

## BOOK REVIEWS

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*The Reluctant Land: Society,  
Space, and Environment in  
Canada before Confederation*

Cole Harris

Vancouver: UBC Press, 2008.  
512 pp. \$32.95 paper.

ALLAN GREER  
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THIS AMBITIOUS book takes up the daunting challenge of surveying Canada's evolution from the 1500s to the 1870s. Cole Harris' long and distinguished career as a historical geographer with exceptionally wide-ranging interests provide him with unique qualifications for the task: the author of path-breaking monographs on such diverse topics as the seigneurial system in New France and the dispossession of Native peoples in British Columbia, he was also the driving force behind the *Historical Atlas of Canada*. Years ago, Harris also published *Canada before Confederation*, co-authored with John Warkentin, a very successful textbook that covers much the same territory as the present work. Geographers, historians, and anthropologists have produced so much

new research since 1974 that a simple update was out of the question, Harris tells us: an entirely new treatment was required. Given the accumulation of scholarship and the opening of new lines of research in the last three decades, *The Reluctant Land* is inevitably a longer, more complicated work than *Canada before Confederation*; it is also, for reasons that have to do with both the author's purposes and the state of the field, a rather unwieldy book.

*Canada before Confederation* was frankly and straightforwardly a work of historical geography: lots of maps, an emphasis on commodity flows, migration streams, patterns of urbanization. *The Reluctant Land* maintains that basic orientation but reaches out to history and other disciplines that have contributed to our understanding of early Canada. Like its predecessor, the new survey presents a panorama that takes readers from the fisheries of Newfoundland and the dyked marshes of Acadia through the habitant settlements of New France and across the trading networks of the western interior to the trading posts and mining camps of British Columbia. The account is rich, informative, and authoritative. Chapters on Upper Canada, Lower Canada, and the

Maritimes in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries are particularly bulky, while strangely, the British Columbia chapter is quite brief (did Cole Harris impose a self-denying ordinance to limit attention to his own research specialty?) and the Arctic is hardly mentioned. Empires, political projects, states of mind, and relations of power feature much more prominently here than in the 1974 book, evidence of Harris' (perhaps geography's) growing engagement with aspects of the past traditionally addressed by historians. There is even a concluding chapter on Confederation.

*The Reluctant Land* surveys the intellectual as well as the physical landscape; much more than *Canada before Confederation*, it presents the work of other researchers in the field. Occasionally, as in the Lower Canada chapter, historiography threatens to overwhelm substance in a somewhat disjointed literature review; but, on the whole, academic readers will appreciate this tour of the literature. Less useful are the occasional forays into "theory": here and there allusions to Habermas or Foucault drop into the text with a clang, all the more discordant in that these philosophers' insights hardly seem to have shaped Harris' approach to his subject.

*Canada before Confederation* was "concerned with the European rather than the indigenous inhabitants of Canada" on the grounds that these newcomers were the agents of change (vi). As we might expect from a scholar who has done so much since these words were written to revitalize Native history in British Columbia, the present book shows a greater concern to integrate Natives into the story of pre-Confederation Canada. *The Reluctant Land* opens with a brief survey of pre-contact Native cultures across the

northern half of the continent; and, in the chapters that constitute the body of the work, it has much more to say than did its predecessor about the impact of European exploration, settlement, and trades on First Nations. Yet, the spotlight remains firmly fastened to non-Natives as agents and subjects. The BC chapter, typical of the others, begins with the words, "Europeans reached the coast of what is now British Columbia late in the eighteenth century" (416). In *The Reluctant Land*, if not in lived history, Europeans tend to come first. This is quite surprising to anyone familiar, through works such as *The Resettlement of British Columbia*, with Harris' deep knowledge of First Nations history; moreover, his respect and sympathy for indigenous peoples and his sensitivity to the injustices and injuries inflicted upon them by colonization shine through in the pages of the present work. This is not a problem of prejudice or neglect but, rather, of literary purpose and narrative organization: something about the way this book is conceived seems to work against the impulse animating much current work in the field to treat Natives as a central subject.

Cole Harris is conscious of swimming against the scholarly tide. His preface opens with a polemic in favour of "national history" at a time when historians are busy, as he sees it, "deconstructing" national narratives. "There is no consistent, broadly accepted narrative of the Canadian past," he laments, and consequently the broader public "is hesitant about the nature of Canadian identity and the meaning of being Canadian" (xv). The purpose of *The Reluctant Land*, the author announces, is to reconstruct meaning at the national level: "I would like Canadians to know their country better" (xvi). The implication,

of course, is that the uncoordinated profusion of studies on particular places and phenomena, the Babel of diverse methods and incommensurable agendas, sometimes challenging received wisdom, more frequently talking past it and proposing new nodes of inquiry, all this “deconstruction” (to follow Harris’ very loose usage) does not help Canadians “to know their country better.” That is, not unless someone can rise above the fray, extract useful elements from the mess of contemporary scholarship, and integrate these into a unifying national story. Respectful of other researchers and genuinely open to the diverse range of work in the field, Cole Harris nevertheless wants to enlist their findings for an enterprise to which most had no intention of contributing. Hence one of the internal tensions that makes this a book somewhat at odds with itself.

The search for Canada in the period before the country was born causes trouble in a number of ways. The concluding chapter, true to the “national history” objectives of the book, consists of a reflection on Confederation. (*Canada before Confederation* had treated 1867 as a purely arbitrary end date.) But Confederation was basically a political arrangement, and so the conclusion lurches abruptly into a realm – politics – that was almost completely neglected in the body of the work. The title, *The Reluctant Land*, implies nation-building teleology in the long term – a vast terrain of disconnected settlements slowly and with great difficulty becomes what it was always destined to be: a transcontinental nation-state. In fact, the establishment of an Atlantic-to-Pacific federation, from the earliest discussions of the concept in the late 1850s to its realization in 1871, was a rapid and comparatively easy process. (Compare the wars accompanying

the unification of Germany and Italy.) There is little to support the idea of a step-by-step struggle from 1500 to 1867 to create modern Canada. The land wasn’t reluctant; it wasn’t even “the” land.

In carefully and thoughtfully synthesizing the literature on the various settlements and zones of colonization that would eventually be integrated into the Canadian nation-state, Cole Harris has made a formidable contribution to historical studies. I only wish he had been content to leave it at that, a series of regional profiles describing the antecedents of Canada, without trying to distil a national meaning from this collection of diverse and largely disconnected histories.

*One Step Over the Line:  
Toward a History of Women in  
the North American Wests*

Elizabeth Jameson and  
Sheila McManus, editors

Edmonton and Athabasca:  
University of Alberta Press/  
Athabasca University Press, 2008.  
446 pp. Illus. \$34.95 paper.

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*One Step Over the Line* is the second published collection of papers drawn from a conference held at the University of Calgary in 2002 (the first, *Unsettled Pasts: Reconceiving the West through Women’s History*, was reviewed in the Autumn 2006 issue of *BC Studies*). Among their aims, the conference organizers hoped “to generate conversations that would link and compare the histories of the women of western North America” (xiv), and this goal serves as the focal point

for the collection. Editors Elizabeth Jameson and Sheila McManus explain that “crossing the boundaries of national histories ... involves entering unfamiliar territory where all sorts of assumptions may be challenged, including unexamined assumptions about gender, history, and the nations to which we offer allegiance. Choosing to step across those lines means giving up the power of the familiar” (xix). In taking up the challenges of comparative and transnational history, Jameson, McManus, and the sixteen contributors have produced a collection remarkable for its synthesis, iconoclasm, and insight.

