

for the book ends with a painfully sad portrait of Morice, shunned by a church that had finally removed him from a position of power, unrecognized for his ethnographic studies, and ignored by his former charges; it would have been appropriate to turn back to the venue of Morice's power, and to assess the lingering images of the "priest-king" in the northern Interior of British Columbia. It was there, and not in a small Winnipeg home, that the principal impact of Father A. G. Morice's career rested.

The volume reflects the typically high standards of the University of British Columbia Press, but a couple of technical details merit attention. An excellent series of photographs illustrates the text, but they are jumbled together in a fashion that does the illustrations a disservice. More unfortunate is the absence of a suitable series of maps (one is provided) to enable readers to trace Morice's lengthy travels among the Indians.

One does not wish to end a review of a well-researched, finely written biography on a negative note, but a major puzzle remains. Why are scholars drawn to exceptional individuals within the missionary corps? A biography of Morice is helpful, but one is left knowing a great deal about a unique and unrepresentative character, and wanting to know more about the less flamboyant or controversial missionaries. While biographies such as *Will to Power* and Jean Usher's *William Duncan of Metlakatla* help us understand these highly publicized figures from British Columbia's past, they leave us with a far from complete, and even misleading, portrait of the missionary enterprise. Is it too much to hope that future historians will, while not eschewing controversial individuals, look for more representative individuals or perhaps assess the background, motivation, and impact of the broader missionary corps? Given David Mulhall's ability to handle the multi-faceted Father Morice, it is to be hoped that he will subsequently search for a larger canvas.

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*British Columbia: Visions of the Promised Land*, ed. and intro. Brenda Lea White. Vancouver: Flight Press, 1986. Pp. 115.

"Vancouver has always seemed," muses Ron Woodall,

like a city that only dabbles at being a city, its citizens a population that only dabbles at its pursuits. I hasten to add that I consider myself a dabbler. The dictionary will tell you that the term describes a person who does things in a slight or superficial manner. My definition differs slightly. I see dabbling as

slowly getting better at something, at one's own pace, without the imposition of other people's schedules or expectations, and without making a big deal about it.

Such dedicated dabbling pervades this collection of eighteen essays on "what it means to be a British Columbian." Ron Woodall, an advertising consultant (creator of the A & W Root Bear, according to the notes) and painter, takes time to reminisce about his family's arrival in a "God forsaken colourless cul-de-sac in the bush." Brenda Lea White takes time out from magazine journalism and playwriting to create an anthology aimed at the Expo '86 and tourist market. The contributors take time off from their primary writerly obligations to dabble in memoir and autobiography — or pop philosophy: for example, "British Columbia may have its sunshine and its flowers and its gay kitchen curtains, but it is permeated at every level by a mood of desolation, the desolation of a spirit endlessly searching."

Given the lure of dabbling which this book embodies, it's not surprising that the main impression left by the book is that the clichés of place are extraordinarily pervasive and deep-seated, especially that honoured in the book's title — British Columbia as paradise. To say that the primary impact of the book is a reaffirmation of cliché sounds like a very negative comment. And yet it's not, exactly. I came to the book prepared to dislike this element, but the fluency of the writing impressed me. I recognized the commonplace observations — the gentle climate, the swelling growth, the leisurely habits, the impinging wilderness — but the edge of metaphor, a turn of phrase, a shift of familiar context were usually enough to make these fresh, even a bit startling. John Gray writes that "Vancouver was [a] place . . . where people made an effort to maintain creative habits." For George Woodcock, "Vancouver . . . is a city . . . in which good causes can become mass causes." Jack Shadbolt gives us a new angle on his own art, when he notes that "our garden, our woods, relate to my studio as Monet's garden at Giverny did to his." Even those writers who emphasize the ugliest aspects of British Columbia politics and poverty can't resist the paradisaical forms: George Ryga, who writes mainly of poverty in a small Mexican village, is writing obliquely of B.C.'s enormous plenty as he agonizes about the "spectre of a slow death within an illusion of wealth and abundance." W. P. Kinsella, who sputters and fumes that "real writers . . . don't give a flying fuck about British Columbia," nevertheless allows that he lives "in British Columbia for only one reason; White Rock is the warmest spot in mainland Canada."

These samplings imply another cliché. This book should have been titled "Vancouver Visions" or "Vancouver and Surroundings." Certainly the interior and the islands get very short shrift. But the emphasis is another aspect of the promised land. Vancouver is desirable partly because it is as much an imperial centre within British Columbia as Toronto is within Canada. That Vancouver's dominance is not much noticed in the book is part of its idyll.

Woodall's definitions of dabbling may also explain why this review is mostly a list of quotations with few transitions. The feeling of the book is of an anthology of mostly journalistic memoirs, occasionally provocative (Gary Cristall's celebration of the creative potential of "political polarization" or Jeani Read's vision of the earth moving), often suggesting topics (Jack Hodgins on Island dialect, Michael Mercer on place names) for more extended essays. But pending such essays, this book that just dabbles at being a book is seldom merely slight because it does reveal a community "slowly getting better at something," at articulating a mythology of mountains and rain, in resolute low key.

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LAURIE RICOU

*Solidarity: The Rise and Fall of an Opposition in British Columbia*, by Bryan D. Palmer. Vancouver: New Star Books, 1987. Pp. 120. \$6.95 paper.

Was the Solidarity movement that burgeoned in the summer and fall of 1983 in opposition to the Bennett government's restraint program betrayed by the social democratic and labour leadership? Could a general strike have been carried off successfully, forcing Social Credit to retreat on most or all of the twenty-six measures introduced? Could the politicization that would have resulted have helped move the province's labour movement and the province more generally in a more socialist direction? The answer to these questions, argues Palmer, is yes.

Let me begin with the strengths of his essay. Palmer writes with verve and commitment, bringing to bear a detailed knowledge of the events in question and a more than passing acquaintance with the history and class character of twentieth-century labour movements, both in North America and in Europe. If Trotsky's theme of "the revolution betrayed" is applied altogether too mechanistically and, in my opinion, inappropriately to the B.C. situation, it is also fair to recognize that it is precisely the broader,