power*

Wing Chung Ng

Vancouver: UBC Press, 1999. 256 pp. \$75.00 cloth; \$29.95 paper.

LISA R. MAR

*University of Toronto*

**I**N TWO VERY DIFFERENT BOOKS, authors Wayson Choy and Wing Chung Ng contribute to our understanding of the forces that have shaped the development of ethnic Chinese identities in British Columbia. Recent scholarship on the topic has often focused more on how others imagined Asians rather than on how Asians envisioned themselves. These two authors richly analyze the history of Chinese Canadian identity as seen from the inside. Choy and Ng see Chinese identity in Vancouver as neither a linear path to assimilation over time nor solely as the product of mainstream opinion. Using a wealth of sources, they show how Chinese Canadian identities developed and evolved over time in patterns far more interactive than one might assume.

Both books add new dimensions to a central theme within immigration studies: the conflict among generations of immigrants and their Canadian-born descendants. Ng's *The Chinese in Vancouver* shows how different groups within the Chinese population in Vancouver articulated many different positions about Chinese identity over time. Over thirty-five years, he argues

that Vancouver's Chinese population developed five factions: older pre-1924 immigrants, postwar local-born Chinese, postwar new immigrants, 1970s new immigrants, and 1970s Canadian-born. Each faction was shaped by its unique historical circumstances as well as by its interactions and competition for influence with the others. He studies this conflict among generations by looking at an extensive body of original research data relating to Chinese ethnic organizations, including copious Chinese language sources and interviews with many important community figures.

Ng views Chinese organizations as expressions of identity within a realm that was controlled by Chinese. Though his main interest is in factions that competed to define the proper meaning of Chineseness, he grounds his discussion in histories of institutions and their origins, practices, and internecine competition for cultural power. The result is an ambitious analysis of intra-ethnic conflict covering a broad sweep of time. His vignettes delineate the struggle between immigrants and older immigrants as well as the Canadian-born in the 1950s,

Chinese involvement in the politics of urban renewal in the 1960s, and Chinese engagement in the ethnic politics of Canadian multiculturalism in the 1970s. For each of these eras, he has sketched a partial outline that will help orient future research.

The book's scope necessarily sacrifices depth. There is little coverage of individual group members or leaders, and no individual accounts of identity, which makes for a rather impersonal study. It seems difficult to completely assess the meaning of these groups without paying closer attention to their membership. In addition, women and gender are curiously absent from his discussion, despite women's visible presence in community organizations during this era. Further, the pivotal pre-1945 backdrop to identity politics for both older immigrants and the local-born could use further elaboration. Finally, Ng's focus on Chinese organizations would be strengthened by a more sustained analysis of how identity was linked with political power.

In contrast, Wayson Choy's *Paper Shadows* traces the question of Chinese Canadian identity in the author's own life. Choy's deeply researched, poetic memoir of growing up in Vancouver revisits his early childhood, richly analyzing the personal and collective contours of his life as a young boy in the 1940s and 1950s. The result is an astonishing historical narrative of personal discovery. His poetic style effortlessly weaves sophisticated contextual analyses of the era into an engaging story. Though a memoir, it makes an important contribution to Chinese Canadian history, and it deserves a wide audience, including the general public, children, and Canadian historians.

*Paper Shadows* opens with Choy's middle-aged discovery of the secret of

his adoption, an event that leads him to recall his childhood in Vancouver. The majority of the book recounts his life from his earliest memories to his departure for Ontario at age eleven. Later in life, he returns to his family members and friends to explore the meaning of his childhood, researching its details and contexts with a more mature understanding. His narration moves seamlessly from the present to his childhood view of past events and to the personal mysteries that, decades later, still haunt him.