To the credit of both the editors and contributors, *One Step Over the Line* is a tightly integrated ensemble. The editors have arranged the articles into seven thematic sections designed to induce comparison. These sections address the challenges of writing comparative women’s history; the meanings of race and gender in the Canadian and American Wests; the relationship of individual biographies to regional, national, and transnational history; the connections between education, race, and national policy; the experiences of women who crossed the international border; the influence and experiences of women in the International Mine Mill and Smelter Workers’ Union and its Women’s Auxiliary; and pedagogical approaches to teaching the comparative history of women in the North American Wests. Within these sections, the articles have been sequenced to provide contextual material that enhances the reader’s understanding of successive chapters. Susan Armitage’s discussion of gender and race in the Oregon Territory, for example, provides invaluable contextual background for Sylvia Van Kirk’s discussion of the experiences of Charles and Isabella Ross’ interracial family

in Oregon, Washington, and British Columbia; likewise, Laurie Mercier’s analysis of Mine Mill Women’s Auxiliaries during the Cold War sets the scene for Cynthia Loch-Drake’s study of the 1947 Mine Mill strike at Medalta Potteries in Medicine Hat.

Editors Jameson and McManus also establish compelling connections between the articles. Their introduction and the synopses opening each section set the historical context, outline central themes, and emphasize important arguments and historiographical issues. These commentaries and the thoughtful sequencing of articles generate a high level of intertextuality. There are meaningful links, for example, between Molly P. Rozum’s and Cheryl Foggo’s (separate) discussions of black women’s experiences in the Canadian and American Wests and Van Kirk’s discussion of the Ross family; there are also themes that recur frequently in the articles, such as the meanings Canadians and Americans have assigned to the West.

As I read *One Step Over the Line*, I found myself repeatedly reflecting back on an article by sociologist and historian Charles Tilly. Tilly argued that social historians have two basic aims: reconstitution and connection. On the one hand, he wrote, social historians seek “to reconstitute a round of life as people lived it”; on the other, they attempt “to connect life on the small scale with large social structures and processes.” Tilly asserted that “over the long run ... connection must take priority. If social historians devote themselves chiefly to reconstitution, they will produce many bright fragments of dubious comparability and uncertain relationship. If they concentrate on reconstructing rounds of life as people lived them, they will miss the opportunity to address, criti-

cize, and modify general conceptions of historical development.”<sup>1</sup>

*One Step Over the Line* frequently echoes Tilly’s concerns. In the introduction the editors ask, “How do people’s individual histories, or the histories of daily social life connect with the histories of nation states?” (xix) Near the end of the volume, Margaret Walsh observes that “there are two sets of lenses: the male (and possibly the macro view) and the female (and possibly the micro view), and these need to intersect” (393). When those views do intersect, the extant historiography can be altered in fundamental ways. McManus opines that “women’s historians have always unsettled the past” (29), asserting that women’s histories disturb established narratives or, as Tilly would put it, “modify general conceptions of historical development.”<sup>2</sup> This, as Kathryn Kish Sklar has argued, is one of the great promises of women’s history: integrating the history of the female majority into our narratives holds the potential to change our understanding of all fields of history.<sup>3</sup> The articles in *One Step Over the Line* hold the potential to recast our understanding of major events and social phenomena in important ways, whether through Helen Raptis’ discussion of Edith Lucas’ efforts to provide correspondence education to evacuated Japanese Canadians in

British Columbia during the Second World War or through Cynthia Loch-Drake’s description of how the Medalta Potteries strike changed public attitudes towards organized labour in postwar Alberta. Indeed, the connections between lived experiences and overarching metanarratives are not only explored on a subject-by-subject basis. In separate chapters, Margaret Walsh and Mary Murphy explore pedagogical strategies for connecting women’s experiences with the most prominent narrative themes and theses in Western history. Their focus is on the classroom, but their discussions resonate with meaning for a practising historian. That a volume so intently focused on reconstituting women’s lives concludes with two chapters exploring the connection of women’s experiences to broader historical themes highlights the thoughtful editorial choices made in structuring the collection.

Having emphasized synthesis, it is worth observing that *One Step Over the Line* is often iconoclastic as well. In part, this iconoclasm is the product of the comparative approach central to the project. In Mary Murphy’s words, “using a comparative approach nudges students to see that history’s ‘unfolding’ is not a natural process, but is one of struggle and choice that can unfold quite differently depending upon the country in which one lives” (422). Human agency, Elizabeth Jameson emphasizes, is responsible for the differences that distinguish the American and Canadian nations (8). The use of comparative history to expose the historically constructed nature of social and political orders is nowhere more apparent than in Sylvia Van Kirk’s examination of the Ross family’s experiences in Oregon, Washington, and British Columbia. Differences in national historical

<sup>1</sup> Charles Tilly, “Family History, Social History, and Social Change,” in *Family History at the Crossroads: A Journal of Family History Reader*, ed. Tamara K. Hareven and Andrejs Plakans (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 320–21.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 321.

<sup>3</sup> Nancy Cott, Gerda Lerner, Kathryn Kish Sklar, Ellen Dubois, and Nancy Hewitt, “Considering the State of US Women’s History,” *Journal of Women’s History* 15, 1 (2003): 147.

experience, legal systems, and the timing of settlement meant that the Ross children's interracial heritage had a different impact on their lives, depending upon which side of the border they resided.

The iconoclasm that typifies *One Step Over the Line* owes much to the authors' devotion to questioning received themes, categories, and professional practices. Margaret Walsh captures the spirit of this approach in her pedagogical piece, emphasizing the importance of raising questions in the classroom, even when the evidence to resolve those questions is currently inadequate (401). Throughout the collection, stock Western narratives are challenged. The mythical Wests of young white men, the narrative contrasts often drawn between the "Wild" (American) and "Mild" (Canadian) Wests, the received history of racism in both countries, and the notion of the West as region all receive scrutiny and reconceptualization. The editors also draw attention to the social construction of gender, race, class, and nation-states, arguing that each has "been understood and created in different ways in different times and places ... among people with unequal access to resources and power" (xx), an observation that is borne out by many of the articles. Finally, in a remarkably frank historiographical piece, Joan M. Jensen engages in constructive self-scrutiny, reflecting on various impulses – which she terms fantasizing, romanticizing, victimizing, rationalizing, personalizing, and politicizing – that threaten to distort the significance, ideals, ambitions, and even the privacy of the women she studies.

*One Step Over the Line* is an important and meaningful addition to the histories of the American and Canadian Wests, and it would serve well as a college or university course reader. While there are

some important gaps in chronological and thematic coverage – which the editors acknowledge – the collection's superb contextualization of events, along with its persuasive challenges to the ideas, themes, and categories prominent in Western history, make it a potentially thought-provoking classroom tool and worthwhile reading for any student of Western history.

*Canada's Rights Revolution,  
Social Movements and Social  
Change, 1937–82*

Dominique Clément

Vancouver: UBC Press, 2008.

296 pp. \$32.95 paper.

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*Dalhousie University*

I AM NOT AS confident as is Dominique Clément that "the vast majority of Canadians instinctively see human rights as an inherent good" (9). It might be true that most of us value civil liberties, at least for themselves. But, as he argues in this work, what people actually believe is really best understood by examining how such rights concepts are expressed in action. "We" may share some very general views that there are such things as rights. But defining the content of those rights deeply divides us now, and the same question was hugely controversial during the period Clément describes in this very useful book. By examining the activities and accomplishments of four human rights associations from the 1960s and 1970s, Clément shows us how a small minority of Canadians helped to redefine as human rights abuses things that most Canadians in the 1960s and 1970s were used to accepting as the normal

operations of the state and normal workings of business.

