

BOOK REVIEWS

*Fort St. James and New
Caledonia: Where British
Columbia Began*

Marie Elliott

Madeira Park, BC: Harbour Publishing, 2009. 272 pp. \$24.95 paper.

WILLIAM R. MORRISON
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British Columbia*

MANY RESIDENTS of British Columbia are probably unaware that the settler history of the province began not in the Fraser Valley but in New Caledonia, the north-central interior, a result not of the explorations of Captain Vancouver and others but, rather, of incursions of fur traders from the eastern part of the continent. Some might object to the title of this book, of course, on the grounds that human occupation of the region began twelve thousand years ago, not two hundred, but clearly the title refers to the settler or newcomer history, which is its main focus.

In the early years of the nineteenth century, fur traders came to northern British Columbia from the east, following the lead of Alexander

Mackenzie, and founded a number of posts, some of which grew into towns after the end of the fur trade (e.g., Prince George), while others, like Fort Alexandria, are remembered only by cairns. The fur trade was a major economic enterprise, with its axis east-west rather than north-south (only later on was it attached to the Hudson's Bay Company's (HBC's) headquarters at Fort Langley). Before the era of agricultural settlement it defined the economy of the region, and until the railway came through during the First World War, it continued to dominate the northern part of the province.

What stands out in this fascinating and meticulously researched book is the sheer amount of human muscle power it took to build a fur trade economy in the interior of British Columbia. When we read that a canoe brigade left Fort St. James (the collecting centre for the region's furs), carried its cargo to Fort William at the head of Lake Superior, and then from there to Montreal, we can hardly comprehend the amount of effort required to paddle canoes that distance and then return the next season with trade goods.

One of the author's heroes – if that is not too strong a word for a person who was, like most of the HBC's officials,

simply an ordinary man working in extraordinary circumstances – was William Connolly, a native of Lachine, Quebec, who came to New Caledonia in 1824. It was Connolly who, in 1826, first directed the shipment of the HBC's furs southward, via the Columbia River, rather than eastward, thus redirecting the trade axis of the region. He had to deal with all sorts of difficulties, including tricky relations with First Nations and the murder of two of his employees. Like many of his colleagues, he took a "country wife," but, like many other fur traders, he did not marry her. After his death, their son challenged the provisions of Connolly's will, a claim that the courts upheld in a precedent-setting decision.

It has been more than a century since the last comprehensive history of British Columbia's northern interior was written, and that work, though closer to the period, did not have the advantage of access to the Hudson's Bay Company Archives. Elliott's book, very traditional in its approach and tone, brings the wealth of this source to what will likely be the definitive work on the subject for the foreseeable future.

*Captain Alex MacLean: Jack
London's Sea Wolf*

Don MacGillivray

Vancouver: UBC Press, 2008. 376 pp.
\$29.95 paper.

CARY C. COLLINS

Maple Valley, Washington

ANYONE WHO HAS delved into the gripping, sometimes impregnable, but always complex world of pelagic fur sealing on the north Pacific Coast knows just what a challenge the

history of that subject poses. Then, to construct a biography of one of the most renowned and, depending on your point of view, notorious sea captains to have trafficked in that trade, and, finally, to compound matters with the fact that this trailblazing maverick of an individualist was the inspiration for a revered and classic icon in American literature, is to have taken on the proverbial Herculean task indeed. But that is just what Don MacGillivray, a professor of history at Cape Breton University, has done – and superbly. Seamlessly weaving together the divergent strands of nature, man, and daunting legacy into a deeply penetrating tale, *Captain Alex MacLean* is a tour de force that matches in its scope the towering persona of its subject, a must-read on one of our most compelling – and, in some ways, elusive – figures of the American-Canadian frontier.

Singularly charismatic and always larger than life, Alex MacLean walked into a room – and, in his case, it was likely a barroom – and you immediately felt his presence. Although he was a Cape Breton Gael hailing from Nova Scotia, MacLean left his mark on the Pacific rim of the continent. Most notably, he and his equally remarkable brother, Daniel, were there at the founding of the commercial fur seal industry, and they put Victoria, along with San Francisco, on the map as the principal sealing ports on the west coast. Daniel was in charge of the first sealing schooner to enter the Bering Sea in the summer of 1883, a watershed event that catalyzed a headlong fur rush that was every bit as vigorous as the gold rushes carried out on land. Both brothers masterminded the "MacLean Experiment," in which the use of Aboriginal and white seal hunters was compared, proving that

“Indians” could serve as valuable co-labourers in the trade. In a little over a decade, Alex forged a fast reputation as one of the most able and daring sealers in the west, running his ships with an iron will that perhaps only a Captain Bligh could appreciate, and with brother Daniel taking more seals than any other hunter on the Pacific Coast. However, Alex was also maligned as a merciless poacher who wantonly violated regulatory laws for his own selfish gain. When he illegally attempted to make a run on the seals on Copper Island, a Russian possession, and treated his crew with a callous, drunken ferocity, his actions reputedly generated the grist for the cruel and brutish antagonist Wolf Larsen in Jack London’s psychological adventure novel *The Sea-Wolf*.

