

From Maps to Metaphors. The Pacific World of George Vancouver. Edited by Robin Fisher and Hugh Johnston. University of British Columbia Press, Vancouver, 1993. 355 pp. Canadian price: \$39.95. ISBN 0-7748-0470-X.

THIS COLLECTION of essays presents some of the papers given at the 1992 'Vancouver Conference on Exploration and Discovery', convened by Robin Fisher of the University of Northern British Columbia and Hugh Johnston of Simon Fraser University. Both are to be congratulated for organizing what was a stimulating conference and for so quickly publishing the proceedings in a beautifully produced and reasonably priced book.

The occasion for the conference and the book was the bicentennial of George Vancouver's arrival in the Pacific northwest. Yet in a postmodernist turn, whether intentional or not, Vancouver himself is almost nowhere to be seen. For a start there is no picture of him, nor could there be since the supposed 'portrait' that hangs in the National Gallery in London may not even be of him. He remains a dimly lit figure who seems unable still, two centuries later, to escape the monumental shadow cast by his master, teacher and captain, James Cook. Cook wrote in broad brush strokes across the entire Pacific; Vancouver filled in the gaps (large and convoluted though those gaps were). Cook was killed in spectacular fashion in Hawaii and rapidly ascended into the European and Hawaiian pantheon; Vancouver died of an obscure illness in England, lost amidst the turmoil of the British reaction to the French Revolution. While there are well-known paintings of Cook floating up to heaven assisted by various cherubic and angelic figures, the most memorable image of Vancouver is a caricature of his absurd fight with the mentally unbalanced Thomas Pitt outside Jesse Ramsden's mathematical instrument shop in Picadilly.

As if to confirm Cook's omnipresence, the first essay (Ben Finney, 'James Cook and the European Discovery of Polynesia') is entirely about him and he has nearly as many index entries as Vancouver himself. Perhaps this uncertainty about Vancouver's role should not be surprising in an age that has become vexed in its treatment of dead white men. Historical figures like Vancouver, who were once useful for nation building, must now bear the symbolic brunt of the destructive consequences of the European arrival in the New World. The editors note a 'striking ambivalence on the 200th anniversary of Vancouver's voyage', which led the mayor and council of the city of Vancouver to support 'commemorative events which determinedly avoided recognizing Vancouver himself'. Yet the essays in this book continue right on where the municipal worthies left off. I would have liked to have learned more about Vancouver. Was he the maniacal flogger that Greg Denning has documented in his recent book *Mr Bligh's Bad Language*? How could the British empire spare him from wartime duties when it was at war with France? Did he help Kamehameha construct a kingdom in the Hawaiian islands? What role did he play in the spread of European science, commerce and military power across the globe?

This last question is partly touched upon by the best essay in the collection, Alan Frost's 'Nootka Sound and the Beginnings of Britain's Imperialism of Free Trade'. Frost meticulously and convincingly argues that Britain did not acquire an empire in the Pacific by accident nor by 'fits of absence of mind', but rather by carefully marshalling resources to achieve that aim. His account of the Royal Navy's mobilization in 1790 against Spain drives home the point that Vancouver and his ships were a small part of a much larger commercial and militarized empire.

What links the other essays in the book, given the comparative absence of Vancouver himself, is the ocean he sailed upon. We learn how Europeans mapped and navigated it

(Andrew David and Alun Davies), imagined it (Glyndwyr Williams, Kerry Howe and David Mackay), and ignored it (James Gisborn), and how the people who already lived in and around the Pacific Ocean tried to cope with the unusual ways of the newcomers who arrived on their shores (Yvonne Marshall, Victoria Wyatt and Anne Salmond).

Before he became a *dead* white man, Vancouver himself, in the introduction to his *Voyage of Discovery to the North Pacific Ocean*, contemplated 'the rapid progress of improvement in the sciences, and the general diffusion of knowledge since the commencement of the eighteenth century'. His own voyage was a part of this general trend, and if his eighteenth-century complacency seems a little hard to take today, we might remind ourselves that the Vancouver conference, peopled with scholars brought together via jumbo jet from Australasia, North America and the British Isles to the city that bears his name, could not have occurred without the 'improvement' of the sciences and the globalization of European culture in which men such as Vancouver took part.

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Standing in the Sunshine. A History of New Zealand Women Since They Won the Vote. By Sandra Coney. Viking/Penguin, Auckland, 1993. 332 pp. NZ price: \$59.95. ISBN 0-670-846287.

STANDING IN THE SUNSHINE was the most highly publicized book to come out of Suffrage Year, for reasons both positive and negative. With its associated television series, it was certainly the most ambitious. Anyone who has edited even a modest collection of academic essays will empathize with the task Coney must have faced in the eight years before the project came to fruition. The book is touted on its cover as 'a new way of looking at the place of women in New Zealand society since those dramatic days in 1893'. While it cannot be said that it advances New Zealand women's history in any analytical sense, it certainly provides a multitude of new images of women in this country, an attractive format, and a text that is concise, and like earlier historical work by Coney, immensely readable.

Standing in the Sunshine is organized thematically. Each theme begins with a short introductory essay, the text supplemented by boxed inserts on more specialized topics, and by copious illustrations. This is a book designed for 'dipping into', each page opening complete in itself. Biographical detail mingles with fascinating short extracts on such varied topics as the feminist press, the work of the Women's Food Value League, the 'Tall Women's Club', infanticide, breach of promise cases, romantic suicide mania and Maori attitudes to menstruation. Maori women are well represented throughout the book, though it was irritating to have to refer continually to a listing of names in small type at the front of the volume to discover the authors of these and other sections — surely the 35 or so other writers could have had their names on the pages where their contributions appear.

On the other hand, Coney as principal writer is to be congratulated for the decision to include references, a practice neglected in many so-called 'popular' works. Since one of the long-term benefits of this book may be to inspire more detailed inquiry into the fresh topics highlighted here, the references will, hopefully, provide a starting point for future researchers. They also show how effectively Coney and her associates mined secondary works, including theses, as well as archival and manuscript sources. In a work of this