

critical chestnut the relative merits of realism on one hand and a more advanced kind of prose on the other. Sproxton claims that Tefs the novelist is doing what he champions as a critic, "playing with the conventions and expectations of the realist tradition." Diehl-Jones wishes that Birdsell would play more, and claims that her failure to do so results in her production of stories only, not fictions.

Two of the essays take offbeat approaches that have great potential. Wayne Tef's quirky "Thirteen Ways of Looking at Pat Friesen" is divided into the number of sections indicated. This strategy encourages Tefs to make more approaches to the writer's work than are found in most critical essays. I would like to see him try this method on a writer he does not know personally: he treads too softly in this piece. Herb Weil is somewhat tentative in his essay on narrative control in stories by Carol Shields, but his approach is also promising. He obviously knows reader response and narrative theory, but he avoids cluttering his essay with it as he focusses on the evanescent range of tones in Shields's stories.

David Arnason's analysis of Robert Kroetsch's *Seed Catalogue* is unabashedly, and usefully, informed by theory. This is to be expected, for he demonstrates that Kroetsch's seminal poem is, among other things, a post-structuralist critical essay. Arnason's contribution will sit easily in the ever-growing body of criticism on prairie writing's *éminence grise*. In the same critical vein, Debbie D'Aoust writes a solid essay on Dennis Cooley's *Bloody Jack* as a decentring, de-privileging, Bakhtinian exercise. This description may make the essay sound dessicating, but it is not. Cooley's humour, invention, and generosity shine through the sophisticated critical screen.

These qualities are even more apparent in my favourite essay among the ten, Cooley's analysis of Birk Sproxton's *Headframe*. It is easy to see why he has some reputation as a teacher: He makes the text available as he teases it open before our very eyes and ears. He makes palpable the "lovely feel of words as they take on heft." As should be apparent above, this collection contains many kinds of critical essay. Cooley's is an enticement to get Sproxton's book and see what all the fun and skill is about. While not every essay works that way, corporately they do. And while not every significant Manitoba writer is represented (why, for example, no essay on David Williams?), it is clear that Manitoba writers should more often be part of the reputation-making critical machine.

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The English River Book: A North West Company Journal and Account Book of 1786, edited by Harry W. Duckworth. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1990. Pp 212.

The paucity of archival and published documents from the North West Company traders' viewpoint is certainly a problem in writing fur trade and

Native history. This publication, volume 1 of the Rupert's Land Record Society Series (edited by Jennifer S. Brown), includes an introduction by the editor, Harry W. Duckworth, a short Cree trading vocabulary, a journal which runs through the months of April and May 1786, and some accounting records for the employees of the North West Company (NWC). The most significant section of this book is the editor's appendixes which provide bibliographic information on the Indians mentioned in the journal and the NWC voyageurs and traders. This book is very attractive, but the inclusion of the map after the editor's introduction seems to be more of a misplaced afterthought. The Cree trading words have been cross-referenced to other early Cree vocabularies kept by traders. However, the use of two different referencing systems (historical endnotes and social science) looks inconsistent.

The introduction provides some useful information on the early development of Montreal fur trade interests in the region known as the English River district (Churchill and Athabasca country). The interest in these historical documents is explained: "the publication of the English River Book in its entirety will be of value to historians of the early northwest fur trade" (p.xii). Apparently it affords a "uniquely early glimpse" and "many vivid details which enrich our understanding of how the fur trade was established in that region" (pp. xi-xii). Duckworth claims that this document has been missed by historians, although A.S. Morton was aware of this document, since he identified Cuthbert Grant as the writer. The introduction fails to place these new documents in the context of the current and divergent thinking about the subarctic fur trade. This is not to suggest that the author is not aware of the historiography of the fur trade, more likely, the actual content of these documents is so insignificant that it provides little material to support either new or existing interpretations. Certainly, the editor was not able to suggest that our thinking about the Montreal traders was in need of revision. While Duckworth states that A.S. Morton's *History of the Canadian West* did not make use of the English River records, he provides no reason why this document should have influenced Morton's interpretation of western Canadian history.