Like his previous best-selling book, *The Jade Peony*, *Paper Shadows* joins the specificities of Chinese historical experience in Vancouver with universal childhood themes. In *Paper Shadows*, though, Choy constructs history, not fiction, fusing fact and memory in masterful prose. His use of detail and acknowledgments testify to a meticulously researched past through interviews and archival research. The book ultimately integrates these perspectives in ways he could have never fully understood as a young boy, immersing the reader in a finely crafted portrait of his childhood world of family, friends, and school.

The memoir serves as a rich educational resource, particularly as an account of a son of immigrants. Like other youth of his era, Choy chose to rebel against his parents' attempts to teach him the Chinese language and declared his intention to be "Canadian." Such matters of the heart, he soon discovered, are not so simple. Chinatown, his family, his friends, and his language never truly left him, and so, in *Paper Shadows*, he returns. History too proves to have more mysteries than does a novelist's fiction. In the end, his quest to discover the meaning of his own life and his family's past leaves much to the imagination.

Both Choy's *Paper Shadows* and Ng's *The Chinese in Vancouver* attest to the increasing maturity of Chinese Canadian historical writing. They analyze identity as complex – rooted in time, generation, locale, and interaction with other Chinese and European groups. To sum up, Chinese Canadians

imagined their identities while being engaged in many layers of community interaction. More books like these would continue to build the nascent field of Chinese Canadian history and would also make important contributions to Canadian immigration history.

### *Ships of Steel, A British Columbia Shipbuilder's Story*

T.A. McLaren and Vickie Jensen

Madeira Park, British Columbia: Harbour Publishing. 2000. 288 pp.

Illus. \$39.95 cloth.

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**S**HIPS OF STEEL tells the story of the careers of two men, William Dick McLaren and his son Thomas Arthur McLaren, and is set within the context of British Columbia's steel shipbuilding industry, from the 1920s through the 1990s. The McLaren story begins in Scotland with the shipbuilding endeavours of W.D. McLaren, which included converting war surplus minesweepers into passenger vessels for the Union Steamship Company. In 1927 McLaren moved to Vancouver and worked as a consulting engineer.

The Second World War created an urgent need for merchant ships, and W.D. McLaren served as manager of the newly established West Coast Shipbuilders. His son Arthur, as a new graduate of UBC's engineering school, joined him. The wartime ships, including

the famous "Park" vessels, were designed for mass production, and, although their construction produced a surge in shipyard activity, it did not prepare the industry for the postwar period. "The experience," notes Arthur McLaren, "was doing the same ship fifty-five times, not building fifty-five different ships" (69). The details of the wartime program are fascinating and well illustrated, but more credit should have been given to the way that H.R. MacMillan and his West Coast cronies stole the march on eastern shipbuilders when establishing a Second World War shipbuilding program.

After the war Arthur McLaren decided, against sound advice, to establish his own shipyard. And, with considerable perseverance and imagination, he succeeded in making it a

sound and innovative company. The book provides a detailed record of Allied's production up to the construction of British Columbia's infamous "fast ferries," parts of which were built by Allied, but the discussion of these vessels and what went wrong with the program is very limited.

*Ships of Steel* recounts the details of design and construction of many important BC vessels, particularly from the post-Second World War era. These include the *Sidney* and *Tsawwassen*, the first vessels built for BC Ferries; the ferry *Anscomb*, with a service record of over fifty years on Kootenay Lake; the *Omineca Princess*, built in 1976 for service on Francois Lake; the successful *Spirit* Class BC Ferries; and a host of less obvious or little known, but collectively very important, tugs, barges, special purpose craft, and fishing vessels.

Although *Ships of Steel* may be a BC shipbuilder's story, the book has broader interest as Allied Shipbuilders became particularly expert at building vessels that could be constructed, cut into sections, and then reassembled in remote areas such as the Upper MacKenzie River and the Interior of British Columbia. Allied's accomplishments in sending sectioned vessels to Waterways, Alberta, were impressive, as were the many vessels it built for use on the lakes and rivers of British Columbia. Similarly, Allied became a major builder for Arctic and North Sea oil exploration in the 1970s and constructed many

supply vessels, ice-breakers, and similar ships.

