

Surf's Up! The Rising Tide of Atlantic-Canadian Literature

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Volume 33, Number 2, 2008

URI: https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/sc133_2art01

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Publisher(s)

The University of New Brunswick

ISSN

0380-6995 (print)

1718-7850 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this article

Wylie, H. & Lynes, J. (2008). Surf's Up! The Rising Tide of Atlantic-Canadian Literature. *Studies in Canadian Literature / Études en littérature canadienne*, 33(2), 5-22.

Surf's Up! The Rising Tide of Atlantic-Canadian Literature

HERB WYILE AND JEANETTE LYNES

YOU PROBABLY KNOW THE SCENARIO. Hyperimaginative orphan Anne Shirley sits on the front seat of Matthew Cuthbert's buggy as they travel from the Avonlea train station to Anne's new home, Green Gables. Her loquacious rhapsodizing over the beauty of Prince Edward Island is brought to an abrupt halt as she is struck dumb by the vision of the "Avenue" (soon to be rechristened "the White Way of Delight"):

The 'Avenue' . . . was a stretch of road four or five hundred yards long, completely arched over with huge, wide-spreading apple-trees, planted years ago by an eccentric old farmer. Overhead was one long canopy of snowy fragrant bloom. Below the boughs the air was full of a purple twilight and far ahead a glimpse of painted sunset sky shone like a great rose window at the end of a cathedral aisle. (Montgomery 24-25)

And so it goes on. Saltwater synaesthesia. Orgasmic pastoral.

A flurry of pages off the calendar (or, perhaps more appropriately, a heavy thumb on the fast-forward button) and, almost a hundred years later, we are presented with this scene from Newfoundland writer Edward Riche's 2004 novel *The Nine Planets*. Picnic basket in hand, Riche's protagonist Marty Devereaux and his new amour Jackie Spurrell gaze upon the Perroquet Downs just outside St. John's:

the spot, while on the sea, was nestled in protective geology. The hills cradled it in a giant's arm, shielding it from the nor'easters. The trees here at the head of the valley were straight, tall and mixed, birches and larch breaking up the impenetrable stands of spruce. The grasses and peat, which took over closer to the point, were . . . a plush carpet. The variety of the low-growing plants was astonishing: leaves delicate or leathery, sporting berries, seed heads and pods. But this, at ankle height, was only the canopy. Below was fibrous growth, a thatch of runners and then farther down interwoven mosses, emerald foam — a fairy forest of redheaded matchsticks. (200)

There is a problem, however, or rather a series of problems, with this idyllic, bucolic picture. Not only is Jackie a married woman whom Marty is aspiring to “bang” (what would Rachel Lynde have to say about that?); not only do the pair have in tow Jackie’s semi-comatose husband Ted, a recovering alcoholic whose rescheduled group therapy has put a wrench in Marty and Jackie’s adulterous assignation; but also the Perroquet Downs are being coveted as a construction site by a local developer who has encouraged Marty to devise a blueprint for “schools that could be disassembled, loaded into semis, and hauled to the next market, be it Arizona or British Columbia, or for that matter packed into a container and shipped to the U.A.E. or New Zealand” (146). As the developer assures Marty, the idea that the Downs are “unspoiled” is ludicrous,

as though building there, like making use of it, letting people live in it, would spoil it. That’s such bullshit, Marty, ’cause this place is about commerce. They didn’t cross the pond in leaky boats for a theatre festival or to watch whales, they came to this place to make money, to kill whales and sell their fat. North America is about capitalism, and it got its start here, right here. Money means vitality, money means movement. That’s our lost tradition, Marty, not running the fucking goat. (141)

You’ve got it, Dorothy. This *doesn’t* look like Kansas.

For those (and they are legion) who picture Canada’s East Coast as a seaside retreat populated by quaint, rustic relics from the nineteenth century — “the stoic rickety sea-serfs of yesteryear,” as Riche puts it (147) — his hilarious novel provides a bracing, sobering gale. With its biting cynicism toward cultural authenticity and heroic narratives of Newfoundland history and its acute consciousness of the precariousness of Newfoundland’s position within a mobile, globalized economy, *The Nine Planets* sends a message loud and clear: if you’re in quest of the Folk, you’ve come to the wrong place. Rather than offering up the retreat from modernity sought by those cultural producers who constructed the myth of Maritime innocence diagnosed by Ian McKay in his seminal study *The Quest of the Folk: Antimodernism and Cultural Selection in Twentieth-Century Nova Scotia*, Riche, like many of the current generation of writers coming out of the Atlantic provinces, provides an image of the region that is thoroughly inscribed within the political, cultural, and economic dynamics of a postmodern “global village.”

