

## BOOK REVIEWS

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*Makúk: A New History of  
Aboriginal-White Relations*

John Sutton Lutz

Vancouver: UBC Press, 2008.  
416 pp. Maps, Illus. \$85.00 cloth,  
\$32.95 paper.

MARGARET SEQUIN ANDERSON  
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*Makúk: A New History of Aboriginal-White Relations* is a thorough treatment of a significant subject in BC history. Lutz has examined the history of exchanges of things, labour, and ideas between Aboriginal peoples and immigrants and how Aboriginal peoples were displaced from their land and resources in the province while, at the same time, providing the labour to build it – at least prior to their labour becoming marginalized and denigrated, and their communities impoverished and “vanished.” The book moves from an abstract, rather sweeping theoretical discussion of perspectives on exchange and postmodernism to detailed histories of two specific Aboriginal groups: the Lekwungen and the Tsilhqot’in.

Lekwungen territory was located around present-day Victoria, and it experienced rapid white settlement. The Lekwungen were, “of all the Aboriginal Peoples in British Columbia and western Canada[,] ... the best positioned to succeed within the European, capitalist economy” (50). The Tsilhqot’in, in contrast, were located in one of the most remote parts of the province and engaged in a lengthy struggle to keep settlers out of their territory in the interior plateau. Despite these differences, the current situations of these two groups are not dissimilar. Lutz does a thorough job of laying out how this came to be.

Much of the book is taken up by Lutz’s discussion of Aboriginal workers, and this is an excellent addition to the literature; he delves deeply into the subject and provides both a clear overview and detailed examples of Aboriginal contributions in specific industries such as fishing, logging, and agriculture. He has built on the work of earlier scholars (such as Rolf Knight, Dianne Newell, Douglas Harris, and numerous others) and provides quotations, from both the scholarly literature and from Aboriginal people, drawn from archives, correspondence with government departments, and

contemporary interviews. Of equal importance to his history of Aboriginal labour in various industries is Lutz's analysis of the history of the current welfare system and how it has altered Aboriginal communities; he provides a detailed picture of the genesis of the welfare system in reluctant and racist relief policies through to the trap in which many Aboriginal communities now find themselves. The final chapter discusses developments over the period from 1970 to 2007, including the impact of recent court cases that seem to indicate that Aboriginal voices are perhaps being understood to a greater degree than in the past and that there may yet be the possibility of productive dialogue. A postscript crystallizes the main thrust of the book, encouraging serious listening and real dialogue: "So long as we keep the silence, so long as we continue to 'vanish,' or in literary scholar Renée Bergland's words, 'ghost' Indians, we will continue to be doomed to revisit the site of our haunting – the history of aboriginal/non-aboriginal encounters – over and over again" (308).

One aspect of *Makúk* that I would like to note especially is the extensive use of sidebars and illustrations of the people mentioned in the text, along with relevant quotations. These range from early drawings from the Cook expedition through to photographs of contemporary leaders and also include some of the theoreticians, such as Edward Said, upon whose work Lutz draws. The least successful aspect of the book, for me, is the attempt to frame it within a discussion of Chinook jargon, which Lutz characterizes as "a language amorphous enough that each [group] could interpret it in a way that made sense within its own cultural framework. It was a language of deliberate ambiguity" (xi), "a language whose very construction guaranteed

misunderstandings" (xii). Lutz uses this characterization of Chinook jargon as a metaphor for the miscommunications that often characterized relations between settlers and Aboriginal peoples in the history of the province, but the metaphor seems to me to be unconvincing and the discussion of the language extraneous to the main thrust of the book. Creating the chapter title "Pomo Wawa" (postmodernist vocabulary) as ersatz Chinook jargon for the discussion of the theoretical underpinnings of Lutz's analysis was more irksome than enlightening, at least for this reader.

*Makúk: A New History of Aboriginal-White Relations* is theoretically sophisticated and richly detailed, and it will be valued as a reference for researchers in several fields as well as by Aboriginal people. This book will become a standard resource for research on BC history. I expect that, for the next decade, it will fill the place in the literature that Robin Fisher's *Contact and Conflict* held during previous decades. The book exemplifies the best of contemporary research on British Columbia's history, and it will be an inspiration to future researchers.



*Madness, Betrayal and the Lash:  
The Epic Voyage of Captain  
George Vancouver*

Stephen Bown

Toronto/Vancouver: Douglas and  
McIntyre, 2008. 256 pp. Illus.  
\$34.95 cloth, \$21.95 paper.

