

Towards the Elusive Synthesis: The Atlantic Provinces in Recent General Treatments of Canadian History

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Volume 16, numéro 2, spring 1987

URI : https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/acad16_2rv01

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Éditeur(s)

The Department of History of the University of New Brunswick

ISSN

0044-5851 (imprimé)

1712-7432 (numérique)

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Citer ce document

Reid, J. G. (1987). Towards the Elusive Synthesis:: The Atlantic Provinces in Recent General Treatments of Canadian History. *Acadiensis*, 16(2), 107–121.

Reviews/Revues

Towards the Elusive Synthesis: The Atlantic Provinces in Recent General Treatments of Canadian History

"WE KNOW MUCH MORE ABOUT THE AMERICAN PAST as we enter the 1980s", wrote Herbert Gutman in 1981, "than we did when we entered the 1960s. And yet the past is more inaccessible to nonhistorians than it was thirty or fifty years ago".¹ Gutman's comment was a contribution to a debate that has subsequently gathered force in Canadian as well as in United States historiography. The historiography of the 1960s and 1970s was characterized by the opening of new fields of enquiry, focusing on questions such as gender, class, ethnicity, and region. During the 1980s, concern has increasingly been expressed that fragmentation has been the result. Without proper attention to the more general patterns and contexts of national history, the argument has been made in Canada by J.M.S. Careless, the study of "limited identities" may raise the danger of intellectual particularism as "national concerns are by and large passed over or discounted".² Such contentions are not necessarily aimed at discrediting the study of the specialized areas of social and regional history which — with the participation of both Gutman and Careless — have been opened up in the past twenty or so years. At their most constructive, they can be read rather as calls for more integration of specific insights into general history through a process of synthesis. "A new synthesis is needed", Gutman continued, "that incorporates and then transcends the new history".³

In the relationship between national and regional history in Canada, however, difficulty immediately arises. There have been all too many general histories, whether survey textbooks or more detailed accounts of shorter periods of national development, that have attempted to transcend regional history by ignoring rather than incorporating it. In the columns of *Acadiensis* in 1975, D.A. Muise lamented the prevailing "ignorance of the Maritimes" in national histories, but observed that there was some excuse for it in the fact that so much of regional scholarship was of recent vintage at that time.⁴ Five years later, W.G. Godfrey served notice that the validity of this excuse had expired, and rebuked the writers of textbooks for their failure to offer any "thoughtful synthesis of recent research on the Maritimes".⁵ Since Godfrey wrote in 1980, a number of new and revised textbooks and other general treatments of Canadian history

1 Herbert G. Gutman, "Whatever Happened to History: The Missing Synthesis", *The Nation*, 21 November 1981, p. 521.

2 J.M.S. Careless, "Limited Identities: Ten Years Later", *Manitoba History*, I (1980), p. 3.

3 Gutman, "Whatever Happened to History", p. 554.

4 D.A. Muise, "The Atlantic Region in Recent Canadian National Histories", *Acadiensis*, IV, 2 (Spring 1975), p. 125.

5 W.G. Godfrey, "Canadian History Textbooks and the Maritimes", *Acadiensis*, X, 1 (Autumn 1980), p. 134.

have appeared. As reviewed in this essay, they include books of readings, general works of synthesis, and two volumes of the Canadian Centenary Series. All are designed to appeal to a non-specialist readership, whether undergraduate students or general readers. By virtue of that intended accessibility, all are potentially influential in shaping popular perceptions of Canadian past. How effective are they in their approaches to national history? More specifically, how far do they convey the Atlantic component of the Canadian experience, in being informed by the best of regional scholarship and in giving due weight to Maritime and Newfoundland issues? "Until our national historiography really does incorporate the insights contained in journals like *Acadiensis*", P.A. Buckner and David Frank rightly observed in 1985, "the flight from regional concerns in the 1980s seems, at best, premature".⁶ This essay, by reviewing nine works published between 1982 and 1986, will offer a report on progress to date.

