

complete than Gerson's, and the editing is not as thoroughgoing. There are too many distracting typographical errors in the stories, and someone — Watmough or Watmough's editors — should have dealt with the following construction in the "Introduction": "Indeed, while the use of natural phenomena as a determining [*sic*] factor in conduct and even thought patterns are perceivable in several of these fictions, it is nowhere more the case than in Maillard's pages."

That *Vancouver Fiction* is more restricted in its range does not negate the collection's worth. It bears out, as does *Vancouver Short Stories*, the various powers of fiction to create identity by imagining a place. Vancouver's topography haunts these fictions through language that conveys the figurative information necessary to conjure an imagined, imaginative locale. If Frye is correct in suggesting that Canada's cultural life is most troubled, finally, by some riddling question such as "Where is Here?", then these collections resonate with Vancouver's many-voiced reply.

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'*My Dear Legs . . .*': *Letters to a Young Social Democrat*, by Alex Macdonald. Vancouver: New Star Books, 1985. Pp. 187.

My father, then Chief Justice of British Columbia, used to be riled to read in the Elections Act that the only persons who could not sit in the Legislature were "Judges, Indians and Lunatics". Since then an Indian has been seated, no judges of course, and quite a few lunatics, whom I readily recognize. So will the reader who perseveres.

My Dear Legs . . . mirrors the character of its author. It is by turns amusing, obscure, passionate, radical, reformist and, one must say, in truth, ever so slightly haughty. So is Alex.

Alex Macdonald attempts to hide his serious purposes with an appealing after dinner kind of wit to be taken like mints so as not to offend. When gently discussing the sins of his colleagues in the legal profession he observes that "it reminds me of Voltaire who wrote that he had only been ruined twice — once when he lost a lawsuit and once when he won one." Sensitive to the ambitions of the young and the impatience of his seatmate Bob Williams, he notes that his "friends credit me with every Christian virtue but resignation." There is undoubtedly a purpose to his declaration that "this collection is dedicated to my wife Dorothy, whom I married at an early urge."

Perhaps his most urgent purpose is to propose public policies — and Macdonald proposes a veritable potpourri of policy. He favours rent controls, a not surprising preference since as Attorney-General he was the minister responsible for introducing them during the NDP sojourn in government. It is more startling to learn that he believes that resource companies and other large commercial enterprises should be publicly owned and that a fair incomes policy should be pursued which would eradicate large differences in take-home pay — doctors and waitresses will lie down together like the lion and the lamb after the tax department is through with them. These are not central themes in NDP election campaigns, and Macdonald hints at a feeling of annoyance at democratic socialists who have not felt able to keep the old faith. Macdonald himself is not a man to turn his back on the policy propositions of his youth, though he does indicate an acquaintance with a more contemporary left wing gospel by advocating that large public enterprises should be broken down into small self-sufficient entities which will promote a more democratic culture in Canada.

As an old and experienced courtroom advocate he forcefully argues the case for a number of other programs with a flavour of the radical passion of his younger days. He argues for a new medical billing scheme where physicians would be paid by the number of patients registered with them with the fees varied by the age of the patient. Clement Atlee would be pleased. He argues for a youth corps to get unemployed kids off the streets into a setting where they can learn skills and be toughened up by “former Sergeant-Majors who know how to bark orders.” F.D.R. will beam in heaven. He decries state lotteries, as befits a Christian socialist. He would mobilize the \$36 billion he states is tucked away in financial institutions in B.C. through state-guaranteed wage-earner funds directed at providing capital for public and private enterprise. He would end tort liability in automobile accidents and substitute a thoroughgoing no fault insurance scheme. He would reinstitute death duties, confiscate all the gains of real estate flippers (is this a prophecy of a new inflationary spiral in the province?), heavily subsidize television programming, tax with a vengeance the tobacco companies (even the cigar makers!) and encourage worker participation in the management of industry. The ideas, often as old and venerable as the author, occasionally new fangled, always passionately argued, keep tumbling from the pages of the book, entertaining and provoking.