BRIAN RICHARDSON  
*University of Hawaii*

*Madness, Betrayal and the Lash* is an accessible, succinct narrative of George Vancouver's life, focusing on the voyage he led into the Pacific in the late eighteenth-century. Bown's stated goal is to give Vancouver "a more honourable place in history" (4) by rehabilitating his reputation, which was ruthlessly attacked after the voyage. There are well-chosen illustrations and interesting quotes, although unfortunately the author does not include a timeline, a map of the voyage, or references.

There are some unfortunate errors and distracting tendencies in the book. Bown confuses Thomas Hobbes with John Locke (16). He states that Cook's journals were published "several months" after the voyage was completed (8) when in fact it took roughly two years. He also claims that Vancouver's voyage, covering 65,000 miles, was the "longest circumnavigation ever by sailing ship and a significantly greater distance than Cook's second voyage" (232). Beaglehole, in contrast, notes that Cook's second voyage was roughly 70,000 miles (*Exploration of the Pacific*, 286). Finally, Bown tries to include too much titillating detail. The constant reference to Manby's description of "native maidens" and "bewitching girls" becomes annoying. At one point the author laments that "unfortunately

no record of [Manby's] survives of this second visit to Hawaii" (186), as if these passages are a significant part of the narrative. Instead, they add little, and reinforce the peep show that was so important to eighteenth-century European imperialism.

Personal conflicts dominate Bown's narrative, and with the exception of Bodega y Quadra, no one is likeable. The most despicable character is Thomas Pitt, the arrogant son of nobility and persistent troublemaker on the voyage. The conflict between his claims to privilege and the discipline of the Royal Navy was a constant problem for Vancouver, and in this case that conflict became very personal. Bown's description of Pitt's vendetta against Vancouver is a highlight of the book.

Another highlight was the description of Vancouver's second powerful enemy: Joseph Banks. Both Cook and Vancouver had conflicts with Banks, but the conflict with Cook occurred when Banks had not achieved significant power. Vancouver, on the other hand, faced a well-connected Banks capable of forcing his plans and associates on Vancouver and of seeking revenge when Vancouver resisted. As with Pitt, the description of Banks's vengeance offers a glimpse into English society. Yet Banks not only tried to vilify Vancouver, he tried to write Vancouver out of the country's history, and the details of Banks's efforts are fascinating.

For a book that attempts to rehabilitate Vancouver, the account of his character is surprisingly negative. Vancouver's anger is described throughout the book. He frequently overreacts, his outbursts are "disgraceful" (134), and he is constantly impatient, annoyed, autocratic, and even cruel. Led by his commitment to naval regulations, Vancouver "always adhered to the letter

of his instructions, fearing that leniency would bring him censure or reprimand” (117). He alienated most of the crew and his behaviour was a key reason why morale on the ship was so poor (119). He was even described as going slowly insane (204). But rather than believing that Vancouver was largely responsible for his fate, Bown sticks to the belief that Vancouver has been wrongly vilified, even if the details work against his conclusion.

As with Vancouver’s character, Bown also tries to improve the status of Vancouver’s voyage. Yet the same tension with the details arises. Bown claims that the voyage was monumental but describes how the voyage was ultimately inconsequential. Bown claims that Vancouver’s “epic voyage to unknown Pacific America is one of a handful of truly incredible voyages in the history of seafaring, on par in its own way with the voyages of Columbus, Magellan, Drake, Bougainville and Cook” (237). But such a description is unsupported. At best, without Vancouver, Canada would not have a Pacific coast (223) and Hawaii may have fallen under American influence a little faster. The political issues surrounding Nootka Sound were resolved in Europe after the voyage ended. The agreement between Vancouver and Kamehameha, which would have increased the British presence in Hawaii, was ignored by the British government. Vancouver’s voyage likewise comes up short when compared to Cook’s: Vancouver’s voyage had little anthropological detail (137), his voyage has no drama, the printed journals are tedious, and his relationship to the crew was dysfunctional if not outright abusive. Not the makings of a monumental voyage or of an heroic captain.

Overall, Bown’s account of Vancouver’s life and voyages is

interesting and accessible. Rather than rehabilitating Vancouver’s character, however, he ends up reinforcing the negative reputation Vancouver already has. Vancouver appears better than how he was portrayed by Pitt and Banks, but only because the people around him, including Pitt and Banks, were so despicable. There are many reasons why Vancouver failed, including his government, his crew, Pitt, Banks, and his own deteriorating health and character. But explaining why he failed does not mean that he succeeded.

Perhaps a more compelling narrative structure, which the book hints at, is that Vancouver is a tragic figure. If he had not had such powerful enemies, and if his voyages had not been overshadowed by the French Revolution and the Napoleonic wars, he might have joined Cook in the pantheon of important navigators. In the end, the strongest reaction that the author elicits for Vancouver is pity.

