

photographs and photographers, an area where he is clearly more at home.

A brief page-and-a-half text introduces each of the seven sections, four devoted to the major photographers of nineteenth-century Vancouver: J. A. Brock & Co., the Bailey Brothers, Trueman & Caple, and S. J. Thompson. Mattison examines the motives and achievements of these early commercial landscape photographers and their portrayal of the city. Additional information includes a two-part bibliography listing reference materials about nineteenth-century urban photographers and photography and photographic history books about Vancouver, an Appendix of Vancouver Commercial Photographers and Studios 1886-1900, and an Index well referenced by photographer but otherwise rather idiosyncratic. Firmly focused on Burrard Inlet, *Eyes of a City* might have profitably given greater consideration to the rich photographic legacy of nearby New Westminster as the root of later photographic developments in Vancouver. The reproductions, not unexpectedly for a modest publication, are frequently flat and lacking in detail in the shadows. The format is pleasing, with images and explanation closely juxtaposed. Caption information is excellent and could only have been improved by the inclusion of the original photographic process.

Mattison crusades for the "photograph as document," emphasizing the importance of context and intent for a proper understanding of historical visual records. For example, using the example of "City Hall in a Tent" and "Real Estate Office in Big Tree" he demonstrates how time and memory can transform images, from hoax into cliché and from re-enactment into icon. Mattison speaks directly to and about the photographs, describing their content, pointing out details, setting up comparisons. The information presented to the reader in *Eyes of a City* is conveyed by a balanced mix of text and image. Mattison's strength lies in his presentation of fact; he is thorough in his research and careful in his attention to detail. Therein lies the strength of *Eyes of a City*.

National Archives of Canada

JOAN M. SCHWARTZ

Malcolm Lowry: Vancouver Days, by Sheryl Salloum. Vancouver: Harbour Publishing, 1986. \$9.95.

In May 1987, the first International Lowry Symposium was held in Vancouver; to coincide with this conference, and to commemorate the fortieth anniversary of the publishing of Lowry's most famous novel, *Under the Volcano*, Harbour Publishing released *Vancouver Days*, the first one-

book study of Lowry's years in Vancouver (1940-54), where Lowry and his wife Margerie lived in a seaside shack near Dollarton in North Vancouver (where he wrote *Under the Volcano* and most of his other posthumously published works). The Dollarton area no doubt affected Lowry deeply. He loved the sea, the feeling of being perched in a shack where the waves at high tide would wash under his floor. At the end of the day he could see the diffused lights of the city and the flares of the refinery across the water, and be happy that he could live apart from them. Sheryl Salloum has put together a series of recollections from individuals who knew the Lowrys when they lived there, combined with photographs of people and places they knew; she has done a very good job with the available material and has interviewed many people who remember those days.

When I have walked the path that led to their shack, particularly in the early spring when the foliage is new and fresh, I felt the Lowrys' spirit, palpable. Malcolm was able to catch the spirit of the place, its beauty and its quality of paradise which he describes so perfectly in "Forest Path to the Spring," for me still his best work. We have all read the stories, heard the tales, of that Dollarton world. I attended the symposium in May and did not read *Vancouver Days* until later. The combination makes me now feel that Lowry's life is a sad little story, about a man's troubles in a sad little shack on a beach with equally sad little shacks surrounding it. The couple in question is headed by a hard-drinking, self-serving man who, when he writes, writes well his internal, and eternal, soliloquy for the world; the wife appears to be something else instead. She serves the husband, initially appears to match him drink-for-drink, and she does her damndest to make the situation such that he will write, for she feels that he has something important to say. It appears, therefore, that we are engaged in observing yet another portrait of the artist as a not-so-young man, who has his own personal demons so that he cannot always fulfil himself in either his work or his marriage; not far into the book we are prompted to ask the question that is fatal to works of biography in any form: "Why?" We have glimpses of Lowry's writing which for him was autobiography, which is after all self-indulgent forgiveness; we hear of his kindness, his humour, his rage, his using of others. There is simply no nourishment left for us in this particular subject matter; it lacks the boon of fresh information, nor does it even provide fresh insights into old information. How dreary the Lowrys' story is, how narrow the range of emotions they permitted themselves, and their friends, to express!