In the book's introduction, he asks how effective the strategies of these organizations were. Over the course of the book, he argues that they were not especially effective, largely because, for the most part, the associations limited their activities to "briefs, publications, litigation, the development of position papers, and sending observers to protest marches" (208). They made little or no use of tactics involving broad, grassroots mobilization. These were "conservative" strategies, albeit applied to a project of change. While some of the rights associations were also somewhat conservative in their definition of rights, hewing to a civil liberties/negative freedoms ideology, Clément finds that even organizations that conceived of human rights in more socialist terms were confined in their strategies and, therefore, limited in their effectiveness. In his view, the human rights organizations, compared with other social movements of the 1960s and 1970s, were hamstrung by their preference for elite, professional tactics.

He also examines another explanation for these groups' modest accomplishments. In the 1970s, social activists disagreed about whether critics of the state and of the social order could be effective if their work was funded by government grants. Such grants were abundantly distributed by the Citizenship Branch of the Secretary of State, and, in three of the four cases Clément studies, the associations would have been unable to function without them. The fourth, Toronto's Canadian Civil Liberties Association, did well with regard to fundraising. It went on to stymie the creation of a national organization because of its view that to collaborate with government-funded associations would inevitably limit what human

rights advocates could accomplish. To assess this argument, Clément compares the tactical creativity, ideology, and challenges to state power provided by each association – one each from British Columbia, Quebec, and Newfoundland – and finds that all were at least as independent, aggressive, and ideologically radical as was the one from Toronto. In addition, he points out that large private funders, such as the United Way, could and did constrain projects. Careful comparative description underpins this analysis, and though Clément probably will not change the minds of those who believe that the 1970s funding bonanza built a certain fragility into the human rights movement, he effectively dispatches the notion that private funding is always more likely than is public funding to allow innovation and radicalism.

This comparative analysis is not the only reason to value Clément's regionally diverse case studies. To see how the general phenomenon of rights activism varied so widely by context puts paid to any simplistic structuralist or vague culturalist account of this important international phenomenon. Perhaps surprisingly, the BC organization defined its concerns more "conservatively" than did those of Montreal and Newfoundland. The human rights that BC activists defended were civil liberties such as free speech, the right to refuse medical treatment, and the limitation on police power. In supposedly more conservative Newfoundland, particular contingencies of leadership and politics led the human rights association there to promote the right to adequate housing. The sheer variety of rights issues in Clément's sample illustrates perfectly how little the general theory of human rights tells us about the history of human rights.

For students of BC history, and especially of Vancouver history, Clément's chapter on the BC Civil Liberties Association will be essential reading. The particular tensions of life in the Lower Mainland, with its free marketeers, Christian fundamentalists, communists, drug culture, and radicals of multiple stripes, is vividly portrayed in the episodes Clément discusses. I was sorry not to see any mention of the Civic Unity Association, a labour human rights organization that was funded by the United Way in the late 1950s and early 1960s. It may be that labour human rights work did not fall away in the 1960s as abruptly as Clément suggests. It is inevitable, however, in ranging from sea to sea, as Clément does, that local specialists will find holes to fill. I hope the work of more deeply investigating these local narratives will be taken up by a horde of honours and graduate students.

The more important vulnerability of Clément's work is on its right flank. Clément's work is open to attack or appropriation by conservatives such as Tasha Kheiriddin and Adam Daifallah. In their 2005 work, *Rescuing Canada's Right: Blueprint for a Conservative Revolution*, they argue that the problem with state funding of human rights associations, and with the Charter Challenges Program that followed them, is that the state should not spend tax money to support "rights" that are actually, in their view, "wrongs." They would agree with Clément that the advocates of human rights were a small group, but they would dispute his implication that there was a potential for a broad mobilization that this elite failed to deploy. If there had been, they would say, then the market and private donations would have provided the means. The need for government funding, in this logic,

proved the illegitimacy of the project. To respond to this logic, historians on the left might want to consider whether celebrating the grassroots versus the elite always helps to accurately identify the mechanisms of progressive change towards a more just society.

*Country Roads of British  
Columbia: Exploring the Interior*

Liz Bryan

Vancouver: Heritage House, 2008.  
192 pp. \$24.95 paper.

JOCELYN SMITH

*University of British Columbia*

LIZ BRYAN will be known to many readers of *BC Studies* as the founding publisher and editor (with her husband, photographer Jack Bryan) of *Western Living* and the author of *British Columbia: This Favoured Land* (1982); *Buffalo People: Pre-Contact Archaeology on the Canadian Plains* (2005); and *Stone by Stone: Exploring Ancient Sites on the Canadian Plains* (2005).

*Country Roads of British Columbia* is an excellent collection of eighteen articles, some of which are reprinted from Bryan's earlier works, and some from *Westworld Magazine* and *Western Living Magazine*. Each article, or "journey" (as Bryan terms them), covers a drive of not more than a few days (and most can be done in one day) along a less-travelled road in British Columbia: the appealingly named route "Soda Creek and Sugar Cane" (from Williams Lake to McAlister), or "North of the South" (from Kamloops eastwards to Squilax Hostel), or "High Hedley Circuit" (from Hedley to just past Keremeos). The result is not only an impetus to undertake these



extraordinary journeys but also an invitation to delve into the landscapes, geology, and human history of the province.

"I have chosen not to include a bibliography," Bryan writes at the end of the last journey. "If I were to add one, it would be longer than this entire book for I have, over the years, read just about everything ever written about BC" (191). The results of this lifetime of reading are clear. Bryan writes with an impressive but never ostentatious knowledge of the physical and human composition of British Columbia. In the chapter "Along Deadman River," she tells us that

the Skeetchestn graveyard beside the [Deadman/Vidette] road is a good place to stop and savour this unique and geologically fascinating landscape. The north-south valley lies on the seam between two separate land masses fused onto what is now British Columbia during the different episodes of earth history. On the west side, the relatively flat and forested Interior Plateau is bordered with basaltic columns, the exposed edge of a thick layer of lava that covers ancient bedrock formed during the Miocene/Pliocene era (five million years ago). To the east, it seems that all hell must have broken loose. Deeply fractured and fissured, the land dates from the Holocene/Pleistocene era (1.6 million years ago) and the river valley is walled with strange fire-coloured rock formations, mostly solidified from volcanic ash. (35-36)

Bryan writes about the recent past just as skilfully as she does of the remote past. Once mining had established

itself in British Columbia, how quickly human settlements arose, grew, and vanished! Again and again Bryan writes of mining towns such as Fairview (described in the chapter entitled "Sagebrush Solitudes"), just west of Oliver, once the largest town in the Okanagan, "with everything necessary for urban life: stores and livery stables, doctor's office, school, government buildings, two churches, a Chinese laundry and a jail" (143) and six hotels. Fairview survived a typhoid epidemic and a fire, but when the mine closed in 1907, after twenty years of operation (admittedly a respectable lifespan for a gold mine), the town died. Now, nothing is left. Not a trace remains of the lives of the doctor and his patients, the teachers and their pupils, the jailers and their prisoners: it has all gone.