The Nine Planets, in short, signals a sea change (as it were) currently under way in the literature of Canada's Far East. Writing in 1999, Tony Tremblay pointed to "a confluence of creative energies and achievements . . . signaling that Maritime literature is again re-energizing, again readying to come of age" ("Even" 270), and the intervening decade of literary activity on the East Coast has proven him right indeed.

Before getting too overheated on the subject, though, it's worth noting that over the past two centuries the Atlantic provinces have enjoyed periodic bouts of literary prominence that have become part of the lore of nationalist literary history. In the early decades of the nineteenth century, for instance, there was a considerable degree of literary activity in New Brunswick and Nova Scotia in particular, and figures such as Joseph Howe, Thomas Chandler Haliburton, Thomas McCulloch, and Oliver Goldsmith made an early mark on what ultimately came to be Canadian literature. And, of course, two of the most prominent members of the most prominent group of writers at the end of the nineteenth century, the so-called Confederation Poets, Charles G.D. Roberts and Bliss Carman, were from New Brunswick and emerged from a vibrant literary and cultural community centred in Fredericton. Indeed, over the course of the nineteenth century, the Maritimes played an influential role in the development of the broader culture of the nation.

The twentieth century, however, was culturally — as it was economically — a different story. As Margaret Conrad and James Hiller argue in *Atlantic Canada: A Region in the Making*, the previous century witnessed the increasing relegation of Canada's far eastern provinces (not to be confused with embittered western Canadians' imaginary "eastern Canada") to the figurative margins of Confederation. The same was arguably the case for the region's literature. The spectacular success of L.M. Montgomery aside, while the region has certainly produced a number of writers who have gained national prominence — Hugh MacLennan, Ernest Buckler, Alden Nowlan, Milton Acorn, E.J. Pratt, David French, Thomas Raddall, to name a few — for most of the century the region's writers were eclipsed by those in the rest of the country, particularly in "central" Canada. With the publishing industry and the literati concentrated in the metropolitan centres of Montreal and (increasingly) Toronto, for much of the century writers from the east were faced with the choice of relocating to the centre — as did MacLennan and Pratt, for instance — or sticking it out on the margin, like Buckler and Nowlan.

In short, the fate of writing on the East Coast was that it seemed to be within the national culture what the region itself increasingly became in the national imagination — an appendage. However, over the past twenty years, while the latter impression has been consolidated and even intensified, there has been a distinct shift in the former. Through the 1970s and 1980s (to grossly simplify), the profile of writing on the East Coast on the national scene was sustained principally by two figures: Alistair MacLeod, who, along with Alice Munro, is widely considered one of the finest practitioners of the short story in Canada; and David Adams Richards, who has become one of the country's premier novelists, building through an impressive corpus of novels one of the most sustained, lyrical, and morally resonant fictional territories in the history of Canadian literature. Over the course of the 1990s, two more writers, Wayne Johnston and George Elliott Clarke, joined the ranks of Richards and MacLeod as prominent figures on the national literary scene. Johnston has garnered attention for a series of comic novels but more particularly for his historical novels *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams* and *The Navigator of New York*. The indefatigable Clarke is a veritable Renaissance avatar (poet, anthologist, critic, academic, novelist, playwright), winning a Governor General's Literary Award for his poetry (*Execution Poems*) and making a splash with his debut novel *George & Rue*; furthermore, as Alexander MacLeod suggests in his overview of Clarke's career in this issue, Clarke has played a pivotal role in increasing the profile of people of African heritage in the Maritimes through his impassioned vision of the imagined community of "Africadia." These four are the writers of whom readers outside the region are most likely to have heard, and for very good reason.

Given the lamentable neglect of Atlantic writers in the past, perhaps it should be cause for celebration that the names of four writers from the East Coast might be recognized west (and, for that matter, north) of Edmundston. What is of more significance, though, is that this is (to poach a metaphor from Newfoundland and Labrador's Department of Tourism) just the tip of the iceberg. The more encouraging fact is that there are many other writers who, in the past twenty years, have gained a considerable profile not just inside the region but outside it as well: poets such as Brian Bartlett, Lesley Choyce, Anne Compton, Mary Dalton, Lynn Davies, Don Domanski, Anne Simpson, Harry Thurston, and Maxine Tynes; playwrights such as Robert Chafe,

