

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.

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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.

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