Three of these works, each including more than one volume, can be categorized as "readers": books of essays, mostly reprinted from other sources, collected to provide convenient access to reading for undergraduates. Two of the collections, R. Douglas Francis and Donald B. Smith, eds., *Readings in Canadian History* (2 vols.; 2nd ed.; Toronto, Holt, Rinehart and Winston of Canada, 1986) and J.M. Bumsted, ed., *Interpreting Canada's Past* (2 vols.; Toronto, Oxford University Press, 1986), are general in scope. Michael S. Cross and Gregory S. Kealey, eds., *Readings in Canadian Social History* (5 vols.; Toronto, McClelland and Stewart, 1982-4) has the more specific focus indicated by its title. Each of the collections in its own way provides an encouraging start to a review essay such as this one. All draw heavily upon recent scholarship. A simple count reveals that of the 76 articles included in the Francis and Smith volumes (excluding four other pieces that appear as primary sources), 48 were first published in the 1970s or 1980s, and 22 in the 1960s. The Bumsted collection includes 49 essays (excluding one primary source extract), all but three originating in the 1970s or 1980s, and the remainder in the 1960s. Of the 35 essays presented by Cross and Kealey, eleven were first published in the 1980s (including the seven commissioned original essays of the final volume), 21 in the 1970s, and the other three in the 1960s. These collections overwhelmingly reflect historiographical trends of the last twenty years and it is a tribute to scholarly productivity that few essays are duplicated. Only one — Sylvia Van Kirk's "Women in Between": Indian Women in Fur-Trade Society in Western Canada" — appears in all three. Another six are included in two, while 145 articles appear in only one of the collections. The representation of the Atlantic colonies and provinces varies between collections and time periods, but the new regional scholarship is not ignored.

The two volumes of Francis and Smith's *Readings in Canadian History* are

6 P.A. Buckner and David Frank, *Atlantic Canada Before Confederation: The Acadiensis Reader, Volume One* (Fredericton, 1985), Preface, p. 9.

divided at Confederation. In the 1986 edition, each volume has been substantially revised from that of 1982. As they did in the first edition, the editors commit themselves in the preface not only to reflecting "new research issues" but also to including material dealing with "the various regions of the country" (I, p. ix). For the most part, the promise is kept. The Atlantic colonies appear prominently in the pre-Confederation volume, where entire sections are devoted to early European contact and settlement of the region, to the impact of the American Revolution, and to economic development in mid-19th century Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. For the post-Confederation era, the coverage is not so extensive. Nevertheless, the second volume does include Donald Warner and F.W.P. Bolger on Maritime reactions to Confederation, J.M.S. Careless on metropolitanism in Atlantic Canada, E.R. Forbes on Maritime Rights, and David Alexander on regionalism. The sections, or "topics", are designed to raise major issues in Canadian history, and each includes a useful introductory and bibliographical essay. *Readings in Canadian History* would not in itself offer any student a thorough grounding in the study of Atlantic Canada, but neither does it harbour any of the more egregious stereotypes that regional scholars have been hunting down in recent years.

J.M. Bumsted's *Interpreting Canada's Past* takes a subtly different approach from that of Francis and Smith. Like them, Bumsted emphasizes the importance of new approaches, giving especial prominence to regional study. "Much of the best and most innovative work of the past few years", he writes, "has focused on regions and localities peripheral to the central Canadian heartland, and no compilation that ignores the resurgence of local and regional historiography...can satisfactorily reflect the present state of scholarship" (I, p. x). Accordingly, both volumes contain numerous essays concerned with topics that might once have been regarded as narrowly circumscribed by time and place but which are used by the editor to raise general social questions in the introductory commentaries. These brief introductions are among the real strengths of the collection, encouraging readers to analyse the essays critically and to make cross-references on common themes ranging from the acculturation of native people (I, pp. 168-9) to competing definitions of social class (I, p. 345). Where Bumsted's approach is most distinctive is in its conscious avoidance of domination by the "major issues". It is assumed that most instructors will already have defined their approaches to traditional historiographical questions. The collected essays, therefore, are intended to stimulate and provoke rather than to supply a comprehensive framework for study. Again, Atlantic Canada is more prominent before than after Confederation, but the work of Forbes and of T.W. Acheson on the post-Confederation Maritimes is represented, as is that of Ralph Matthews on the later post-Confederation era of Newfoundland. This is a collection for the course that seeks to introduce students not only to substantive questions, but also to the practice of history.

Questions of approach and method are again prominent in Cross and Kealey's

Readings in Canadian Social History. Based on a "global" definition of social history, "which can embrace politics and economics as well as the history of social groups or charitable institutions", the collection reflects the editors' commitment to "the 'working class' approach", with its emphasis on class conflict as the dynamic of social change (I, pp. 5-6). Refreshingly, the five volumes are divided according to a periodization derived from social history itself rather than from traditional political turning-points. The major breaks come in 1759, 1849, 1896, and 1929. Within each volume, the essays are organized by theme: an economic overview is followed by sections on social structures, the working class, violence and protest, social control, and women or native people. In this collection, Atlantic developments are more satisfactorily treated in the later than in the earlier eras. Calvin Martin's essay on the European impact on the Micmac is a valuable inclusion in the first volume, as is Judith Fingard's "The Poor in Winter" in the second. Otherwise, readers gain little insight into the Maritime colonies, and could be forgiven for doubting whether Acadian and Newfoundland societies existed at all. As the collection goes on to the late 19th century and into the 20th, however, regional balance is regained not only through the inclusion of articles on Maritime topics by Acheson and by Don Macgillivray, but also of others — such as those on women's history by Susan Mann Trofimenkoff, Veronica Strong-Boag, and Ruth Pierson and Marjorie Cohen — which are genuinely national in scope, incorporating research in all regions. Ultimately, *Readings in Canadian Social History* is an effective collection. Its explicitly revisionist thrust is sustained by the quality of the essays themselves, and by the concise introduction provided in each case by the editors.

