

The omission of a map depicting the region and the groups in question is an unfortunate oversight, especially for those of us with little or no knowledge of Alaskan ethnography. I would also suggest that when unpublished work is cited in the text, that the reader be told where the manuscript can be obtained. If it is not available, I recommend that the work not be cited.

In conclusion, this book is a piece of solid scholarship in the material-culture study tradition. As William Fenton observed several years ago, such studies have never been that popular in anthropology, nor have they ever died out (1974:17). Students of northern anthropology are fortunate that VanStone continues his work in this vein, especially considering the scarcity of early northern Athapaskan material culture and the generally poor documentation.

I recommend this book to all with an interest in the anthropology and ethnohistory of northern Athapaskans. I also recommend it to all museum curators as both a model and standard for museum catalogues. Finally, it should be studied by all archaeologists engaged in the reconstruction of northern Athapaskan prehistory, as VanStone provides a glimpse of the ethnographic richness which is no longer perceptible in the archaeological record. For those who think only of the stark simplicity of northern Athapaskan life in the Subarctic, this book is a pleasant surprise and an important lesson.

## REFERENCES

- FENTON, W.N. 1974. The advancement of material culture studies in modern anthropological research. In: Richardson, M. (ed). *The Human Mirror*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press. 15-36.
- SIEBERT, E.V. 1980. Northern Athapaskan collections of the first half of the nineteenth century. *Arctic Anthropology* 17(1):49-76.

Robert R. Janes  
 Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre  
 Department of Justice and Public Services  
 Government of the N.W.T.  
 Yellowknife, N.W.T., Canada  
 X1A 2L9

ALEUT AND ESKIMO ART: TRADITION AND INNOVATION IN SOUTH ALASKA. By DOROTHY JEAN RAY. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1981. ISBN 0-295-95709-3. 250 p. incl. app., gloss., bib., index, illus. No price indicated.

This book treats the geographic area from St. Michael, on the north-eastern shore of the Bering Sea, southward, wherein reside people of Eskimo-Aleut speech. The subject is the recognized arts from the time of the first exploration of the region by Europeans until the present day, including contemporary and almost completely non-traditional fine-arts movements. In this it provides a companion to the author's earlier *Eskimo Art: Tradition and Innovation in North Alaska* (University of Washington Press, 1977).

In addition to more than 200 black and white illustrations, the book contains a lengthy (79-page) section of text that deals sequentially with the history of contact, artistic techniques, traditional arts (as defined by early historical sources and collections), and new arts. Naturally, a major focus is upon changes in artistic tradition that occurred as responses both to alterations in native lifeways, and to the arrival of the commercial art market with the first souvenir-hungry foreigners. The research is careful, the photographs generally very good, the selection discriminating, the result significant.

There were, obviously, problems for the author. Whereas north of St. Michael the recording of history and the systematic collecting of souvenirs both were begun by responsible visitors only shortly before the beginning of the nineteenth century, in the south the first significant contacts were made by commercial opportunists, the Cossack fur hunters, in a traumatic association that began shortly after the first Aleuts were sighted in 1741 and lasted, essentially unregulated, until the assignment of the first permanent Russian priest to Alaska in 1824. During this period the crafts — including those now recognized as arts — underwent a change so profound as to alter seriously the shape of what can now be found, through historical study alone, to call "traditional". A laudable

but nevertheless incomplete effort to overcome this shortcoming is made by the use of photographs of material from some early Russian collections.

To her further credit, the author hopes that "one day someone can make an intensive study of historical Aleut and Pacific Eskimo art in all media, utilizing world-wide collections at first hand. By also including the art of prehistoric times . . . such a study would give the art of the Aleut and Pacific Eskimos the attention it deserves" (p. 6). Such an endeavor would add to the present corpus at least two media that are lacking coverage entirely — stoneware, particularly stone vessels of the Aleut and Pacific Eskimo regions, and pottery, so characteristic of the coast of the Bering Sea. The first of these, with a beginning at least 6000 years ago on the Pacific coast, reached an artistic height some time in the first millennium A.D., although the craft may have declined by the time of the Russian arrival. The second, first in evidence more than 2000 years ago and always solely utilitarian, was still thriving upon European contact, with some of the best potted wares produced after the foreign presence was well established.

