

Strangers Devour the Land. By Boyce Richardson. Post Mills, VT: Chelsea Green Publishing Co., 1991. 342 pages. \$14.95 paper.

Quebec's hydroelectric development project is big by any standard. To give an idea of its scale, reservoirs created by dammed rivers are described as the size of Lake Ontario, and the area affected ecologically is compared to more than half that of France. Phase 1 of the monument to Quebec nationalism was completed in 1985; now that phase 2 has been announced, the province is once again squarely in conflict with ecological and native rights groups wishing to see it halted. Supplied with experience gained in the 1970s struggle and with preliminary environmental data—for example, increased mercury levels in waterways—these allies promise a protracted battle.

Boyce Richardson, a Montreal journalist and documentary filmmaker, first published this book in 1976; it is a report on the opposition of six thousand James Bay Cree to phase I, their legal gains and losses, and the settlement between them and the government that allowed completion of the project. The book's reissue, with the addition of a 1991 epilogue, is timely.

When the James Bay Development Corporation was established in 1971, no one deemed it necessary to consult Cree hunters and Inuit who would be dislocated by the corporation's activities. The Indians' first news of the project came from a radio program. Since James Bay Cree themselves were not then equipped with leadership and material resources to pursue their case, it fell to the umbrella IQA (Indians of Quebec Association) to file for legal injunction against Hydro Quebec on their behalf. Two issues were pivotal in the litigation: the existence of immemorial native rights and ownership of the territory to be developed, and whether a distinctive Cree culture was (and is) viable in the context of a modern industrial state. One ambiguity was that the Quebec Cree had not signed treaties or been protected by the nineteenth-century Indian Act, which provided reserves in other Canadian provinces. Lawyers for Hydro Quebec insisted that their consent was therefore not required. Since Indian rights were not enumerated in written treaties, these rights could not be said to exist at all. Indian hunters had been permitted to range territories in the North on sufferance, as long as the lands were not required for the common good. Hunting and trapping had already been centrally regulated by the province for a half-century; the Cree were not autonomous subsistence hunters. Defense lawyers wanted to

prove that Indians are as dependent as any other Canadians on modern technology, conveniences, wage labor (and social welfare).

The corporation, confident that its case was self-evident, did not prepare very carefully. Following a well-documented argument by the attorneys for the Cree, including extensive testimony by hunters brought to Montreal (with translators), the judge issued an injunction against further construction until such time as the ownership question could be settled. Hydro Quebec promptly contested the injunction, a round that Indians lost. Maneuvers stopped short of final appeal in federal court, when the Cree, cutting losses, signed a settlement in 1975. Although they saw many of the terms as having been forced upon them, the Indians emerged with hope that a way of life based on traditional culture would successfully coexist with large-scale energy development. The novel Income Security Programme—a plan to subsidize subsistence hunting and trapping—is one of the accommodations agreed on.

The Cree enlisted outside assistance: To marshal favorable public opinion, they had the energetic support of journalists (Richardson went to the North for his first film at the invitation of the IQA), took their case to the United Nations, and secured intervention by the Pope. Once having decided to negotiate, Cree leaders were committed to months of arduous bargaining, much of it in secret. At one stage, to force the issue, Quebec Premier Bourassa revealed to the press that the Cree had failed to respond to an offer of \$100 million in cash. This had the desired effect of turning some public support against the Cree and accelerating negotiation. Even with a settlement reached, work was far from over. To get all of the provisions implemented, an elaborate bureaucracy had to be first created and then prodded into action. Indian leaders continued working to get the settlement enshrined in provincial and federal law, even to the point of its inclusion in the Canadian constitution. It can be added, parenthetically, that James Bay Indians, believing that the IQA was not sufficiently attuned to its special interests, formed their own Grand Council of the Cree. There has been some criticism of this body, on the grounds that it chose to settle out of court, which set a dangerous precedent, rather than to fight the aboriginal ownership issue all the way through the federal courts.