*A Silent Revolution?  
Gender and Wealth in English  
Canada, 1860–1930*  
Peter Baskerville

Montreal and Kingston: McGill-  
Queen’s University Press, 2008.  
376 pp. \$29.95 paper.

JUDITH FINGARD  
*Dalhousie University*

*A Silent Revolution?* is a fascinating study of female capitalists in Victoria and Hamilton at the turn of the twentieth century. Peter Baskerville employs both quantitative and qualitative methods to establish that women were willing and active participants in building the financial infrastructure of

the liberal bourgeois state in modern Canada. The prevailing ideology of separate spheres had virtually no impact on the behaviour of women in the marketplace. Female testators, investors, borrowers, lenders, property owners, and entrepreneurs held their own with their male counterparts, and the system they produced together was largely non-gendered. The context for the analysis is urban English Canada, the approach comparative – female/male, Hamilton/Victoria, then and now – and it is based on every conceivable variable. The sources constitute an impressive range of probate and assessment records, shareholder lists, census returns, bills of sale registration, and, for Chapter 7 (on businesswomen) and Chapter 8 (on family enterprise), the 5 percent 1901 census household sample of the Canadian Families Project.

Baskerville convincingly demonstrates that the various provincial married women's property acts of late Victorian Canada became more broadly *women's* property laws by encouraging new patterns of inheritance from parents to daughters and husbands to wives. The loosening of the controls on women's property rights facilitated the expansion of women's role in financial affairs whether they were married, widowed, or single. In terms of total probated wealth, women in both cities were equal to men below the top quintile. Women were therefore not among the wealthiest Canadians, nor were they greatly attracted to risky business ventures, possibly a prerequisite for attaining the most wealth. Their more moderate and conservative patterns of wealth management, including a preference for shares in banks and insurance companies and land ownership, may have been encouraged by a mother-to-daughter practice of financial knowledge-sharing that

was far less structured than was that of father-to-son. Women's agency in material matters nonetheless increased over the period covered by this book. In wills and probate, for example, women became more active as executors. They were as likely as their husbands to place controls in their wills on their widowed spouse, but they were more likely to overlook their spouse entirely as a beneficiary. For daughters, the more generous inheritances encouraged by the new laws governing women's property provided the very opportunity for them to enter the money market.

Women's gains in real property after the enactment of women's property legislation were especially impressive: in Victoria, women moved from owning one in every \$29 of landed wealth in 1871 to one in every \$5 in 1899; in Hamilton, the figures were one in every \$22 and one in every \$7. In fact "more Victoria women were landowners and general investors than was the case in Hamilton" (114). A considerable portion of the analysis focuses on relationships between wives and husbands concerning property, a central issue then and for many decades to follow. Baskerville traces the likely impact of such features as the lack of dower law in British Columbia, the traditional anti-coercion safeguard of the privy, or separate, examination of the wife, and differential sex ratios in these two cities. In the mortgage market, age turned out to be an important factor, with women loaning money to a younger set than did men. Women, especially self-employed women, were also active as lenders and borrowers in the chattel loan market, which is described "as a kind of pawnshop, only the goods remained in possession of the borrower" (168). A broader range of class was involved here than in the realty market. When the author turns to the role of women in

business, he encounters the deficiencies of the 1901 census, particularly with regard to boarding house keepers, and spends considerable time explaining this problem instead of resorting to city directories as a possible solution. As an enterprise, self-employment for women was far more prevalent early in the twentieth century than it would become later. Indeed, in 1901, women were 5.3 times more likely to be self-employed than were men. Even though most were married and undoubtedly middle class, these women were demonstrably not “constrained by separate spheres ideology” (219). Moreover, the family context of women’s self-employment meant that “female-run family businesses extended the world of contracts and competition into the home” (235).

While some readers may find the degree of speculation and repetition problematic, the number of graphs and tables tedious, and the statistical methods as obfuscating as they are revealing, Baskerville redeems himself by cogently situating his analysis within the international literature on the subject – legal, feminist, business, and theoretical. A discussion of one additional topic might have helped to dispel the uncomfortable notion that women were merely individualistic, closet capitalists. We are not told the extent to which women used their wealth to create social capital, particularly through bequests. Given women’s active participation in the institutions of their community – churches and missions, schools and colleges, the arts, hospitals and homes, charities and self-help ventures, it is not only their participation in women’s organizations and auxiliaries that measures their philanthropic influence (see Appendix 4) but also their financial clout when it came to longer-term support, both

annually and through their wills. As penny capitalists, sharing the features of their property with the middling stratum of male capitalists, women had only two opportunities to exert power through their wealth. One involved their position in the family, which must have varied enormously woman to woman across society, from some calling the shots to others withering in the corner (even for the more assertive it was indeed a well-hidden, or “silent,” power). The other involved women’s position in their community, where the rapid establishment and expansion of all the agencies and institutions that would today be incorporated as registered charities must have benefited considerably not only from their activism but also from their financial support. Placing first-wave feminists across Canada within the framework of female capitalism that Baskerville has so compellingly uncovered would be an intriguing focus for a follow-up study.