As MacGillivray points out, it was the populations of fur seals that lost out in the end, although miraculously they have survived. Those besieged creatures, every ounce as vulnerable as MacLean was strong, fell prey to the ginned-up fury of an onslaught so powerful and ruthless that there was virtually no abating it until nations banded together to make strong international agreements imposing strict limitations on how, and how many, fur seals could be taken. It was through such acts of conservation that the vast killing zones of the north Pacific were ultimately pacified and the decimated herds were placed on the road to recovery and long-term sustainability. Not to know Alex MacLean and his times is not to know much of that story, which needs to be known in this troubled age of ecological stresses and the impacts that are continuing to be imposed on our vast marine resources.

It is said that the measure of a great biography is the extent to which its subject gets stuck in the head of

the reader. *Captain Alex MacLean* succeeds fully on that level. For all his faults and for everything that has happened in the long history of fur sealing, Alex MacLean stands among the pantheon of western American and Canadian heroes, and we are all in Don MacGillivray’s debt for having brought him back to us in such a stirring, unforgettable fashion.

*Making Wawa: The Genesis of
Chinook Jargon*
George Lang

Vancouver: UBC Press, 2009. 198 pp.
\$29.95 paper.

FORREST D. PASS
Ottawa

IT IS DIFFICULT to research and write about the history of British Columbia without coming across snippets of Chinook Jargon. Within living memory, it was the lingua franca in coastal logging camps and salmon canneries, and early twentieth-century visitors described it as a quintessentially west coast curiosity. Chinook toponyms dot the landscape, and for some today the language connotes a sort of proto-multiculturalism, as illustrated by the quotation from former lieutenant-governor Iona Campagnolo that George Lang has selected as his epigraph. Many British Columbians have at least a passing acquaintance with Chinook Jargon (perhaps having bought a car at Skookum Chrysler in Gibsons, spent a night at the Tye Village Motel in Port Alberni, or jogged along the Stanley Park seawall to Siwash Rock), and they may even know it as a hybrid trade language combining First Nations, French, and English

elements. However, the dynamics of its genesis and early evolution have largely escaped the attention of historians and linguists alike.

To fill this void, Lang skilfully melds linguistic and historical analysis in a fascinating interdisciplinary study of the formation of Chinook Jargon. He traces its genealogy not to the basin of the Columbia River but, rather, to Nootka Sound and the attempts by British and Spanish explorers to communicate with their Nuu-chah-nulth trading partners. As the centre of the maritime fur trade spread southward to Forts Astoria and Vancouver, so too did “Nootka Jargon.” Lang convincingly dismisses theories of a pre-contact Chinook Jargon, instead demonstrating that the adoption of Nootka Jargon by Chinook traders and the approximation of Lower Chinook speech by Boston traders converged to create a new language suited to the needs of the fur trade. Among Lang’s intriguing revelations is the role of women and children in shaping Chinook Jargon. First Nations women, he argues, were among the first regular speakers of the trade language, and he draws an analogy between their fate as wives or mistresses of European traders and the fate of the language itself. At Fort Vancouver, the use of Chinook, almost as a mother tongue, among mixed-blood children stabilized the Jargon in its now familiar form, as did the incorporation of French vocabulary and the diminishing population of Lower Chinook speakers.

The displacement of this first generation of Jargon-speakers and their migration throughout the Pacific Northwest transformed the Jargon once again, this time into a diasporic language and, most recently, into a regional *aide-mémoire*, an unofficial language for Cascadians. Given this continuing evolution of the language,

Lang’s rigorous study of the early history of Chinook Jargon will be a welcome read not only for linguists but also for historians of Native-newcomer contact and of the cultural peculiarities of the northern Pacific Slope.

*The Last Best West: An
Exploration of Myth, Identity,
and Quality of Life in Western
Canada*

Edited by Anne Gagnon,
W.F. Garrett-Petts, and James
Hoffman

Vancouver: New Star Books 2009.
256 pp. \$24.00 paper.