A flood seems to be the major event during the two months of the journal. Because the journal covers the spring, the comings and goings of Indian trade groups are noted. Thus one of the two important trade times of the year has been put on record. However, without the other ten months, an annual seasonal cycle cannot be constructed. We cannot get a feel for the pulse of life from such a fragmentary daily journal. The accounting records do not concern the Indian trade and do not contain a great deal of information. The names, wages, and sundry expenses of the NWC employees are recorded in a credit/debit format. By abstracting a price list of some of the trade goods purchased and by attempting to compare the prices charged in the English River district with prices paid in Lac la Pluie and Grand Portage, Duckworth made a good start at extracting information from the accounts. The layout of these accounts, as anyone who opens the book will see, is a great waste of paper. (Most of the men's accounts take up less than

half the page allocated.) A horizontal layout of these accounts would have provided for a more compact format. The antiquity of these NWC fragments seems to be the main reason for this publication.

The most interesting part of this volume is Duckworth's own research, which need not have been placed in the appendixes. He has used primary historical records to build up the biographies of the traders, voyageurs and Indians mentioned in the journal or accounts. By including the Indians named in the journal, the editor has demonstrated that all the groups that made up fur trade society could be better understood through the creation of individual biographies. Certainly the entries for Aubuchon, Boyer, Cardinal, Coté, Doucette, Dumas, Durrocher, Laliberté, Lavallé, Lesieur, Letendre, Piché, Primeau and Roy are valuable for anyone interested in the French Métis of northern Saskatchewan. Clearly, some Métis will find that Duckworth's information and sources are a useful guide for genealogical research. Duckworth has linked some of these individuals back to Quebec and has made use of parish records. As one might expect with such historical fragments, the connection between what may have been the same individual in entirely different record groups can be uncertain. Frequently the editor's "link" is surrounded by qualifiers such as "may be," "conceivably," "probably," or "perhaps." Generally the reasons for his ambiguity are not given, as no doubt the text would have become too cumbersome. Endnotes could have been used for the discursive details explaining why such and such an individual is or is not the same individual identified in other historical records. Moreover, endnotes to these appendixes would have allowed the editor to share his research procedures with the reader. Two names, from the English River records, LaFrance and Lesieur, might have been discussed further. (A Joseph LaFrance traded in the northwest in 1749; and a Touissant Lussier assisted Louis Riel, Junior during the events of 1869/70 at Red River.) Otherwise, the research appears to have been developed by considerable tedious work.

As an historical document, it is not immediately clear why the Rupert's Land Record Society Series would devote its efforts to such a topic. The appeal seems to be largely antiquarian. Some new facts have been made available. A more useful approach would have been to format the publication as a document monograph. Thus the editor's research on the individuals could have been more prominent. The biographies indicate one way to extend the original document. More could have been done with the accounting records. Simple tabular summaries, based on descriptive statistics might have revealed some patterns about the social relationship between the traders and their employees. Although I have used fur trade accounting records and would therefore find some excitement where most do not, the English River accounts are really quite boring. Without some effort to interpret or explain the past, these fragmentary records lack relevance. Similarly, more could have been squeezed from the short daily journal. The information on where the European men were sent to trade and to establish outposts, and the identification of certain Indians with particular locales could have been mapped. Thus the early fur frontier of the Montreal traders

could have been better identified by depicting the market catchment area on a map. It might have been possible also to summarize the interesting social historical data in the individual biographies created by Duckworth. But there seems to be no interest whatsoever in discerning social patterns from the data. This volume could have served a broader purpose as a creative mix of published primary records and secondary research. The lack of prominence for the editor's research, and the rather pedestrian quality of the journal and accounts combine to make this volume neither an interesting interpretation of the fur trade nor a soon to be much cited published primary source.

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