

Martine J. Reid. *Paddling to Where I Stand: Agnes Alfred, Qwiqwasutinuxw Noblewoman*. Translated by Daisy Sewid-Smith. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2004.

Rebecca Shorten, University of Northern British Columbia

The literal meaning of a K^wa'k^wala word, "Paddling to Where I Stand" is a potlatch name. Agnes Alfred chose the name to represent the people still coming towards her for her gifts of knowledge (xxvii). Even though Martine Reid recognizes the organizational and academic work put into the book by Daisy Sewid-Smith (translator) and herself (editor), she insists that Alfred was the true author of the book, making *Paddling to Where I Stand* a rare autobiography of a K^wak^wakə'wak^w First Nations woman. Reid's intent as editor was to respect Alfred's stories and memories by staying close to Alfred's meaning, and by offering K^wa'k^wala words with an explanation where English fails to have a parallel. Although there is no thesis to this book, Alfred's purpose in telling these stories is "to ensure the continuity of cultural identity and traditions" (xxiii). An oral history such as this enhances historical scholarship by offering new and different cultural perspectives for future analysis.

Although Reid indicates there are three parts to this book, there are actually four. The introduction written by Reid provides the anthropological basis for understanding Alfred's culture and offers historical context; the extensive appendices are a continuation of this understanding. The first chapter is devoted to the mythology that served similar functions to the K^wak^wakə'wak^w as did fairy tales to the Europeans. Chapter two discusses her people's immediate history before Alfred was born. The remaining

five chapters address Alfred's early life. She spent her childhood following her elders around the village, learning the old ways. As much as Alfred's early life was influenced by her elders' ways, being married at age ten to Moses Alfred, her later life was equally influenced by European ways, with electric lights and indoor plumbing.

2 |

Alfred's experiences of adapting to, and compromising with, two distinct cultures throughout her life make this book an important addition to the growing list of literature about the First Nations on British Columbia's coast. The difference between this and most of the others is that not only is a woman the subject of the account, she is also the speaker. With very few opportunities left to document life for groups like the K^wak^wakə'wak^w, *Paddling to Where I Stand* is a valuable contribution to the gathering of material that has both anthropological and historical relevance. The collaboration between Reid, Sewid-Smith, and Alfred paves the way for more first Nations women to tell their stories.

The oral storyteller in every society has several functions: historical archivist, keeper of traditions and customs, entertainer, and teacher. Agnes Alfred was no exception. Scholars who would benefit from reading this book are historians interested in gender and First Nations studies, cultural anthropologists, and folklorists. Anyone else interested in the history of the West Coast First Nations would find Alfred's narratives intriguing, memorable, and delightful. This is one woman's perspective of the world that she grew up in and that grew up around her, giving us hard evidence that oral history is a valuable resource.