
Alan Twigg is best known as editor of *BC BookWorld*. He is a photographer and the author of nine books on literature and politics. He lives in Vancouver and is a passionate promoter of western Canadian publishing and history – without wearing the unfortunate armour of a west-coast patriot. Since the deaths of W. Kaye Lamb, Willard Ireland, Margaret Ormsby, and Charles Lillard, Twigg has been the main voice for what I call the British Columbia narrative. With so many useful, scholarly contributions locked away in academic journals that have lost the central ground of discourse, opening the way for the soaring *British Columbia History* (the old *BC Historical News*), Twigg’s entrance on the stage of History is refreshing and welcome, despite its uncertainties and occasional errors.

The work under consideration here is the first volume of a series on British Columbia literary history. With more to come, readers will want to know something about the format. I would describe it as a smorgasbord, with 65 authors discussed – beginning with Jonathan Swift and ending with Sir Alexander Mackenzie’s voyage to Dean Channel from deep in Athabasca in 1793 – and there is food for all here. Defying literary taxonomy, the book breaks new ground. Fellow readers have been delighted by it, and have passed me their recommendations repeatedly and energetically. You can open up a segment, e.g., the American Marco Polo John Ledyard, or Fanny Burney’s sailor historian brother James, or the American mariner Robert Gray, or the botanist who sailed with Captain Vancouver, Archibald Menzies, and have a mini-feast. Twigg provides a brief summary, some comments on the text and its value and importance, then has an endnote of details about the publication (and translations of same). To this he adds – and here he is inconsistent – references to recent books published on the topic. I would like to have seen the most recent biography of Mackenzie given notice. Bering’s recent biographers, including Orcutt Frost, are mentioned, and Robert Gray’s historian John Scofield gets similar treatment. Twigg is good at attempting to reference the most authoritative and recent publication of the journals, diaries, or accounts in question – but he is not always consistent. For instance, particulars of James Cook’s third voyage (his fatal one) published in definitive text by the Hakluyt Society, with brilliant charts and views issued by the same publisher
and collected and edited by Andrew David, are missing from the James Cook entry.

Twigg has every conceivable literary voice here, even Hui Shen and Juan de Fuca, Arthur Dobbs and Denis Diderot, all the Spanish of account, every Cook navigator, a cluster of British sea-otter questers, including the lively seaman John Nicol (the only voice from the lower deck, as it were), and several Bostonians, or Yankees, who by strength of character, circumstances, and better sailing craft, became the masters of the sea-otter trade. Twigg has placed Charles Bishop among them, but he should be with the British maritime traders. Bishop sailed out of Bristol in the Ruby, in the employ of the delightfully named Sydenham Teast. Bishop holds no punches when commenting on native thievery, which though diminished over time, was quenched by Bishop’s hard tactics against thefts committed by the crew of the Ruby.

Twigg never gets moralistic about relations between newcomers and natives: this is laudable. Still, I wonder about the title of this book. Is “Invaders” the right word to describe those who came to the Northwest Coast, by sea or overland, those who glanced at it only from the distance of their libraries in England or France, or those like Mackenzie who came overland? I think the choice of “Invaders” puts up a false dichotomy that Twigg cannot sustain, principally because the first nations hardly put up defence or fortification against such incursions, real or imagined. Besides which, what was the native role in attracting such would-be “invaders”? My view is that the title sets back the progression of better understanding of what we might call the contact, or pre-colonial period of British Columbia and Northwest Coast history. But literature is literature, and a catchy title can claim all. Incidentally, the book has a lovely cover – a coloured photograph of a stained glass window at Yuquot, paid for by the Spanish government, and showing in the distance two great men-of-war, one Spanish, the other British, with canoes on the shoaling beach, some Moachat or Muchalat observing proceedings, and two Spanish officers (one of them Bodega y Quadra) and two British naval officers (one of them George Vancouver) working out the details of interpretation of the October 1790 Convention, signed at Madrid between the Spanish government and the British ambassador. The pained and firm expressions on the faces of all four nicely reflect the impasse that had developed. Vancouver literally threw up his hands and rightly wrote home for further instructions, and in the end the British got what was theirs in the first place, except to say that they,
too, were obliged to withdraw from Yuquot and Nootka Sound leaving it terra incognita to a permanent presence from outsiders. In fact the “invaders” lived in a transients’ world. It will thus be interesting to see what Twigg does with the years and the literature of the permanent arrivals.