Sheryl Salloum outlines Lowry's time in this area for the first time, and the contradictions in the man come through extremely well. He is and will

forever be a paradox. Though he was able to catch the flavour of the forest and the sea in British Columbia, he remains forever British and it is unfair, I think, to adopt him as a Canadian. Lowry loved his Eden, but as Salloum points out, his childhood and background were always with him. Salloum says he was "introverted, theatrical, dispirited, waggish, charming, churlish, powerful, vulnerable, sober, bacchanalian, generous, self-possessed, mystical and ingenious," and she illustrates this very well.

Many of the memories here are available elsewhere, memories of people who are honest in their recollections of him but often tell us more about the speaker than of Lowry. They ring true, like the bell that tolls for all of us, in the memory of our friends. But often there is a gloss of hindsight, of making those moments more than what they were — but be that ever so. What particularly charmed me about the recollections here was the memory pieces of Gloria (Newton) Onley and Norman Newton. In Gloria's memoir of Lowry shines not only the voice of an extremely articulate woman, but also the soul of a compassionate human being of integrity. When she says that "When I saw Malcolm he wasn't at his most lovable" and illustrates that succinctly by saying he was vomiting, unable to shave or wash himself, believe it. Her response to looking after Lowry for a few days tells us a great deal about Gloria but much more about Lowry:

He was so mired down in his condition, I wished for an antidote to magically cure him. The next morning, with naive good will I picked a flower from the garden around the coach house and brought it to him. It might have been a narcissus, it might have been a daffodil; it was a fresh, beautiful spring flower. He took it with a wry smile and said something half-chagrined, half-charming. I felt terribly young, and very unsuccessful in my symbolism.

I feel sure that it was a narcissus. Poor Malcolm.

Along with Gloria's fine writing is that of Norman Newton, whose flair for rhythm in his prose, his use of language, makes me want him to write more. His perception of Lowry, his story of his time with him, is the most revealing, most well written, and for me the most perceptive part of the book. His last paragraph bears repeating:

The effect on my "life" was similar to that of witnessing and to some extent participating in a tragic event which offers a brief but powerful perception of spiritual realities which are normally hidden to us. It is tragic because it involves tragic pride, a desperate storming of precipices which are meant to be climbed one foothold at a time. I think of Malcolm as dying in some remote and terrible wilderness which most of us know nothing of, a place he himself had chosen. But when I think that he was enabled to find a universal meaning, even a tortured beauty, in this fate I think of what I shall call, without theological presumptions in this case, "redemptive mercy."

Sheryl Salloum acknowledges this dichotomy in her collection of memories. These recollections are as varied as Lowry's personality, and as she says, "The passage of time has sometimes dimmed, sometimes sharpened these memories, but Lowry the man and Lowry the artist remain unforgettable — both powerful, both an enigma."

Turning to the production of these recollections, I am grateful for the opportunity to praise the exceptionally strong and subtle interweaving of Sheryl Salloum's hand in this book. She says she admires Lowry's work, yet she does not strike a single falsely sentimental note from start to finish in a book that could teeter constantly on the verge of sentimentality — of those who could claim that they knew Lowry better than they did. There are, of course, other things I would like to see: for instance, some memoir from Esther Birney, who years ago regaled me with stories about Lowry; I hope that she is one of the contributors who preferred to remain anonymous, but if that is the case, some of her richly funny stories are missing. Dorothy Livesay's memories, particularly of Margerie, are clear and distanced, and she makes Margerie appear to be the stronger person I am positive she was, when at the symposium it seemed to be fashionable with some critics to downgrade her not only as a person but as a writer and collaborator and listener. When I met her years ago, she was a charming and intense woman and devoted to Malcolm's memory. I liked her, as William McConnell obviously liked her; this book helps with that perspective. It would have been interesting, too, to have a memoir from David Markson, the story about his visit with the Lowrys when Markson was a young student in New York and travelled across the continent to meet the man who was becoming a great influence on his own work.

But these complaints are picayune. Salloum has done an excellent research job with her material. The photographs are well chosen, the material nicely integrated. The variety of the material she has selected leads the reader to a firmer understanding of Lowry's method of working, his view of himself and of his world. It is that understanding, rather than judgement, of Lowry as one of the most innovative writers in twentieth-century literature that makes this book a valuable contribution to the enigma that is Lowry. If the book had done everything that I would like it to do, then it would be a different book. As it is, it helps fill in gaps about this man who once lived in British Columbia; the research and handiwork are admirable.