Norm Foster, Christopher Heide, Wendy Lill, Bryden MacDonald, Daniel MacIvor, and R.M. Vaughan; and fiction writers such as Lynn Coady, Michael Crummey, Sheldon Currie, Leo McKay Jr., Lisa Moore, Bernice Morgan, Donna Morrissey, John Steffler, and Michael Winter. Moreover, the writing of the current generation reflects an increasing generic and stylistic diversification and sophistication. In his introduction to *The Literature of Newfoundland*, a recent special issue of *Essays on Canadian Writing*, Lawrence Mathews sees in the work of the current crop of Newfoundland fiction writers a greater attention to language, a broader range of literary influences, a more sophisticated treatment of themes, and a more complex approach to literary form and technique (9-10). This observation arguably can be extended to a good deal of the current literary output of the Atlantic provinces, posing a distinct challenge to the stereotypical association of Atlantic-Canadian literature with a kind of rock-bound, elemental, simplistic realism.

Having mentioned *The Literature of Newfoundland*, a caveat is in order about the scope of this issue of *Studies in Canadian Literature*. In his recent study, *Setting in the East: Maritime Realist Fiction*, David Creelman limits his discussion to the Maritimes, arguing that the Atlantic provinces “are linked by their common struggle against the economic hardships of underdevelopment and underemployment, yet, for all the political and economic similarities, the culture of Newfoundland has been shaped by historical, social, ethnic and religious forces very different from those which have moulded the three Maritime provinces.” Despite some shared “thematic and formal similarities,” Creelman contends, “the texts of Newfoundland embody a very different set of cultural and ideological tensions and must be considered as a regional literature distinct in itself” (3). Creelman’s argument is certainly compelling, and, indeed, that distinctiveness is implicit in the dedication of an entire issue of *Essays on Canadian Writing* to the literature of Newfoundland, edited by Mathews. Nonetheless, the focus of this present collection, on contemporary Atlantic-Canadian writing, suggests that there is much to be gained by viewing contemporary writing in the Maritimes and Newfoundland together, particularly because of the shared experiences of the four Atlantic provinces. In establishing the scope of their history of the region, Conrad and Hiller refer, for one thing, to “the deep sense of place that sets Atlantic-Canadians apart from many other North Americans” and argue that, although other

criteria “may be used to define Atlantic Canada, it is above all the region’s functional relation to the rest of the continent that now fixes its identity” (1). Despite the recent provenance of the very concept of “Atlantic Canada,” the Atlantic provinces are increasingly being shaped by common economic, cultural, political, and social forces — a resource crisis, continuing out-migration, a shared reliance on tourism, and a fractious relationship with the rest of the country — and these shared experiences are subsequently reflected, to a degree, by common concerns and characteristics in the literature of the region.

In *Setting in the East*, Creelman argues that because of the Maritime Provinces’ experience of modernity — the transformation of the Maritimes over the course of the twentieth century “from one of the most developed, prosperous, and promising regions in Canada into one now characterized by chronic underemployment and underdevelopment” (4) — the culture of the region is marked by a “fragile equilibrium,” an uneasy “balance between hesitation about the future and its memory of the past” (15) that distinguishes it from the rest of the country. A similar, perhaps even more intense, ambivalence can be observed behind the current cultural and literary renaissance in Newfoundland. This is, in part, the end result of a century of modernization, uneven development, and economic centralization during which the East Coast was relegated to the status of a subordinate dependant. In his 1991 essay, “Atlantic Canada and ‘the End of History’: Postmodernism and Regional Underdevelopment,” Marc Epprecht made the dramatic observation that “the four Atlantic provinces are, by many criteria, actually more dependent and underdeveloped now than countries which were formerly considered ‘Third World’” (429). Thom Workman’s more recent study, *Social Torment: Globalization in Atlantic Canada*, suggests that this effect has been intensified by the increasing dominance of a neoliberal rhetoric — what Pierre Bourdieu calls “symbolic inculcation” (29) — of international competitiveness, profitability, austerity, and “flexible” labour. The dividends of globalization, Workman cautions, tend to be shared in a highly unequal fashion, with workers and the poor bearing the brunt of an economic regime that, if anything, sees wealth “trickling up” rather than down, creating an even greater divide between the rich and the poor (7). In Bourdieu’s terms, it is “a very smart and very modern repackaging of the oldest ideas of the oldest capitalists” (34). The imposition of this corporatist, global economic

ethos, along with changes in federal policies, Conrad and Hiller point out, has had profound social and cultural effects on Atlantic Canada over the past couple of decades:

the dismantling of the interventionist state has taken a heavy toll in a region where private institutions are ill-positioned to take up the slack. Toll highways, home-based care, food banks, call centres, and corporate sponsorship of education and research may represent a brave new world to those converted to the religion of the marketplace, but many Atlantic-Canadians regret the abandonment of the noble dream that made human welfare rather than corporate profits the measure of a civil society. (212)