### *Red Dog, Red Dog*

Patrick Lane

Toronto: McClelland Stewart, 2008.  
332 pp. \$32.99 cloth.

MARK DIOTTE

*University of British Columbia*

**D**UE TO THE STRONG tourism and leisure economy of British Columbia, the Okanagan Valley has become primarily associated with orchards, beaches, and, most recently, award-winning vineyards – in short, the Okanagan Valley is synonymous with the idyllic countryside. Yet, while Patrick Lane’s debut novel *Red Dog, Red Dog* is set in the Okanagan Valley, it subverts any notion of the



romanticized countryside typically associated with peace, purity, family values, stability, and healing. Instead, *Red Dog, Red Dog* combines elements of the supernatural with elements of reality in an exploration of the dark side of human behaviour and psychology. Indeed, Lane's novel has echoes of the violence, cruelty, and gloom of the American South described by William Faulkner and Cormac McCarthy, of the British Columbia described by Sheila Watson in *The Double Hook*, and, to a lesser extent, of the supernatural elements described by Gail Anderson-Dargatz in *Turtle Valley*.

In combination with writers such as Watson and Anderson-Dargatz, Lane is contributing to what I would suggest is the beginning of a West Coast gothic tradition in Canada. Centred around the Stark family, the novel takes place over a one-week time period. Interspersed in the narrative are "stories arcing back in time to the 1920s and '30s on the prairies" and to the "1880s West" (book jacket). Narrated by the deceased infant Alice Stark, *Red Dog, Red Dog* immediately introduces an element of the uncanny into the narrative. Traditional gothic architecture is replaced with bleak descriptions of a "valley leading nowhere" set against equally desolate "rocky outcrops with their swales of rotted snow" (14-15), while the innocent heroine is replaced by an abusive mother who spends the majority of her time behind the locked door of her bedroom at the end of the hall. The traditional gothic atmosphere of gloom, foreboding, and horror, however, remains intact in Lane's novel through a narrative of continually shocking events that include buried secrets, dog fighting, rape, incest, murder, and child abuse.

Equally resistant to the cliché of the romanticized countryside are the

characters who populate Lane's novel. Elmer Stark, the father figure of the novel, is an alcoholic, quick-tempered and violent; the eldest brother, drug-addicted Eddy, is also violent and is filled with "something dead" after he comes back from Boyco, a correctional school for boys (18); Tom, arguably the most sympathetic character, is "a boy gone early to old" (45); Lillian is the cruel, neglectful, and incestuous mother figure. All characters in the novel are unstable, damaged through different combinations of physical, emotional, and psychological abuse, and it is the process of revealing these multiple layers of abuse and secrecy that stands out in Lane's novel. Like Eddy, the characters in *Red Dog, Red Dog* all have "something dead" or psychologically missing; they are desperate and are searching for that which will reconcile their lives to their expectations of life. It is primarily the failure of this attempt at reconciliation that leads to desolation, rage, and violence. While virtually all characters in the novel are monstrous, they cannot be said to be evil; rather, they are examples of a failed humanity. *Red Dog, Red Dog*, above all, is a novel that explores the bonds and loyalties needed to survive while it highlights the pressures that combine to create these damaged characters.

Like other poets who make the decision to write fiction, Lane is open to the criticism that his language is too poetic or laboured. In *Red Dog, Red Dog*, I don't find this to be the case. Instead, so-called called poetic or descriptive passages are used to accentuate the harsh, bleak atmosphere of both the physical and psychological landscape of the novel. Lane's debut novel does much to illuminate the BC literary landscape and makes a substantial contribution to literature in Canada.

*Subway under Byzantium*

Maxine Gadd

Vancouver: New Star Books, 2008.  
128 pp. \$20.00 paper.

*Nightmarker*

Meredith Quartermain

Edmonton: NeWest Press, 2008.  
107 pp. \$14.95 paper.

JASON V. STARNES

*Simon Fraser University*

VANCOUVERITES Maxine Gadd and Meredith Quartermain each pursue unique place-based poetics in recent books of poetry that deploy historical, geographical, and philosophical disciplines in ways that map specific social spaces in British Columbia. Their related practices display a global range of voice, description, and activism marshalled by locally critical and socially conscious poetics.

Gadd and Quartermain both write from first-person experiences of their immediate community and geographic surroundings. Both inspired by and affiliated with Vancouver's Kootenay School of Writing, their works are not limited to the specificities of place and space around them but, rather, arise out of their first-person engagements with communities that persist in contemporary traces of history.