KEN FAVRHOLDT
Kamloops

THE LAST BEST WEST is an eclectic collection of chapters based loosely on the meaning and mythology of the advertising slogan used by the Canadian government around the turn of the twentieth century to attract immigrants to western Canada. The chapters reflect the essential themes of historical representation and imagery, but they go beyond a traditional and regional view of “the West” by offering a distillation of current issues pertaining race, gender, culture, colonialism, and politics. Although “the West” is vaguely defined, and is less geographical than metaphorical, the topics are decidedly western. Edited by Anne Gagnon and other faculty at Thompson Rivers University (TRU), with an introduction by Terry Kading, the book is the outcome of an interdisciplinary conference held at TRU in Kamloops in September 2007. The conference was based on the rhetoric of the famous

promotional slogan, and its papers reflect an academic audience.

The book is divided into three parts. Part 1, "Talking West," contains three chapters, beginning with the one that is most geographically focused. This is Rachel Nash's "Are the Rocky Mountains Conservative? Towards a Theory of How 'the West' Functions in Canadian Discourse," which explores the various interpretations of the modern west, particularly British Columbia and Alberta. Tanis MacDonald expands on this theme in "Gateway Politics: West Meets West in Kristjana Gunnars' Zero Hour," which, from a fictional work, extracts meanings about the West from Winnipeg to the Pacific Coast. Yajing Zhang, in "What Is the Chinese-Canadian Accent? Ideologies of Language and the Construction of Immigrant Identities," deals with the ways in which Chinese newcomers to Kamloops integrate into society and how "accent ... highlights hierarchy and justifies discrimination." There is no doubt that ideologies and attitudes permeate "the West" as place.

Part 2, "Peopling West," includes Kimberley Mair's "Subjects of Consumption and the 'Alberta Advantage': Representation of Wiebo Ludwig in the Theatre and Media, 1997-2005," which focuses on Ludwig's opposition to the oil and gas industry in northern Alberta and extends to global issues relating to how multinational corporations have exploited the rural hinterland. It also looks at how the media has portrayed Ludwig as an eco-terrorist, which fits into Alberta's mythology of being a rogue province – a stereotype that contradicts the dependence of urban Albertans on corporate employment. In "Unruly Alberta: Queering the 'Last Best West,'" Gloria Filax provides a counterpoint to Mair's thesis. There

are contradictions contained in the image of Alberta as a maverick province made up of a "community of rugged individuals whose very sense of self-interest contradicts the idea and well-being of the collective" (85). Filax argues that the Albertan mythology is split "through competing and contradictory stories" and unified "through dominant narratives" (94). In contrast to these Albertan views, Pamela Cairn's "Teaching Adventures in Seymour Arm: A Case Study of Rural Education" is a more traditional piece of research that looks at rural education in one-room schools and is based on interviews of teachers from two eras. While spanning almost five decades, teachers from quite separate periods faced similar difficulties, not the least of which was "feeling cut-off from the rest of the world." Completing this section is "The Roundtable on Defining Quality of Life and Cultural Indicators for Small Cities," in which a number of academics and planners comment on the ways in which quality-of-life can be measured in small towns as opposed to large cities. "Quality of life is something that defines a community, makes a community distinctive and reflects the uniqueness of the community" (157).

Part 3, "Picturing West," opens with Kalli Paakspuu's "Photojournal Rhetorics of the West." She deals with the interpretation of photographs as text and profiles photographers Harry Pollard and Edward Curtis and their iconic yet ambiguous images of Blackfoot and Blood peoples. Ginny Ratsoy, in "Re-Viewing the West: A Study of Newspaper Critics' Perceptions of Historical Drama in a Western Canadian Small City," focuses on plays mounted by Kamloops' Western Canada Theatre. These plays originate in Kamloops and have "strong

local content,” and Ratsoy looks at how they have been reviewed in local newspapers as well as at how reviewers and audiences have responded to them. In “Community Engagement and Professional Theatre in the Small City in British Columbia,” James Hoffman also looks at Kamloops’ cultural scene as well as at those of other BC towns as he analyzes the role of theatre in the life of small cities. The pairing of chapters by Ratsoy and Hoffman clearly relates to the concerns of the Small Cities Roundtable. Finally, Mervyn Nicholson, in “Babes in the Woods: Exotic Americans in British Columbia Films,” discusses the pastoral myth of British Columbia. In doing so, he focuses on *The Grey Fox* and *My American Cousin*, two Canadian films with American protagonists who find refuge in the province. This chapter, I think, is a fitting counterpart to MacDonald’s piece.

In the end, the chapters must stand on their own. While “the goal of this edited collection is to provoke and advance thinking about Canada’s West” (83), how each chapter informs the trope of the “Last Best West” is uneven – a common problem when putting together a book from assorted conference papers. The themes in this collection may not hang together as well as they should, but they do create counterpoints to narratives of identities and representation as portrayed in theatre, film, and literature. A theory about the “Last Best West,” as wished for by Filax, is elusive but worth searching for. As Nash puts it, “What we need is not the stabilization of a brand or a regional stereotype offer, but rather flexibility and slipperiness as we continually negotiate the West” (22). Although the end result is mixed, the individual chapters, touching on themes of representation, identity,

gender, race, and culture, are thought-provoking and ultimately useful in the attempt to rediscover “The Last Best West.”

