ForeWord Reviews

River of the Angry Moon: Seasons on the Bella Coola
Harvey Thommassen
Mark Hume
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River of the Angry Moon illustrates both what perceptions and perspectives of the scientist and the sportsman—rigorous reasoning and factual precision on one side and passionate affection coupled with an acute sense of present and prospective loss on the other. The synthesis of these two attitudes of intense attention toward the same subject might most conveniently be called love.

In this particular instance, the recipient of this love is British Columbia's Bella Coola River, its tributaries and terrain and inhabitants of all species (though with special attention given to those of the salmonid persuasion).

Thommassen's statistical data—a virtually invariable record of the recent decades' depredations and degradations of this once richly forested and fertile region—establish the general context of loss within which Hume composes his annular sequence of elegies and laments, translating the general fact into specifically felt experiences.

Although the calendar governs the overall structure of this book, most of the chapters take their titles from the indigenous Nuxalk tribe's names for the months of the year. The inner structure of the book's emotional burden resonates through the recurring syntactic refrain, "At one time, but now…" "At one time, the Wagon Wheel was among the most productive steelhead runs on the river…But not anymore." "Once there were longhouses lined up here, with elaborate Thunderbird and grizzly bear motifs painted on them, but today…" "There used to be a small but strong run of steelhead in the 12th month…but that stock, like all the others, has dwindled to a point where it is not really worth going out." And so the bell tolls.

Whether such a course of loss and desolation can be reversed depends finally, as Hume and Thommassen insist, upon the realization of a wild hope—that love of place will overcome lust for profits.

Nick Bozanic