With no intent to criticize the present author in particular, one must lament the limits that our own conceptions of art and artistry impose upon any such study as this — limits that banish entirely from our attention crucial elements of the genius of the people who are this art's producers and of which the art is only a fragmentary manifestation. Without falling back upon the hackneyed characterization of these same people as mechanical wizards, it is nonetheless fair to point to a long tradition of engineering and executionary skills. Males in this tradition produced not only intricate hunting gadgets in profuse variety, but also cribbed frames for semi-subterranean buildings fastened together only through notched connections that held ever more solidly with each increase in weight of overlying sod; these skills also produced that marvel of sea- and craftmanship, the flexible-framed kayak. It is this same focus upon engineered form that is exhibited in today's native communities, where each man builds his own plank skiff of his own design, without recorded plan, contriving the angle and depth of transom to take what he conceives to be the greatest advantage of the biggest outboard motor he can buy. Within the sphere of the females it was this focus that produced the watertight cover of the kayak, the elegant waterproof of gut for its paddler, the parkas and raincoats made variously of fur, of the peltry of birds, or of the skin of fish. All of these products have carried design and elaboration to a point well beyond that required by mere utility, and so enter the realm of artistry.

It is no wonder that, as demands of life have changed, there are among these people individuals who have turned to the market-carving of ivory and wood, or the weaving of rye grass, and who excel at it. But unfortunately our sole attention to these more narrow categories — those we see as art — leaves us blind to those broader, related ones. Even anthropologists have not embraced the study of craft production in these broad terms — despite the fact that more than one of us who have worked ethnographically in southwestern Alaska are uncommonly interested in the material aspects of culture. It is no credit to our vision.

But it is always easier to find fault with the book that was not written, and Ray's aim included nothing of the sort that I have just described, although one must add that she does not slight the seamstress. To return to Ray's work, it is possible to point to several questions — more of social than artistic import, to be sure — that might profitably be addressed, some on the basis of data she presents, others that she might have answered with only a little in the way of explanation, still others that call for information she did not or could not call forth.

As one example, the spheres of activity that have persisted most fully into the modern world are those of men — the carving of ivory and of wood. With one partial exception, traditional artistic activities of women have not endured similarly. In the Aleutian Islands twined baskets have continued to be made since the beginning of contact, but to the north the skill all but died out, the basketry revived as a souvenir art in which twining was replaced by the introduced technique of coiling. Although the sewing of skins persisted longer than pottery making, it too has vanished virtually everywhere except in the manufacture of some souvenir dolls, and these often of indifferent quality. All of this is at variance with what has happened in many parts of the world, where males are first and most acculturated to suffer the speedier loss of traditional activities. What is the difference here?

Another example is the rather rapid abandonment of the making of baked clay vessels upon the arrival of Euro-American trade pots of other materials, which, coupled with the unsuccessful attempt to introduce

pottery making on a market scale at Toksook Bay (detailed by Ray), might suggest that the native peoples of the Bering Sea coast were never eager workers in clay. How does this relate to their two millennia of potting history?

For still another, there is the question of Ray's choice of ethnic designators, Yupik, Pacific Eskimo, and Aleut. The term Yupik, which she uses for people north of the Alaska Peninsula, is a linguistic designator that can also apply to people south of that point, to speakers of what has been called the Suk dialect of the Yupik language, which she separates as Pacific Eskimo. One would like to see the rationale.

But trifling questions aside, the book is interesting in its treatment and impressive in its scholarship. And as an additional authoritative touch there is appended a list of villages with their geographical locations that will be helpful to many of us in endeavors that bear no immediate relationships either to art or to its appreciation.

Don E. Dumond  
Department of Anthropology  
University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403  
U.S.A.

THE MAD TRAPPER. By RUDY WIEBE. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Ltd., 1980. \$14.95.

Good fiction often appeals to us because it draws on a rich legacy of folklore and legend, a legacy largely inaccessible to Canadian writers. Both young and multi-cultural, this country has developed little folk material of an indigenously Canadian character. Certainly a wealth of historical events have transpired since John Cabot first coasted along the Grand Banks of Newfoundland, but that time has been too short to permit much of the nurturing gestation that transforms history into legend. Only in a few instances has the complete process — from event to legend to literature — taken place in Canada.

One of the most striking cases began with an RCMP manhunt through the Yukon and Northwest Territories in the winter of 1931-32. A minor complaint had been laid, and when a police patrol went to investigate, a Mountie was seriously wounded by rifle fire from within an isolated, fortress-like cabin. The ensuing manhunt for the assailant, which lasted for 48 days, ranged over 150 miles of rugged terrain well north of the Arctic Circle. In mid-winter temperatures averaging -40° Fahrenheit, a lone man held well-armed, radio-equipped posses at bay.

This much is history and is still documented in police files. Out of these events grew the legend of the Mad Trapper of Rat River. Few residents of Depression-ridden Canada escaped the daily reports on radio broadcasts and newspaper front pages, reports which gave rise to myriad personal interpretations of what had taken place. For the unemployed waiting in long bread-lines, the "Arctic Circle War" symbolized authoritarian oppression of the individual. In spite of his murderous intent, the man identified only as Albert Johnson was soon clothed in the same legendary garb worn by such folk heroes as Jesse James and Robin Hood.