*Never Shoot a Stampede Queen:
A Rookie Reporter in the Cariboo*

Mark Leiren-Young

Surrey, BC: Heritage House, 2008.

224 pp. \$19.95 paper.

JENNY CLAYTON
University of Victoria

NEVER SHOOT *a Stampede Queen* tells the story of a twenty-two-year-old university graduate from Vancouver adapting to life in Williams Lake in the 1980s after he accidentally landed a job there as a community newspaper reporter. Once he has hooked the reader with a suspenseful courtroom scene, Mark Leiren-Young explains how he learned to be a writer and the circuitous route that took him to Williams Lake. The rest of the book explores social relations in that town through telling the stories behind his newspaper columns. Leiren-Young’s broad responsibilities for covering “crime, the environment, labour, forest fires, Native affairs, education and anything else [the editor] could think of” provide the basis for a well-rounded account of community events told by an outsider with a “pit bull”-like approach to research (49, 154). Leiren-Young wrote these stories for his friends two years after he left Williams Lake, then he set them aside for two decades until he decided to revise them for publication – a process that included fact-checking the court cases and changing individuals’ names.

Winner of the 2009 Stephen Leacock Medal for Humour, this book is well written, entertaining, and fast-paced. I did laugh out loud, for example, when reading about the strike at the cookie factory and the unusual bear trap. Balancing humour with more serious insight, Leiren-Young shows how ongoing tensions in British Columbia between capital and labour, urban and rural identities, and Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal residents played out at the local level. Realizing that he was underpaid, and having the advantage of intending to leave town eventually, Leiren-Young refused to work during lunch and supported unionization among his co-workers. Although some of his characterizations of this resource-based town appear stereotypical (only two radio stations, western-style clothing, and a prevalence of trucks), Leiren-Young also delves into the complex lives of long-term locals and urban transplants. In addition, this book critiques the marginalization of Aboriginal residents. For example, it provides an account of Aboriginal people who died from exposure in the winter as well as an investigation into how Aboriginal people were affected by housing segregation and the exploitative behaviour of slum landlords.

Written shortly after his stint as a reporter, and allowed to rest for twenty years, this book has a sense of immediacy tempered by reflection, and it does not hesitate to expose Leiren-Young's own youthful naiveté. More important, in *Never Shoot a Stampede Queen*, Leiren-Young has the freedom to write candidly about events that mattered to him but that, for various reasons, did not appear in print in the *Williams Lake Tribune*. Overall, this is a humorous and critical account of a small town in 1980s British Columbia as seen through the eyes of a young man from the city.

Beyond the Chilcotin: On the Home Ranch with Pan Philips

Diana Philips

Vancouver: Harbour Publishing, 2008. 274 pp. Photos. \$34.95 cloth.

JOHN THISTLE

University of British Columbia

BYOND THE CHILCOTIN is a collection of stories about ranch life in a remote part of west-central British Columbia. Written by Diana Philips, whose father Pan Philips first came to the Chilcotin plateau in the 1930s with Rich Hobson (author of *Grass beyond the Mountains* and several other popular books about pioneer life in British Columbia), it begins with the building of a "home ranch" and ends some forty years later with one final cattle drive that was filmed by the CBC. In between these important family events are numerous and often nostalgic stories about the rise and fall of a family ranch. *Beyond the Chilcotin* is not intended for an academic audience, nor does it engage with academic writing. It does, however, allude to several important topics in BC ranching history. The most important of these, I think, is the way that ranching worked to resettle and remake an important regional environment. Other important topics alluded to in this book include: the critical role of indigenous and female labour on family ranches, the changing relationship between First Nations and several levels of settler government, the impact of irrigation and other kinds of technological change on agricultural production, the rise of corporate ranching, and the decline of the family farm. These are important stories to tell because they bear in basic ways on BC history and geography. But

to explore them would be to move well beyond Philips' interesting and often entertaining reflections about life on the range.

*Go Do Some Great Thing:
The Black Pioneers of British
Columbia*

Crawford Kilian

Vancouver: Commodore Books,
2nd ed., 2008. 160 pp. \$24.00 paper.

JAMES W. ST. G. WALKER
University of Waterloo

THE FIRST EDITION of *Go Do Some Great Thing* was indeed a "first" in 1978. No book-length survey of the subject then existed, and Kilian's volume was welcomed as an opportunity for British Columbians to learn of the contributions and tribulations of some six hundred African Americans who migrated to this province in 1858. The narrative began in 1850s San Francisco, where there were numerous restrictions on the freedom of black people, and the danger of being returned to Southern slavery was constant. The members of the black community considered emigration, sending a "Pioneer Committee" to Victoria to determine how they might be treated in the British territory. The committee's highly favourable report encouraged hundreds more to ship for Victoria during the summer of 1858.