Macdonald seems particularly anxious to provide the complacent in his own party. He criticizes the B.C. Teachers' Federation for failing to

“assume its share of responsibility in work and income sharing.” Not a stated party policy. He criticizes Michael Harcourt, a bit unfairly given the rather limited powers of mayors, for not securing the public ownership of land adjacent to the new rapid transit stations in Vancouver. He is dismayed by the NDP embrace of quotas to the point where half of the federal executive must be women. He is distressed by what he sees as an over-reliance on campaigning devices for identifying rather than persuading voters, noting that the NDP originated the three canvass door-knocking campaign at voter identification in the late 1960s. Actually the CCF in Ontario conducted such a campaign in a 1942 by-election, partly borrowing Liberal techniques in order to defeat Arthur Meighen. One should not, of course, expect Macdonald to be completely immune from the mythologies of B.C. socialists. Finally, he is appalled at the easy acceptance on the left of the “rights culture.” He was certainly against the imposition of the Charter of Rights (with Blakeney rather than Broadbent) because he sees so many of the rights as ill-defined and because he is not at all certain about the wisdom of the judges who will be called upon to provide definitions — a very proper sentiment in a man whose father was chief justice of the province and who boasts two brothers on the bench. Macdonald recognizes that the Charter may make things rather more difficult for reformers and scathingly notes that “our MLAs in a fit of lunacy supported a formal Sacred resolution to insert property rights into the Charter.”

Of course Alex Macdonald is able to delight in taking potshots at his colleagues because he is not really a modern social democrat — he is instead a nineteenth-century Radical from a good Whig family. As a radical he romanticizes the workers, particularly those in service. He writes feelingly about his waitress at the Union Club who, he surmises, will never “land a . . . husband . . . never make a killing on the stock exchange; never have a home of her own.” There is actually no reason to believe this of a “chipper and peppy” young woman who owns a car and holds down another job as a waitress, no reason other than an aristocratic sense of *noblesse oblige*. It is a prejudice, just as is the Macdonald disdain of businessmen (and women) — those, as it would have been pronounced in the last century, who are in trade. Mind you, it is a prejudice shared by many in the NDP and a reason why the party in British Columbia is likely to continue finding it difficult to appeal to small businessmen and others in the middle classes not employed in the public sector or not intellectually secure in their professions. It is no accident that Macdonald, in choosing a former caucus researcher to

patronize by sending letters of advice, the heuristic device of the book, should choose Hugh Legg, the son of a B.C. Supreme Court judge who married Linda Coady, the grand-daughter of another Supreme Court judge and the daughter of a very prominent physician. Nor is it any accident that Macdonald's favourite Biblical tale, taken, of course, from the King James Version, is that of the Householder who decides to pay all who worked in his fields on a hot day, whether for all day or just for a few minutes, the same needed penny. The Whig aristocracy is alive and well, living in a house overlooking English Bay yet holding the NDP pocket borough of Vancouver East.

This, no doubt, sounds critical. It is not, or at least not very critical save to suggest that Alex Macdonald, like us all, is not very conscious of his own assumptions. The book itself is wonderful. The courtly reminiscing about Woodsworth and Coldwell and other party icons is delightful. Macdonald's story about his role in obtaining the appointment of the first Chinese notary public (with a little judicial help from Linda Coady's grandfather) is inspiring and usefully reminds us of the shameful treatment given to the Chinese and the Japanese in British Columbia and of the courage of those like himself who could not abide racism. His story of providing a seat at the San Francisco founding of the United Nations for none other than John Diefenbaker is a nice bit of Canadian memorabilia. His account of his father's investigation of oil and gas prices for the Pattullo government is, in itself, worth the price of the book. So, for that matter, is the picture of Alex in his kilt opening Robson Square a half hour before the official deed.

Alex Macdonald threatens to write another book. This one is a partial autobiography disguised as amusing and didactic letters from the Earl of Sandwich to his son. I hope that the next one, even if written about a less personal subject, shows the same wit and sense of style. Alex Macdonald is the last person who ought to succumb to academic overcaution.