

Garrisons, whether military or commercial, have been notorious for disregarding the sensitivities of those among whom they reside. McDonald's life of exile in the fur trade exemplifies the garrison experience. Neither McDonald nor the author seems to have much concern for or interest in the lives of native peoples beyond the walls of the Hudson's Bay Company's trading posts.

Jean Murray Cole's biography of Chief Factor Archibald McDonald is a valuable addition to the traditional literature on social life in the fur trade. Both in what it discusses and in what it ignores it casts a most useful light on the fur trade experience.

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Coast of Many Faces, by Ulli Steltzer and Catherine Kerr. Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre. \$29.95.

There is no better summing up of the message of this fine book than the remarks it quotes by the sculptor Bill Reid. Reid was speaking at the raising of his great new pole at Skidegate in June 1978. "I think that something new and wonderful is happening here," he said. "A new breed of offshore people is coming to be, from the people of all the races from all over the world who have assembled on these islands, together with the original inhabitants, the Haidas. I hope in time something will form that will be distinctive, unique and valuable in the world, and I hope that this pole in a way symbolizes that destiny."

The only qualification I would make to Reid's statement is that already a unique and distinctive way of life exists on the coast, and has existed for a long time, and that the text and illustrations of *Coast of Many Faces* testify marvellously to its variety and its vitality.

Ulli Steltzer is one of the finest photographers on the west coast and, indeed, in North America. Perhaps not the least notable characteristic of her work is the philosophic attitude that seems to inspire it. Though she is a remarkable craftsman and her photographs are usually excellent in both composition and tonal quality, they are never mere formal exercises or mere capturings of evanescent appearance, of the changing surface of nature. At their best they are always populated, and humanity is Ulli Steltzer's real subject: men and women living in their environment, men and women living with each other, men and women facing the searching lens. They are seen with understanding, and — where it may be necessary — with compassion, but the mood never slips on the one side into sentimentality or on the other into mockery.

Ulli Steltzer's aim is to reveal, to create understanding, not to pass judgment. The prevalent mood of her photography is a kind of luminous gravity, and it is a mood that often seems to be transmitted to her subjects at the moment of facing the camera. Portraiture has always contained as much of psychology as of artifice, and the psychology of it includes inducing the subject to be in a sense his own lens and to reveal his real self openly to the eye of the artist, whether a painter or a photographer. Ulli Steltzer has mastered superbly this aspect of her art, and it is remarkable how rarely the mask of tension closes over the faces that she records.

In her earlier book, *Indian Artists at Work*, Ulli Steltzer gave us a fine record of the carvers and other craftsmen who have contributed to the great revival in recent years of the native arts of British Columbia, and throughout that book she sustained our interest in actual craft processes as well as in the people who were carrying them out. Her own craftsman's understanding of what it meant to be "at work" never let her escape from the awareness that what the artists did was the reason why they were being photographed.

In rather the same way, work forms a necessary part of the visual content of *Coast of Many Faces*. It is true that some of the photographs are portraits that are and need to be no more than people caught in moments of eloquent stillness: fine likenesses like that of the Ahousat elder James Adams, with its look of fierce wisdom, that of Alison Yarwood and her baby Robert, as tenderly precise as a Bellini portrait, and the moving cover portrait of the Kingcome chief Sam Webber and his daughter Laura. But the strength and tone of the book are given largely by the photographs of people in action, and especially at work, cutting up sea lions, preparing oolichan grease (a fine long sequence of operations), gathering medicinal herbs, fishing, falling, cooking, repairing boats, and carrying on the many other occupations followed by the Indians and whites who have now been mingling on the coast so long that they have already, in Reid's words, merged into "a new breed."

Yet there are differences between the various strains of the breed, and these differences, of tradition, of outlook, of situation, are illustrated not only in the photographs but even more in the text, which was prepared by Ulli Steltzer's collaborator, Catherine Kerr. The only part of the book actually composed on the typewriter was in fact the brief introduction, and that ends with the remark: "Convinced that coast people speak best for themselves, we drew the text for this book from their words."