Boomtown Victoria offered opportunities for African-American workers, merchants, and entrepreneurs. Many grew quite affluent, and they showed their appreciation for their new homeland by establishing the Victoria Pioneer Rifle Company to protect it against American incursions. Though

Kilian emphasized the contributions made by the original settlers and their descendants, his story necessarily included the discrimination they faced in housing, recreation, employment, and social acceptance. The end of American slavery in 1865 prompted many erstwhile Pioneers to try their fortunes again in the United States. Kilian followed the remnant Black community through this period and added a brief epilogue sketching developments in the twentieth century.

I enthusiastically reviewed the first edition in these pages (*BC Studies* 40 [Winter 1978-79]: 86-91). Kilian's explicit denial of any claim to scholarly merit dissuaded me from complaining about the lack of footnotes or the limitations of some of his sources; the absence of any contextual treatment of racism in British Columbia or elsewhere in that era; and his failure to analyze the Black community itself, its institutions, and its efforts to achieve equality. Since it was intended for the general reader I praised its style, its illustrations, its accessibility, and its challenge to professional historians to take the story further and deeper. Although there have been some journal articles elaborating parts of the story since then, the historical profession has not produced a scholarly survey to replace Kilian's. The amateur historian has therefore stepped into the breach himself with a "second edition." It has a new publisher and a back-cover blurb announcing: "This new edition adds vital information gathered by Crawford Kilian over the last thirty years."

It takes a careful reading to recognize that new material. There are a few changes in wording and, occasionally, some additional details regarding episodes and personalities already described in the original. The epilogue comes closer to the present. The type

is smaller and the pages more crowded, and a very few more titles are in the bibliography, although the scholarly articles published since 1978 are by-and-large ignored. Even the historians thanked in the introduction do not all appear in the list of sources. To compensate for the absence of adequate references, Kilian invites readers to visit his blog, <http://crofsblogs.typepad.com/pioneers/>. There are some interesting connections, but many have not been kept up to date.

Go Do Some Great Thing is still worth reading. It offers vignettes and personality sketches that support Kilian's general thesis that the 1858 migration proved beneficial to the participants and their descendants, and to the Province of British Columbia, where their contribution is still not sufficiently recognized. It would make a good present for readers of *BC Studies* to give to less-informed friends and relatives.

*The Rise of Jewish Life and
Religion in British Columbia,
1858-1948*
Cyril Leonoff

The Scribe: The Journal of the
Jewish Historical Society of British
Columbia, Volume 28, 2008. 204 pp.
\$20.00 paper.

IRA ROBINSON
Concordia University

THE JEWISH Historical Society of British Columbia is to be congratulated for publishing Cyril Leonoff's comprehensive study of the Jewish community of British Columbia from its beginnings to the mid-twentieth century as a 204-page

"article" that comprises the entire content of Volume 28 of its journal, *The Scribe*. Leonoff has evidently spent considerable time and much painstaking research in producing this book, which allows specialists and non-specialists alike to gain a more comprehensive picture of the first century or so of Jewish presence in British Columbia. The virtue of his book is that he has gathered and classified a wide variety of manuscript and published sources and placed them at the disposal of the reader, while attempting throughout to explain the history, laws, and customs of Judaism so that a reader unfamiliar with the subject would not be at a disadvantage.

It is one of the book's great strengths that it deals in a serious and systematic way with the Jewish religion as conceived and practised by BC Jews, and thus it allows those interested in issues related to Canadian Judaism and Canadian religious pluralism to examine and mine important data related to their subject. Another of its strengths is that it allows the reader to understand something of the nature and quality of the family, professional, and religious relationships that existed between BC Jews and Jewish communities elsewhere in Canada, such as Winnipeg or Montreal. The book has no index, which is a shame as the inclusion of one would have made this work far more useful to researchers.

The book's title lets the reader know that the years to be covered are "1858-1948." Fortunately, the author did not strictly adhere to the timeline contained therein and let his documents speak, even though they may have dealt with developments occurring during the decades after 1948.

Cyril Leonoff's great achievement in bringing together everything he could find of significance for the story of the

Jews and Judaism in British Columbia has succeeded in raising the profile of BC Jewry and bringing it forcibly to the attention of other researchers. Some of them will undoubtedly be inspired to utilize Leonoff's work in their own studies, which will continue the work of understanding this pioneer Jewish community in all its complexity.