In addition to these misinterpretations I found a number of errors. Mourelle, the Spanish navigator, was not replaced on grounds of illness in 1792. Malaspina wanted a top-notch surveyor and astronomer to sail the *Sutil* and *Mexicana* north to spy out details of the Strait of Juan de Fuca and waters north. He thus turned to Alcalá Galiano, a person of enlightenment science and wide views. Mourelle, a good pilot, was of the older school, one passing with the years; and Galiano and his fellow officer Cayetano Valdes, were of a higher order of competence in the use and possession of chronometers and astronomical devices. Twigg does not state why Caamano was sent if Malaspina was thereabouts. Incidentally, Caamano’s journal needs reprinting. I wonder about the claim that a Spanish olive jar, found on Langara Island by two Masset fishermen in 1985 is sufficient to prove that it could only have been left there by Caamano in 1792. Couldn’t it have been traded from near or far? Then there is the business of John Meares, the “notorious liar.” Twigg accepts the accusation uncritically, without explaining to the reader the misleading maps of the *Lady Washington*’s voyage, the Dixon-Meares pamphlet war, the veracity of native evidence, and the convenient use by the British cabinet of the evidence Meares gave before the Privy Council about Spanish seizures of British ships and property at Nootka (to say nothing of interruption of trade). There is more to this than meets the eye. As for James Colnett, he is erroneously noted as William Colnett on page 158. When citing Joseph Ingraham he has got the publication details woefully wrong, and the more’s the pity inasmuch as Ingraham, as Bodega y Quadra attested, was an intelligent fellow of considerable talent. For the record, the late Mark Kaplanoff, fellow of Pembroke College, Cambridge, was the editor of *Joseph Ingraham’s Journal of the Brigantine Hope* ... and The Imprint Society, an organization sadly defunct, published the work in Barre, Mass. The work has been reissued (not noted by Twigg) in a new edition by the Oregon Historical Society, with handsome illustrations by Hewitt Jackson.

Twigg has an excellent grasp of the details of possible Chinese landfalls on the Northwest Coast. He gives a workmanlike survey of the literature, giving poser Gavin Menzies – whose book, *1421: The
Year China Discovered America, was rightly destroyed in the pages of The Economist — little more than mention. As to the impossible claims by Samuel Bawlf that Drake’s Golden Hind made a surfer’s tour of the Northwest Coast in 44 days and passed through then-deadly Seymour Narrows and the tide rips off Ten Mile Point without two large Yamaha outboard motors strapped on her transom, he has left it to the noted authority, Edward Von der Porten, to answer the indemonstrable claims. Twigg prints the obituary on this case — a damning indictment of Bawlf’s scholarship and a comment on the culpable public who tend to think with their hearts rather than their heads.

BARRY GOUGH
Victoria, British Columbia


Prolific Saskatoon poet, playwright, short-story writer, and scholar, Don Kerr, has written a history of Saskatchewan’s “one province” public-library system to coincide with the province’s centennial celebrations. Fittingly celebratory in its tone, this book is a partly personal and partly historical narrative. Kerr’s central theme is to outline how one of the reportedly weakest library services in Canada came to be, in his words, one of the best.

In 1935, more than 80% of Saskatchewan was without library service, and the province ranked 43rd of 59 in comparison to other provinces and American states in regard to the quality of library service. But by 1975, Kerr reports that Saskatchewan had the best library system in Canada. Kerr outlines the development of library services in the province, beginning with the Mechanics’ and Literary Institute of the territorial government in the 1890s, the Public Libraries Act of 1906, the emergence of a Travelling Library in 1914, and the Open Shelf Library initiative of 1922.

Kerr notes that the concept of a regional library system was part of Saskatchewan’s co-operative tradition and that the greatest changes and developments with regards to the province’s libraries came with the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF)