

Anglican or a Methodist in nineteenth-century BC — socially, politically, culturally? Were there indeed differences in leadership strategies between Anglican and Roman Catholic bishops, and how were these differences manifested in the social relations of power that governed colonial society? Moving beyond sectarian histories of missionary activity might elucidate the differences between and among denominational strategies for evangelization and provide the basis for a broader understanding of the missionary impetus in the context of

colonial and imperial BC. Closer attention to particular missionary discourses, and to the ways in which missionaries articulated their understanding of work and personal belief, would allow a more nuanced reading of the inter-section of religious activity and British imperial hegemony represented by a prayer for more missionaries printed in the 1894 *Official Report of the Missionary Conference of the Anglican Communion*: “Defer not; delay not; send especially labourers into all the heathen parts of our own British Empire.”

Bowering's BC: A Swashbuckling History

George Bowering.

Viking: Toronto: 1996. 416 pp. Illus. \$32 cloth.

By Allan Smith, *University of British Columbia*

THIS IS A VERY FUNNY BOOK. Written in a chatty, accessible way and full of splendid anecdotes — my favourite remains the tale of W.A.C. Bennett's antic attempt to celebrate his financial rectitude by sending a flaming arrow into a barge filled with the province's paid-off (and gasoline-soaked) bonds — it breaks new ground concerning the familiar subject of BC looniness. From its reading of Amor de Cosmos's career to its fun with “the Zalm” this book deepens and extends our sense of BC as a terminally (pun intended) zany place full of politicians who act — and sometimes look — as though they ought to be “wearing big red putty noses” (p. 153).

Bowering's BC is also a very serious book. Bowering wants to introduce what he clearly expects will be a non-specialist readership to a number of

points, and he hammers those points home with zeal and energy. The most basic point concerns the nature of written history itself. Not completely committed to the postmodern idea that the history historians produce is reducible to a set of contested accounts (taking this up in an unqualified way would prevent him from claiming any authority for his own version of events), he nonetheless makes clear his belief in the “constructed,” “ideological” character of much of that history and in its involvement in the processes by which dominant groups and orthodoxies maintain their influence.

That belief certainly underpins his impatience with what he sees as the way the work of some of his most prominent predecessors helped to marginalize whole ranges of BC experience. Margaret Ormsby's view of the

area was, he says, essentially Euro-centric (p. 37), a disability her “one sentence” (p. 286) on the Japanese evacuation did nothing to mitigate. W. Kaye Lamb is presented as unable to countenance any reading of the past not resting on grounds of the most narrowly empirical sort (p. 406). The book’s indictment of “old” approaches to the writing of history is plainest in its relentless critique of traditional history’s treatment of First Nations peoples. What Bowering sees as the arbitrariness of the distinction between the “hard” evidence favoured by the historians responsible for that work and the “truth”-yielding capacities of myth and story is much insisted upon. Efforts to make up for past historians’ neglect of the First Nations by assuring them a place at the centre of this volume are prominent. Some of this activity involves beating a dead horse: Bowering’s rebalancing of the record has, in large part, been made possible by the extensive body of work on the First Nations (some of it done under the influence of Ormsby and Lamb) in existence before he himself put pen to paper. Nor does he completely avoid the sort of trap he has sprung on others; despite his use of Mourning Dove and other First Nations commentators, it is his authorial presence that dominates these sections of the book. But these difficulties don’t diminish the narrative’s impact. Bowering’s debt to earlier work is discharged by the clever way that work is used. Tendencies towards the appropriation of voice are limited and benign. The account finally rendered (it includes Asian as well as First Nations peoples) is capacious and accommodating.

Concern to avoid the gaps and absences characteristic of “old” work

also leads to a large dose of working-class history. There is a poignant account of Ginger Goodwin’s proletarian martyrdom (pp. 248-49), and the story of Vancouver labour militancy during the 1930s is powerfully told (pp. 273-76). Women don’t do quite so well. Bowering recognizes their absence from most earlier accounts and tries to give them a place in his (he records the birth of BC’s first Eurobaby [a girl], notes the 1871 arrival of Emily Carr, acknowledges the presence of the Suffragettes, and summarizes the careers of Helen Gregory McGill and Helena Gutteridge), but it is clear that he has been handicapped by the fact that work on women in BC is still in an early stage. Receiving more attention — not surprisingly, given Bowering’s own estimable contribution to the province’s cultural/intellectual life — is culture. Different forms of that phenomenon are discussed — baseball’s status as a Bowering favourite is especially evident; but it is mostly the fine, performing, and creative arts that come in for scrutiny.

Writing gets a close look — yielding a surprisingly favourable verdict on M. Allerdale Grainger (pp. 215-16) — with poetry (particularly as influenced by the Black Mountain School) given a special place (pp. 320-21) and Sheila Watson’s *The Double Hook* singled out as nothing less than the novel most admired by Canada’s “innovative poets and fiction writers” (p. 314). Painting and music also receive attention, but architecture — oddly, given the imagination with which its BC practitioners have explored the links among place, form, and materials — does not. Space and place themselves, though, are not ignored. Bowering, like many others, sees British Columbians’ strong sense of mountain, sea, and valley — and of

their position on the Pacific coast — as a central element in their peculiar feeling of community and identity. Where, he says, easterners think about space and location in east-west terms, British Columbians think about them in north-south terms — a point made fresh and interesting through a quite suggestive comparison of how British Columbians understand maps and directions with how easterners do so (pp. 21-22).

In the end, the sober side of Bowering's funny book prevails. Its deeply felt critique of the way historical writing works to foreground, mask, and privilege certainly stays in the mind. The reach and inclusiveness of its determinedly wide-ranging narrative make a powerful impression. And — more

unexpectedly, perhaps — it is the serious dimension of the laugh-eliciting sequences that gives them force and power. Building their ludic subversion of authority and pretence on careful attention to the flawed and imperfect in human behaviour, those sequences depend for their effect on the exploitation of an understanding of the human predicament to which notions of the tragic and absurd are central. Consistently working to enlarge and deepen the reader's sense of the human experience in BC, this richly variegated, highly personal confection will be viewed with a sceptical eye by those who think that proper history should be served straight up. Everyone else, though, will be able to read it with profit, interest, and pleasure.

Vancouver Island Letters of Edmund Hope Verney, 1862-65

Allan Pritchard, ed.

Vancouver: UBC Press, 1996. 320 pp. Illus. \$65.00 cloth. \$24.95 paper.

By Daniel Clayton. *University of St Andrews, Scotland*

EDMUND VERNEY (1838-1910) was from an English aristocratic family steeped in naval tradition and Liberal politics. Typical of upper-class men of his generation, he joined the Royal Navy as a boy and was expected to serve his country overseas and climb the military ranks before settling on the family estate with a suitable wife and applying his worldly wisdom to domestic politics and philanthropic causes. Verney had visited much of the world (including India during the revolt of 1857-58) before he reached Vancouver Island in 1862 to command HMS *Grappler*, a British gunboat, and the intimate

letters to his father collected in this volume are a provocative addition to the archive on colonial British Columbia. Verney's correspondence is diligently introduced and annotated by Allan Pritchard, a Professor Emeritus of English.

Verney worked in many corners of the Northwest Coast, and his letters are crammed with vivid descriptions of people and places as well as intriguing observations about colonial politics and missionary work. More fully, however, this volume is about the tribulations of Victorian imperial sentiment in a British colonial setting. Verney was perplexed by the course of