Taken together, the three collections indicate that recent research on Atlantic Canada is at last beginning to find its way into material used for the teaching of national history. The influence of regional scholarship is stronger in some volumes than in others, but all the editors are firmly committed to the importance of the new approaches that have developed since the 1960s and are sensitive to the importance of regionalism. Nevertheless, one major caveat must be entered. It is to be expected that new research findings would soon find their way into reading collections, in which the presentation of a variety of different and possibly contrasting approaches is a virtue. From there to the synthesis of new and old research is a considerable journey. "We have not yet achieved a new synthesis", notes J.M. Bumsted, "and the sheer bulk of recent scholarship often seems daunting" (II, p. vii). Encouraging as it is to see important articles on Atlantic Canada included in major collections, more is needed before real integration can be achieved.

Two works which do attempt to form a synthesis, though also having some characteristics of the reading collections, are Paul W. Bennett and Cornelius J. Jaenen, *Emerging Identities: Selected Problems and Interpretations in Canadian History* (Scarborough, Ont., Prentice-Hall Canada, 1986), and J.L.

Granatstein, Irving M. Abella, David J. Bercuson, R. Craig Brown, and H. Blair Neatby, *Twentieth Century Canada* (2nd ed.; Toronto, McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1986) and *Twentieth Century Canada: A Reader* (Toronto, McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1986). Bennett and Jaenen adopt, with due acknowledgement, the technique pioneered in Canada by K.A. McKirdy, J.S. Moir, and Y.F. Zoltvany in 1967: to present in one volume a series of historical problems through numerous extracts from primary and secondary material, with extensive introductory comment.⁷ In *Emerging Identities*, problems are selected that reflect not only traditional historiographical issues such as the conquest of Canada, the Laurier era, and the Quiet Revolution, but also newer interests such as Indian-French interaction, 19th century social reform movements, working-class responses to industrialization, and the women's movement in the progressive era. Up-to-date sources are used, and extensive bibliographies are appended to each chapter. The Maritime provinces figure prominently in two chapters prepared by G.A. Rawlyk, and one prepared by Bennett, and there is also some Atlantic-related material elsewhere in the book.

In many ways, this is an exciting collection. It reflects much of the creative energy of recent scholarship and for that it deserves the praise of all historians of Canada, regional or otherwise. The chapters that deal primarily with the Maritimes give good value. Rawlyk's presentation of "Revolution Rejected" is essentially an abridged and updated version of his *Revolution Rejected, 1775-1776*, and fills the gap that had been left when the earlier work went out of print some years ago.⁸ His chapter dealing with the Maritimes and Confederation is a balanced presentation, in which primary source extracts convey the flavour of the contemporary debates while older secondary sources are set off by the work of recent authors such as Errol Sharpe and David Bell. Bennett's chapter on "Regional Protest in the West and the Maritimes, 1919-1939", meanwhile, poses the obvious but important question of whether regional protest represented pure reaction or a genuine demand for structural change.

So far, so good. Yet, for all the signal virtues of this volume, the Atlantic experience is still sold short as an element of Canadian history. Nobody should expect a single volume to be comprehensive in its treatment of historical problems, and the editors of this one specifically disclaim any effort to "capture the whole spectrum of specialized interests among historians today" (p. vi). But is the history of Newfoundland a specialized interest? Or the history of the Acadians? It takes until p. 537 for Newfoundland to rate more than a passing mention, and when it comes it is — of all things — an extract from the *Globe and Mail*, reporting comments by David Alexander on economic problems of the 1970s. The item hardly serves to represent the subtleties of Newfoundland history as evoked in the writings of Alexander and others. It may be that

7 See K.A. McKirdy, J.S. Moir, and Y.F. Zoltvany, *Changing Perspectives in Canadian History: Selected Problems* (Don Mills, Ont., 1967).

8 G.A. Rawlyk, ed., *Revolution Rejected, 1775-1776* (Scarborough, Ont., 1968).

Newfoundland's pre-1949 era has been deliberately excluded as being non-Canadian, though the editors do not say so, and the fact that a specific explanation is given (p. 239) of Newfoundland's exclusion from the chapter on the Confederation debates suggests that this was not their intent. In any case, Newfoundland comes off rather better than the Acadians. The colony of Acadia is mentioned occasionally in the early chapters, in the contexts of European perceptions and of Micmac responses to European contact. Of the existence of a colonial society in Acadia that differed significantly from that of the St. Lawrence valley, or indeed of the existence of an Acadian society at any time or in any place, there is no indication. To disclaim an omni-faceted approach to Canadian history is fair enough, but whether these two important elements can justifiably be so thoroughly ignored is another question altogether.