Perhaps one of the most useful features of this book is the many insights it provides into the nature of shipbuilding, ship design, ship construction for remote locations and the operation of a shipyard on the Pacific Coast. Offering numerous details and perspectives that would be difficult or impossible to find in other published sources, the book includes appendices that list all the vessels built by Allied as well as by other shipyards in British Columbia.

This highly recommended and very readable book presents useful introductory and contextual material and a large selection of diverse illustrations that depict not only a wide range of vessels but also many aspects of shipbuilding. Our quibbles are minor: the organization of chapters, which are defined both chronologically and topically, is sometimes confusing; no references are included for the text; and some of the shipbuilding terminology may be too specialized for general readers. Finally, we must take issue with T.A. McLaren's comment, (50-1) "You don't build ships on the sides of hills," to which Ken Mackenzie retorts, "Oh yeah? There is a successful aluminum shipyard halfway up Mt. Maxwell on Saltspring Island." Perhaps the Saltspring Islanders talked to Arthur McLaren about the difficulties he had when launching vessels on the flat lands around Burrard Inlet.

*Direct Action: Memoirs of an Urban Guerrilla*

Ann Hansen

Toronto: Between the Lines, 2001. 493 pp. \$19.95 paper.

*Guilty of Everything*

John Armstrong

Vancouver: Transmontanus/New Star Books, 2001.  
98 pp. CDN\$16/US\$12 paper.

SCOTT BEADLE

*Vancouver*

THE AUTHORS OF *Direct Action* and *Guilty of Everything* made their mark in BC popular culture during the first few years of the 1980s. John Armstrong was a creative force in Vancouver's independent rock music scene, while Ann Hansen made her mark with a bang – literally – as a member of the urban guerrilla group Direct Action, better known after their arrest as the Squamish Five.

Authors Hansen and Armstrong revisit and confront their respective cultural legacies. Both works are autobiographical and explore a narrow segment of the authors' lives soon after they had come of age.

Some reviewers will inevitably link *Direct Action* and *Guilty of Everything* with Vancouver's punk rock subculture – indeed, that is why they are being reviewed together. In Armstrong's case the punk link is self-evident because his story directly concerns his role in Vancouver's then developing punk scene. Hansen, on the other hand, is only distantly and accidentally related to punk, so this linkage is a bit misleading. However, *Direct Action* does offer a glimpse of the relationships

that were formed between some of the city's radical activists and punks in the late 1970s.

Although it is possible that Hansen and Armstrong crossed paths at a punk concert at the Oddfellows Hall, or rubbed elbows at the Smilin' Buddha Cabaret, they probably did not know each other at all. Armstrong and Hansen tell two different, but not necessarily opposed, sides of the punk experience. Hansen's story is concerned with the nature of political activism, commitment, self-doubt, and the gritty day-to-day realities of being an urban guerrilla. Armstrong, mirroring the nature of his musical contributions, is totally unconcerned with punk's political dimensions; rather, he focuses on the romance of the rock 'n' roll lifestyle and its outlaw mystique. Their stories are representative of the polarities of attitudes that existed at the core of the punk experience: one camp saw punk as a musical and artistic rebellion – an embattled, romantic reclamation of rock's lost passions; while the other camp saw it as a socio-political rebellion, an expression of the desire for change, and an opportunity for

radical agitation. In punk's early days, these tendencies formed a more or less natural alliance; but during the 1980s the punk movement began splintering across these and other lines.

While the audience for *Guilty of Everything* will be more or less limited to those interested in the history of Vancouver's independent rock music, the appeal and significance of *Direct Action* goes well beyond its minor but interesting connections with Vancouver punk rock. It should be remembered that, during their spectacular trial, Hansen and her co-conspirators were nearly household names in Canada, making headlines as the country's first post-FLQ guerrilla group. In 1982 Ann Hansen, Brent Taylor, Doug Stewart, Julie Belmas, and Gerry Hannah began a bombing and arson campaign that eventually culminated in their arrest in January 1983 on a highway just north of Vancouver. Dubbed the Squamish Five (after their place of capture) by local news media, they were charged with blowing up a BC Hydro substation on Vancouver Island, blowing up a Litton Systems plant in Toronto, and helping to fire-bomb some Red Hot Video stores in Vancouver. They were finally apprehended while in the final stages of planning an armed robbery of a Brinks guard in a Burnaby shopping mall.

