

RICHLING, Barnett, 2012 *In Twilight and Dawn: A Biography of Diamond Jenness*, Montreal, McGill-Queen's University Press, 413 pages.

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RICHLING, Barnett

2012 *In Twilight and Dawn: A Biography of Diamond Jenness*, Montreal, McGill-Queen's University Press, 413 pages.

If people today are at all aware of New Zealand-born Diamond Jenness (1886-1969), it is likely for *The People of the Twilight*, his moving account of a 1914-1916 stay among the Copper Inuit. A few will also have heard of his *Dawn in Arctic Alaska* or the five-volume *Eskimo Administration* composed late in life. To make the ethnologist's "many accomplishments" (p. ix) better known in Canada, his adopted country, Barnett Richling, University of Winnipeg senior scholar in anthropology, has written *In Twilight and Dawn*, a cradle-to-grave academic biography.

A half-dozen chapters concern mainly Jenness himself: South Seas youth; studies at Oxford; World War I soldiering for Canada; over 20 years of work in Ottawa for the federal government's Anthropology Division (including the National Museum of Man) with two stints as director; de facto transfer at the onset of WWII to other functions until retirement in 1948; and the period to his death. Admixed are expansions on Jenness's stays among various Indigenous peoples: the Papuan of the D'Entrecasteaux Islands (1911-1912); Alaska's Inupiat and Canada's Copper Inuit, both while with the Stefansson-led Canadian Arctic Expedition (1913-1916); Alberta's Sarcee (1921); British Columbia's Wet'suwet'en, Sekani, and Carrier groups (1923-1924); Ontario's Ojibway (1929); and the West Coast Saanich and Katzie (1935-1936). Throughout, Richling covers local history, prior studies by others, and theoretical issues. In addition, 50 pages present the early archaeology of pre-contact Inuit cultures, Jenness's search for buried artifacts on the Diomedede Islands (1926) and in Newfoundland (1927), his review of thousands of Arctic items dug up by others, and his identification thereby of the Dorset people.

New Zealand's liberal treatment of the Maori appears when Richling asserts that this attitude to Native people infused Jenness and shaped his career (p. 18, 292), when Jenness drew on the Maori example to criticise Ottawa's handling of Treaty Indians (p. 279, 293), and in 1948 when he was made a one-man commission to find in Maori status what might be applied in Canada (p. 295-297). Richling uses the term "applied anthropology" (p. 263) for Jenness's thoughts, expressed as advisor to Indian Affairs and in public formats, on improving Native lives. That expertise presumably arose from on-site visits, but it is hard to get a sense of that happening. His tribal stays between 1921 and 1936 tend to blur in the mind, given the recurrent themes of haste, item acquisition, interrogation of elders (Old David, Old Cyrus, etc.) (p. 269, 270) and disappointment with people who had adopted new ways. Seldom during these years is there an image of Jenness interacting with families at the real level of day-to-day life.

The author deserves credit for decades of research, including a visit with Jenness's New Zealand family, but the product is not so much a book to read as a fine one to consult. Context pieces that mention Jenness only briefly, if at all, occupy much print. No detail, it seems, has been left out (Victoria, B.C.'s past, for example, when Jenness stays in nearby Sydney, p. 269) and the overload exhausts. One of biography's traps is to let it become other forms of history, and when Richling veers into the history of institutions, or of anthropology in higher education, with lists of who was appointed when, one wishes much had gone into endnotes. Non-events—expositions of plans by Jenness or others that did not come about—also break the flow. Often, the author cannot wait to tell what happened years on, adding "later" to a list of frequently used words (e.g., p. 64-65).

"Exceedingly" makes seven appearances: once on the dustcover to describe the author's fine writing, and the rest by Richling (p. xvii, xx, 192, 297, 304, 322). Thus, he tells how "exceedingly" thankful he is for his editor's great care and nearby calls a Jenness study by Nansi Swayze (1960) an "exceedingly breezy biographical composite." Yet Swayze's book, whatever its faults, reads more smoothly than Richling's. Some of the densest lines mark a lengthy early statement on his historicist-rather-than-presentist approach (p. xv-xvi).