These shared experiences, and particularly the region's contemporary status as the nation's dependant, help to explain what is perhaps most distinctive about contemporary Atlantic-Canadian writing: its more determined — and not infrequently defiant — tone. Especially because that modernization has been structurally and materially disadvantageous to so many people in the Atlantic provinces (as evident in continuing scepticism in both the Maritimes and Newfoundland about the benefits of joining Confederation), there is in the region perhaps a more pronounced wariness about modernity and a genuine sense of anxiety, as Creelman for one describes, at the eclipse of the sense of culture and community that developed around the region's traditional reliance on resource-based industries (11). **At the same time, however, while this anxiety is routinely coupled with a sense of having been exploited, denigrated, and dismissed, that sense of grievance has also been leavened, particularly in the literature of the region, by a more subversive and resistant scepticism about the region's marginal position.**

As Tony Tremblay's opening salvo here reflects, this scepticism can be seen as akin to a postcolonial writing back to the centre. Although playful irony is not a recent import to the East Coast — witness Ray Smith's 1969 collection *Cape Breton Is the Thought Control Centre of Canada*, for starters — the regionalism that so dominated critical debate in the 1970s often took the shape, in the literature and literary criticism of the East Coast, of an assertive but somewhat essentialist regional pride and distinctiveness. What is increasingly conspicuous in Atlantic-Canadian literature, however, is a self-consciously ironic and contestatory attitude to the way in which the region has been positioned in the rest of the country as, on the one hand, its "ocean playground" and, on the

other, its economic albatross. While contemporary Atlantic-Canadian literature may be less grounded in monolithic notions of regional or provincial identity, it is arguably much more assured and assertive as it stakes its distance from such notions. From Clarke's pointed reminders about the long genealogy of African Canadians (and about the history of slavery) in the Maritimes, to Riche's subversive parodying of the tourist gaze in both of his novels, to the cosmopolitan regionalism of Michael Winter's and Lisa Moore's fiction, this is a literature that knows where it stands.

One must be wary, however, of creating a wholesale impression of contemporary writing in the Atlantic provinces as "resistant" or "edgy" or (worse yet) "quirky," creating yet another monolithic (and marketable) stereotype of the region. That task, as Tremblay's essay suggests, can be left to the national media. Contemporary East Coast writing, as this collection of essays testifies, is much more complex and varied than that, marked as much by continuity as by change. While Paul Chafe's essay on Riche's *Rare Birds* and Thomas Hodd's piece on the heritage preservation narrative in the Maritimes reflect the increasing engagement of the gaze of the outsider in Atlantic-Canadian literature, and Susanne Marshall's discussion of Moore's work emphasizes how the Atlantic coast was always already cosmopolitan and international, other pieces in this collection, such as Wanda Campbell's meditation on the continuing place of the sea in Maritime poetry and Cynthia Sugars's exploration of the complexities of nostalgia in the work of Alistair MacLeod, provide sophisticated revisitations of perennial features of writing on the East Coast.

If Atlantic-Canadian literature can be said to be in the best shape it has been in for a long time (perhaps ever), the same cannot be said for the critical response to that literature — at least not yet. In his introduction to a special issue of *Essays on Canadian Writing* on the literature of Atlantic Canada published in the summer of 1985, guest editor Terry Whalen reflected on the flurry of critical commentary on the literature of the region at the time and observed that "our efforts will, we hope, further nourish an interest in and an intelligent attention to the study of Atlantic-Canadian literature" (1). That interest, arguably, has been slow to emerge in the intervening years. Although two collections of essays on Atlantic-Canadian writing appeared during the 1990s — *Studies in Maritime Literary History 1760-1930*, edited by Gwendolyn Davies,

and *Down East: Critical Essays on Contemporary Maritime Canadian Literature*, edited by Wolfgang Hochbruck and James O. Taylor — Creelman's *Setting in the East* was the first book-length, single-author study of writing on the East Coast in almost twenty years, since the publication of Janice Kulyk Keefer's *Under Eastern Eyes: A Critical Reading of Maritime Fiction* in 1985. However, there have been no book-length studies of the work of Richards and MacLeod to this date (though Guernica has issued slim collections of essays on MacLeod and Richards), and there is very little critical commentary on the current crop of East Coast writers beyond the more prominent foursome of MacLeod, Richards, Clarke, and Johnston (and there had been but a handful of pieces on Johnston's work prior to the special Newfoundland issue of *Essays on Canadian Writing*, almost half of which is devoted to discussing Johnston's novels).