*Victoria Underfoot: Excavating
a City's Secrets*

Edited by Brenda Clark, Nicole
Kilburn, and Nick Russell

Madeira Park, BC: Harbour Pub-
lishing, 2008. Illus. and Photos.
144 pp. \$24.95 paper.

R.G. MATSON
University of British Columbia

THIS IS A colourful guidebook to the archaeology of Victoria, both with regard to pre-contact Northwest Coast Aboriginal peoples and of the extremely varied inhabitants of postcontact Victoria. It ranges from a three thousand-year-old wet site, with remains of perishable baskets, to the historic archaeology of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities, to standing buildings (and basements), not excluding a leper colony for the Chinese on D'arcy Island. A number of authors contributed to this volume, eleven by my count, several of whom are involved in multiple chapters and/or sidebars. The general level of the chapters is appropriate, although there is some variation in quality and amount of integration with other contributions. Visually, this book is bright and attractive with over a hundred colour photographs and charts.

The volume begins with a general introduction by the editors and ends with former provincial archaeologist Bjorn Simonsen's summary of the current legal and actual situation of archaeology in British Columbia. Other chapters are arranged chronologically, beginning with prehistoric archaeology, then moving to mid- to late nineteenth-century archaeology, and finishing with standing archaeology (or, in one case, basement archaeology!).

I particularly enjoyed "On the Beach: the Wonders of Wet Sites," by Morley Eldridge; "Burial Cairns and Mounds: The Landscape of the Dead," by Darcy Mathews; "Buried Pots Recall Early Chinese Immigrants," by Grant Keddie; and "Under Victoria's Sidewalks," by Janis Ringuette. I thought the emphasis on nineteenth-century archaeology, including First Nations, Europeans, and Asians, was fruitful as it is unusual to see these varied ethnicities treated in a similar fashion. I also thought that the academic quality was quite high.

Some things did not work so well. The extensive use of colour could have been reduced and more emphasis placed on detailed black-and-white line drawings (e.g., a better map would have been helpful). Several explanations and illustrations seemed out of place, and a rather idiosyncratic prehistoric phase sequence is given. A set of references is provided (something that is often missing in guidebooks), which, for several chapters, is very complete and very academic; however, it does not lead the reader to more general and available additional readings. These are merely quibbles. *Victoria Underfoot* is an interesting and informative volume for visitors and residents. It would be very nice to see a set of similar volumes for other places in British Columbia.

*Comrades and Critics: Women,
Literature, and the Left in 1930s
Canada*

Candida Rifkind

Toronto: University of Toronto
Press, 2009. 280 pp. \$50.00 cloth.

CAROLE GERSON
Simon Fraser University

CANADA'S BEST-KNOWN female literary writers from the 1930s are all closely associated with British Columbia: activist wordsmith Dorothy Livesay, then a member of the Communist Party, who first moved to Vancouver in 1936; Anne Marriott, who was living in Victoria when she wrote her signature long poem, *The Wind Our Enemy* (1939), about the drought on the Prairies; and Irene Baird, whose gritty urban novel *Waste Heritage* (1939) was based on the occupation of the Vancouver post office by the unemployed in 1938. Hence, it is not surprising that all three figure prominently in Candida Rifkind's study, which effectively employs the analytical paradigms developed by French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu to map out the English-Canadian literary field during the decade of the Great Depression.

The major writings of these three women have already received considerable critical attention; what Rifkind adds is a focus on gender. Thus, she reads their writings and activities not only in terms of their political and socio-economic significance regarding various phases and ideological shifts of left-wing thought but also in relation to gender issues connected with the aesthetics of literary modernism. This is no mean feat, given that gender was not a significant concern of Canada's

Communists and Marxists, whose class-based analysis sidelined issues that specifically affected women, while the country's modernist literary patriarchs viewed most female authors with disdain. Yet, I was disappointed to find that, despite the book's subtitle, the fresh attention brought to these three was not enhanced with much detail about other left-wing female writers of the era.

This problem arises, I think, from Rifkind's critical methodology. Each section of her book opens with a detailed mapping of the significant players – thinkers, writers, editors, publishers, and theatre people – pertaining to its particular focus and culminates with one of her three key women. Beginning with the “third period modernism” of intellectual identification with the proletariat (Livesay), Rifkind then considers the popular front modernism connected with the Spanish Civil War (Marriott), the political uses of theatre (Livesay), and documentary modernism (Baird). These discussions are very well researched and informative, drawing on many ephemeral and archival sources. But because these fields of cultural activity were so strongly male-dominated, the bulk of the discussion is devoted to the men who were in charge, with the women entering as secondary figures. Discussion of the play *Eight Men Speak* brings some attention to Toby Gordon Ryan, but we learn very little about other female theatre activists such as Mildred Goldberg, Elsie Park Gowan, Minnie Evans Bicknell, and Mary Reynolds; New Frontier writers Jean Burton, Margaret Gould, and Margery Cleveland; and the intriguing Jean (Jim) Watts, who occupies more space in the notes than in the text. Rifkind's general discussion of gender issues is astute (e.g., her analysis of the appeal of social work as a career for left-

wing middle-class women). While this book offers much new cultural history and critical insight, I was left with the feeling that it inadvertently perpetuates the marginalization of women that it deplors.

