

Encyclopedia of British Columbia

Daniel Francis, Editor

Madeira Park: Harbour Publishing, 2000.
806 pp. Illus., maps. \$100 cloth.

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ENCYCLOPEDIAS ARE NOT my preferred medium, and I did not hold out much hope for this one. But my increasing experience is that prior judgments are usually wrong, as in this case. The *Encyclopedia of British Columbia* is a remarkable work. It contains a profusion of information on a vast array of topics, organized in entries ranging from a few sentences to 8,000 to 10,000 words. It is profusely illustrated, handsome, and packed. It can be consulted for quite specific information: about the results of provincial elections since 1903, nudibranchs (sea slugs), Jean Coulthard, Pit Polder, or the Ballard fuel cell. It can be browsed with much pleasure and a sense of discovery. It has taken a decade to make and has involved a great many people, a labour amply justified by the product.

Above all, the *Encyclopedia of British Columbia* has been exceedingly well edited. A work on this scale can easily dissolve into chaos marked by a profusion of writing styles, different densities of information, and erratic subject selection. Not, however, in this work. The writing is crisp and consistent, a fairly common level of information is maintained, and decisions about the categories of inclusion and exclusion that must have been taken fairly early in the project have been

consistently adhered to. All of this bespeaks a strong editor who, in this case, has also written (by my estimation) some half of the entries – a monumental achievement.

The most basic challenge in making an encyclopedia is deciding what to exclude. This one excludes topics of universal relevance (there is no entry on oxygen) and treats topics of wide regional significance only in so far as they bear on the province (the cuckoo has a short entry because its range touches the Kootenays). But this still leaves an enormous latitude; the list of subjects that could be included is endless. Choices have to be made and lines drawn where there is no correct position. The more the entries, the more sketchy, necessarily, the treatment of each of them, and in this encyclopedia I would say that the line has been nudged towards inclusion. Most of the entries are short, in the range of 100 to 200 words. But general topics, like giant trees, commercial fishing, coal mining, or Conservative Protestantism, command longer entries. Then there are six major essays in the 5,000- to 10,000-word range, each offering a useful synthesis of its topic: economy, First Nations, history, literature, natural history, physical geography. The last of these is perhaps the encyclopedia's most complex and most academic piece of writing.

The overall result is an encyclopedia that is basically an accessible inventory of a great deal of information (as any encyclopedia must be) but that also offers a considerable opportunity for thoughtful engagement with the province. There is no correct way of making an encyclopedia, but – given the objective to produce an accessible work that a great many British Columbians

would use, enjoy, and be instructed by – I find it hard to imagine a more successful result than this one. The attention it has attracted since its publication is eminently deserved, and academics who want fuller and more nuanced treatments need to go ahead and write them. Few if any of our works will find the audience that this book deserves.

The Paulo Freire Reader

Ana Maria Araújo Freire and Donaldo Macedo, Editors
New York: Continuum, 2000. 291 pp. US\$18.95 paper.

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PAULO FREIRE WAS a passionate educator, one who embodied a love of humanity and commitment to social justice; and he was someone who played a significant role in my own life. I had the good fortune to take courses from him at the beginning of my graduate studies in Adult Education at the University of British Columbia (UBC). In the summer of 1984, Paulo Freire came to teach a course at UBC. It was my first master's degree course in adult education, and, at that point, I had only heard of Freire in passing. My mother had become very ill, and her health crisis was foremost in my mind as I began my graduate work. Within this context, I was oblivious to the excitement of his visit and his iconic status, and I asked him many questions. It is his grace, passion, and care that I remember from that summer as he listened deeply to my queries and responded with care and wisdom. In the following year, I

had the privilege of again witnessing his dialogic approach, this time in a seminar in Recife, Brazil, his hometown. I was part of a small group of UBC students who toured Brazil studying its literacy policy and programs. Freire's ideas – that all education is political and key to achieving social justice – became the foundation for my master's thesis and have stayed with me as a source of inspiration and support. He died on 2 May 1997, but his ideas remain refreshing, radical, and important.

The Paulo Freire Reader begins with a forty-four-page introduction by Anna Maria Arujo Freire (his second wife) and Donaldo Macedo (a long-time colleague) that outlines Freire's life, ideas, career, and awards (he was once nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize). In this introduction, a dominant objective becomes clear – to situate Freire's writings and thought within the context of his life and to argue that