There are indications, though, that the interest in Atlantic-Canadian literature that Whalen anticipated is starting to emerge. Creelman's study was followed a year later by Danielle Fuller's investigation of the publishing industry, constructions of regional identity, and the pivotal role of textual communities in fostering writing by women in the Atlantic region, *Writing the Everyday: Women's Textual Communities in Atlantic Canada*, which won the 2004 Gabrielle Roy Prize for English-language literary criticism. Beyond Creelman's and Fuller's studies and the Newfoundland *ECW* issue, there are signs of more to come. The journal *Canadian Literature*, for instance, has published a special issue on Atlantic-Canadian writing, coedited by Marta Dvorak and Coral Ann Howells. Bruce Barton, Michael Devine, and Natalie Alvarez are coediting an issue of *Theatre Research in Canada* on theatre in Atlantic Canada, dedicated to a conference held at the University of Toronto's Graduate Centre for the Study of Drama in March 2004 called "Shifting Tides: Atlantic-Canadian Theatre Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow." *Canadian Theatre Review* published a theme issue on Atlantic-Canadian theatre, edited by Linda Burnett. The growing interest in East Coast writing has also been reflected in, and further fuelled by, the publication of a cluster of anthologies dedicated to contemporary Atlantic-Canadian literature. Jeanette Lynes's *Words out There: Women Poets in Atlantic Canada* was published in 1999. Hugh MacDonald and Brent MacLaine coedited *Landmarks: An Anthology of New Atlantic-Canadian Poetry of the Land* (2001). Lesley Choyce's 2001 fiction anthology *Atlantica:*

Stories from the Maritimes and Newfoundland was published by Goose Lane, as was a collection consisting primarily of contemporary poetry, *Coastlines: The Poetry of Atlantic Canada*, edited by Anne Compton, Laurence Hutchman, Ross Leckie, and Robin McGrath, which appeared the following year. Another anthology of stories, edited by Lynn Coady, *Victory Meat: New Fiction from Atlantic Canada*, came out in 2003. Finally, *Marigraph: Gauging the Tides of Drama from New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island*, a collection of plays edited by Bruce Barton, appeared in 2004.

This current issue of *Studies in Canadian Literature, Surf's Up!*, — with extended essays on Clarke, Moore, Riche, and MacLeod and articles touching on the work of a wide range of writers, including Johnston, Thurston, Richards, Choyce, Compton, Currie, Susan Kerlake, Deidre Dwyer, and others — comes out of an effort to generate a more sustained critical response to the current flurry of literary activity in Atlantic Canada and represents a substantial contribution to the growing body of commentary on Atlantic-Canadian literature. All but one of the pieces included here started as papers presented at Surf's Up! The Rising Tide of Atlantic-Canadian Literature, a three-day conference held at Acadia University in Wolfville, Nova Scotia, in October of 2004, as part of the Department of English's ongoing Thomas Raddall Symposium series. Surf's Up! was an intimate and energetic gathering of scholars and writers from the Atlantic Provinces, from across Canada, and from as far away as England and Japan. The conference's first keynote speaker, poet, fiction writer, and publisher of Pottersfield Press, Lesley Choyce, gave an entertaining insider's view of the history of Atlantic literature over the past three decades, while the second keynote speaker, playwright and former NDP Member of Parliament Wendy Lill, described her experiences as the party's cultural critic in Parliament and spoke passionately and eloquently to the political and cultural challenges facing the region. Lynn Coady and Michael Crummey gave new meaning to the term "dinner theatre," regaling those gathered at the conference banquet with salty passages from their novels-in-progress (Crummey's *The Wreckage* subsequently appeared in the summer of 2005, and Coady's novel *Mean Boy* appeared in the spring of 2006). The conference came to a lyrical close with readings by Anne Compton, including selections from *Opening the Island*, and by Harry Thurston, who gave a preview of his historical verse novella *A Ship Portrait*, since released in the fall of 2005 by Gaspereau Press.

