

Book Reviews

Seasons in the Rain, by Silver Donald Cameron. McClelland & Stewart, 1978. Paper, \$6.95.

I remember Donald Cameron (the Silver has been a later adornment) as a young UBC academic who astonished me when I was editing *Canadian Literature* by submitting an essay which actually found something new to say about Stephen Leacock. I accepted it and — as Cameron remarks in *Seasons in the Rain* — started him on what has become a professional writing career. More than a decade ago Cameron departed from academia and since then he has worked freelance as one of the brighter and more urbane writers in popular magazines like *Weekend* and *Saturday Night*.

Seasons in the Rain is a collection of pieces that mostly appeared first in such journals and which have been minimally polished to fit them into a cohesive volume. Normally such collections are not very interesting, since the writing in popular magazines is looser and the attention is nearer the surface than one expects in a book. What relaxes one's mind on a plane or after Sunday lunch is not usually durable enough to take a second and more serious reading.

But *Seasons in the Rain* does hold one's attention, and I think there are two reasons for it. One is the unity of the book, which consists of a series of pieces written around a series of returns to the British Columbian haunts of Cameron's childhood and youth. Born "accidentally" in Ontario, Cameron regarded himself as to all intents and purposes a Vancouverite, which "means I think of mountains as friendly, and I will never be at home away from the sea." But he is a self-exiled British Columbian, for in 1964 he departed and he has not returned except as a visitor. Now he lives in the Maritimes which, he contends, have values "of which B.C. knows nothing: the values of stability and rootedness, the sense of belonging to a well-defined community, the gentler, domesticated beauty of farmstead and fishing harbour." Of course, with a little searching one can

in fact find all this in British Columbia, which is why many of us stay, but Cameron evidently did not, and that is why he went, to become a dedicated advocate of Maritime regionalism.

But, as these essays show, the mountains and the seas and the rain still call him, and Cameron has made his third book a tribute to British Columbia and its people. Here we come to the second reason why *Seasons in the Rain* is more appealing than most collections of pieces gleaned from the weeklies and the monthlies. It is the mingling of humanity and humour and a certain intellectual seriousness that distinguishes Cameron from most of the other magazine writers.

There are three essays that really relate to Cameron's own feelings. All the rest are about people he visited on his return trips because in some way or another they seemed to express a truth about British Columbia and its way of life. Some of them were people he had known for decades, like the musicologist, Ida Halpern, who was his piano teacher, or the wise Chinese grocer on West 10th whom everyone in the university area knew as Angus, or Alvin Fisher, who ran the school bus in Ladner a generation ago. Others he visited because their work or their lives meant something to him, like Homer Stevens the union leader, or Len Norris the cartoonist, or Hubert Evans the novelist, or, as I realized with some amusement after I had agreed to review *Seasons in the Rain*, George Woodcock the anarchist.

There is an inevitable lightness about every treatment. A wryly personal touch, a manner at times jesting and occasionally touching on sentimentality, are mandatory in *Weekend* articles, and Cameron has both, but he also has a knack of getting at the serious core of whatever the person he discusses stands for. As I can vouch from my experience, he reads one's books and researches one's background; if I had any cavil with the piece he wrote on me it was not that he misinterpreted my ideas in any way, since he paraphrased them with skill and understanding, but rather that in interpreting conversation or perhaps in mishearing a tape, a fact or two went wrong.

We are an oddly mixed group of people Cameron writes of, but that is a fair enough illustration of the extraordinary variety of human types that have been caught up in the great ruffles of our mountains, and it gives Cameron a chance to display the breadth of his own interests — in radical politics, in writing and music (interestingly, he includes none of British Columbia's remarkable painters), in minorities like Doukhobors and Chinese, in different ways of organizing our lives than are contained in normal politics; significantly, there is not a single professional politician

in his list of names, and, as he says, "not a word about the MacMillans, the Clynes, the Woodwards, the Farrises, the Bell-Irvings."

We are all, in one way or another, people Cameron likes, which shows another of his characteristics as a writer. There is nothing in him of the smart aleck, of the cheap malice with which so many weekly journalists seek to titillate their readers and needle their subjects. He writes indeed with such manifest affection that one longs for a sharp word, a critical barb. It is the nostalgic vision of the returning native that Cameron presents, and somehow it tints us all *en couleur de rose*.

Vancouver

GEORGE WOODCOCK

The Economic Constitution of Federal States, by Albert Breton and Anthony Scott. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978. Pp. 166. \$10.00.

Most readers of this journal are aware of "economic imperialism." Fewer readers are likely to be aware of "economics imperialism." In the latter case the analytic assumptions and deductive reasoning of the discipline of economics are applied to political, legal and social questions. The study of politics, law and society is being reassessed in the face of such initiatives, which have burgeoned in the last two decades.

This eagerly awaited book by two Canadian economists is an example of "economics imperialism." It is also an example of theoretical inquiry on the most important research frontier in the scholarly field, namely the analysis of constitutions. Constitutional arrangements are seen as the crucial factors affecting the operation of governments, and in turn the behaviour and welfare of citizens, groups and private corporations.

The book is, thirdly, an example of one of three thrusts of research on constitutions. The traditional approach of economists in making policy prescriptions is to assume that government can affect policy changes in the light of citizen preferences at zero cost. This is structurally the same as assuming that constitutions cede complete authority to a benevolent despot. A second approach is to assess constitutions directly in the light of ethical criteria about individual welfare in a just society. And the third approach, typified by the Breton and Scott work, is to evaluate constitutional arrangements by the degree to which they economize on the scarcity of resources available in any society. Put more intuitively, Breton and