There are several counts on which Richardson's book may be evaluated. First is how effectively it relates the story of the Cree

struggle for cultural survival, how persuasively it argues the Cree case. One may also assess how much it tells us about this culture, how adequately it fits the local conflict into the question of Quebec nationalism. Richardson's mode of presentation makes evaluation difficult. He juxtaposes anecdotal narrative with lengthy quotes from court testimony, reportage of firsthand observation, interviews with principals and interested parties to the conflict, and historical accounts of Cree-European relations. He shifts abruptly from one to another in such a way that the overall threads of the book are often obscured, the narratives disarticulated. This makes for repetitiousness; in consequence, an excessively long book loses impact. From the jumble, it is possible to extract the following main points.

First, contrary to assertions by the government that northern Quebec was a vast and underdeveloped wilderness, Richardson shows that the entire region is exploited by the hunters. It is divided into traplines and hunting territories, occupied by families most of the year. Hunters transmit usufruct "ownership" to apprentices, generally from father to son. Boundaries between them are adjusted yearly to the availability of game. Consummate naturalists, the Cree rely on generations of stored knowledge about animals, plants, and the weather to provide for their families.

Second, Indians are not merely a kind of rural proletariat, completely dependent on a cash economy. Drawing on testimony of anthropologists, Richardson establishes that Cree rely on animal harvest for the bulk of their sustenance. In some locales, as much as 90 percent of the annual food supply is provided by hunting and trapping. Corporation lawyers had argued that the Cree follow a lifestyle essentially no different from that of other Canadians. On the contrary, Richardson tells us, it does not matter that artifacts of white society are visible; these are integrated into Cree culture without robbing it of its integrity. In fact, airplanes and outboard motors for canoes allow hunters to spend even more time in the bush than before. The tradition of summer village life rests on an old pattern of trading at Hudson's Bay Company trading and outfitting.

Third, most Cree wish to preserve this way of life. Above all, the relationship between the Indians and the land is a sacred one. Beginning with the first chapter, a portrait of sixty-year-old Isaiah Awashish, Richardson describes the deep reverence Indians maintain towards nature and the complex spirit world personified in it. Daily activities are accompanied by ritual, and Cree ceremonials

are conducted to affirm the respect that humans feel for animals that support life. A theme that is repeated throughout the book is this: Whereas Indians regard the territory as a "garden," which it is their moral obligation to nurture in return for nurturance received, whites see nature as an enemy to be assaulted and tamed, from which material wealth is wrested with no obligation of return.

Fourth, where wage employment is important for Indians—in scattered villages—the intrusion of white culture has exacted great costs. There are familiar problems with alcoholism and violence. Family life suffers, as young people learn about the outside world and are estranged from traditions of their parents. They are confronted with "confused values" (p. 188) and experience the stress of trying to accommodate two cultures, comfortable in neither. Chapter 13 relates the experiences of a young woman who visited Richardson's family in Montreal. Unwilling to make a marriage her parents had arranged with a bush hunter, she wished to continue her education and make a life in the glamorous city. She was utterly unprepared for the outside world, however, and, overwhelmed, she returned to Mistassini village after a few weeks.

At points in his discourse, Richardson displays an unexpected insensitivity toward his subjects, whose cause he seeks to publicize. For example, during an early visit at the invitation of the IQA, he and several other journalists passed a night drinking with a group of young Indian men, who were rather the worse for wear as a result. The following day, several elders suggested to the visitors that the practice needs to be discouraged. Yet he does drink with Cree on other occasions and takes alcohol along on a bush visit, causing a fight in camp. Richardson concludes that "the incident seemed to confirm some of the preconceptions that white men have about Indians being unable to hold their liquor" (p. 274).

At times, Richardson indulges in a kind of "pop anthropology," which does not serve his subjects well. Remarking on the enjoyment of river travel that his Indian companions displayed, he characterizes their exuberant relish as "a behavioral trait which came from the hunting culture" (p. 138). On another occasion, he attributes the pragmatic attitude of one man toward Cree culture and wage labor to a "large injection of white blood" (p. 217). Again, in a section entitled "How It's Done" (pp. 283–84), he questions a clearly uncomfortable informant on the irrelevant subject of sex life in the crowded winter lodge, where there is little privacy.