Maxine Gadd's *Subway under Byzantium* represents the continuation of her works about the dual spaces of the Gulf Islands and Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, extending the project collected in 2005's *Backup to Babylon*. This dialectic of places explores the shared and distinct qualities of these areas. Gadd evinces

the illusory character of any singularity separating "nature" (in its pristine island manifestations) and "humanity" (propagating in the [fallen] structures of urban ecosystems): "More production.' Invent a new kind of justice / or a plastic gizmo to fill up the holes in the roads. Who goes there any / more to fix the cracks wherein did fall / the many who are few?" (38). Her British Columbia is one in which "the eyes in trees" report panoptic data to "strange minds in the mountains planning casual chaos" (12). Gadd's Marxist politics are in evidence as she gives voice to economically and socially disempowered victims of capital: "Capitalism is caused by wars; Communism by floods. / There comes a point where you can't refuse yr neighbour at the price of being inhuman" (119).

Gadd's poetic affinities include a concrete aesthetic that appears more frequently towards the end of *Byzantium's* sequence, culminating in expressive typographic forms arrayed against Mandelbrot sets. Her interest in humanity's position in the ecology it generates recalls Lyn Hejinian, to whom a poem is dedicated here. Her affiliation with the community of Kootenay School writers shows through in the directness of her radical politics and the post-L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E aesthetics of her fragmentary yet lyrical lineation.

Meredith Quartermain's *Nightmarker* is an exploration of the history embedded in local space, and in many ways it is a sequel to her BC Book Award-winning *Vancouver Walking* (2006). As in that work, which poet Margaret Christakos calls a "lived epic of how specific native soil became appropriated to a condition of contemporary real estate," *Nightmarker* develops a poetic psychogeography as Quartermain delves into both the geographical and archival



specifics of her urban environment. The epic designation is important here, conjuring *Nightmarker's* extension of Ezra Pound's "poem containing history." Quartermain's epigraph from Charles Olson's *Special View of History* denotes her epic sensibilities: "A thing done is not simply done but is re-done or pre-done. It is at once commemorative, magical, and prospective." Extending this maxim, Quartermain explores the concrete manifestations of history while showing the present as spatially, contingently engaged with the past and directly determinative of future forms. History in *Nightmarker* is a paratactic field versus a linear path, and Quartermain beautifully arrays the synchronic materials unearthed and gathered in the course of her Olsonian Projective cartography: "Cartographer at Work sails the 20th Century grid – no longer trees, but streets named Chestnut. Cypress. Arbutus. Maple" (23). One perception leads to another with no loss of momentum or abstraction of critical insight.

In "Night Bus," Quartermain notes that she has been called a philosophical as opposed to an anecdotal poet. This seems a fair description of her relationship to forebears such as Robin Blaser, with whom she collaborated in *Wanders* (2002), and Robert Duncan, both of whose poetics engage philosophy as organic content. Conjuring a persona called Geo, who may represent both a philosophical echo of George Vancouver and the Earth itself, many of the poems appear in the form of letters: "Sir, The universe is expanding... Shale, sandstone, yanked thin by mountains drifting west, grinding under tectonic plates... 10 million years later, humans reading this" (35-36). Geo bears a relationship to Olson's Maximus, a mythic concatenation of historical personae that addresses letters to the

*polis* of his hometown in *The Maximus Poems*.

While Gadd and Quartermain pursue slightly diverging practices, themes of orientation and disorientation in the postmodern welter of political-spatial experience are shared in the poets' work, and the trope of way finding takes on allegorical significance. Gadd's suite of lyrical personae, rich in politics and idiosyncrasy, enunciates the lost "i" of the unrepresented: "Leave me, fear that i will not find my way" (8); while Quartermain's epistolary poems, packed with dense philosophical allusion, engage a psychogeographic mapping through the medium of language: "To speak is to echolocate" (11). For both Gadd and Quartermain, the public space of politics is a constant theme. They each develop a poetic geography, never far from the reality of community and the fantasy of history. These books represent important extensions of a tradition specific to British Columbia, one that offers social critique and philosophical resonance pertinent to any citizen of postmodernity.



*Gold Dust on His Shirt: The  
True Story of an Immigrant  
Mining Family*

Irene Howard

Toronto: Between the Lines, 2008.  
250 pp. \$26.95 paper.

EVA ST. JEAN

*Northern Lights College*

BRITISH COLUMBIA produces an astounding number of works on non-British immigrants on the west coast. Many recent books, such as *Voices Raised in Protest* (2008), *The Triumph of Citizenship* (2007), *Nikkei Fishermen on the BC Coast* (2007), and *Hiroshima Immigrants in Canada, 1891-1941* (2007) focus on Asian immigration. However, while a significant minority of Scandinavians resided in British Columbia in the first half of the twentieth century, they are often considered to have assimilated too easily into the Canadian fabric to warrant scholarly attention.