Although Fairview's two churches did not survive, many other rural churches throughout British Columbia remain, and Bryan does an excellent job of bringing this aspect of the province's past to the traveller's attention. She writes not only about the well known, such as the Church of the Holy Cross near Skatin (described in the chapter entitled "Lillooet Adventure Road") but also, with sensitivity and appreciation, about the less known. "The tidy white and blue frame Church of St Gregory appears on top of a rise," Bryan writes in "Sagebrush Solitudes." "It is an old church (1885), but a little beyond it is an even older one, of hand-hewn logs ... which has been built around an even older and smaller church. Windowless and with a sod roof, this first building was dated to before 1860. The church that was constructed around this older core is of logs, once sheathed with pine planks. Today in ruins and open to the elements ... its stark simplicity is somehow more redolent [*sic*] of past faith than the 'new' church opposite" (141).

It is hard to imagine how this useful and beautiful book could be improved, though a few thoughts come to mind. A map accompanies each of the eighteen journeys, but none has a scale. An index would also be helpful, as would a single map of the entire province that showed the approximate region of each journey. These small points can easily be corrected in a later edition. *Country Roads of British Columbia* is an irresistible invitation to travel throughout the province. Read it, savour the prose and the exquisite photographs, and start your engine.

*The Archive of Place: Unearthing the Pasts of the Chilcotin Plateau*

William J. Turkel

Vancouver: UBC Press, 2007. 322 pp.  
Illus. \$85.00 cloth, \$32.95 paper.

COLE HARRIS

*University of British Columbia*

WILLIAM TURKEL grew up in central British Columbia; studied linguistics and psychology before undertaking doctoral studies in history, anthropology, and the Science, Technology and Society Program at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology; and now teaches environmental history at the University of Western Ontario. He brings this diverse, interdisciplinary background to the Chilcotin Plateau with the intention, he says, of understanding the ways and conditions “in which people interpret material traces to construct past events” (xix). He is interested in the “physical traces of the past” and in their various intersections with memory. To this end, he has organized his book around three topics situated in different chronological

scales. The first topic is mining and the scale is geological. Turkel treats the long geological evolution of the Chilcotin Plateau, and then his arguments focus on a protracted, expensive, and much-contested attempt by Taseko Mines Limited to develop a world-class copper and gold mine. The second topic concerns Mackenzie’s exploration westward from the Fraser in 1793 and the Tsilhqot’in people he encountered along the way. Turkel considers arguments about and interpretations of Mackenzie’s route, and then provides a history (extending over thousands of years) of the Tsilhqot’in people as well as a description of some of their ways. The third topic, which has a much narrower historical register than do the preceding two, describes the “Chilcotin War” of 1864 and its legacies in immigrant and Native memories. It then goes on to examine the very different accounts, and the protracted legal-political aftermath, of the death in 1972 of a Native man in police custody. Such is the diverse ground that Turkel attempts to cover with, to my mind, quite varying degrees of success.

In general, I think, the parts of Turkel’s book are more successful than the whole. The account of Taseko Mines’ attempt to develop a mine in the face of government regulations, the protests of environmentalists, Tsilhqot’in land claims, and decisions of the Supreme Court of Canada is a fascinating example of the challenges and politics associated with resource development in contemporary British Columbia. The failed attempt to turn Mackenzie’s route across the Chilcotin into a national symbol – *a mari usque ad mare* – is a powerful reminder, among so many others over the years, of the difficulty of imposing a unitary symbolic vocabulary on the diversity of Canada. The case of Fred Quilt, the

Tsilhqot'in man who died in police custody, is a poignant evocation of the racial bias built so long, and until recently so seamlessly, into provincial law enforcement. Even parts of the book that are entirely derivative – the account of the Tsilhqot'in for example – are competent, useful précis of current understandings.

But Turkel is interested in much more than parts. He wants to show how the Chilcotin is threaded together as place and in memory, and how the “archive of place,” and particularly the material components of that archive, contribute to this threading. He does establish connections across reaches of time – Taseko Mines' proving up a copper-gold deposit created tens of millions of years ago; an early Holocene waterfall's blocking entrance to a lake, thereby allowing its rainbow trout to remain genetically distinct (a discovery that strengthened the environmental case against the mine) – but all mines have long geological roots and many natural circumstances create isolated breeding populations. He does show that memories reach back variously into the Chilcotin past. Mackenzie's passage, as Turkel shows, is differently remembered. The Chilcotin War, and particularly the hanging of five Tsilhqot'in men, is also differently remembered, and different memories feed different ideologies and conceptions of history. Turkel makes these claims and he is right, but is that surprising? The point is familiar even in the Chilcotin; elsewhere, it underlies many of the world's most intractable conflicts and innumerable studies of them.

For all of Turkel's professed interest in “the materiality of place,” the actual physical land of the Chilcotin hardly figures in this book. There are a few trails, an ore deposit, a lake, a mine site,

a Miocene lava flow, a few very general, very sketchy maps, but not a great deal more. The archive Turkel has consulted is not the land but written records in various depositories. To be sure, the land is notoriously difficult to read. Footprints disappear or are overlain with complexities. But in a book that claims to explore the archive of place and insists on the importance of the physical traces of the past, the omission is remarkable. Turkel has written an environmental history without the environment; instead, he has a set of stories, all set in the Chilcotin, two of them having some environmental referent. It is as if the ground shifted during the writing of this book, as if an initial plan to engage the land turned into something quite other. Perhaps, from where he was writing, the Chilcotin was simply too far away, perhaps the context in which he was writing (the Science, Technology and Society Program at MIT) was more persuasive than the land he was writing about. That would be consistent with his conclusion that “the different ways a place is imagined do as much to shape the understanding of what happened there in the past as any physical trace ever could” (227).

In many ways, this is less a book about the land of the Chilcotin, or even about some stories set in the Chilcotin, than it is about the means by which knowledge is constructed. It shows that knowledge is not so much given as contested and that different contexts beget different memories and understandings. But who (in the scholarly community) now seriously disputes this? How many demonstrations of the increasingly taken-for-granted do we need?

Beyond Turkel's account is the book he somewhat proposed but did not write. Turkel certainly has the ability to write it, but he would have to take

the Chilcotin seriously. In so doing, he would need to reach much farther into the various ways in which the Tsilhqot'in and others have lived in this beautiful, isolated land somewhat detached from the main thrust of settler colonialism.

### *Totem Poles*

Pat Kramer

Vancouver: Heritage House, 2008.  
112 pp. Illus. \$19.95 paper.

SOLEN ROTH

*University of British Columbia*

THIS ENJOYABLE and lavishly illustrated book is true to Heritage House's mission to provide its readers with accessible and well-written guides to the history and cultures of British Columbia. Where *Totem Poles* slightly strays from the publisher's philosophy – and for the better – is that the book does not so much “celebrate the pioneer spirit and colourful history of western Canada” (<http://www.heritagehouse.ca/who.html>, viewed 15 January 2009) as it provides a critical account of the colonial encounter and its impact on totem poles as an artistic expression and a cultural tradition (in particular, see “Origin and History of Totem Poles,” 11–39). It is important that these dark episodes of colonial history be recounted to the general public in educational books such as this one, and Kramer succeeds in doing so without alienating her readers from the desire to engage with First Nations people and their art.

The core of *Totem Poles* is divided into four sections, respectively addressing the history of totem poles, their symbolism and associated ceremonies, and the

identification of totem figures. Kramer provides her non-academic readership with synthetic and accessible overviews of each of these themes as well as a short guide to the location of what she identifies as “authentic, well-designed totem poles and totem pole collections” (99) in Washington, British Columbia, and Alaska. Also included is a list of recommended readings, most of which are academic texts that were available at the time of *Totem Poles*' first publication in 1998, indicating that, regrettably, the list was not updated for this new 2008 edition.

