

affairs. While McClean's narrative ends here, Farris lived on for another thirty years as a wife, mother, and grandmother.

A strength of this biography is its integration of the religious, political, and social contexts. The sections on the modernist Baptists are particularly useful. McClean addresses the biases of many middle-class Canadians, including Farris, and demonstrates just how contradictory and complex any individual's belief system and behaviour can be. While McClean does not dwell on the anti-Asian prejudice or the class bias of her subject, she raises these issues and does not attempt to play down the effects of racism or elitism on Farris's behaviour.

McClean writes in a rather dispassionate style, which makes it difficult for the reader to care about Farris and masks the effect she had on people. While McClean takes a good look at

Farris's beliefs and achievements, she is less successful in uncovering how other people saw this woman. Farris had little in common with most of Vancouver's moral reformers and first-wave women's movement activists. Nor did most of the men in the Liberal party seem to like either her or her "influence" on policy. While McClean argues that Farris's influence faded as her ideas and beliefs became dated, her early personal influence on party politics is possibly overstated, particularly given the lack of personal and official support for many of her ideas. These criticisms aside, McClean fills a gap in BC women's history. Her portrait of Farris as a "warts and all" maternal feminist whose influence moved beyond her family into the political culture of British Columbia is an interesting and useful reminder that much of the political history of this province's women remains to be written.

*The Gentle Anarchist.  
A Life of George Woodcock*

Douglas Fetherling

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**T**he West Coast has always attracted men and women in search of a more stimulating environment. The belief that life would be better West of the Rockies brought to our shores many who still had to make their mark in society as well as those who were already fairly well known in other parts of the world.

Among the latter, George Woodcock is by far the most famous. A native of Winnipeg who spent his formative years in England, he emigrated to Vancouver Island in 1949 and stayed in British Columbia until his death. The decades he lived in Vancouver were years of tremendous intellectual growth and visibility that extended well beyond Canada.

Woodcock became Canada's most illustrious man of letters. The tremendous range of his publications and his nurturing of those who assumed an increasingly important role in the study of Canadian literature ensured him a very prominent place in the firmament of Canadian intellectual life in the second half of the twentieth century.

Success, however, came at a very heavy price. A highly disciplined approach to work left little time for relaxation, light amusement, and the kind of reflection that might have led to truly revolutionary breakthroughs in those areas in which he was particularly interested and qualified. Financial pressure imposed upon him a certain amount of hack work at the expense of the writing that he and his admirers hoped that he would undertake. Friction and misunderstandings at the University of British Columbia imposed additional restrictions on his creative work and provided yet another example of how myopic university administrators and envious colleagues complicate the life of very gifted and highly productive scholars.

Douglas Fetherling, the author of the first major biography of Woodcock, has produced a convincing portrait of an individual whose life in British Columbia started on a farm near Sooke and who died forty-five odd years later amidst a great deal of adulation from the literati.

Fetherling was helped in his task by his experience as a writer of some distinction as well as by gaining access

to Woodcock's correspondence at Queen's University, Kingston, and through fairly lengthy conversations with Woodcock in the evening of his life. Considerable evidence shows that Woodcock was eager for Fetherling to write the biography. However, Woodcock's wife Inge, and several of his closest collaborators in Vancouver, either declined to be interviewed for the project or were not asked.

The result is a study that will be of great use to those interested in assessing the impact that Woodcock made in Canada and the English-speaking world through his major contributions to our understanding of anarchism; sophisticated travel books; and numerous studies on Canadian and English literature, history, and politics. Ironically, the weakest parts of the biography are the sections devoted to Woodcock's work as editor of UBC's journal of *Canadian Literature* and the lack of proper assessment of a wide range of Canadian writers who figure in Woodcock's writings, correspondence, and conversations. References to the "gentle anarchist" ignore the fact that Woodcock held very strong views about fellow writers and often did not share the prevalent estimates of the work of this or that poet or novelist.

Notwithstanding these concerns, Fetherling's biography of Woodcock has much to offer. The prose is clear, the story flows easily, and a great deal of pertinent information is made available about a modest man who contributed so much to our understanding of Canada and of the outside world.