

colonies of Vancouver Island and mainland British Columbia, he was fiercely resented by many of the settlers who remained after the gold rush. He faced a much more difficult situation than had McLoughlin. Although historians have restored his reputation, he has not received the acclaim accorded McLoughlin. The smouldering resentment among Americans against the

British as an outcome of the American Revolution and the War of 1812 made a hero of a man who was rejected by a British company and betrayed by rogue Americans. Douglas, striving to maintain British control on a volatile frontier, was perceived to be autocratic by settlers from Upper Canada, who had very recently achieved responsible government.

*Ranald MacDonald: Pacific Rim Adventurer*

Jo Ann Roe

Pullman: Washington State University Press, 1997.  
256 pp. Ilus., map. \$28.95 paper.

*The City of Yes*

Peter Oliva

Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1999. 336 pp. \$21.99 paper.

By Jean Wilson  
*UBC Press*

**I**F YOU ARE a fur trade aficionado, especially of Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) lore and lives, you will have heard of Ranald MacDonald. His life, by any measure, was adventurous and his legacy long-lasting, and references to him crop up in many HBC and Pacific Northwest histories. The first son of HBC clerk Archibald McDonald (his children adopted the "Mac" spelling) and Koale'zoa, daughter of the Chinook leader Concomly, Ranald lived a long life (1824-94) during which he spent time as a child and young man at Ft. George and Ft. Vancouver in the Columbia District as well as at Red River in Rupert's Land and St. Thomas, Upper Canada.

Between 1848 and 1858 he wandered the world as an ordinary seaman and as a whaler, visiting ports in Britain, Europe, Africa, the United States, Hawaii, and Asia. He also lived for a year in Japan and in Australia before returning to North America to participate in the Cariboo gold rush and the Vancouver Island Exploring Expedition (VIEE 1864), and to settle into the roadhouse business and then ranching near Ft. Colville, where he died.

It is MacDonald's experience in Japan that is perhaps most noteworthy and that is the focus of Jo Ann Roe's biography and a parallel theme to the main narrative in Peter Oliva's novel.

Roe is a travel and history writer based in Bellingham. Her biography is somewhat disjointed and occasionally simplistic or inaccurate, but it is also a fascinating reconstruction of a remarkable life. Her enthusiasm and fascination with her subject are evident, and she succeeds in describing Ranald MacDonald's full history.

In a life of many adventures, probably MacDonald's greatest was to be the first known White foreigner to gain entry into Japan and to survive as well as to leave a mark. He entered by faking shipwreck off the Hokkaido coast of northern Japan in 1848, being rescued by Japanese villagers and then, subsequently, being interned by high-ranking officials. MacDonald had been fascinated by Japan since he was a boy and had heard of three Japanese sailors shipwrecked off the Olympic Peninsula, imprisoned by Natives, and later released by HBC officials. MacDonald became determined, despite the risks, to see this "forbidden" country. During the year he spent as a relatively comfortable prisoner, MacDonald taught English. The men he taught were later instrumental in effecting treaty negotiations between Commodore Matthew Perry and Japanese officials in 1854.

My frustrations with Roe's biography have to do with a rather cavalier approach to justification for statements made and some obvious inaccuracies – for example, E. Herbert Norman was *not* an American historian, he was a Canadian diplomat who also wrote one of the most important books about Japan subsequent to his posting there (*Japan's Emergence as a Modern State* [1940]); Toronto did not, as far as I can determine, ever have a newspaper called "the Toronto Press"; and surely the statement that "slaves of coastal Indians lived a miserable life, indeed" is something of a gross generalization,

as are other statements about Northwest Coast Aboriginal peoples.

My greatest frustration with Roe's book is its idiosyncratic organization and lack of documentation. I fully appreciate that *Ranald MacDonald* is intended primarily for a general audience, and that is commendable, but readers would have been better served by a proper bibliography than by only an unkeyed list of references pertaining to each chapter at the back of the book. There are few notes, so on the whole it is difficult to determine what the sources are for most of Roe's observations, though much of her material obviously is based on MacDonald's story as written up by his friend Malcolm McLeod between the 1860s and 1890s. As well, chapters are often short (the first chapter is a mere four pages) and would have been better combined, and there is a disconcerting disjuncture in the narrative about half way through the book when Roe abandons MacDonald in Canada in order to insert two chapters about the completion of Perry's mission. They're interesting, but the Perry story could have been condensed, even summarized, in a note.

Peter Oliva, who is a well established Alberta writer and owner of the Calgary bookstore Pages on Kensington, obviously became as fascinated by MacDonald's story as did Roe (*The City of Yes* was shortlisted for the Giller Prize). Although Ranald MacDonald is not the focus of Oliva's story, his life provides an interesting parallel to the anonymous narrator's, he being a young Albertan hired to teach English in contemporary Japan. While there he learns of MacDonald's adventure and success in teaching men who became well established translators. The novel gets its title from the ancient name for Hokkaido – Yesso –

and from a poem by Yevgeny Yevtushenko:

I am like a train  
rushing for many years now  
between the city of Yes  
and the city of No.

"Yes" was also the name of the VIEE's last camp on Vancouver Island, MacDonald's journal of the trip being the only one to mention this fact.

Oliva's narrator is as curious to learn more about the alien Japanese culture as was Ranald MacDonald, and when he learns about MacDonald and his experience in the country almost 200 years earlier, he is struck by the parallels in their encounters with the Japanese. MacDonald's experience becomes a metaphor for the narrator's own search to become more than just "an outside person – an apparition made real" (57) and for Japan itself to become more than "an affectionate prison" (287). He is trying, instead, to become part of the world

he has adopted, even if only for the term of a one-year teaching contract. His life as an English teacher, his interaction with other teachers and students, his portrayal of Santa Claus and other attempts to portray North American customs, his whimsical tending of a colony of praying mantises, his sexual relationship with the charismatic Hiroko – all these experiences are interspersed with lyrical descriptions of MacDonald's experiences.

Reading these two books in tandem is yet another parallel complementing those in *The City of Yes*. It was particularly interesting to read first the biography and then the novel. Peter Oliva dextrously weaves fact and fiction; Jo Ann Roe assiduously presents all the facts of MacDonald's life, from which Oliva so successfully draws. There is certainly still room for a scholarly version of MacDonald's life, but in the meantime *Ranald MacDonald: Pacific Rim Adventurer* and *The City of Yes* bring this attractive and venturesome man vividly to life.

### *The Burden of History: Colonialism and the Frontier Myth in a Rural Canadian Community*

Elizabeth Furniss

Vancouver: UBC Press, 1999. 237 pp. \$29.95 paper.

By Jo-Anne Fiske

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**I**MAGES OF PIONEERS figure largely in the identity of central British Columbia communities. Tales of extraordinary self-reliance, unparalleled feats of courage, personal sacrifice, and enviable economic success saturate local histories and community celebrations

and mark a pioneer era as both heroic and the foundation of a stable and meaningful rural culture. In *Burden of History*, Furniss unravels the underlying assumptions and symbols of these narratives, conceived as "the frontier myth," in order to demonstrate how