Perhaps inevitable in a book of this format addressing a topic this vast, the text suffers from a few overgeneralizations. For example, at times Kramer's retelling of BC history is slightly misleading, such as when she writes about the anti-potlatch law. She states that, “in some cases, plea bargains were arranged” in which “the Native community could sell their regalia and artworks to anthropologists, or their elders could go to prison” (25). The use of the plural here could give the impression that this was common practice, yet the only historical instance of this was with regard to the 1921 Village Island potlatch hosted by Dan Cranmer (which Kramer describes), when the regalia was confiscated by police officer Sergeant Angerman and Indian Agent W.M. Halliday in exchange for suspended sentences. The very fact that this was an ad hoc arrangement not in accord with the Indian Act helped make the case for the return of the majority of these belongings to the Kwakwaka'wakw in the late 1970s and 1980s.

Also, while in some parts of the book Kramer can be praised for her efforts to distinguish between the cultural groups indigenous to the Pacific Coast, in other parts her text risks leading the

reader to believe that the figures she describes are common to all of these groups. For example, her descriptions of “Dzunkwa” and “Siskiutl” make no mention of the fact that these figures are originally specific to the Kwakwaka’wakw people. Without succumbing to cultural essentialism, giving more explicit attention to distinctions between groups would have served an educational purpose in line with Kramer’s active support of many First Nations artists’ efforts to respect cultural boundaries in the name of indigenous protocols and proprietary rights. Kramer is of course very far from being the first to directly or indirectly imply that the indigenous peoples of the Pacific Coast form one single cultural entity. In fact, anthropologists and art historians of the so-called “Northwest Coast” are largely responsible for the construction of this misrepresentation, one that some scholars are now actively questioning and attempting to dispel (see, for example, the forthcoming volume *The Idea of Northwest Coast Art*, edited by Charlotte Townsend-Gault, Jennifer Kramer, and Ki-ke-in, UBC Press).

One of *Totem Poles*’ most appreciable features is the attention Kramer has given to weaving into the pages of her book references to and photographs of the lives and accomplishments of contemporary First Nations, thus helping communicate respect and admiration for their living cultures. For this, and for the clear and concise overview of the vast topic of totem poles it offers, *Totem Poles* will no doubt be enjoyed by visitors to and residents of British Columbia who are looking for an introduction to this complex subject.

*Celebration: Tlingit, Haida, Tsimshian Dancing on the Land*

Rosita Worl. Foreword by Byron I. Mallott and essays by Maria Williams and Robert Davidson. Photographs by Bill Hess. Edited by Kathy Dye.

Juneau/Seattle: Sealaska Heritage Institute/University of Washington Press, 2008. 152 pp. Illus. \$40.00 cloth.

KAREN DUFFEK

*University of British Columbia*

CONCERNED THAT not all Native Alaskan children had the opportunity to learn their communities’ ancient songs and dances or to participate in traditional ceremony, the fledging Native non-profit Sealaska Heritage Institute decided to hold a dance-and-culture festival in Juneau in 1982. Their objective was to celebrate the Tlingit, Haida, and Tsimshian cultures of southeast Alaska. This first Celebration, which attracted about two hundred participants, has since grown to become the largest cultural event in the state, drawing thousands of people to the biennial five-day festival and prompting the formation of dance groups as well as the creation of new regalia throughout the region. The events have been documented through amateur and professional photography, video, television, and webcasts. This book adds to the mediated experience of Celebration, compiling 267 photographs, most of them by Bill Hess, into a kind of album representing the cultural communities and many of their elders, dancers, singers, and other participants.

Four essays by Tlingit cultural leader and anthropologist Rosita Worl explore

the historical context of Celebration, placing the contemporary gatherings within an accessible, informed discussion of ongoing attempts by Native people to assert control of their lands, economies, and cultural practices. These are supplemented with commentaries by Tlingit Kwaashk'i Kw'aan clan leader Byron Mallott, Tlingit/Carcross-Tagish ethnomusicologist Maria Williams, and Haida artist Robert Davidson. "The authors are Native artists and academics," notes Worl, who is also the book's editor; "and thus readers will see such words as *ku.éex'* and *at.óow* in lieu of the English words for 'potlatch' and 'property.' The English words fail to convey or embody Native concepts, and the Native words are used in the hopes of replacing some erroneous conceptions conveyed in earlier anthropological writings" (18). In this sense, the book celebrates but does not limit itself to celebratory discourse: Worl both acknowledges and problematizes the process of attempting translations across cultural, generational, and institutional boundaries – including describing the difficult decisions that had to be made by the Celebration Committee itself "because of the cultural complexities and sensitivities of integrating traditional practices into a new and secular event" (12). Moreover, the object-centred discourse that characterizes many books and exhibition catalogues about Northwest Coast Aboriginal art is here reoriented towards people and the connections between them, the spiritual and social values that supersede the status of ceremonial regalia as art objects, and the public context within which the preservation of cultural traditions is performed.

After I received a copy of this book for review, I had the opportunity of showing it to an Alaskan Tlingit acquaintance

who has attended Celebration over the years. She was curious to see how her experiences might be reflected in the publication, and she soon became engrossed in the black-and-white photos of earlier gatherings in the 1980s as well as in the colour-rich photos of more recent events. Almost all of the individuals pictured in the book are identified by name; she pointed at images of friends and relatives, laughing with pleasure at seeing them included and readily shedding tears at photos prompting memories of a beloved uncle since passed away or an aunt whose songs still ring in her ears. This book is highly visual and yet clearly emphasizes that which goes beyond the merely visual. Directed primarily towards an Aboriginal audience, it offers all readers an on-the-dance-floor picture of the importance of joy, memory, and recognition in affirming – and creating – community.

*Landing Native Fisheries:  
Indian Reserves and Fishing  
Rights in British Columbia,  
1849-1925*

Douglas C. Harris

Vancouver: UBC Press, 2008. 296  
pp. Ill. \$32.95 paper.

FRANK TOUGH

*University of British Columbia*

*Landing Native Fisheries* is an important contribution to the history of fisheries and a good companion to Harris' *Fish, Law, and Colonialism* (2001). This is a serious study that demonstrates conclusively that dispossession of Aboriginal lands in British Columbia left only tiny reserves

and that this allocation was premised on the significance of fisheries to the Aboriginal population. Empirically, Harris proves a locational correlation between particular plots of reserve land and fisheries, and, in this respect, he adds to Cole Harris' findings in *Making Native Space: Colonialism, Resistance, and Reserves in British Columbia* (2002). Douglas Harris provides a detailed description of "an Indian reserve geography premised on access to fish and a legal regime that had detached the fisheries from the reserves" (165). Federal fisheries officials were alarmed when the Department of Indian Affairs (DIA) began surveying reserves and allocating fisheries. Harris explains how the intent to set aside exclusive fishing reserves for Indian bands was thwarted by an unsound legal argument claiming that the Crown lacked the prerogative to ignore the "public right to fish," which he delineates by indicating its Canadian and English common law origins. Good information is provided on the rights associated with land ownership and adjacent fisheries. Aboriginal views concerning fisheries and reserves are well represented. Whatever the legal obscurity concerning the conflict between exclusive fishing reserves and the public right to have access to fisheries, Harris makes the point that Aboriginal fishing rights were not created by colonial authorities. Ultimately, through minuscule reserves stripped of adjacent fisheries, BC Native peoples were thoroughly dispossessed. Aspects of this process are captured by wonderful maps.

