

history, a not unnatural reflection of the compiler's expertise, but also perhaps of the nature of the University of Alaska Fairbanks' collections, where scientific works tend to be found in several departmental collections rather than the main Elmer E. Rasmuson Library where Falk works. Such minor criticisms apart, this is a worthy addition to the series, with the selections well chosen and informatively annotated. With many years' experience of Alaskan literature, Falk clearly knows this literature well and gives the impression of having read a good proportion of it.

Whilst Falk's volume fills an obvious gap, the Falkland Islands, South Georgia, and the South Sandwich Islands have been covered by two previous volumes in the World Bibliographical Series, *The Antarctic* (1994) and *The Atlantic Ocean* (1985), containing 69 and 142 entries, respectively, for these islands. Clearly, those specifically interested in the Falklands will appreciate the more-focused coverage that a dedicated volume allows, although it is perhaps a pity that the limitation to primarily English-language works meant that the greater space available could not be utilized by including a much greater representation of Argentinian, other South American, and other European non-English perspectives both on the 1982 war itself and on preceding events. That said, Day does include some of the most important non-English language works, and here, as elsewhere, his selections appear sound and his annotations informative.

Returning to the question posed by this review's introduction. Clearly these are two highly competent bibliographies. Falk's book is informed by its compiler's familiarity with both state and literature developed during many years. The selective, annotated format of the World Bibliographical Series allows him to communicate much of this knowledge, whereas a comprehensive Alaskan bibliography would simply overwhelm. Day's book presents an interesting contrast. Whatever Day's expert knowledge of these islands — and one would guess that it was much more considerable at the conclusion of this work than at its origin — his prime qualification as its compiler is his unrivalled expertise in making use of libraries, indexes, and indeed bibliographies. The success of his book thus is itself an instructive illustration of the continuing need for the bibliographer's art. (William Mills, Scott Polar Research Institute, University of Cambridge, Lensfield Road, Cambridge CB2 1ER.)

References

- Plafker, G., and H.C. Berg (eds). 1994. *The geology of Alaska*. Boulder: Geological Society of America.
- Wickersham, J. 1927. *A bibliography of Alaskan literature, 1724–1924*. Cordova, AK: Alaska Agricultural College and School of Mines.

A DEATH ON THE BARRENS. George James Grinnell. 1996. Toronto: Northern Books. vi + 333 p, illustrated, soft cover. ISBN 0-96804040-3. \$Can25.00.

A death on the barrens is an interesting puzzle indeed. George James Grinnell's book is surely one of the most uneven, wandering pieces of prose ever published, post-

modern experiments in end-of-the-millennium alienation and fragmentation not excepted. If a book is to be measured by classical aesthetic standards alone — balance, proportion, unity of focus and action, etc — *A death on the barrens* can hardly be said to succeed. On the other hand, if a book's success depends on the emotional bond it establishes between author and reader, Grinnell's book accomplishes precisely what its author set out to do. It is certainly one of the most subjective human responses to an experience of wilderness travel that I have ever read.

At its core, *A death on the barrens* is a story of a canoe trip across the barrenlands of northern Canada in the 1950s. Related in the first person by one of the canoeists, the book offers an innovative variation on the popular narrative of wilderness travel, of which there are many examples. What is unique about Grinnell's approach — at least, initially — is his attention to group dynamics within the six-man party. For the most part, Grinnell's emphasis sheers away from the familiar celebrations of nature's beauties, the excitement of running rapids, or the challenge of difficult portages. Instead, the first three-quarters of the book explores the politics of leadership, an issue made particularly relevant by a perceived shortage of food on a journey that steadily takes the party deeper and deeper into the heart of the uninhabited barrens.

As I read *A death on the barrens*, I was excited by Grinnell's innovative approach. Having read numerous accounts of wilderness travel, I tire rather quickly of those books that do little more than temporarily transport me from my armchair to a vicariously imagined outdoor life. Rather, travel writers who succeed in capturing my interest must offer some unique quality, whether it is the lyric of simplicity of Sigurd Olsen or the humour of R.M. Patterson. What Grinnell's narrative offers — or at least promises — is an exploration of the human response to authority and leadership within a small but highly dependent group. No doubt, I was especially alert to such matters, having recently completed a major project on John Franklin's canoe journey of 1819–1822, a project in which Franklin's style of leadership commanded significant attention.

Thus, I began reading *A death on the barrens* with great interest in the group dynamics that Grinnell reveals. Roughly three-quarters of the way through the book, however, the investigation of leadership becomes lost in a maze of other themes. These other themes — wilderness travel as spiritual metaphor, the journey of personal growth, the eulogy of a great man, the corruption of human institutions, the morality of a Wordsworthian natural universe — are the familiar fare of scores of wilderness travel accounts, and the uniqueness that initially made Grinnell's book attractive disappears.

Having said that, all these odds and ends of theme, this helter-skelter of responses, contribute to the humanity — if not to the classical aesthetics — of the book. One man's life was lost on the 'recreational' journey in the summer of 1955 (perplexingly, the death arose from drowning, not from starvation, as the earlier passages of the book foreshadow), and sadly, decades later, Grinnell lost his sons in

a similar canoeing accident. The deaths of Grinnell's sons have no connection with the events of the 1950s barrenlands trip, but, as one might well imagine, those deaths three decades later did give Grinnell pause to rethink his own earlier experience.