Hansen was an activist in the Toronto area in the mid-1970s. At a political conference in Toronto she met Vancouverite Brent Taylor, and she was drawn to his infectious energy and activist inclinations. They became fast friends, and a couple of years later Hansen visited Vancouver and looked up Taylor to renew their acquaintance. Hansen stayed in Vancouver and eventually moved in with Taylor as their mutual political and intellectual attraction transformed into romantic involvement.

Taylor was already a veteran of a Yippie-inspired group called the Groucho-Marxists. In 1977 Taylor "pied" a visiting Joe Clark at UBC, the first of several pie-throwing incidents for which the Groucho-Marxists were notorious in Vancouver. The Grouchos were a radical clique comprised of student activists, Yippies, former *Georgia Straight* staffers, and founders of the anarchist paper *Open Road*. In 1978 the Anarchist Party of Canada (Groucho-Marxist) organized a May Day anarchist festival in Stanley Park that included a few local punk bands. The organizers followed that up with an Anti-Canada Day punk rock concert in Stanley Park in July. These events marked the start of a lengthy relationship between this group of activists and some key punk rockers. Two members of this anarchist-Yippie axis, Ken Lester and David Spaner, became the managers of seminal Vancouver punk bands DOA and the Subhumans, respectively.

Future *Direct Action* members Gerry Hannah and Julie Belmas were both active in the punk scene. Hannah, as Gerry Useless, was a bass player and one of the songwriters for the Subhumans. Belmas also played bass, and, in 1980, she co-wrote a punk "fanzine" called *Opposition*. After Hannah quit the Subhumans in 1981, the two began living together. It was Brent Taylor who introduced Hannah and Belmas into the small circle of political activists that included Ann Hansen and Doug Stewart.

In *Direct Action*, Hansen weaves a tale that is very readable and perhaps surprisingly enjoyable. She carries the reader effortlessly through a cinematic-style narrative, populated by believably complicated characters, and she builds suspense like an accomplished fiction writer. Its only weakness is that,

because Hansen is from Toronto, she is not able to provide a historical background or context for Vancouver's anarchist-activist underground. She engages in some slight fictionalization – for instance, a composite police investigator character was created to help tell “the other side” – but this does not impede an essential sense of accuracy. The quality of Hansen's writing is much greater than is usually expected for works of this nature.

Sadly, the same cannot be said for John Armstrong's slim memoir. As Buck Cherry, Armstrong was the singer, guitarist, and songwriter for the Modernettes, arguably Vancouver's finest pop-punk band of the early 1980s. *Guilty of Everything* chronicles Armstrong's career from his first band in White Rock in 1977 to his tenure in Los Popularos, a group that also featured Armstrong's friend and mentor Art Bergmann. Armstrong's narrative ends abruptly when he quits Los Popularos before its ill-fated move to Toronto. He does not describe the reforming of the Modernettes or his semi-retirement into journalism (he wrote for the *Georgia Straight* before becoming an entertainment columnist for a major daily newspaper).

Where Hansen is able to describe inner turmoil and self-doubt, Armstrong's writing is notable for its lack of personal insight. There is little vulnerability to Armstrong's Buck Cherry character; there is no awkward transformation or embarrassing past. Any embarrassing revelations invariably involve other people, not Armstrong. One of the most interesting things about punk was the way that individuals who were often outcasts or misfits felt they could reinvent themselves, carve new personae, lifestyles, and avenues for self-expression within the precincts of an encouraging subculture. Armstrong seems to want us to believe that he has always been “cool.”