Although Richardson repeatedly asserts the dignity and viabil-

ity of Cree traditional culture, we are not given very much detail about its content. There is little background information about Cree social and political organization or about traditional religion. He does allude to Indian superstitions (for example, the “shaking tent” in “Demon Worship, Sort Of” [pp. 89–90]), but there is little description of complex beliefs regarding cosmology, ethnometaphysics, or ceremonialism. Richardson’s tenuous grasp of these matters is evident in his own participation in settlement negotiations (pp. 306–307). He quotes anthropologists Tanner, Feit, and others on the relationship between Indians and land—that their idea of “ownership” is far removed from European conceptions. At a point in the negotiations, when the Cree were under great pressure to sign, he suggested a scheme by which they would be designated “owners” of all of the wild animals in northern Quebec. Then Indians could decide how much they would sell to sports hunters each year as a “cash crop.” He was positioned to get much media publicity for the idea—an idea that does not fit traditional views very well. If Cree culture does not allow for ownership of land in a way that makes it alienable, how can it allow for ownership of animals? Is this not the more so, considering that animals represent spirit beings with whom Indians have a sacred relationship? There is no discussion of what became of the proposal.

Richardson fails to underscore the more significant outcomes of the struggle between the James Bay Cree and the forces of progress. One is the “nation-building” impetus of the process. Aboriginally, there was little supra-familial political organization within Cree bands and still less formal political unity among them. Cree elders—few of them speaking English or French—possessed little organizational experience or knowledge of the machinery of white institutions. They were disempowered when they first learned of plans to flood much of their country. Only a few younger men, like Billy Diamond and Philip Awashish, had had contact with the outside world. Yet, in the next a few years, the Cree responded creatively. With the birth of the Grand Council of the Cree, the Indians of James Bay now exist as a corporate political body, where there was no such entity before. They have sought outside help resourcefully among lawyers and other experts and have applied moral and political pressure adroitly. In his biography, *Chief: The Fearless Vision of Billy Diamond* (1989), Roy MacGregor observes that “[b]efore the endless battle against the James Bay project would be over, the fight itself would have created the Cree

Nation, and the prospect of more wars to come . . . would substantially sustain it" (p. 134). There have, in short, been positive consequences of the development.

Richardson is a passionate champion of the Cree. There is no mistaking his outrage at the ecological, cultural, and human wreckage threatened and accomplished by Hydro Quebec. There is a good argument, he notes, that the entire project may be economically unnecessary, except as a grandiose embellishment of Quebecois nationalism. Were Quebec not so intent to sell electricity to the United States and if appropriate power conservation measures were taken at home, none of it would have been justifiable from the start. The book is, however, flawed by its rambling discursiveness. Richardson flourishes flashbacks, fade-ins, fade-outs, and other detours at the expense of coherence so much that the book not only loses force; it is also much too long. For more readable and informative accounts of the travails—and triumphs—of the James Bay Cree, I would recommend MacGregor's biography, cited above, or the more scholarly work by R. Salisbury, *A Homeland for the Crees: Regional Development in James Bay, 1971–1981* (1986).

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The Taos Indians and the Battle for Blue Lake. By R. C. Gordon-McCutchan. Santa Fe: Red Crane Books, 1991. 236 pages. \$25.95 cloth.

On 15 December 1970, President Richard Nixon signed into law H. R. 471. Also known as the Blue Lake Bill, this legislation finally resolved the sixty-four-year struggle during which the Indians of Taos Pueblo fought for the restoration to trust status of 48,000 acres of their sacred mountain lands, including their most important religious symbol—Blue Lake. It was a landmark decision in many respects. Certainly it was a major victory for the Taos people, who had contended for complete control of the lake and surrounding lands since the area had been taken from them in 1906, when it became part of the Carson National Forest. The battle had pitted an economically poor tribe of approximately two thousand people against the massive machinery and complexity of the federal government. For many, it came to symbolize the struggle