The scholarly papers presented at Surf's Up! were marked by a theoretical sophistication and a frequently combative tone that are sustained and sharpened in the essays contained in this collection. In the opening article, "Lest on Too Close Sight I Miss the Darling Illusion': The Politics of the Centre in 'Writing Maritime,'" Tony Tremblay sets the stage for the essays to follow by reading regionalism "backward" — "as a construction of the centre rather than the margins." His discussion is a cogent reminder of both the ideological nature of reading practices and the cultural politics inherent in the formation of literary canons. Using postcolonial and Marxist theories to frame his examination of how Maritime literature has been read, Tremblay argues that "critics, reviewers, and centralists who endorse our books" reinscribe a nationalist (i.e., Upper Canadian) mythos that perpetuates romantic stereotypes of Atlantic-Canadian culture as a nostalgic, marginal, and, ultimately, colonial space. These centrist constructions shape the process of canon formation in that, as Tremblay illustrates, only those Maritime authors whose work is "intelligible" — that is, familiar, conforming to pre-existing stereotypes — to the nation's "ideological control-rooms such as the CBC and the National Film Board," as well as the print media, are deemed worthy of inclusion in the "inner circle at the centre of the country." In other words, Maritime texts that do not uphold the centre's static stereotype of the region or do not support "a mythology of 'Maritimeness' that readers outside the region desire" may be subject to critical sanctions. To illustrate this, Tremblay cites examples of how critics have "scolded" David Adams Richards for "breaking the covenant" — in other words, for refusing to conform to the centre's "Canadian-appropriate myth . . . that must deny regional and class disparities in order to affirm the rightness and health of the federation." These imperialistic cultural formulations, Tremblay points out, quoting Homi Bhabha, have relegated Richards's narratives and characters to membership in a "colonized . . . population of degenerate types." The centrist policing of how Maritime texts are received in the country's cultural "centre," Tremblay contends, continually reinstalls nostalgia and a white, "Old World" "Celtic ethnicity" as prime values. Riffing off Charles G.D. Roberts's famous poem, "The Tantramar Revisited," Tremblay issues a challenge to revisit the Tantramar *again* — to look beyond centrist constructions of Maritime space.

Subsequent contributors take up Tremblay's challenge. Danielle Fuller and David Creelman, in two companion articles, examine Maritime "bestsellers" and "obscured texts." In "The Crest of the Wave: Reading the Success Story of Bestsellers," Fuller focuses on three novels that reflect her hypothesis that "fiction about Atlantic Canada [has] become a 'sexy' transatlantic publishing trend." The questions that Fuller poses with respect to Ann-Marie MacDonald's *Fall on Your Knees*, Wayne Johnston's *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams*, and Alistair MacLeod's *No Great Mischief* are "How and why do Atlantic-Canadian texts travel, . . . and what cultural work — ideological and discursive — do travelling texts perform — and for whom?" Following Pierre Bourdieu's work, Fuller examines the responses of literary reviewers and readers who appear on Oprah's Book Club as well as those who post digital responses to Atlantic-Canadian texts. She illustrates, as well, how the corporatization of the publishing industry has created a "'blockbuster culture' in which a handful of titles hog the spotlight." Fuller tracks strategies used by editors, publishers, publicists, and media celebrities to create a "spectacle" around particular Atlantic-Canadian texts — whether this "spectacle" involves romantic myths of authorship, the exoticism of Newfoundland, or the ascendancy of genre fiction. In an era of globalization, Fuller suggests, publishers seem to have tapped into a renewed interest in "geopolitically marginalized communities" and the putative "authenticity" of voices from these locales. Recalling Tremblay's notion of nationalistic agendas, Fuller similarly points out how readers' desire for Canadian and "world-class" texts can elide aspects of these texts that challenge the very ideologies that embrace them.

In "Swept Under: Reading the Stories of Two Undervalued Maritime Writers," David Creelman focuses on the question of why some Maritime texts — specifically those written by Susan Kerslake and Lesley Choyce — have not received the critical recognition they deserve. In addition to being published by smaller presses, Kerslake's and Choyce's work, Creelman argues, "resist[s] the signifying codes that define the Maritime region" and that, therefore, "might have carried them further into the reading community." Specifically, Creelman illustrates how the fact that Kerslake and Choyce do not write within the traditional (Maritime) realistic paradigm has led to a lukewarm critical reception. This reception, in turn, Creelman hypothesizes, "may have less to do with the actual aesthetic codes at work in the Maritimes and more to do with

those critics' own expectations about what the region's literature is or should be." For example, Kerslake's prioritizing of lyricism and myth over "the role of place or the region's culture" in her novels *Middlewatch* and *Penumbra* makes critics with a stake in "the dominant discourses of regional identity" less receptive to her work. Creelman fleshes out critics' "expectations" in terms of what he sees as four dominant discourses at work in constructing the Maritime region: the "essentialist construct" heavily based in geography; the construction of the region as underdeveloped in relation to (and dependent on) a dominant centre; a concept of region based on multiple communities and discourses; and a notion of region as indeterminate space. Choyce's novel *The Republic of Nothing*, in its embracing of indeterminate space, Creelman argues, avoids "the current constructions of regional identity." Decrying the undervaluing of texts that don't fit these dominant discourses, Creelman calls for a more complex understanding of regionalism.