Relentless hagiography follows. To prove Jenness's worth, Richling cites a comment that "his only vice was his respectability" (p. 26) and backs it time and again with repetitive praise: "life-long penchant for self-effacing humor" (p. xviii), "penchant for self-effacement" (p. 82), and so on. The flagwaving feels so overdone that we do not fully trust Richling when he states that Jenness's works anticipated more widely read ones by Kaj Birket-Smith (p. 202), Eleanor Leacock (p. 259), and others (p. 252, 255, 257).

Because the book is smitten with Jenness, its psychological analysis fails—a problem most evident in the account of his becoming Anthropology Division director despite having promised he would not do so to colleague and friend Marius Barbeau, who himself sought the job. Here Richling claims that Jenness's avoidance of this conflict in his memoirs is "especially telling" and reflects "the burden of unresolved feelings over a long-ago *contretemps* tangible to the very end" of his days (p. 142). Yet

when we learn in further chapters that the memoirs “overlooked practically the whole of his professional career,” this absence gets a positive slant: it shows that Jenness “must have been content in the knowledge that his sizable scholarly bibliography stood as statement enough on the things that mattered to him most” (p. 325).

No doubt Jenness was most kind and helpful—witness William E. Taylor’s (1977) heartfelt profile—yet one wonders whether sheep’s clothing ever played a part in his career or whether he sometimes practised what, according to Richling, Oxford taught him: it takes contacts to advance (p. 22). Despite his modesty, he did after all attempt to leave the Anthropology Division to direct the much-larger Department of Indian Affairs (Richling calls the effort “oddly out of character”) (p. 263). A few years later, he headed the American Anthropological Association. After publishing *Eskimo Administration*, he “only partly in jest” (p. 326) suggested it should get him a Nobel Prize.

To look under the carpet but once, we might note that Jenness practised shooting in New Zealand and at Oxford, and in the Arctic became expert with the Ross rifle (Jenness 1991: 426, 429), also used by Canadian sharpshooters throughout World War I. Yet in 1916-1917 while in Ottawa, he tried to use a former Oxford professor and his own ethnology expertise to get posted far from the front. Only when this tactic failed did he join a McGill University artillery unit for a role less dangerous than that of infantry. As well, during his soldiering he received a full Canadian civil service salary thanks to pressure from an influential Oxford graduate. Then, on coming back (his only injury a bruise from a mule), he told Stefansson he had gone to war because he saw others shirk their duty. Richling tells most of that story but gives it a heroic hue (p. 123-126).

A final chapter offers reasons why Jenness is now rarely mentioned: the “long shadow” of Edward Sapir, Anthropological Division head until 1925, who won linguistics fame on moving to Chicago; the “bureaucratic indifference” that stymied fresh thought when Jenness took over; government employ, which made him miss the academic exchange of ideas; and emphasis on salvage ethnology. Hence Robert Hancock’s judgment that Jenness left nothing to mine for “new perspectives” (p. 330-331).

Richling admits that Jenness at post-World War II Indian Act hearings favoured ending Indians’ special status. This stance made him either “a well-intended, if misguided” fan of that policy or, in Peter Kulchyski’s (1993: 24, 29-30) words, a “‘ruthless’ assimilationist, an ardent imperialist ideologue, ‘whose intellectual project was not unrelated to the project of Canadian national definition that excluded Native peoples’” (p. 337). Such criticism, Richling counters, follows from “lightly contextualized” analysis and, alluding to Geertz, makes for “thin history, if it is history at all.” To see Jenness’s faults and not praise his work “offers an object lesson in the potential pitfalls of presentism” (ibid.).

The book ends with the claim that Jenness’s “often pioneering contributions to knowledge and commitment to the betterment of public life, especially for Canada’s

First Peoples, made him not only an interesting figure but an important one” (p. 338). Richling, for one, is sure his legacy matters. To draw others to that view, he might in a next edition cut many pages and pay heed to Thomas Carlyle’s dictum: “The good of a book is not the facts that can be got out of it, but the kind of resonance that it awakens in our own minds” (Smith 2012: 24).

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