The basic findings on the "construction" of an Aboriginal food fishery, its subsequent regulatory marginalization, and the ascendancy of the industrial commercial fishery with the concomitant decline of Aboriginal benefits from this resource activity

are not original. Essentially, Harris confirms and refines the pioneering work of Dianne Newell in *Tangled Webs of History: Indians and the Law in Canada's Pacific Coast Fisheries* (1993). *Landing Native Fisheries* is a well researched but not an exhaustively researched book. While court cases and some DIA records are used to reconstruct the legal thinking with respect to fishing rights, Justice Department (RG23) records were not consulted, so the weaving of history with law is somewhat incomplete.

While Harris realizes that BC fisheries policies were influenced by a Canadian legal history that predates union in 1871, he disregards relevant sources concerning Prairie fisheries. British Columbia is not the only region in which reserve/community locations and fisheries are closely connected. Similarly, fisheries official S. Wilmot's 1891 investigation was preceded by his Manitoba commercial fisheries report, which advocated similar policies. The 1894, Consolidated Fisheries Regulations for the Prairies applied regulations to Natives "provided always, that the Minister of Marine and Fisheries may from time to time set apart for the *exclusive use of the Indians*, such waters as he may deem necessary."<sup>1</sup> These regulations *permitted* the creation of Aboriginal fishing reserves and, perhaps, some ambiguity in the legal thinking of Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) officials. Similarly, departmental discord between the DIA and the DFO was also very pronounced on the Prairies, notwithstanding the written language of treaties. The historical problem of legal recognition

<sup>1</sup> "Regulations Relating to Fishing in Manitoba and the North West Territories, 8 May 1894," *Canada Gazette* 27, 48 (26 May 1894) (emphasis added).

of Aboriginal fisheries would have benefited from a broader geographical awareness.

A strength of this book is that it tackles a problem from diverse perspectives (law/history/geography); however, as a reader, I was not left with a coherent explanation. While the geography of BC Native reserves is well covered, a better effort at reconciling history and law could have been made. Sound, but extremely muted, disagreements are indicated concerning court pronouncements about "history." Harris truthfully notes: "Recent judicial statements that Natives suffered no discrimination in their attempts to participate in the fishery are based on a profound misunderstanding of the fishery and its regulation in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries" (164). But did the Court ignore historical evidence or did it make such inferences because of plaintiffs' failure to provide alternate, evidence-based, historical interpretations? Harris concludes that the law turned out to be "a malleable set of ideas" that fortified "the position of the colonial state" and was not "a unitary and coherent body of independent principles" (191). This cogent finding, along with a historical approach to resource disputes, needs to be taken more seriously by those who litigate Aboriginal rights.

However, Harris sees the legal process as entirely driven by the state and for state purposes, a natural inclination of the legally trained, and thus "settlement" is the sole purpose of the colonial state. Jabs are taken at "private property," "colonial theatre," "state power," "settlers," and so on – all of which are the makings of a growing orthodoxy among Canadian historians based on characterization by narrative. Harris then seems somewhat surprised when he discovers that, "in this corner

of empire, the body of law governing relations between Natives and newcomers established over several centuries of interaction in North America and overseas, was all but ignored" (190). While the knowledge of why such a discrepancy existed will not be found in legal studies, *Landing Native Fisheries* is a significant accomplishment.

*Rocksalt: An Anthology of  
Contemporary BC Poetry*

Edited by Mona Fertig and  
Harold Rhenisch

SaltSpring Island: Mother Tongue  
Publishing Ltd., 2008.  
288 pp. \$24.95 paper.

JACQUELINE LARSON  
*Toronto*

THERE ARE MANY strong poems among the 108 contributions to *Rocksalt*, the first anthology of BC poetry in more than thirty years. The editors favour narrative lyric, though there is a handful of innovative texts and one visual poem. But starting with the title, there are puzzling things about this book. Considering that rock salt is common salt, mined mostly in Ontario, Nova Scotia, and Saskatchewan, it's unclear what the BC connection is, unless the editors had a rough "salt of the earth" sense of their selections. The very act of assembling such a collection presumes to offer something particular to British Columbia between its pages, but aside from place names and landscape, ravens and spruce, there is little that's unique to the province from a literary point of view.

I'm curious about the editors' motivation: why do we need *this* book *now*? The introduction explains that



they “chose to produce a snapshot of what BC poets are working on right now” (viii), and, like a snapshot, the result is often fresh and lively but also rather haphazard, if not random, in its composition.

Because anthologies have to choose some works and exclude others, they take positions on literary values, even cultural debates. I found it frustrating that this collection’s specified goal is only to “inspire a new generation of anthologies, like the ones that sprang up in the 1970s” (ix). So much is unsaid here, though there seems more than a hint of nostalgia for early CanLit nationalism – without any of that period’s political necessity. The last thirty years have seen an astonishing range of writing across communities in the province. From women’s writing inspired by the Women and Words conference in 1983 and the Kootenay School of Writing (which opened in Vancouver in 1984) to the groundbreaking Writing through Race conference in 1994 and the flourishing of publications that sprang from that event’s energy, innovation, and concern with social justice have intertwined in the work of dozens of BC poets, many of whom don’t appear here. In their statements about poetry, many of *Rocksalt’s* poets talk about writing as a point of access to mystery or greater depths or something otherwise extraordinary, so there may be an unconscious preference for the spiritual as a criterion for the work.

It’s encouraging to read so many new voices and writers who live in small communities or rural areas: they make for a bigger picture of the province. But the collection could have been much more coherent with a larger editorial grasp, or at least a better-articulated

rationale for the editors’ view, of BC poetries in the new century’s first decade.

### *Waste Heritage*

Irene Baird. Edited and with an introduction by Colin Hill.

Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2007. 291 pp. \$35.00 paper.

ANDREW PARNABY  
*Cape Breton University*

THE PROTAGONIST of Irene Baird’s Depression-era novel *Waste Heritage* is Matt Striker, a twenty-three-year-old transient from Saskatchewan. A veteran of the Regina Riot in 1935, which ended the On-to-Ottawa trek, Matt arrives in Vancouver by train in 1938 to join the twelve hundred sit-down strikers who are occupying the civic art gallery, central post office, and Hotel Georgia as part of their struggle for “work and living wages.” By the time he opens his boxcar door, however, and heads out through the city’s waterfront district – a “burnished maze of storage tracks,” “smokestacks and masts” against a “hard blue sky” – the sit-down strike is already over, its violent conclusion coming as club-wielding police drive the last of the strikers from the post office (3). Disoriented and somewhat tremulous, Matt meets a “sitdowner” named Eddy, who was tear-gassed and beaten badly in the strike’s aftermath, and together they agree to join the rest of the protesters on a hunger march to Victoria to demand greater support for the unemployed. From Vancouver to Nanaimo to Ladysmith and, ultimately, to the provincial capital, the strikers’ journey provides the book with its basic structure. Yet

it is Matt's interior, psychological journey – as he seeks personal salvation through love, friendship, and politics after years of “raw living among a bunch of boys” – that brings depth and complexity to Baird's story (219).