This much is history, one might say, and should have no bearing on our evaluation of the artistry of the book. But it is the realization of Grinnell's 40-year struggle to tell this story of growth — and the loss that always accompanies growth — that forges the undeniable emotional link between author and reader. Writing the book had, no doubt, a crucial therapeutic effect on Grinnell. And while *A death on the barrens* adheres to few of those classical unities Aristotle lauded in Greek tragedy, the bond of humanity any reader must feel through Grinnell's troubled effort to share his loss creates a great deal of empathy in the reader. I am indeed a more complete person for having read this book, and one wonders if a book can ever achieve a higher end. (Richard C. Davis, Department of English, University of Calgary, 2500 University Drive NW, Calgary, Alberta T2N 1N4, Canada.)

THE FROZEN ECHO: GREENLAND AND THE EXPLORATION OF NORTH AMERICA, ca AD 1000–1500. Kirsten A. Seaver. 1996. Stanford: Stanford University Press. xviii + 407 p, illustrated, hard cover. ISBN 0-8047-2514-4. £40.00.

It must be stated straightaway that this work is a major achievement. The author has tackled difficult questions concerning the nature of Norse settlement in Greenland. She has also examined the relationships between those settlements and the exploration and exploitation of North America and of the North Atlantic by other Europeans, most notably the English and Portuguese. A central question is, of course, what was the cause, or what were the causes, that led to the extinction of the Greenland colonies?

The author uses a kaleidoscopic variety of sources, and approaches the questions she has set for herself from the point of view of different disciplines. The sources include historical texts, many in Scandinavian languages, and also the results of archaeological and cartographical studies. The book is divided into two parts. Firstly, there is a detailed study of North Atlantic exploration by the Norse, with an exhaustive analysis of the economic, social, and ecclesiastical conditions of the Greenland colonies. This is followed by an examination of the official and unofficial maritime efforts in the North Atlantic by, for example, the Bristol merchants and of the impact of these on Greenland. The author's central conclusion relating to the fate of the Greenland colonists is that:

...both circumstantial evidence and common sense suggest that the Greenlanders, who had so clearly taken active part in the North Atlantic economic community throughout the fifteenth century, had remained opportunists to the end and joined the early-sixteenth-century European surge toward North America.

As noted, the range and breadth of the author's sources

are breath-taking and the sheer diligence with which she has tackled them is an example to all who undertake historical study. Each of her chapters is a comprehensive analysis of its subject, and they inter-relate well. The totality of the work is a very impressive contribution on a difficult topic.

However, the book is, in some respects, poorly written. The author, in her acknowledgements, comments on the input of her editor, and one feels that the work would have had a more consistent style if the editing had been either more or less rigorous. In places, the author's approach is journalistic, and the uneasy juxtaposition of styles makes for uneven reading. Some of the writing is unfortunate. The first sentence of the acknowledgements — 'It is a truth universally acknowledged that anyone writing a book must be in need of a supportive spouse' — caused this reviewer to wince. One may wonder if the author is aware that Jane Austen was in fact single! Other examples are: 'The cresting wave of European exploration slammed onto the shores of the Americas' (page 254), and the comment that John Cabot 'would try to go Columbus one better' (page 265).

A further deficiency is the illustrations. The maps are adequate as far as they go, but it seems curious that the overall map of the North Atlantic, relevant to the entire argument of the book, is less than half a page in size and is relegated to page 215. The maps of the Greenland settlements are excellent, but the reproductions of contemporary maps and charts are on so reduced a scale as to make them of little use. The photographs of areas in the Greenland settlements, in particular those on pages 10 and 20, give little useful support to the text. Those of archaeological relics are much better and have been carefully selected.

To sum up, a worthy effort, and one that will be required reading for those with specialised interests in the period and area. However, with a more even style and consistent editing, a better book could have been produced, which might have served the needs both of specialists and of the more general reader. Sadly, this is not the book to do this. (Ian R. Stone, Tartu University, Ulukooli 18, Tartu, Estonia.)

TO THE ARCTIC BY CANOE 1819–1821: THE JOURNAL AND PAINTINGS OF ROBERT HOOD, MIDSHIPMAN WITH FRANKLIN. C. Stuart Houston (Editor). 1995. Montreal, Kingston, London, Buffalo: McGill–Queen's University Press. xxxvi + 217 p, illustrated, soft cover. ISBN 0-7735-1222-5. £13.95.

ARCTIC ORDEAL: THE JOURNAL OF JOHN RICHARDSON, SURGEON–NATURALIST WITH FRANKLIN, 1820–1822. C. Stuart Houston (Editor). 1995. Montreal, Kingston, London, Buffalo: McGill–Queen's University Press. xxxiv + 349 p, illustrated, soft cover. ISBN 0-7735-1223-3. £13.95.

Unquestionably one of the most significant exploring efforts of the nineteenth century was the Arctic Land Expedition of 1819–1822, under the command of Lieutenant John Franklin. Not only was it the first expedition to