When Jean Smith's *Ghost of Under-standing* was released a few years ago, it was criticized for its lack of historical insight into Vancouver's punk subculture. That criticism was a little unfair as it was ostensibly a work of fiction. However, it is not unfair, in this case, to say that *Guilty of Everything* suffers glaringly from a lack of historical context. We learn little or nothing about the other bands and individuals that made the Vancouver punk scene – and stories like Armstrong's – possible.



## Mine

Steven Collis

Vancouver: New Star Books, 2001. 116 pp. \$18.00 paper.

ROBERT MCINTOSH

*National Archives of Canada*

IN 1849 THE HUDSON'S BAY Company began to mine coal on Vancouver Island, where large collieries operated from the 1870s until the mid-twentieth century. Highly prized as a source of power for factories, railways, and oceanic steamers, coal was also used to heat dwellings, generate electricity, provide light (when burned as coal gas), and as a raw material for chemical industries.

Collis's book-length poem represents his homage to mining men and women on Vancouver Island and, notably, to his own forebears. He deploys an eclectic mix of verse and prose in a variety of voices, weaving stray images, snippets of song, explanatory narratives, allusions to literature, a glossary of mining terms, a chronicle-like list of events by date, and transcriptions from written records. His tone is earnest and reflective, at times angry.

Collis is preoccupied by the methodology of constructing memory: "How to remember dismembered histories, memories crushed under the collapse of time?" (20). The physical evidence is vague: "I drive into Wellington where they lived. What remains? Strip mall. Shallow lake. Marsh land" (92). An ancestor's dwelling leaves unclear what it housed in the past: "I do not know what really raged in these now decaying rooms" (102). Collis's forebears did not document their activity: "Generations die quickly, without passing their stories on" (21). Surviving oral accounts

only offer "gossip and family hearsay" (92). Nor are the records of the state particularly illuminating: "The civic archives are only hollow reminders of what is missing – the unwritten lives of the poor and history-less" (22). Records, Collis recognizes, are weak surrogates for the lived, experienced past they document: "and I have only inherited words / not who spoke them / not what they may have meant, robbed as I am of context and propinquity" (82). For his purpose this evidence is ultimately inadequate. Consequently, calling on his gifts as a poet, he will "Imagine Ancestors" he "Cannot Know" (86).

*Mine* is structured in four parts ("Shafts"), each of which penetrates the past differently. In Shaft One, Collis reflects on the art of memory, likening the origins of coal to the genesis of his poem. Shaft Two develops the "story": Aboriginal inhabitants reveal the presence of coal to the European colonizers, immigrant miners arrive after the difficult journey from the United Kingdom, Robert Dunsmuir emerges as regional coal magnate. Shaft Three recounts industrial strife and offers a quartet of individual statements – three based on Émile Zola and characters from his novel *Germinal*, and one on labour organizer Ginger Goodwin. Shaft Four focuses on an account of an accident in a mine and "one man alive and alone in the vast infernal network of the dead" (85).

With what memory of the mine

would Collis leave us? It is bleak: it is a dangerous workplace, rent by murderous explosions. The mine workforce is split by ethnic divisions, "hate and fear hidden behind humour" (41). The mining community is scarred by class divisions and violent strikes. It is a memory replete with images of strike-breakers, the arrival of the militia and evictions from company housing, violence: "the battle / loot / smash" (65), and the desolation of miners' families – "people starve" (64).

Memory is marked as much by what it omits as by what it encompasses. And it is unclear why Collis privileges

certain memories over others. Familiar elements of the mining community are unexamined: its vigorous social life and range of leisure activities, miners' pride in their craft and in their families. His account of the Vancouver Island mining communities hesitates to recognize that their residents, on occasion, experienced joy, pride, or satisfaction.

Like other contemporary poetry, this is an uncompromising, demanding book. But, with each reading, it offers fresh insights into the experience of the Vancouver Island mines.