Matt's crisis, the author suggests, is symptomatic of modern life: an abstract, impersonal force – the economic collapse, “something you couldn't see,” “an injustice too vague and terrible to defeat” – has cut him off from the organic, intimately known bonds of home, family, and community, and cast him adrift, to wander in the anonymous, less understood world of “narrow store fronts crowded in close together, second-hand stores ... and the shoddy office blocks filled with advertising dentists and palmists and beauty parlors” (73, 232, 8). His wit and guile sustain him, as his fatherly relationship with Eddy reveals; so, too, does a fragile faith in a future with Hazel, his girlfriend from Vancouver, whose ongoing employment during the Depression reminds him of the emasculating effects of the economic crisis. Among the protesters it is Hep, a seasoned “Red,” who matters most to Matt. A confidant and mentor, he eases the protagonist deeper into the unemployed movement, insisting along the way that personal restoration will only come through discipline and solidarity. By the end of the novel, however, Matt is no longer optimistic about a life with Hazel; nor does he trust Hep, with his “cold wolf grin,” or believe in the movement, “the whole freak circus” (247-48). He is “numb” – his deep desire to be his own man reduced to nothing by the subordination required by collective action, the dehumanizing effects of transiency, and the near constant threat of state violence. In the book's final, dramatic sequence, Matt brutally assaults a police constable

who is beating Eddy with a club. A mob forms, a riot ensues, Matt disappears, and Eddy – desperate to leave the scene, the town, the life of a bum – tries to ride the rods once again, only to be crushed by the oncoming train.

Originally published by Macmillan (Canada) and Random House (US) in 1939, this edition appears as part of the University of Ottawa Press' Canadian Literature Collection. With a critical and detailed introduction by Colin Hill (which deftly situates the book in its historical, literary, and biographical context), and an informative set of explanatory notes, *Waste Heritage* reintroduces a splendid example of Canada's radical literary heritage and the era – the Great Depression – that inspired it. Baird's central preoccupation is with the complex interplay between Matt's interior life and the hostile modern world, with its “snarling gears” and “sweaty, fumey smells” (31) that threatens to envelop him: “Anger, excitement, shock, climax, anti-climax, they seethed in his raw, aching mind as the pain throbbled in his jaw. His mind did not try to deal with them, nevertheless they penetrated and grew, forming some secret substance of which in tomorrow and in days to come his mind was to be made” (56). Although the author's understanding of this theme is deeply pessimistic – Matt ends the book blind with rage, while Eddy is immolated by a locomotive, a potent symbol of modernity – her portrayal of the heavy psychological toll exacted by prolonged joblessness is moving. Crafted in the 1930s, Baird's evocative portrait is also timely, as the global economy once again descends into crisis and the ranks of the unemployed begin to swell.

*Svoboda*

Bill Stenson

Saskatoon: ThistleDown Press, 2007.  
292 pp. \$18.95, paper.

DUFF SUTHERLAND

*Selkirk College*

**B**ILL STENSON'S *Svoboda* is a coming-of-age novel set in the West Kootenay during the 1950s. Vasili Saprikin is a Doukhobor who spends most of his earliest years with his mother (a widow) and grandfather in a communal village in Shoreacres on the Kootenay River. A sweet-singing Freedomite bomber from the village, George Lazaroff, has charmed Vasili's mother Anuta. However, she breaks off the relationship when Vasili blows up a chicken coop (and nearly himself) with a gasoline bomb he had learned to make by watching Lazaroff construct his own bombs. This early turning point in the novel lets us know that these radical activities do not reflect the quiet Doukhobor faith of Anuta and her father Alexay.

Life for Vasili and his mother and grandfather takes another dramatic turn when RCMP officers remove Vasili from his family for not attending school. The provincial government sends him to the residential school at New Denver, which was established as part of its forced assimilation policy for Freedomite children. Vasili's three years in the school are lonely and unhappy ones, although a few teachers open up for him a world of books and learning. One young girl, Polly, escapes the harsh reality of life in the school by dreaming that a ship will come to Slocan Lake to take the Doukhobors back to Russia. Vasili, on the other hand, escapes through reading.

Stenson's descriptions evoke the sadness, regimentation, and brutality of life for the children at New Denver. As is well known, provincial officials allowed parents and relatives to visit the inmates for an hour every other Sunday. The sensitive Vasili is painfully aware of the children's anger and emotion on Mondays after visiting day. Through all of this, the novel points to the harshness of the forced assimilation policy. It also points out that RCMP officers and teachers at the school could be kind and decent to the children. When the school closes in 1956, for example, the teachers take great care to place Vasili in the proper grade in the high school in Nelson.

The latter part of *Svoboda* focuses on Vasili's and his mother's and grandfather's efforts to build a new life in Nelson in the 1950s. A local entrepreneur, Jim Sellers, recognizes Anuta's skills as a worker and eventually makes her manager of Hipperson's Hardware Store. As time goes on, Anuta and Sellers' business relationship blossoms into a romantic one. In the meantime, Vasili excels at Nelson High School. He enjoys his classes and works hard to fit in by dressing like everyone else, by drinking beer with his friend Kenny, and by dancing in a pub on Saturday nights in the nearby community of Proctor.

Vasili also becomes reacquainted with his childhood friend from Shoreacres, Lara Inikova. By the late 1950s, Lara and her family have almost entirely assimilated into the Anglo-Canadian society of Nelson. Her parents rarely speak Russian at home, and she wears the latest fashions and enjoys Betty Crocker cakes and Swanson TV Dinners. Although Vasili also works hard to fit in, he does not forget the Doukhobor heritage taught to him by his grandfather. We see this when

Vasili organizes and leads a student delegation to a peace conference at the University of British Columbia. At the same time, Vasili's Doukhorism takes the form of the quiet faith of his mother and grandfather rather than the radical beliefs of Walter and Sam, his fellow students from New Denver, who demand that he help them burn down the Nelson high school. Vasili refuses.

*Svoboda* brings together its themes of change and continuity in the concluding chapters. Anuta completes her journey from the Doukhor communal village in Shoreacres to the broader world of Nelson with the academic success of her son, which she has done much to achieve, and her planned marriage to Jim Sellers. Vasili makes love to the very modern Lara on the floor of the dry cleaners in Nelson while her boyfriend Arnold spins in an industrial-sized dryer. Vasili also looks forward to journeying to the wider world of Vancouver and to attending university. Finally, Vasili's grandfather apparently completes the cycle of his life, which has taken him from Russia under the tsar to Doukhor communal villages in Saskatchewan and British Columbia and on to Nelson, where he disappears on a trip to "heaven" in a plane of his own construction. Alexay's strange end somehow seems fitting as it reflects Stenson's broader interest in Doukhor responses to modernity.

While didactic at times, *Svoboda* is clearly written and reflects a solid understanding of its subject matter. Stenson nicely evokes the atmosphere of Nelson in the 1950s. *Svoboda* also makes an imaginative contribution to our understanding of Doukhor families after the break-up of many communal villages in the late 1930s and 1940s. Much has been written about the impact of government policy on the Doukhor community and on

its Freedomite radicals, but we know less about how individual families adapted to the changes brought by the collapse of the Christian Community of Universal Brotherhood in 1938.

*Svoboda's* references to the bombing and burning of property by Freedomites and its description of the children's experience at the school in New Denver points to the obvious tensions and struggles many Doukhor families experienced in the West Kootenay in the 1950s. The widespread use by Anglo-Canadians of the disparaging term "Douk" for Doukhobors represented another challenge for Doukhobors trying to find their way in mainstream Canadian society. Strikingly, Vasili does not reflect much on the treatment he and his family received from the government and wider society. His eventual response to all that happens to him is simply that he is proud to be a Doukhor. I enjoyed getting to know him in the pages of *Svoboda*.

### *Reena: A Father's Story*

Manjit Virk

Vancouver: Heritage House, 2008.  
172 pp. \$29.95 cloth.

