

**WHITE, Patrick, 2004 *Mountie in Mukluks: The Arctic Adventures of Bill White*, Maderia Park, B.C., Harbour Publishing, 248 pages.**

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L'influence de Marcel Mauss  
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Frank James Tester, and Pamela Stern. It reconsiders the paradigm of space and place, and its role in Inuit lives and in the history of Inuit Studies. The last chapter (“From Area Studies to Cultural Studies to a Critical Inuit Studies”), by Pamela Stern, offers a good description of the recent history of Inuit studies in the United States, though it fails to mention the role played by *Études/Inuit/Studies* and the biennial Inuit Studies Conferences in the development of the field at the international level. Moreover, from a Canadian or Greenlandic point of view, Stern's assertion (p. 263) that “the push for some form of indigenous self-governance [...] is based on the presumption that Inuit cultural difference cannot be accommodated within a modern liberal democracy” sounds rather strange. Home rule in Greenland, as well as Canada's Nunavut, are precisely examples of modern liberal democracies (amongst other characteristics, their governments are popular rather than ethnic) which were established in order to accommodate Inuit cultural and social difference.

The book is generally good, with, as it is normal, a few chapters weaker than the others. It should nevertheless make a useful textbook for undergraduate students in northern anthropology, geography or sociology. The authors constitute an interesting sample of contemporary specialists of Inuit studies, most of them American or Canadian, but with the addition of two scholars from the Old World, one French and one Japanese. The sample includes several specialists from the younger generation, though it is somewhat distressing to this reviewer to realise that these “young” scholars have already reached their forties and early fifties.

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WHITE, Patrick

2004 *Mountie in Mukluks: The Arctic Adventures of Bill White*, Maderia Park, B.C., Harbour Publishing, 248 pages.

Over the past 20 years there has been an increasing number of memoirs and collections of stories published by nurses, teachers and Mounties reflecting upon their government service in the Canadian Arctic. Most of these date back to the 1950s and 1960s when the Canadian government vastly increased its official presence as part of the incorporation of northern Canada into the modern social state. There are fewer however that go back to the pre-war period. This was a time when non-aboriginal people were rare in the Arctic, when the first tentative contacts between different cultures were made. Bill White, by his own account irascible and cantankerous from his youth, served with the RCMP on the *St. Roch* ship and at Cambridge Bay for four years in the early 1930s. *Mountie in Mukluks* is Bill's story.

Bill's Arctic story is a loose transcription by Patrick White (no relation) of interviews taped by Patrick's grandfather Frank and father Howard White from the 1970s to 1996. Much of this taped material covered Bill's career as a labour organizer in the B.C. Lower Mainland, after his term with the RCMP, and was published by Howard as *A Hard Man to Beat* in 1983. Patrick, a Toronto based journalist, revisited the collection and worked with Bill's daughter to produce the present work.

The book is a well produced effort, larded with fascinating photos from Bill's personal collection. The images cover all seasons and every facet of life, from Inuit families through the many ships traversing the central arctic in the mid 1930s to the travails of isolated detachment life. The original interviews appear to have been presented as stories, no doubt randomly told over some 20 years. Patrick has organised the material into a chronological sequence and admits to moving pieces about to ensure the reader can understand the narrative and its subjects without an Arctic encyclopaedia at hand. This may cause some grief for the researcher as there are no references to specific interviews or their dates. From the text it is impossible to know where the "real language of a real person" (p. 15) ends and the voice of the organising author, anxious to maintain a strong narrative thread, takes over.

Nevertheless the point of the book is not so much in the details as in Bill's desire to puncture the pompous myth of order and justice that grew around the Mounties' presence in the North. Bill is especially aggrieved by the heroic epics produced by journalists and his fellow Mounties. This is most apparent in the chapter on the hunt for the Mad Trapper, "the biggest goddamn bungle in Mountie history" (p. 173). In some ways the weakest part of the book—it is the only chapter where Bill speaks beyond his personal experience—his version highlights the sense of chaos and disorder that newcomers felt in their attempts to come to terms with the Arctic. Rudy Wiebe (1989) tells a similar tale of misunderstandings and mistakes in his account of Albert Johnson's death. The remainder of the book focuses on Bill's experience and offers real gems. In a long discussion of daily life at a fish camp, Bill recalls long evenings around a smoky fire of willow and seal blubber:

You could see their faces—they were kinda greasy, shining and glistening in the light. And they'd sing away like a choir. Some would get up and dance and others would sit with caribou-skin drums. The dances reenacted the hunt. Sometimes the dancer played the hunter, sometimes he'd play the animal. They always ended with the animal dying. I'd just sit there and think, 'This sure as hell beats cribbage' (p. 150).

Bill also offers harsh words on the way the expectations of white society, especially the trade in white foxes, disrupted traditional lifeways in the central Arctic. He describes how trade provided the Inuit with rifles and their subsequent massacring of caribou. "It wasn't long before the whole thing spiralled right out of bloody control" (p. 233-234). But in this analysis, he actually confirms how much an agent of southern society he was. The implicit denial of Inuit adaptability was a common refrain amongst police men in the Arctic, and bringing change only made their jobs harder. There was also the assumption that when they got firearms, Inuit tended to over-hunt. Recent research by Parks Canada on northern Ellesmere Island challenges such idea by a close analysis of non-aboriginal hunting by exploration expeditions (*cf.* Manseau *et al.* 2005).

In keeping with his iconoclastic purpose, Bill also reminisces about Inuit dogs. Reporting a departure from Goa Haven he had 10 or 15 community dogs follow him. Despite his efforts to chase them off they were still with him at day's end. "When I stopped for the night I knew bloody fine that there wouldn't be a bit of feed left in the morning if these dogs were loose out there. So I caught two of them and tied them up. That was all I could catch, the rest just circled out around [...]. There was only one thing to do. I shot them. All of them. Dead dogs lying all over the jeezly place. I hated to do it. I don't like shooting dogs but I had no choice" (p. 190-191).

Bill describes the difficult and challenging work that individual police faced in these early Arctic postings. He remained bitter, even during his return trip north in the mid-1970s, about the inability of southern Canadians to make meaningful connections with the Inuit. He rails against individuals who refused to make the effort to learn the language or try to understand local customs. Bill saves his most vitriolic thoughts however for the government, and the society, which established the imperial order he was charged with imposing on people he came to admire. And in this regard he was the same as many Mounties and northern officials of the time who regularly expressed confusion and doubts about the southern programs they were to apply. One hopes the current trend towards pluralism eases the lives of those working on the cultural frontiers.

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