A Verse Map of Vancouver

Edited by George McWhirter,
photography by Derek von
Essen

Vancouver: Anvil Press, 2009.
208 pp. \$45.00 cloth.

The Anachronicles

George McWhirter

Vancouver: Ronsdale Press, 2008.
100 pp. \$15.95 paper.

JASON V. STARNES
Simon Fraser University

IN *A VERSE MAP OF VANCOUVER*, Editor George McWhirter sets himself a compelling challenge: “to represent the city’s places and principal features in poetry” rather than to collect its most prominent poems or poets. The book’s coffee-table dimensions and gloss make it something of a hybrid in the world of poetry anthologies; while it uses a unique map-based organization for its varied place-renderings, a certain upmarket “tourist” aesthetic abounds. Still, many readers of poetry will appreciate this effort to bring poetry about Vancouver to a larger audience, even if it demands the accompaniment of the vibrant, accessible photographs contributed by Derek von Essen.

The collection starts strong with Pat Lowther’s “Vancity” and George Woodcock’s “The Cherry Tree on Cherry Street,” the latter evoking the history of a name by pinning it to local flora, the former a paean to the night-cloaked city as a massive metaphor. Essen’s photography captures attractive views of Vancouver, but the relationship of the images to the poems is one of mere documentation: all ambiguity has been annihilated here, leaving no interpretation to the reader. The poems are laid out as though they accompany the photos rather than the other way around, and, while this can’t help but detract from the literary imagery in the work, many of the weaker poems actually benefit from the photographic crutch – and this does not speak well of their evocative power.

Several pairings of images and poems would seem to be specifically for the benefit of tourists or out-of-towners: Lionel Kearns’s “Vancouver General” is mated with a photo of that hospital, and two turns later Bibiana Tomasic’s “99 Express – 8 a.m.” is helpfully illustrated with that very express bus bearing down on the reader. A general mistrust of the reader’s imagination is betrayed as George Stanley’s “Fire Alarm” is given the literal treatment with a photograph of firefighters rushing towards an apartment from their red truck. Show and tell would seem to be the *modus operandi* here.

But highlights abound: contemporary, experimental writers, including Michael Turner and Oana Avasilichioaei, paint with sound and disjunctive sense, not miming or merely describing the city but, through creative accumulation, representing the way the city presents. Elizabeth Bachinsky dares to imagine the eventual collapse of the Lions Gate Bridge, seeing it from up close as a massive machine

and “from a distance / thin as a hair crawling with pestilent traffic” (138). The opportunity to experience Michael Turner’s “1 a.m. this road, this way,” the first poem from his brilliant *Kingsway*, is valuable, offering the perspective of a local luminary of Vancouver’s literary history. McWhirter should be praised for collecting these contemporary, experimental views along with more mainstream fare.

Stephanie Bolster wasn’t exaggerating when she described George McWhirter’s own book of poetry, *The Anachronicles*, as one that “leaps from the sublime to the – perfectly – ridiculous.” This is a rather strange book, exploring McWhirter’s titular coinage, which melds “anachronism” and “chronicle,” and elaborating a formal style that hearkens back to Shakespeare, with pentameter rhythms and frequent rhyme. On the book’s back cover Gary Geddes touts it as “a wonderfully crazy romp through then and now”: “then” is represented by sixteenth-century explorers of the west coast, Hernan Cortez and Gonzalo de Sandoval among them, while “now” appears to be the late 1970s. The anachronisms manifest on the first page as the explorers happen upon a crew filming Bo Derek in the sexually decadent 10. The adventurer/conquistador’s interest in pop culture is piqued by Derek’s near-nudity, so the film-shoot offers numerous occasions for the time-travellers to absurdly comment in excited rhythms: “I believe / Our place usurped / By a pair of udders, not some English rudder, / and by thighs that stretch and stride”(11).

That McWhirter allows his figures of the past to view and comment on later times is interesting in that it redefines our usual sense of anachronism: something conspicuously old-fashioned rather than something from the relative

future. The quasi-Shakespearean form of *The Anachronicles* obstinately hovers in a bygone era, extending anachronism into the formal dimension. This is hewed to with a faith both surprising and silly: as much as Bo Derek’s bathing suit might be a temporal disjuncture to the sixteenth-century Spanish, the pursuit of Renaissance-era blank verse in 2009 is positively jarring as Cortez and Sandoval take turns describing “Bo’s bottom” (18).