Perhaps this is why Irene Howard presents her latest book in a form designed to attract a wider, popular audience. Howard firmly established herself as a talented biographer with her award-winning *The Struggle for Social Justice in British Columbia: Helena Gutteridge, the Unknown Reformer* (1992), and *Gold Dust* continues the theme of the immigrant working class. Where the Gutteridge biography follows a scholarly style of referencing with numbered notes, however, *Gold Dust* lacks in-text notation and instead lists sources at the end of the book, identified by chapter, page number, and a few identifying words from a relevant sentence. The advantage is an uncluttered text for those who are not interested in references; the

disadvantage is that it erects hurdles for academic researchers.

*Gold Dust* is a thoughtful tribute to Howard's Scandinavian family, taking the reader from Sweden and Norway to a search for either land-ownership or permanent work in British Columbia. We learn of "Old World" poverty, a powerful push-factor that convinced people to leave loved ones – even children – behind in the faint hope of later reuniting. We also learn how endless and relentless labour caused the premature death of Howard's parents; any bitterness betrayed in the book is found in the depiction of the Workmen's Compensation Board's reluctant awards for work-related injuries and Alfred Nilsson's subsequent death by silicosis. Here the text might have elaborated on why governments strangle funding to institutions helping ill and injured workers, which ultimately makes villains of the wcb clerks charged with doling out the funds. Such analysis, however, might have proved difficult to accomplish given the structure of this work.

The subtitle promises a *True Story of an Immigrant Mining Family*, and this is mostly upheld. There are trifling points, such as that Alfred's sayings seem more Norwegian than Swedish (perhaps due to the linguistic influences of Howard's Norwegian mother) and that the Prince Rupert "Norwegian" consul on page 214 is likely the Swede, Olaf Hanson, from page 76. In other cases, Howard's reconstruction of events is wholly transparent as she "take[s] it upon [herself] to spin" the completion of a story (103). More serious fictionalizing involves her desire to recreate her father's image in line with her labour movement heroes from *Vancouver's Svenskar* (1970), but this tells more about Irene Howard than about her father and his contemporaries.

She admits wishing she was “writing fiction” so that she could revise Alfred’s non-participation in the famous 1912 International Workers of the World strike (13), and she claims to “believe” her father was one in a group of workers whose wage demands led to a mining strike in 1935 (216). While such narrative impulses are wholly understandable, her story is already brimming with loyalty, affection, ingenuity, and persistence – all heroic qualities that need neither spinning nor embroidering.

Despite these minor reservations, the structure of Howard’s biography lends it a much greater usefulness than would be found in a simple family portrait. It is migration history, labour history, women’s history, and family history woven into one story. Through photographs and literary depictions, *Gold Dust* provides vivid imagery of working-class life and shows that the migratory pattern of BC workers was not restricted to single *sojourners*. Indeed, in search of work, the family criss-crossed British Columbia, even venturing into the mines of Idaho in the United States. This engaging tale is written with an ironic, low-keyed humour that demonstrates Howard’s deep affection for workers who often lost limbs and lives in building this province, and it will be useful to anyone who seeks a better understanding of British Columbia’s rich working-class history.

*The Law of the Land:  
The Advent of the Torrens  
System in Canada*

Greg Taylor

Toronto: University of Toronto  
Press for the Osgoode Society for  
Canadian Legal History, 2008.  
234 pp. \$55.00 cloth.

JOHN McLAREN  
*University of Victoria*

IN RECENT YEARS both imperial historians and colonial legal historians have begun turning their attention to the networks at play within the British Empire and the transmission of information and ideas within the imperial system.<sup>1</sup> The emphasis in this work has been as much, if not more, on the channels of communication between and among colonies as between the latter and the metropolis. Professor Taylor’s account falls into this genre, more particularly into those studies that track how legal ideas and institutions with their origins in one geographic area of the Empire were transferred to others, whether by the physical movement of individuals or by long distance communications within the imperial system.

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Zoe Laidlaw, *Colonial Connections, 1815–45: Patronage, the Information Revolution, and Colonial Government* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005); David Lambert and Alan Lester, *Colonial Lives across the British Empire: Imperial Careerism in the Long Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). The value of this literature to colonial legal historians is stressed in Russell Smandych, “Mapping Imperial Legal Connections: Toward a Comparative Historical Sociology of Colonial Law,” forthcoming in the *University of Adelaide Law Review* (2009).