This public attention — essential to the legend-making process — has led to numerous popular accounts. The titles are many, and include Frank Anderson's *The Death of Albert Johnson* (1965), Dick North's *The Saga of the Mad Trapper of Rat River* (1969; republished as *The Mad Trapper of Rat River* in 1972), and Thomas P. Kelley's *Rat River Trapper* (1972). Attention to historical fact varies considerably from one book to the next: complete with Appendices and "Exhibits" of evidence, North's version has an air of authority; Kelley's story of "the man with the hungry gun" is significantly further removed from historical accuracy. Nevertheless, the events of 1931-32 are finished. From that point forward, each time the story is re-told, the legend acquires a new shape and a new intensity.

For Rudy Wiebe's new novel *The Mad Trapper* (1980), the legend — not the event — provides the frame. Beyond any concern with historical event, the author draws on the legendary dimension to weave his tale of conflict. Wiebe's confrontation, however, is not simply between the RCMP and Albert Johnson; his battle is between the frontier spirit of self-reliant independence and the many-tentacled monster of our ultra-complex and impersonal civilization. The facts change — in *The Mad Trapper*, Spike Millen falls before Johnson's gun in the final scene, although the prototypic Millen was killed more than two weeks earlier. Wiebe reshapes the legend to suit his aesthetic design, not to distort history.

Millen, for example, becomes a police counterpart to the raging Johnson. The parallels are numerous: an unattainable woman lurks in each man's past, images of blackened skulls crop up in descriptions of both characters, both men stand in juxtaposition to society's complexities and abstractions. Johnson and Millen recognize this tacit bond uniting them, a recognition crystallized in several face-to-face confrontations with each other.

Similar as they are, one works for law and order; the other is a total anarchist. In response to Johnson's query of "Why are cops always so snoopy?" Millen answers:

"Well . . . there's order. Community order depends on . . . a certain knowledge, a . . . certain common acceptance of . . . personal information" (p. 37).

But Millen's "community order" is not of the authoritarian sort. In fact, he fights against all those oppressive and impersonal forms of order — the "cut-and-dried" police instructions taught at Regina, the political expediency in Ottawa that affects how police affairs must be handled far away on the Rat River, the sweeping influence of the new technological age that sends airplanes and radios into the Arctic. Millen, a traditionalist and a humanist, believes in the kind of community order that grows out of talking with and trusting one another. He refuses to believe that Johnson will actually kill a man, a belief he stubbornly cherishes until Paul Thompson, a young RCMP constable with views similar to Millen's, falls dead at his feet. At this point, Millen's faith is shattered; his pursuit of Johnson becomes an obsession, but one that insists on meeting the fugitive in a man-to-man confrontation, not on defeating him through the superiority of numbers or technology. Significantly, Constable Thompson is entirely Wiebe's creation; he is shot by Johnson under exactly the same circumstances that the historical Spike Millen was killed.

With the deaths of his two protagonists, Wiebe clearly heralds a victory for the oppressive forces of modern society. This is not a victory with which Wiebe is pleased, but one he sees as inevitable. Interestingly, the best parts of *The Mad Trapper* are those involving Johnson and his Mountie counterpart, Millen; both the narrative action and Wiebe's prose are less convincing when such figures as RCMP Commissioner MacBrien, WWI Flying Ace W.R. "Wop" May, and newspaperman Gary Snordon come on the scene. Unable to charge these societal representatives with life, Wiebe must push them about like cardboard cut-outs. The author has perhaps backed himself into a corner — these two-dimensional characters represent the indelicate, crushing social machinery that destroys both Millen and Johnson; accordingly, Wiebe portrays them as shallow and lacking vitality. But because of their very inertness, whenever they enter, the narrative appeal and vigour drops markedly.

Wiebe finds himself backed into a similarly awkward corner when Johnson speaks. The reader hears constantly of the man's reticence, his refusal to offer more than a few monosyllables even when directly addressed. It is not surprising, then, that whatever words Wiebe puts into Johnson's mouth will ring false, as do the following:

"Never smile at a woman," he murmured aloud, not actually talking not singing either but making a sound somewhere between the two. "Call no man your friend. If you trust . . ." (p. 29).

The natural and inevitable quality of the fine sequences that describe Johnson's actions is completely lost when the character opens his mouth to speak.

In spite of its internal problems, *The Mad Trapper* takes on shape and significance from the legendary material it involves. This process from event to legend to literature has rarely been completed in a uniquely Canadian context, and *The Mad Trapper* should be read and appreciated in this light, and not mistakenly condemned for taking too much freedom with historical fact.

Richard C. Davis  
AINA Post-Doctoral Fellow  
Department of English  
University of Calgary  
Calgary, Alberta, Canada  
T2N 1N4