

The authors give short biographies of other minor players, including Charles Marega, sculptor of the pair of massive concrete lions who guard the south portal; Palmer and Bow, architects of the Taylor home at Kew Beach; and such incidental persons as the *News-Herald's* Evelyn Caldwell (Penny Wise), who hazarded a dizzying walk across the construction catwalk. Surprisingly, no background information is offered on the engineering designers, Monsarrat and Pratley of Montreal, who are described only as "the leading bridge design firm in Canada" (37), or on their associate, W.G. (Bill) Swan, Vancouver's foremost civil engineer of the day. And little information is provided on the contractors who built the bridge.

Admittedly, D'Acres and Luxton are out of their depth when it comes to describing the engineering features of the suspension bridge and "can only

wonder at the complexity of the calculations ... undertaken with nothing more than a slide rule" (65). Yet such problems as pier construction in the turbulent waters of the First Narrows, aerodynamic stability in the windy inlet, and earthquake resistance would be of interest to this reviewer. Also missing is a tabulation giving length of channel span, ships' clearance, and width and length of roadway and approaches – all statistics upon which great bridges are judged.

Handsomely designed and profusely illustrated, *Lions Gate* will appeal particularly to heritage conservers, the tourist industry, and nostalgic Vancouverites. The strength of the book lies in the excellent series of photographs taken throughout the construction period, many the work of industrial photographer Leonard Frank.

Passage to Juneau: A Sea and Its Meanings

Jonathan Raban

New York: Pantheon (Random), 1999. 435 pp. \$37.95 cloth

By Nancy Pagh

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DURING his cruise from Seattle to Juneau, Jonathan Raban stops at a Ketchikan restaurant, orders a glass of Merlot, and muses: "the dining room seemed a good perch from which to survey the voyage so far, and to try to see if anything resembling a pattern or story was discernible in its tumble of places and events. Not much, not yet. While a number of wispy narrative strands had begun to emerge, I knew that journeys hardly ever disclose their true

meaning until after – and sometimes years after – they are over" (366). Too impatient to allow this story to age into "true meaning," Raban seems rather quick to offer the loosely knit account of sailing his thirty-five-foot sailboat north. The narrative's shapelessness (even by the standards of the travel "ramble"), predictability, and occasional misinformation are irritating and disappointing. Yet for readers particularly interested in exploration, sea literature, and, more specifically, the layers

of meanings ascribed to Northwest Coast seascape, it offers worthwhile stops along the way.

What stands out as unusually inventive in Raban's book is his ability to write about water in new yet completely appropriate ways for the Northwest Coast. Editor of *The Oxford Book of the Sea*, Raban "sail[s] through a logjam of dead literary cliché" (184) and creates contemporary metaphors that offer finely detailed readings of the surface of the Inside Passage. "In Malaspina Strait," he writes, "between Texada Island and the mainland, the sea was covered, shore to shore, by the glossy membrane of its surface film. One could see stretch marks on it caused by the current, but it was distinct from the water on which it lay like an enormous sheet of Saran Wrap. Motoring into it, I made a long ragged tear in the film, and my roiling wake stretched back as far as I could see" (163). Raban goes beyond offering passages of well-wrought detail; as is reflected in its subtitle, an important part of the book concerns his thinking about how we humans see and define (and delude) ourselves through seascape. His writing about this theme in connection with early European artists along the Coast is not original. But when he writes of his own watery misreadings (e.g., discovering a "body" that turns into a discarded jacket), we experience this double vision of the sea with him. "All first-person narratives are like this," he writes. "I thought it was a body. You thought it was a body. We were wrong" (341). This effect is particularly appropriate during the parts of the book when Raban thinks about his father's life, about systems of faith and belief, about his own aging, and about the nature of human identity. Probably the most intriguing aspect of the entire book is his decision

to read Northwest Coast Aboriginal design as "art in thrall to ripples and reflections" (205). "The fundamental design unit in the art of all the Northwest coastal tribes," he says, is the ovoid. "I've watched ovoids form, in their millions, in almost-still water, under a breath of wind, or by the friction of the moving tide. The canoe Indians, living on this water as their primary habitat, saw ovoids in nature every day of their lives; and when they combined them in design, they made them do exactly what capillary waves do – reflect the world in smithereens" (203). Raban makes this idea make perfect sense to the reader. However, I found a degree of unintended irony in his certain and emphatic tone regarding this single idea ("the coastal tribes couldn't help but see ..." [207]), particularly given his emphasis in the rest of the text on the fact that humans are wont to misapprehend each other – and the Other.

Problems with the readability of the text are serious. It is never clear why Raban is taking this cruise and what he hopes to discover. At first it appears his goal is to trace the route of Seattle's fishers (why?), but soon the focus shifts to Captain Vancouver. Raban's misanthropic persona is well suited for cultivating an interesting connection to the man he repeatedly calls "Captain Van." The book seems out of control, however, as the focus shifts almost entirely to the Vancouver expedition (why?) for a few hundred pages, then forgets that thread entirely. Another strand is the family drama, concerning his wife and daughter left at home. This aspect of the narrative is forced, superficial, and entirely predictable – particularly in contrast to his writing about his father – and no meaning is made from it. The last pages of the book are a compilation of quotations,

allowing Raban to dodge addressing directly what this voyage has come to mean to him. Numerous relatively small errors combine to make a careful reader aware of sloppy editing; for instance, he misidentifies the popular park Bowman Bay as Cornet Bay, writes of the company "Microscroft," refers to bulb farmers as those in the cut-flower trade, misuses nautical terms ("rope," "pier") that any self-proclaimed captain – or his editor – should know, and equates local Shakers with the English and eastern American religious

sect (same name, different belief). The book design is also less than useful: the table of contents is missing, maps on the inside covers are out of order, and the photo on the bottom half of the cover should be transposed to mirror the top half (Raban discusses the effect this should have at length in the text). These minor irritations, when combined with a lack of cohesiveness, make the project seem hurried and less than meaningful as a whole. At its best, the book offers extremely interesting isolated reflections.

*Hideaway: Life on the
Queen Charlotte Islands*

James Houston

Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1999. 259 pp. Illus., map. \$29.99 cloth.

*Oar and Sail:
An Odyssey of the West Coast*

Kenneth Macrae Leighton

Smithers: Creekstone, 1999. 152 pp. Illus., maps. \$24.95 cloth.

By Adam C. Waldie

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THESE two delightful books about life and adventure on the BC Coast appeared within days of each other in the fall of 1999. Both authors are aficionados of the area, but neither are native-born British Columbians. Both have an obvious love of the language, and both are excellent writers. The text and end papers of *Hideaway* are illustrated by striking black-and-white sketches by the author, and *Oar and Sail* has been enhanced by bold scratch board pieces reminiscent of lino block cuts. These

were provided by the author's son, Dr. Rod Leighton of Smithers.

Hideaway, by the well-known Canadian author, artist, and entrepreneur James Houston, is a personal essay relating the life he enjoys at his home on the Tlell River, Queen Charlotte Islands, where he spends six months of the year (when he is not travelling or living at his other home in Connecticut). An artist by profession, he studied print-making under one of the masters in Japan, and he is credited with having taught the art to the Inuit. George