

## Book Reviews

*British Columbia: A Celebration*, edited by George Woodcock; photographs by J. A. Kraulis. Edmonton: Hurtig, 1983. Pp. 208, \$29.95.

Reviewers, acutely aware of gaps in their knowledge, uncertain of their constituency, have a graceful retreat: praise the book, and without many reservations either. Or add just enough to imply, not too delicately, how much more you know than you actually say. There is hypocrisy in favourable reviews as in unfavourable ones. Still, there may be some justice in an easterner who once had a love affair with British Columbia reviewing a book by an "outsider" who married her.

*Splendor sine occasu* is British Columbia's motto, but her splendours should never be taken casually; it is best to take them with pride, as if, as the motto has it, there was never an end to them. Quiet, unobtrusive countrysides, a sudden village, the ordered neatness of that comfortable world of small farms that is southern Ontario, southern Quebec, the Saint John and Annapolis valleys—these are not British Columbia's charms, though they will be found in Vernon and Kelowna and the lower Fraser. British Columbia must be taken as she more generally is: bold, big, brassy, beautiful. So her life, like books that celebrate it, has to be forthright as well as modest, extravagant as well as tender. It is difficult for easterners to quite grasp British Columbia's physical scale: it is a vast empire of regions, in some ways deployed further and realized more in the minds of its people than empire Ontario or imperial Quebec.

The photographs of J. A. Kraulis represent his own poetic instinct. The neutral camera, showing the pageantry and power the province's geography, is not always present. Kraulis' camera is studied, but it is elegantly and charmingly so, as in the Chinese effects of reeds in Lac Le Jeune south of Kamloops (p. 78). Occasionally his pictures shoulder the full burden and splendour of being British Columbian, such as the aerial view of the Fraser valley taken from east of Hope (p. 111), Mount Robson (p. 101) or the splendid panorama of the Spectrum Range in Mount

Edziza Provincial Park (p. 113). One is caught by the photographs, undeniably; and Kraulis' treatment of the sea coast of Vancouver Island is done as lovingly as if he were a Nova Scotian. There are frequent touches of intimacy of landscape, not exactly of cosiness, but with the sense of a nature unalien to man.

The book can be got at more easily through its pictures than its text, but that is stating the obvious. It is right to say, however, that the pictures and the text are not one. They have each their own world: the text does not explain the pictures, nor do the pictures elucidate much the text. It is a book of two gods, perhaps no bad thing in British Columbia; both are trying to reach us; both succeed; but they succeed separately, each in their own way. Thus the text requires from the reader a series of exploratory tangents; the effect cannot be measured because the tangents elude measurement. It cannot, like the pictures, be suddenly taken *per saltum*: it must be taken here and there, from time to time. The book's place is on the coffee table. There may be problems getting it up from there; it is a wide book, its text runs in double columns, and it is awkward to hold. One wonders if short stories in double columns may not defeat themselves. But, that being said, there are some stunning things here. My historian's eye prefers somehow the literary to the historical; perhaps the historical extracts are too much snippets to please one's exacting, over-trained professionalism. But the short stories and poems stand on their own feet, things of beauty often, such as Earle Birney's lovely, intelligible magic on page 187. Not all the poems can be so described. (There is one of the garbage can, fishbones, moonlight, noises of cat-conflict sort.) There is more than one stunning short story, such as Audrey Thomas' "Ted's wife" (p. 189), or Ethel Wilson's "Fog" (p. 154), twenty-five years old now but timeless. You will need the page numbers to find what you want; there is no index of anything, though there is a table of contents.

One can argue that in celebrations one mode of praise should reinforce the other. Here, of course, they don't; but do not repine. The book is \$29.95, and it is a bargain and a joy all at once.