

above Lake Laberge. The potency of place and story, even if only partially understood, help render vague ideas into a more meaningful and purposeful conversation between cultures. Eades and his *Maps and Memes* provide some promising suggestions on concrete contributions that can be made to move ahead with more respectful pluralist relations.

#### Notes

1. Thomas King. *The Inconvenient Indian: A Curious Account of Native People in North America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 218.
2. Traditional Ecological Knowledge / Traditional Land Use Practitioners—Canada, “What Would the Ideal Traditional Knowledge, Land Use, and Occupancy Study / Database Look Like?” (Fe - Se 2015), LinkedIn Interest Group, <https://www.linkedin.com/grp/post/4892298-5960787264400285699>.
3. William Cronon, “A Place for Stories: Nature, History, and Narrative,” *Journal of American History* 78, no. 4 (1992): 1369.

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#### ***Duke: A Novel.* By Sara Tilley. St. John’s, NL: Pedlar Press, 2015.**

Yukoners know about the 24 carat drunkenness that can only be achieved in Dawson City. There is something fantastical in the water and the air, a localized phlogiston that radiates from the dredge tailings, rolling up the Tintina Fault like mustard gas, launching party animals on whirligig benders, shoving teetotallers off their wagons, leaving us drinking electric-blue hootch out of plastic jugs by the river. We each have our stories.

Sara Tilley’s new book, *Duke: A Novel*, begins with a song of eternal Dawson, “where you can see the good / & the bad, all mixed ... where the saloons never close / & neither do their women” (13). The intoxicating gold of that “Shiny City of Dreams” (13) runs through the story that follows. Yukoners will recognize its tang.

Duke is Tilley’s fictionalized account of her own family history, starting at the turn of the last century with her great-grandfather Marmaduke Tilly (later Tilley) a young man in a “preachy frame of mind” (27) who is cast out from his home in Newfoundland, works his way up the Yukon stoking a riverboat, collides with the fleshpots of Dawson City on the crest of the gold rush wave, and travels beyond the world of laws to the Alaskan frontier. His story is sparingly interleaved with that of his daughter Eva, a literary young saint who knows a later, very different version of the wide-eyed young man we meet on that northern quest.

Duke begins as a naive soul with a guilty conscience. He dutifully chronicles the sights and sounds of his outward travels, no matter how the Doves of Louse Town stir his studiously unexamined appetites. In the face of supreme temptation, he struggles manfully with his longings. He keenly feels the oppression of his father's control ("the cause of all my Troubles," 387), yet he doesn't waver from his mission to save that same father, and the family store, from ruin. It is this contradiction that makes us care about Duke, to trust him with our hopes and fears even when we aren't proud of him. Tilley the great-granddaughter inhabits his character, or the mask of his character, and makes us believe in him.

Eva is the child of this man by a school teacher, not destined for adventure but drudgery. Her story is literally the most prosaic part of the novel, written in sentences and paragraphs rather than Duke's gap-filled stream of consciousness. Eva, however, like her father, stands up to her troubles. Duke sums up what could be the understated family motto during one of his darker moments, when starvation and hardship collide with the reality that there is no gold left in the Klondike: "& there is a chance that I Will Not Survive This" (123).

Sara Tilley is a Newfoundlander who writes for print, but she also writes and produces theatre as founder and artistic director of She Said Yes!, a feminist theatre company in St. John's. She is the author of another novel, *Skin Room*, and eleven plays. *Duke* draws from a range of genres and forms, taking poetry, fiction, and mask performance and then casting these elements as adventure, history, and family epic. Tilley plays relentlessly with form. Her lightly twisted lines and concrete language combine to create the feeling of a charcoal sketch, an impressionistic take on the archival photos we've all seen of the Klondike era. Squinting at the pages of the novel, one sees broken lines, jagged edges, strikethroughs, whitespace, and unpunctuated puddles of words; in *Duke*, form serves the characters, not the reader.

Many of the words in the novel belong to the historical Duke himself, or at least they are cloned from his original hoard. In published interviews, Tilley the author has said that she drew on over 200 pages of typewritten material transcribed from her great-grandfather's journals, letters, and other family writings. Much of this source material was discovered in a cupboard in her ancestral home in Newfoundland in 2004. Tilley worked with these archives for years without satisfying results. Eventually, she was inspired to use her theatrical training in Pochinko's Clown Through Mask technique to inhabit the characters of Duke and Eva by literally wearing masks as part of her writing process. One can only assume that improvisation and physical

movement contributed to the sprightliness of Tilley's writing, while helping her to stay so very true to the voices of her characters.

If the novel has any flaws, they are structural. Tilley's riches of character, place, sensation, and subtext are all spent lavishly on the reader, but it sometimes feels as if these coins slip through our fingers and we haven't got a box to carry them home in. Despite the consistent date markers for each chapter, the hopping back and forth in time can sometimes feel confusing and gratuitous.

Rarely, Tilley the author's voice surfaces in passages that are too self-consciously literary to belong to the characters, but this is a minor weakness. Sara Tilley is truly an important new voice in Canadian fiction. Avid readers of Canadian literature will find treasure enough in *Duke: A Novel* to justify their attention. Northerners will appreciate its earthy truthfulness about Klondike era history. Yukoners will savour the Dawson City spirits that infuse its pages.

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