The prospect of reviewing a work on registration of land titles, even its history, might not engender enthusiasm in every reader's mind. Any anxieties I may have had on that score were quickly dispelled. By combining sound and insightful biographical work on the major proponents of the Torrens system of title registration, careful tracking of how the idea of guaranteeing indefeasibility of title in a systematic and relatively simple way by treating the latest registration of an owner's title as dispositive of ownership spread from its Australian origins to other colonial and national jurisdictions, with the detail of the legal regimes themselves, Professor Taylor has produced a work that is both well crafted and engaging. The author makes no bones about the fact that this system of guaranteeing title is the best devised within the Anglo-American legal world. However, good ideas, even legal ones, do not spread without human agency. The extension of the system devised in the late 1850s by South Australian official, politician, and landowner Robert Richard Torrens within the Australian colonies was not difficult given their geographic proximity, the common problems they faced in dealing with title in hyperactive markets for land, and the relatively short period of European settlement in that land mass. Moreover, the Australian political psyche was less impressed with arguments based on the need to follow Mother England's lead on legal procedures, in particular when they appeared arcane and unnecessarily complex, than was true of that in some other settler jurisdictions.

The system's translation to North America, and especially Canada, proved more challenging. Not surprisingly, the first Canadian jurisdictions to adopt a form of Torrens were Vancouver Island and British Columbia, newly founded

as colonies and sparsely settled, in which there were few, if any, vested interests in the Byzantine structure of title searching that bedeviled English conveyancing law. In these histories the initial impetus for adoption seems to have come from personal connections, the relationship between George Carey, the first attorney general of the island colony, and Sir Hugh Cairns, the eminent English barrister, law officer, and judge who was an advocate of the system. The presence in the colony of J.F. McCreight, who had practised at the Victorian bar in Australia in the 1850s, and who was well aware of the campaign in the colony of Victoria in favour of Torrens registration, may well have assisted in the process of persuading local politicians and their constituents of the superiority of that system.

Interestingly, Taylor notes that events in British Columbia seem to have had little or no direct influence on campaigns for the establishment of the system in Ontario and the North-West Territories, which got under way in the 1870s. Plausibly, he ascribes this to the cultural and economic remoteness of the west coast possessions from the rest of British North America until the 1880s. The history of the attempts to bring the Torrens system to central Canada and to the vast prairie lands of the west – the North-West Territories and the Province of Manitoba – is largely an account of the activities of the Canada Land Law Amendment Association, a well organized and astute pressure group that vigorously lobbied the relevant governments to adopt the Torrens system. This alliance included representatives of money-lending institutions and interested professionals, including lawyers who understood the benefits of registration as a guarantee of the indefeasibility

of title. Its success in the west, where settlement conditions were closer to those in Australia and frontier British Columbia, contrasts with political and professional resistance and bureaucratic lethargy in Ontario. As a consequence, unlike western Canada, where the system took off in the decades after its introduction, in Ontario it was only in the late twentieth century that the system began to extend beyond regional application, primarily in more remote and in rural areas, and to expand throughout the province. Nova Scotia and New Brunswick have recently adopted the system, which now operates in seven provinces and the territories.

Taylor is careful to examine the claims made of other influences behind the Torrens system in both Australia and Canada, and to separate out and evaluate the various motives prompting its advocates. Based on this close analysis there seems little doubt that, within the world of European settlement where the Torrens system took root, it served the purposes not only of its commercial champions (the mortgage companies who stood to benefit financially from a simplified system of title registration) but also private property owners (an expanding group in settler populations) who were spared the expenses of lengthy title searches and the worry of less secure registration systems. Moreover, apart from the infrequent blip associated with the occasional difficult personality in the land titles bureaucracy and miscues in organizing access to the system, it has worked consistently well in the jurisdictions that have adopted it.

Taylor demonstrates the value of comparative colonial legal histories as a means of understanding the borrowing of legal concepts and institutions between colonial and postcolonial possessions and, in his

lively engagement with his particular topic, points to other possibilities in cross-imperial legal studies. *The Law of the Land* is a valuable contribution to the literature.

*Early in the Season: A British  
Columbia Journal*

Edward Hoagland

Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre,  
2008. 176 pp. Maps. \$24.95 cloth.

JONATHAN PEYTON

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IN THE SUMMER of 1968, aspiring American novelist Edward Hoagland spent seven weeks in the BC bush, interviewing locals, listening to stories, exploring highways and byways, and chronicling his experiences. He was gathering material for a grand novel, eventually published in 1986 as *Seven Rivers West*. It was his second journey north; the first, two years earlier, provided the fodder for his growing reputation as an essayist. He came to the Stikine and the Omineca mountains searching for something he thought he couldn't find in urban America. The journal in which he fastidiously recorded his experiences is published here for the first time, forty years after his self-reflexive wilderness journey.