Fleshing out Creelman's reference to region as indeterminate space within the context of Newfoundland, Susanne Marshall, in her article "As if There Were Just the Two Choices: Region and Cosmopolis in Lisa Moore's Fiction," examines Moore's two collections of short stories, *Open* and *Degrees of Nakedness*. Marshall illustrates how Moore enacts a new negotiation between "regional identity and global influences" as "played out in the minute actions of our everyday lives, infusing them with political import and responsibility." Moore is particularly adept, Marshall shows, in revealing a new urban, cosmopolitan Newfoundland as opposed to traditional, by now stereotypical images of rugged outports. Using David Jordan's formulation of "postmodern regionalism," Marshall's examination of Moore's work problematizes boundaries and recognizes "the place of the global in local contexts." Her analysis of Moore's stories reveals the latter's strategy of "indigenizing" global influences within "specific cultures." In writing of suburban life in Newfoundland, Marshall illustrates, Moore forces us to think beyond iconic rural stereotypes of Newfoundland and to consider "the interpenetration of mass and regional culture."

The significance of George Elliott Clarke's contribution to Atlantic literature is signalled by the presence in this collection of two essays exploring that contribution against the broader background of constructions of regionalism and of regional identity. In "'The Little State of Africadia Is a Community of Believers': Replacing the Regional and

Remaking the Real in the Work of George Elliott Clarke,” Alexander MacLeod foregrounds a number of probing questions, including the nagging issue of what makes a text “regional” in the first place. Taking his cue from spatial theorists such as Henri Lefebvre and Edward Soja, MacLeod steers away from essentialist notions of region, arguing that “literary scholars are only now beginning to understand that regionalist writers are active participants in the cultural construction of the worlds that they inhabit.” Chronicling the development of not only Clarke’s career as a writer but also his role as a prominent public intellectual, MacLeod fleshes out the ways in which Clarke’s work “straddles the line between traditional and contemporary interpretations of cultural geography.” Specifically, MacLeod assesses the implications of Clarke’s “Africadian nation-building project,” which posits Africadia as a “mythical notion” and constitutes a direct assault on environmentally deterministic formulations of region.

MacLeod’s observation that Clarke’s work has moved outward in widening circles from examining black culture in Nova Scotia is reinforced in Jennifer Andrews’s article, “Re-Visioning Fredericton: Reading George Elliott Clarke’s *Execution Poems*.” Here Andrews examines how Clarke’s *Execution Poems* (2001) challenges the romantic, pastoral representations of New Brunswick’s capital city and, more generally, the “predominantly Loyalist tone of Maritime literature.” Andrews traces the evolution of Fredericton-as-poetic-subject through Sir Charles G.D. Roberts and Bliss Carman to Fred Cogswell, Alden Nowlan, and George Elliott Clarke. Her reading of *Execution Poems*, a collection based on the execution of two of Clarke’s cousins for murdering a white taxi driver in Fredericton in 1949, underscores the dynamics of centre and margin within the Maritimes itself — in other words, how the two African Canadian men in this collection, Geo and Rue, are criminalized, in part, for their difference from the “dominant white Loyalist heritage of Fredericton, New Brunswick, and the Maritimes more generally.” In broader terms, Andrews’s article situates Clarke as a key figure in “exposing the legacy of racism that has shaped the birthplace of Canadian poetry” and, in doing so, further challenging bucolic stereotypes of New Brunswick’s capital and culturally monolithic constructions of regional identity.

In “Repetition with a Difference: The Paradox of Origins in Alistair MacLeod’s *No Great Mischief*,” Cynthia Sugars revisits the element

of nostalgia that critics have often identified in MacLeod's work. Specifically, Sugars examines the "drive for genealogy" in MacLeod's novel and in his earlier writing. The question for MacLeod, as she formulates it, drawing on Freud's work on the double and the uncanny, Said's work on origins, and Derrida's writing on proliferation and names, is "whether human existence is determined by contingency or fate." Sugars complicates the nostalgia that critics have been rather quick to ascribe to MacLeod's writing and contends that in *No Great Mischief* "what we see . . . is not a longing to return to a home of the past but a longing to *arrive at* a past that was never allowed to be." Sugars concludes her article by suggesting how it is possible to position MacLeod's narrative and its quest for genealogy within the "settler trajectory" of the larger history of Canada.