MARGARET WRIGHT

*University of British Columbia*

THERE WILL BE few people in British Columbia who are unfamiliar with Reena Virk's name. In *Reena: A Father's Story*, Manjit Virk tries to give what, in his view, is a more accurate depiction of his daughter's life and death, and of himself as her father, than has so far been offered. It is a first-person account rather than an objective analysis. As such, it has something to offer those of us who study these events from an academic distance.

Initially, Manjit Virk details his early life in India, the circumstances surrounding his migration to Canada, and the process through which he melded Canadian and Indian culture. The remainder of the book is a moving document of his continuing struggle to understand what happened to his daughter, to himself, and to his family.

In Chapter 6, Virk begins to describe Reena's developing rebellious behaviour. He describes her rapid growth as an early adolescent and the bullying she experienced as a result. He voices his frustration about her school's failure to help her and documents his struggles to find a viable solution to the problem, including contemplating moving back to India for a time. He then describes how Reena made contact with a group of kids in a park, how he and his wife objected because the kids smoked, and the resultant power struggle that ended with Reena in the care of the government after she made a claim of abuse. He talks about what it was like to be charged with sexual abuse, to spend the night in jail, and to cope with his public and private life after that allegation. He also talks about how he was later exonerated. He is very critical of the Ministry for Children and Families. Throughout his account, Virk describes his attempts to understand why his daughter would lie about him and why people in authority would believe her, why they would not see through her claim to a child in pain and a family that needed a different kind of help than what they were offered.

Some of the most compelling parts of the book involve Virk's accounts of living with the media reaction to his daughter's murder. He describes what it was like being subjected to speculation as to why his daughter had been murdered as well as being somehow judged to be vicariously responsible.

This book offers a vivid depiction of a father's pain on the death of his child and of his hopes and dreams for her. It provides an overwhelming sense of a father who is struggling to figure out what happened and why.

*Nechako Country: In the Footsteps of Bert Irvine*

June Wood

Vancouver: Heritage House, 2007.  
176 pp. Illus. \$17.95 paper.

JAMES TIRRUL-JONES

*Railway and Forestry Museum*

THIS PERSONAL history is written in concise and readable prose. It is an account of the life of Bert Irvine, an oil worker, soldier, carpenter, trapper, and wilderness guide who chose to live close to nature. The story spans the years from 1934 to 2005 while focusing on the time spent in the upper Nechako country after 1953. The biography comes alive as Wood introduces the reader to a community populated by "serious homesteaders ... draft dodgers, deserters and trappers" (41). The book is richly illustrated with photos that show the intimate and everyday life of Bert Irvine's family and friends. Three of the five maps show significant changes to the settlement within the upper Nechako country.

In a CBC interview in 2007, June Wood said that the family never got sick. Every page reflects this health and the "indomitable Spirit," as Wood calls it, of Bert Irvine. The stock struggle of life is not found here; instead, what is illustrated is a way of living that is personal and fulfilling.

Woven into this tapestry of a wilderness adventure is the reality

of a greater technological world. By 1953, oil exploration was coming into the wilderness areas of Alberta. That year the family moved from Barrhead, Alberta, to Vanderhoof, British Columbia. The Alcan Project was nearly complete by then, and the Kenney Dam had already been built right in the backyard of the new trapline that Irvine purchased in 1954. "I often lay huddled in bed wondering if the Russians were coming to bomb the Kenney Dam" (69). This subtext makes the book real and relevant to the lives of all of us here in British Columbia. The consequences of major logging, industrial, and energy development are best understood by reading a book like this one that lets us both know and feel how the environment has been changed and continues to change at an ever more rapid pace.

*Stranger Wycott's Place: Stories  
from the Cariboo-Chilcotin*

John Schreiber

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

SEAN CARLETON

*Simon Fraser University*

JOHN SCHREIBER'S book reminds us that British Columbia's landscape is defined and haunted by stories from the colonial past. As a self-proclaimed "ragamuffin out of the bush" (12), Schreiber's narrative takes the unconventional form of a walking journey through the south-central region of British Columbia, along the way exploring a variety of historical myths and legends about "wildness," conflict, colonialism, and a strange man named William Walter Wycott. Aiming

to give the reader an environmental and historical awareness of the Cariboo-Chilcotin area, Schreiber argues that embracing a strong sense of place is important, as it is only "through learning where we are, [that] we may learn who we are" (11). *Stranger Wycott's Place* succeeds in cultivating an appreciation for the power of space, place, and myth in the ongoing history of British Columbia.

Schreiber demonstrates a deep respect for the past and a firm understanding of the tensions between indigenous peoples and invading settlers in British Columbia. For example, he refers to McGowan's War, the 1858 Fraser Canyon War, and the 1864 Chilcotin War. Although for the most part discussing these conflicts from the perspective of settlers, Schreiber is careful to highlight the agency of indigenous peoples, noting that "the natives of the canyon, no strangers to struggles over territory, and numerous, fought back with vigour; it was their home ground after all" (21). In contrast to the many works that blindly celebrate the lives and accomplishments of those newcomers who "settled" indigenous territories, Schreiber attempts to complicate our understanding of what it means to remember colonialism. Yet, despite this attempt, Schreiber's "stories from the Cariboo-Chilcotin" are still couched in colonial understandings of the region's past, present, and future – understandings that do not adequately address indigenous perspectives.

In addition to discussions of historical events and the awe-inspiring landscapes and wildlife of the Cariboo-Chilcotin area, *Stranger Wycott's Place* examines a number of memorable characters. For example, there is Annie Zetko York, an intelligent woman of "mixed ancestry," who was chosen by her indigenous Nlaka'pamux elders to be a "carrier

of the old knowings” (22); and Lillie Skinner, or “Chiwid” – “Chickadee” – a wandering indigenous woman who took to living in the woods by herself after a traumatic event. Yet, by far the most powerful and mysterious character is Stranger Wycott – nicknamed “Stranger” for his habit of calling people by that same name. Born in Ontario in 1836, Wycott, like so many others, came to British Columbia via California during the gold rush years. While little is known about this first-generation colonist, Schreiber pieces together fragmented stories from Wycott’s past, allowing the reader brief glimpses into the life of this intriguing historical actor. Perhaps most captivating about Stranger Wycott is his relationship with an indigenous woman, Matthilda “Maggie” Kwonsenak, and the confusing details of his domestic life in colonial British Columbia. Schreiber’s discussion of Stranger Wycott’s interracial family dynamics is the strongest and most fascinating part of the book and is a significant contribution to the larger discussion about the importance of such relationships to the making of British Columbia.

As part of New Star Book’s Transmontanus series, *Stranger Wycott’s Place* lives up to the series’ promise to publish works on the more unusual aspects of British Columbia. From stories of Wycott asking a high society woman if she “ever had the piles” (97), to tales of his wild steers barging into a saloon in Barkerville, and his sewing of nine \$100 bills into his long underwear before he died, Stranger Wycott is definitely a mysterious character from our past. Yet Schreiber’s book could have done more to challenge the way in which stories about colonialism are told. In *Stranger Wycott’s Place* indigenous peoples are still located on the margins – graveyards on the

side of the road, absent or nameless in mentions of colonial conflict. Even Maggie Kwonsenak is presented simply as Wycott’s silent, childbearing partner. Thus, while *Stranger Wycott’s Place* is an interesting contribution to BC historiography, it is also an important reminder that the mythical stories of colonialism are – despite our best intentions – still entwined with colonial ways of thinking about and representing the past.