There are, of course, many ways to read a book as visceral and episodic as *Early in the Season*. Hoagland writes with a keen sensory awareness. In this sense, the book might contribute to a phenomenological study of the experience of the North in Canada; the stark aesthetics, the pungent odours, and the varied silences that Hoagland invokes are all major actors in the history he is recording. This is

an experiential way of writing, a kind of anecdotal history that derives its impetus from serendipitous meetings with the old sourdoughs, hardened outfitters, and half-feral bush pilots. Hoagland came to the wilds of British Columbia's Interior because he believed it was the last bastion of this cast of northern characters. He is enraptured by the differences between the frenetic urban life he left behind and the simple, quotidian life of the North. But the constant presence of New York City in the narrative (through his personal and professional reflections) exposes the interconnectedness of the North and the South within modernity. This contradiction, plainly more evident in light of the forty years wait before publication, shows *Early in the Season* to be an important historical document as well as a manuscript of literary merit. Hoagland's self-imposed remoteness from his urban experience and the perceived lack of modernity in the North are constant motifs used to reinforce the marginality of his experience. This fits with the common popular narrative of the Stikine. Scholars wanting to explore the relationality of the experience of modernity or of place will find the book of real value. For Hoagland, place in the North is a contested object, where old-timers fight against the onslaught of progress. Place becomes especially unique when Hoagland brings his New York to live there as well. Indeed, the book says as much about Hoagland (the personal) as it does about the experience of the North (the external). He is a central and utterly compelling protagonist in the narrative. The amateur psychoanalyst out there could have a field day with his self-reflexive commentary on his impending fatherhood, his speech impediment, his sexuality, and his ambiguous feelings about his new marriage. Students of

race, class, and gender relations in British Columbia will also find much fodder for their analyses.

*Early in the Season* is a useful companion to *Notes from the Century Before*, Hoagland's other, more comprehensive, travelogue of the Stikine. It should also be placed within the canon of northern exploration literature alongside the works of Warburton Pike, Raymond Patterson, and Fenley Hunter. *Vancouver Sun* columnist Stephen Hume offers much of this valuable context in his introduction. Hoagland's work will be useful for scholars working in history, anthropology, geography, and First Peoples studies. However, *Early in the Season* should be read widely and critically by all those interested in the complex histories of the remote northern expanse of this province.





*Shoot!*

George Bowering

Vancouver: New Star Books, 2008.  
260 pp. \$19.00 paper.

MARK DIOTTE

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GEORGE BOWERING'S *Shoot!*, originally published in 1994, is based on the historical account of the murder of officer Johnny Ussher by the McLean Gang. Ostensibly, *Shoot!* is a western novel that revolves around the youthful adventures of the McLean Gang in the Cariboo-Chilcotin area of British Columbia during the late nineteenth century. Yet, *Shoot!* quickly moves beyond a simple adventure novel and becomes an anti-western by denying the romance of "the west" and, instead, ranging across myriad politically charged issues, including Aboriginal land rights, violence and racism on Canada's western frontier, youth violence, power of the Hudson's Bay Company, mixed-race relationships, and the death penalty.

While many components of the traditional western novel are present in *Shoot!* – cowboys, gunfights, a posse, horse-stealing, hanging – these conventions work towards a subversion of the traditional western storyline(s) of adventure, the establishment of order, and the dividends of hard work. The heroes of the novel are four mixed-race "cowboy" characters who comprise the McLean Gang – Allan, Charlie, and Archie McLean, along with Alex Hare – and who are ultimately executed in a group hanging for the tragic murder of Ussher. The adventure of "the gunfight" and the social justice of "the posse" are replaced by four young men trapped without water in a small, feces- and urine-strewn cabin surrounded by over

one hundred gunmen. Insofar as social order is concerned, British Columbia is described in terms of systemic political and social racism. Labelled "half-breeds," the McLeans are denied land and are excluded from both the white settler community and the surrounding Aboriginal communities. Framed by the historical events that led up to this murder and the subsequent hanging of the McLean Gang at New Westminster in 1881, *Shoot!* details the historical circumstances and pressures in western Canada that created murderers out of young men. Yet, while the social realities of the McLeans are horrific, Bowering does not suggest that these realities justify Ussher's murder; rather, he uses this tragedy to portray the larger population and socio-political framework as complicit in both the Ussher murder and the deaths of the McLean Gang.

While at times there is too much "Bowering," or narrator commentary, in the novel, the book's many strengths make it a must for any student of literature and history in Canada. Bowering was Canada's first Parliamentary Poet Laureate (2002–04) and winner of the Governor General's Award for poetry (1969) and fiction (1980).