McWhirter’s figures from the past are established as time-travelling ghosts, seeing but not seen by the new-fashioned, new-found future they somehow established. These contrasts call to mind the profound decentrement in any comparison of eras (what is right, real, or solid amidst so much profound change?). When the movie camera is described as “the black eyeball and socket / Of a Cyclops,” an argument begins as to how it transports the beach babe and whether she will “disappear / Into it.”

McWhirter’s efforts to poeticize the historical details literally written into our immediate surroundings in the form of place names will be appreciated by those with an interest in the idiosyncrasies that produced the first North American maps and early European land claims of the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries. The “view from above” of this history, the naming and renaming of bays and gulfs and harbours along the west coast towards Vancouver’s own Spanish Banks, creates a jarring narrative that nevertheless entwines voices in a same-sounding chorus.

A Verse Map of Vancouver and *The Anachronicles* are each a study in compelling, if occasionally unpalatable, contrasts: *Verse Map* is a relative of the tourist’s guide, a pastiche of work related to Vancouver accompanied

by overbearing visual cues, while *The Anachronicles* is a bewildering concatenation of style and content featuring an inspired conceit but lacking the benefit of an overarching concept.

*The Weather of the Pacific
Northwest*
Cliff Mass

Seattle: University of Washington
Press, 2008. 336 pp. Ill. \$29.95 paper.

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WEATHER IS A favourite topic of conversation in most places but perhaps nowhere more so than along the northwest coast of North America, a region that prides itself on a rich “outdoors” recreational culture and where storm-watching is considered a romantic winter pastime. Here, storms emanating from the expansive Pacific basin (and occasionally cold dry air masses from the continental interior) interact in complicated ways with mountainous coastal terrain. This is a weather forecaster’s nightmare: sparse information from the large “data void” to the west and the complex effects of inlets, valleys, and mountains give the weather an intensely local character.

In this richly illustrated book (281 colour illustrations), Cliff Mass draws on his distinguished research career in the Puget Sound area to provide a fascinating account of the weather and climate of the region. His stated objectives are “to provide a description of Northwest weather that is both accessible to the layperson and scientifically accurate” (8). In so doing, he “describes the weather of the

region stretching from southern British Columbia to the California Border and from the western slopes of the Rockies to the Pacific Ocean” (ibid.). In thirteen chapters, Mass covers the vast array of meteorological phenomena observed in the region in a highly approachable style that is always supported by specific examples and photographs (including rare photos of tornadoes). Covered in separate chapters are floods, snow storms and ice storms, windstorms, sea breezes, land breezes and slope winds, mountain-related phenomena, and even optical phenomena such as mirages that give the impression of “floating ferries.” *The Weather of the Pacific Northwest* ends with a discussion of the challenges of weather forecasting in the region, climate change and variability, and, finally, a useful chapter entitled “Reading the Pacific Northwest Skies” for those who enjoy the outdoors. With this material in hand, anyone can become an informed armchair weather forecaster.

This is truly an excellent book, and it would be equally at home on the coffee table, the bookshelves of people in a wide variety of weather-sensitive occupations (e.g., fishing, forestry, farming, and construction, to name but a few); in the backpacks of climbers, hikers, sailors and pilots; or even on the desks of undergraduate and graduate students. At its modest price, and in the absence of really useful, region-specific textbooks, I would suggest that there is enough in this interesting and accessible book to make it a legitimate choice as a required text in BC undergraduate weather and climate courses.

If there is a criticism of this book, it lies in its parochialism. Although entitled *The Weather of the Pacific Northwest* the focus is undoubtedly the Puget Sound area and wider Washington State. Most definitions of

“Pacific Northwest” are considerably broader in geographical scope and incorporate the wide coastal swath extending from northern California to southern Alaska and as far east as Montana and Idaho. It is fair to say that the meteorological phenomena Mass describes are indeed representative of the much wider region. However, a much wider market for this book (e.g., southern British Columbia) might have been opened up by the addition of just a few Canadian examples. A case in point is the 15 December 2006 windstorm that devastated Vancouver’s Stanley Park. This event is described in great detail, but its impact north of the 49th parallel is ignored (100-1). Further to this point, an enormous amount of research has been conducted in southwestern British Columbia, and it is conspicuously omitted from the list of research literature on Pacific Northwest weather (269-73). Given this, the book might have been more appropriately entitled *The Weather of Washington State*.

Geographical scope aside, Cliff Mass has produced a richly illustrated book that is at once entertaining, educational, and authoritative. It will no doubt become the standard to which other such books are compared, and deservedly so.