

*The Indian History of British Columbia:
The Impact of the White Man*

Wilson Duff

New edition. Victoria: Royal British Columbia Museum, 1997.
184 pp. Illus., maps. \$14.95 paper.

The First Nations of British Columbia

Robert J. Muckle

Vancouver: UBC Press, 1998. 146 pp. Illus., maps. \$19.95 paper.

By Charles Menzies

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FOR THREE DECADES, Wilson Duff's *The Impact of the White Man* has stood out as being practically the only general survey text of the first peoples of British Columbia set within their contemporary context. Other texts have come and gone, but, though dated, Duff has remained, as it were, the "industry standard." The signing of the first modern-day treaty with the Nisga'a highlights the need for an accessible, general text surveying the history, social organization, and contemporary situation of the first peoples in British Columbia. Used in the contemporary classroom, however, Duff's book is more a case study of what anthropology was (and should strive not to be) than it is an accurate depiction of the contemporary situation and history of first peoples in British Columbia.

"It's as though I'm standing in a room in which people are talking about me, but not to me," is how one First Nations student expressed her dissatisfaction with Duff's writing. The editors' desire to leave "Duff's original language intact, except for some minor editorial adjustments to

bring it up to current Royal British Columbia Museum style" (8) is laudable from a history of anthropology perspective. However, it does great disservice to the last three decades of development within anthropology. Since Duff first published *The Impact of the White Man*, anthropological discourse has shifted away from an objectifying "scientific" language in which the people anthropologists write about are only the subjects of the anthropologist's disinterested gaze. While Duff's text and approach remains locked in the early 1960s, anthropology has been radically reconfigured.

Two separate, though related, "revolutions" have occurred in anthropological thought since *The Impact of the White Man* first appeared. The first major shift took place in the late 1960s and early 1970s and challenged anthropologists to engage politically and socially in their fields of study. This call to arms is best expressed in the writings of Kathleen Gough ("New Proposals for Anthropologists," *Current Anthropology* 9, 5 [1968]: 403-7) and Dell Hymes's edited collection (*Reinventing Anthropology* [New York:

Pantheon, 1972]). This radical challenge to the orthodox mainstream laid the groundwork for an "experimental moment" in anthropological representation in the 1980s – a moment that questioned the process through which anthropological texts were constructed (see, for example, Marcus and Fisher, *Anthropology as Cultural Critique: An Experimental Moment in the Human Sciences* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986]). These fundamental challenges to, and transformations within, the discipline of anthropology changed utterly the basis upon which relationships between anthropologist and "subject" are established.

Anthropology today is more clearly orientated towards cooperative and collaborative work. The generation of anthropologists who "came of age" in the 1980s and 1990s is no longer satisfied with objective descriptions of people that treat them as though they are simply objects in a curio cabinet. Current research is built upon long-term personal and collaborative relations in which the subjects of our research are accorded a place and a voice within our texts. While, perhaps, only the most vain will conclude that they have solved the problems of representation, Duff's text is so far removed from contemporary practice that it really should be relegated to the study of the history of anthropology. Duff's work clearly reflects a type of anthropology no longer practised today. The time for a new text, sensitive to the developments of the discipline of anthropology and the contemporary reality of first peoples' lives, is needed. Robert Muckle's *The First Nations of British Columbia* is just such an attempt.

In *The First Nations of British Columbia*, Muckle divides his subject matter into four basic components:

"First Nations Defined," "Archeology and First Peoples," "Ethnology in British Columbia," and "Culture Change and Modernization." The book is clearly aimed at the general reader and, in this respect, does an admirable job. It introduces the general reader and first-year college or university student to a rich and varied literature without condescension or offense. Each chapter ends with an annotated list of suggested readings that will help the reader who wishes to delve into the subject in greater detail.

This otherwise admirable text is hampered by a disproportionately large set of appendices and the complete omission of First Nations peoples' role as workers in the province's resource industries. The forty-five pages of appendices seem somewhat excessive in a book with barely ninety pages of text. The listings of First Nations groups and major ethnic groups (90-122) are undeniably useful pieces of information. However, I would have preferred a short, one-page table on this subject. An additional section expanding on important, but ignored, themes would have been very useful. As with many commentators before him, Muckle moves from the fur trade and the gold rushes to the impacts of non-Native settlement and missionaries without once discussing the role played by First Nations in the forestry, fishing, mining, or transport industries of British Columbia (61-9). To ignore this critical component of First Nations experience is to participate in an academic fiction in which the demise of the fur trade is equated with the economic marginalization of first peoples.

While Robert Muckle's book will not definitively replace Duff's *The Impact of the White Man*, it does ac-

complete the important task of offering the introductory student and general reader an up-to-date survey of

the first peoples of British Columbia, unhindered by an old-fashioned and insensitive anthropology.

A Voice Great Within Us: The Story of Chinook

Charles Lillard with Terry Glavin

Transmontanus series. New Star: Vancouver, 1998. 116 pp.

Illus., maps. \$16 paper.

By Peter Trower, *Gibsons*

CHINOOK IS A GHOST language now, but once it was the creole of the far western wilderness – the esperanto of the Pacific Slope. An amalgam of French, English, and Indian words, it allowed communication between Europeans and many Aboriginal linguistic groups split into isolated enclaves by the rugged, mountainous terrain. Today Chinook lingers on only fitfully in a handful of colourful words and place names – “skookum,” “tyee,” “saltchuck,” “cultus,” “mesachie” – but throughout the 1800s, it was in everyday use.

The late poet and historian Charles “Red” Lillard developed a fascination with this all-but-vanished patois at an early age. American by birth, he moved from California to Alaska when he was six to marvel at the unfamiliar words still used by his father and the other loggers and fishers he met. Lillard would go on to author numerous books of both poetry and prose, but the interest in Chinook stayed with him. It became the subject of the posthumously published compilation he entitled *A Voice Great Within Us*.

This slim volume was Lillard’s final project. He undertook it after correcting the proof sheets of his ultimate

poetry collection, the marvelous and critically acclaimed *Shadow Weather*. Stricken with cancer, Lillard’s health was rapidly and tragically failing, but he devoted his final months to this endeavour, encouraged by writer Terry Glavin, editor of New Star’s Transmontanus series, who had initiated the undertaking. When Lillard succumbed to his illness in March 1997 at the untimely age of fifty-three, Terry Glavin carried on with the project. He shared Lillard’s love of language and the whole northwest mythos and was able to bring the project to a successful conclusion, as the late writer would undoubtedly have wished.

The resultant book is an attractive and informative addition to BC history and folklore. Well illustrated, it is divided into seven chapters, or sections, plus a bibliography. Glavin, in his foreword, describes poignantly how the book came into being.

Chinook was often used to create poetry and songs. In the first section, “Rain Language,” Glavin contributes to this tradition with an epic eighteen-page poem in both Chinook and English. The voices of the past ring through this work, creating a plain-spoken tapestry of words, unique and moving.