Citing David Jordan's contention in *New World Regionalism* that marginality is "a crucial aspect of regionalism," Wanda Campbell's article, "Every Sea-Surrounded Hour': The Margin in Maritime Poetry," situates Maritime poetry as "quintessentially marginal poetry." While Campbell is careful to avoid falling into the trap of essentialism — recognizing, for example, that "many writers from the region have moved away from such traditional [marine, rural] associations" — she argues cogently, and with a poet's touch, for a reconsideration of Maritime poetry within the context of recent writings on ecopoetics. Campbell is also well aware of the extent to which the sea has been appropriated by the tourist industry and marketed as part of "Canada's ocean playground," a commercially driven iconography that overlooks the socio-economic realities of the decline of the fisheries and traditional seafaring lifestyles. However, despite the changing role of the sea in Maritimers' lives, Campbell contends that it "still wields enormous power in the poetry for what it reveals about the margin, not just the margin between land and sea, but also the margin between myth and reality, mortality and survival, memory and forgetting." In contrast to the notion of the sea as tragic in the work of Newfoundland poet E.J. Pratt, Campbell identifies a more "sympathetic portrait of the sea" in formulations of the margin in a series of poems by Deidre Dwyer, Harry Thurston, Anne Compton, and Lesley Choyce. Her discussion of Maritime poetry moves toward an ecological notion of interconnection, the "entanglement" of the human and natural worlds.

Very much in the spirit of McKay's *The Quest of the Folk*, the final two articles in this issue — Paul Chafe's study of Edward Riche's novel *Rare Birds* and Thomas Hodd's examination of stories by Sheldon Currie and Alistair MacLeod — reveal how Atlantic-Canadian writers critique the "culture industry's" stereotypical "idyllic picture" of the region. Chafe begins by surveying the "packaging" of Newfoundland culture for the tourist market, specifically the myth of "a unique, unspoiled people" and "authentic, natural fisher-poets." He illustrates how Riche's novel satirically punctures the false notions of authenticity peddled by the tourist industry. Chafe sets the stage by applying Baudrillard's concept of the simulacra to simulations of Newfoundland's past, such as the set of the *Random Passage* film based on Bernice Morgan's novel of the same title. His reading of *Rare Birds* emphasizes how Riche comically resists essentializing stereotypes of the rugged, elemental Newfoundlander by highlighting the preference of the "new" Newfoundlander, Alphonse Murphy, for technology over nature. As Chafe reveals, "A Newfoundlander such as Alphonse Murphy, who not only ravages the land but also experiments with near-futuristic technology that results in a personal submarine and a revolutionary lighting system that enables one to 'light the biggest kind of room with a double-A battery,' does not fit into the desired type of the 'poor, cute, and simple-minded fisherfolk.'" Chafe also illustrates how Riche satirizes the false authenticity of the tourist experience in the "pseudo-event" that restaurateur Dave Purcell concocts: the sighting of "Tasker's Sulphureous Duck." Thus, as Chafe suggests, Riche shows the complexity and complicity of Newfoundlanders' stake in the tourist industry, of how their island's culture becomes "an artifact that is not so much lived as it is *performed*" (emphasis added).

Taking as his point of departure the theories of Ian McKay, James Overton, and Marc Epprecht, among others, Thomas Hodd examines how the "tartanization" of Nova Scotia fulfilled a government agenda of heritage tourism and explores "the issue of state involvement in heritage identity." Recognizing, like Chafe, the primacy of an ersatz "authenticity" in the construction of tourist sites, Hodd argues that Sheldon Currie's "The Glace Bay Miners' Museum" and Alistair MacLeod's "The Tuning of Perfection" constitute "heritage preservation narratives." Hodd identifies in both MacLeod's and Currie's stories five elements constitutive of such a narrative: a culture under threat, a distinct body

of cultural symbols or themes, a multigenerational text, an interpreter figure, and “preservation motifs.” However, as Hodd concludes, “both narratives invariably complicate rather than simplify the question of ‘authenticity’” as articulated through nostalgia.

Returning to Tremblay’s notion of how an unproblematized nostalgia has served centrist definitions of the Maritimes, what most of the contributions to this issue reveal, and these last two essays in particular, is that contemporary Atlantic-Canadian writing, rather than grasping the Pyrrhic victory that such marketable nostalgia offers, is much more inclined to critique the imperialistic designs imposed by the centre or anyone, for that matter, who has come in quest of “the Folk.”

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