notably in his discussions of the first transcripts of, and initiatives to publish the legends of this continent's first peoples.

For example, "The Humanity of Speaking" goes to some length (and at no small profit to readers) to counter one critic's remark that a First Nations legend is "odd and incoherent." Those who argue so have not taken time to familiarize themselves with the legend's context or, really, to understand it, Bringhurst contends.

Elsewhere, he reminds us that mythtellers just as easily tailor what audiences hear to current circumstances. The Haida whom John Reed Swanton recorded, Bringhurst writes, "told him what they wanted written down and declined to tell him what they didn't." A more egregious example was the Crow mythteller Yellow-Brow's baiting the soon-to-be-married Robert Lowie with digs regarding male-female relations: "The joke he played did damage to the myth, but it is evident that Yellow-Brow and Lowie both thought it was a good one."

Amid discussions of oral literatures and the importance of them being written down for others to appreciate, Bringhurst cautions against esteeming books to such a degree that we lose sight of the literature without which we would have no need for books. For literature exists independent of books; Bringhurst exhorts his audience at one point to arm themselves against books by reading the book that was neither written nor published, the book of living experience that gives rise to literature, stories and books.

To say much more threatens to detract from essays that are more eloquent than this review claims to be. As a friend who received them as a gift remarked, "I almost forgot that people can write in these beautiful ways." A companion volume, which Gaspereau plans to publish this fall, promises to extend some of the discussions started in *The Tree of Meaning*.

The current volume has an elegance in design that matches the prose. Arabic, Chinese, Hebrew and other languages that don't use the Roman alphabet are set in typefaces that blend with the Rialto Piccolo of the main text.

The appearance and content make this a book to feed on rather than devour in one sitting. And, as enlightening as it is on a first read, I believe it has the potential to enrich our understanding of the texts we collect and those we don't.

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EX LIBRIS

Ethel & Wallace Wilson

Though the bookplate can be an intensely private expression, it is also a public piece; the act of naming has little place in a strictly private context. But once the plate leaves the private domain, its images and symbols fall open to interpretation. This particular plate belonged to B.C. author Ethel Wilson and former Canadian Medical Association president Wallace Wilson. It is a case in point.

A biographer might draw connections between Ethel Wilson's precarious orphan upbringing and the plate's romanticized representation of B.C.'s landscape. Perhaps nature's apparent timelessness and stability provided a measure of comfort against the uncertainties of Ethel Wilson's life.

Or maybe a researcher has just found Wallace Wilson's copy of Thackeray's novel *The Newcomes*, which he kept scrupulously clean all through his time in the Great War. The bookplate then takes on heightened meaning. More than whimsy, it has grown out of a lifelong respect for literature.

On the other hand, a master's student with a passion for cultural criticism might see something quite different: a famous Canadian author, who grew up in South Africa, England and Canada during the heyday of the British Empire, married a soon-to-become prominent Canadian physician. This colonizing couple, using the ultimate symbol of old-country, privileged leisure (the bookplate), reproduced a middle-class wilderness, violently stripped of its original inhabitants.

Taken out of its owners' library, this bookplate is now left entirely to the public imagination. It's a new life of possibility and peril for this little object.

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