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Ward, Robin. *Echoes of Empire: Victoria and its Remarkable Buildings*. Madeira Park, BC: Harbour Publishing, 1996. Pp. xxvii, 362. Ninety black and white illustrations. \$32.95 hardback

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have been illuminated by the work of sociologists like S. D. Clark, for example in *The Suburban Society* (1966) and by anthropologists like Stanley Barrett, notably in *Paradise* (1994). By failing to connect his vision with the insights of these other scholars, McIlwraith has weakened his argument that landscape is an important element in social life.

Since the time Hoskins was writing there has been a steady growth of interest in landscapes, both urban and rural. Especially in the past decade, this trend has been accompanied by a new theoretical sophistication, by debates about the meaning and even the objective existence of landscapes. McIlwraith has not been troubled by such debates. A believer in patient observation and clear prose, he subscribes to the traditional view that cultural landscapes can themselves reveal how they were made, and by whom. His book is a testament to the continuing relevance of such a view. Anyone who is interested in the landscape of rural, and small-town Ontario will read it with profit and enjoyment.

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**Ward, Robin. *Echoes of Empire: Victoria and its Remarkable Buildings*. Madeira Park, BC: Harbour Publishing, 1996. Pp. xxvii, 362. Ninety black and white illustrations. \$32.95 hardback.**

No other Canadian city has so consciously cultivated its own image as Victoria has. As Vancouver artist, writer and architecture critic Robin Ward notes, Victoria's "urban fabric" has been "enthusiastically embroidered" ever since the days of HBC Governor James Douglas. In 1862, the city's first mayor, Thomas Harris, for instance created a Committee of Nuisances to prettify the city. The instinct was perpetuated by image promoters as varied as railway companies and candy makers. In all their minds, Ward notes, "history had little value unless it could be edited and repackaged to suit a different time and purpose." Above all else, the city dedicated itself to "an exaggerated Britishness," an image that flattered the pretensions of its political and commercial elite while at the same time making the city an alluring destination for tourists. Robin Ward's *Echoes of Empire* sets out to explore the "myths" that constitute this venerable image by wandering through the city's architecture and using his journey to reveal Victoria instead as a city of "compulsions, contradictions and cultural nostalgia."

This is an immensely readable book. It is organized much like a walking tour that guides the reader from the city core—the Inner Harbour with its signature buildings like Francis Rattenbury's Empress and Legislative Buildings—to sites on the city's periphery like the Fisgard Lighthouse and Butchart's Gardens. Each stop along the way is in fact a pastiche of history, architectural commentary and local lore. The research is thorough, the architectural evaluations free of jargon and accessible to the in-

telligent layman and the writing is lively and yet never florid. Ward casts a wide social net, stopping to comment on the plutocratic Union Club and then proceeding to the Songhees Indian Reserve and Chinatown, where we learn that in the 1880s fourteen opium factories flourished. Ward is expert at mingling his architectural analysis with detail that amplifies the late nineteenth century history of Victoria. There is, for instance, a vivid portrait of Confederation booster Amor de Cosmos and his boisterous newspaper, *The British Colonist*. For the general reader, this approach provides the context in which to appreciate the "remarkable" buildings selected by Ward. Cameo appearances by Victoria sojourners like the poet Robert Service or the British naval explorer Robert Scott enliven the narrative at this level.

Urban history specialists can winnow their own grain from the book; we learn, for instance, that soon after Oak Bay, Victoria's posh seaside suburb, incorporated in 1906, it pioneered the use of a "Beauty Committee" and then a Town Planning Act to groom the nascent community to a high English aesthetic. The Uplands estate adjacent to Oak Bay was a pure garden city experiment, landscaped by Charles Olmsted. Ward has thus furnished Victoria residents and visitors alike with a very usable and handsomely illustrated introduction to the city that Princess Louise once described as "halfway between Balmoral and Heaven." Given this utility, why, oh why did Ward not provide his readers with a map of the city (beyond the grainy military survey map of the endpapers) which pinpointed his remarkable buildings and enabled readers to map out their own approach to the city?

For all his enterprise and solid narrative, Ward shies away from any really probing analysis of Victoria. *Echoes of Empire* is much like a series of fascinating photographs laid out serially, each intriguing in its own right but only loosely connected to what came before or follows. The book is rich in colour and focused detail, but poor in conveying any sense of urban growth. There is talk of the pulse of commerce in the Inner Harbour—fish and timber exports, shipbuilding and repair—but little cohesive sense of what pushed the city forward. Ward suggests that by the 1890s, the end of "empire", Victoria's "metropolitan veneer was cracking" and that economic decline provoked the city to capitalize on its past as a base for tourism. Similarly, Ward's brief concluding epilogue avoids any sweeping conclusions about Victoria.

The rich evidence of his book invites us to draw our own conclusions. Victoria, for instance, emerges as a polyglot community, a mishmash of largely imported influences. Architecturally, the city was a stew of varied styles—eastern Canadian banking architecture, Tudor revival, Gothic revival. Socially, the mix included everything from English remittance men to participants in Chinese Tong Wars. What is striking is how consistently this west coast community-in-the-making eschewed indigenous values. When Emily Carr chose to depict and celebrate the local landscape and native folklore, her work was shunned by the provincial government because it was "too

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brilliant and vivid to be true to the actual conditions of the coast villages." She was "marginalized." Similarly, there was little indigenous architecture. English-born Francis Rattenbury, the city's most industrious architect, stamped Victoria forever with his designs for the Empress and Legislative Buildings. Yet, Ward admits that "Ratz" work was highly derivative and that he "played safe, if entertaining, games with late Victorian styles. ... He was "a better promoter than an architect." Elsewhere in Victoria, new homes were selected from English and American pattern books and built to evoke just the right social statement. One could thus argue that Victoria is just the opposite of the genuine article it presents itself as being, a concoction of external influences worked up against the grain of its intrinsic virtues.

Even if Robin Ward shies away from probing analysis in favour of a photo album approach to architectural history, we can be grateful that he has furnished us with such readable and fascinating material for our own ruminations. This is the sort of book that should prompt the reader to set off on Sunday afternoon walks to explore the sites it chronicles, before returning home to a pot of Murchie's tea, some Rogers' chocolates and some vigorous discussion of just what kind of a city Victoria actually is.

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