Thus one could say that *Coast of Many Faces* shows with one pair of eyes but speaks with many voices, and for this reason the text does not

have the same consistent level of insight and eloquence as the illustrations. Some people are laconic and others eloquent; some merely state facts and utter banalities, and others are sharply aphoristic or speak with the sustained lyrical utterance that one often finds in small communities with a tradition of isolation. "You can see I eat no idle bread," says the septuagenarian widower of an island settler. A myth comes to life in a few lines spoken by an Indian fisherman from the north end of Vancouver Island.

You see that one tree there, on the little island? Long ago when there were wars between the tribes for salmon streams, a son of the chief was killed. They didn't bury him; they put him in his canoe onto the island. Someone went to the grave a year or so later, and there was a tree growing out of his forehead, right from the centre of his forehead.

Authority is always distant and distrusted by these people, whether they are Indians or whites. Some complain about bureaucratic idiocies, about living in communities abandoned to decay from lack of care, but others value their self-reliance and their distance from the centres of power, and I found especially sympathetic one group of people in the tiny coast community of Oona River, just south of the Skeena estuary. A sawmill operator, a fisherman, a housewife and another fisherman describe what, as an old anarchist, I recognize with delight as a little fragment of the world as it should be:

Bergman: The town runs itself; there isn't anybody who represents it. There are lots of individuals in here; everybody has his own ideas.

Schmidt: Everything was run that way before government existed. It's all right as long as you don't have too many people. There are about fifty here.

Jan Lemon: Nobody has ever wanted the police here. My father-in-law's philosophy is that wherever there is a church there is a police station, so maybe we're lucky that there has never been a church here either.

Michael Lemon: The community actually runs the school, around the kids. We don't really need town government. No rules or regulations.

Not every community on the coast, it is evident, lives with such Kropotkinesque harmony as the natural anarchists of Oona River, but though the communes are not so evident as they might have been a decade before, there are still plenty of situations where one senses the easier pace of a past lost in other regions of British Columbia. From most of the accessible part of the province the small sawmills have long vanished. But here and there on the coast such mills still exist, like the Telegraph Bay Sawmill. Bill Mackay went there from a "600-man mill that was putting out a half million board feet in three shifts." For him, at that first glance, "Telegraph Cove looked like a museum. A lot of the mill equipment goes

back to 1927 and has been rebuilt, but it's still putting out excellent timber." He found, by experience, that it was "a community, not a camp," and that after a good day's work "we go home happy."

Yet beside these examples of good work relationships, which make some people realize that the coast is the dreamed-of haven that they never wish to leave, there are the wholly modernized and impersonal industrial operations where people go to make money and to leave, as a mill worker in the mines at Tasu remarks:

After you have been here for a while you don't like to make close friends. People come, then they leave again. We may all have different reasons for being here, but for all of us it is to make money. Once people have made enough money they get fed up with the isolation and take off. So you can't become too close and keep on doing it and doing it.

And always there is the Indian presence, of a group of peoples who in many ways — in folk medicines, in habits of feeding, in varieties of feasting — cling openly to past usages, who at the same time practice Christianity a great deal more zealously than many city churchgoers, and whose adherence to their more ancient beliefs is never really clearly stated in *Coast of Many Faces*, perhaps because they do not wish to admit it, as some of their spokesmen suggest, or perhaps, as one often feels from the nature of their replies, because Indians who have not experienced feedback from non-Indian anthropologists are really so unsure about their ancestral culture that their situation is that of the Quatsino fisherman who laments: "My uncle was the one who knew all the songs for all the dances. He knew the history, too, for the whole island, all the tribes. He never wrote it down, he just knew. And he died."

But the life of the coast changes constantly, and if what is past in native traditions can never be recovered as it was, perhaps it will re-emerge, as Bill Reid suggested, in the form of a new synthesis. The borderlands, the distant marches, the far islands, have often, in history, been the places from which civilizations are renewed. Perhaps it will happen again. But whether it does or not, *Coast of Many Faces* is an evocative and visually beautiful record of the life of the coast as it is in the here-and-now.

Vancouver

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The Cariboo Road, by Mark S. Wade. Victoria: The Haunted Bookshop, 1979. Pp. 264, \$16.95.

This book might well be re-titled "So sad, so strange, the days that are no more" — the last words of the author's text. *The Cariboo Road* is a setting for romantic characters who overcome great obstacles that only