

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*

**E**DMUND 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

colonialism in BC. He imagined that the British Empire was tied together by the bonds of "[ethnic and political] union, religion and loyalty, God and our Queen" and expected colonial officials to have "a high honourable tone," but he was disappointed by what he found in Britain's Northern Pacific colonies (p. 103 and p. 246). The colonial capital of Victoria, he complained, housed "a most odious fraternity" of people who were imbued with American values; there was "great animosity" between the colonists of Vancouver Island and those of mainland BC; Hudson's Bay Company personnel dominated the colonial government and were "mean, petty, slovenly" officials; and Governor James Douglas was "a great drag on the place" and needed to "raise ... [his] excellence in religion, in morals, in dinners, servants, gardens, houses, dress, manners and customs" (pp. 65-76).

Such remarks should not be pigeonholed as the quaint or irreverent musings of a privileged Englishman, for, in trying to make sense of the Northwest Coast and represent it to his father, Verney got hold of some of the basic facets and predicaments of colonial development and pointed to the broader disjunctions between imperial philosophy and colonial reality that beset the British Empire at this time. He assessed personalities and classified places in terms of a grand — almost ethereal — model of colonial society and his own standards of propriety, and his views were not altogether negative. He doted on the fledgling communities of the Cowichan and Comox Valleys because he figured that they were putting down solid agrarian roots, and he was impressed by the industrial spirit of the miners, settlers, and engineers of the Fraser Canyon.

Yet he sensed that these farming districts would not survive unless larger markets could be found and that BC needed to invest massively in infrastructure if it was to benefit fully from its natural resources. Here were small patches of ancient and modern Britain — but in a hostile environment and a disjointed colonial space. Verney correctly judged that such patches were too scattered to encourage the full reproduction of British society in the Cordillera.

Verney's bewilderment at the colonial formation of the region was compounded by feelings of physical disorientation. "Nature works on a grand scale in these parts," he wrote of the mainland. "The eye becomes deceived as to size. A pebbly beach turns out when approached to be a mass of boulders, a few young firs a forest of full-grown pines;" and Native people appeared like "Lilliputian imp[s]" against "immense ... picturesque sights" (p. 156). Verney drew on the representational conventions of the picturesque to describe nature, perhaps in order to domesticate BC's menacing otherness and to familiarize the land for his father by giving it a European aesthetic texture. He noted that he was more interested in the country than the people, and he declared that "the improvement and cultivation of the former must depend upon the amount of improvement and cultivation bestowed on the latter" (p. 94). In other words, colonists had become lost in the forest and needed the finery of British technology and culture to put things in perspective. Verney had what theorists of colonialism call an imperial gaze, which constructs land as an object of appropriation, people as colonial subjects, and Natives as ethnological specimens.

Verney began to realize that in “out-of-the way part[s] of the world” (p. 189) such as BC, new identities and local agendas were emerging that threatened to shatter his model of colonialism and his conception of empire. The valuable, if now well-theorized, insight in his letters is that colonial variation — or imperial deviation — was not simply a political or ideological affair that could be fixed by loyal governors, more representative institutions, or the emigration of more Britons. If colonial officials had dirty hands, and if colonists did not think of Britain as often as they should, it was because they were tackling difficult and discrepant lands.

This engagement with land was a basic medium of social change in colonial societies. Verney’s letters also contain ample material with which to engage the recent critical literature on colonialism in a BC context — especially Homi Bhabha’s argument that imperial ideas and messages become unstable and hybridized when they hit colonial spaces. Verney did not have the time or the cultural inclination to reflect on colonial experience as analytically as do these colonial theorists, but he would have understood much of what they are saying. And I suspect he would have approved of their dress, if not of their manners and customs.

### *Politics, Policy, and Government in British Columbia*

R.K. Carty, ed.

Vancouver: UBC Press, 1996. 381 pp. \$65.00 cloth, \$26.95 paper.

By Stephen Tomblin, *Memorial University of Newfoundland*

**T**HIS EDITED BOOK OF ESSAYS deals with how BC politics is changing in response to new socio-economic and political forces. BC’s rich and complex political system is dissected and analyzed from a number of different perspectives. Indeed, the great strength of this impressive work is the diversity of approaches that it offers to the reader interested in BC politics.

The book itself is organized into four sections. Part one offers a compelling analysis of the province’s political culture, political economy, and the history of struggle over key federal-provincial and Native issues. Even though the book presents an odd mix of themes, in an important way this prepares the reader for what

comes later. In an impressive analysis of the ever-changing political landscape, Donald Blake highlights the impact of old embedded memories and experiences on the way both citizens and political actors respond to political issues in the 1990s. Michael Howlett and Keith Brownsey deal with the changing nature of the province’s political economy and the political realities and dynamics associated with a service-based rather than a resource-based economy. The chapter by Edwin Black provides the reader with an informative and comprehensive overview of federal-provincial relations. In writing about BC in the 1990s, Black grapples with some of the key policy issues that have added to the province’s reputation as