Questions can also be raised about the treatment of the post-Confederation Maritime provinces in the Bennett and Jaenen volume, in that the region tends to be ignored except when the issue is explicit regional protest. The industrializing period of Maritime economic history is scantily treated (p. 367). The working class response to industrialism is discussed in an exclusively central Canadian context, and the introduction to the chapter on the women's movement goes out of its way to assert that suffragists were active in the Maritime provinces only "to a lesser extent" than in all other provinces of Canada in the late 19th century (p. 377). This verdict might well have come as a surprise to, say, the more than 10,000 New Brunswick women who petitioned for voting rights in 1894, to the similar number who petitioned in Nova Scotia in 1895, or to the overwhelming proportion of eligible women who supported the suffrage cause by turning out to vote in the Halifax municipal election of that year.⁹ On the history of women and the working class — though not on the lack of an adequate portrayal of industrialization — criticisms must be tempered by the recognition that important recent research in these areas is only just finding its way into print. Nevertheless, the shortcomings of *Emerging Identities* give evidence that even an otherwise excellent book can all too easily fall prey to the hangover of old stereotypes of the Maritimes and Newfoundland.

The same can be said for *Twentieth Century Canada*, but much more strongly. The original *Twentieth Century Canada* was published in 1983 as a single-volume text. The recently-published second edition has minor revisions, and involves the addition of the *Reader* as an accompanying volume. Both volumes reflect in part the research interests of the authors: in an innovative format, chronological chapters in the text are interspersed with theme chapters on the Canada of John A. Macdonald, political organization and patronage, labour radicalism, immigration, the growth of bureaucracy, and the develop-

9 See Michael J. Smith, "Female Reformers in Victorian Nova Scotia: Architects of a New Womanhood", M.A. thesis, Saint Mary's University, 1986, pp. 144-7; Elspeth Tulloch, *We, the Undersigned: A Historical Overview of New Brunswick Women's Political and Legal Status, 1784-1984* (Moncton, 1985), pp. 42-3.

ment of nationalism in Quebec. These are also the topics by which the 18 essays are organized in the *Reader*. In some ways, the results are impressive. The strength of the collected essays is matched by the fluency of writing in the text, and by the depth brought to the theme chapters by the complementary areas of expertise of the authors. The preface, like those of the other works reviewed, notes the "vigorous process of healthy revisionism" that has shaped recent scholarship. "The writers", it goes on, "are all active and prolific publishing scholars and teachers, deeply immersed in the process of trying to discover more about this country" (*Twentieth Century Canada*, Preface, n.p.).

When it comes to Atlantic Canada, however, more and deeper immersion is obviously required. The tone is set at the beginning of the first chapter, on the Canada of Macdonald. Before Confederation, or so it appears to the authors, "there had been great deeds [in British North America], but too often they represented the struggles of New France against the conquering English, *or the efforts of Nova Scotians to break free of the superior power and economic strength of the Canadas*" (p. 4; italics mine). To be sure, "Empire Canada" was in full operation by the turn of the 20th century, but to date its emergence before 1867 seems fanciful at best. But then, correspondingly, the authors assert that the National Policy was immediately seen as "designed to serve the interests of central Canada alone" (p. 18). That it was widely regarded in the 1880s as potentially beneficial for important areas of the Maritimes, that industrialization did take place, and that only later did changes in capitalist organization, political balance, and economic policy undermine the region's competitive position, are complexities overlooked along with the Maritime Rights movement and the Duncan commission. The denouement is reached on p. 216, where we learn that "in the Maritime provinces the Depression made less of an impact [than elsewhere in Canada in the 1930s] only because these provinces had experienced an almost continuous depression since Confederation". After that revelation, the region mercifully disappears from the text for a hundred or so pages. Newfoundland makes its debut in an unexceptionable treatment of the events leading up to Confederation in 1949 (p. 312), and the entire Atlantic region takes its final curtain call in a discussion (predictably enough) of underdevelopment in the 1950s and 1960s, federal subsidy, and the "backlash" of those in a traditionalist society who felt threatened by new post-war linkages to a Canadian industrial economy which "rewarded adaptability but also brought insecurity" (p. 365). From start to finish, the Maritimes — and later on Newfoundland — are seen in terms of what Bill Godfrey called in 1980 the imagery of "the laggard, the poor cousin".¹⁰ To see this tired and misleading nonsense trotted out again in 1986 — and by five historians of national reputation at that — is not so much infuriating as saddening.

More cheerful prospects beckon when we turn to two recent efforts to provide general syntheses of Canadian history. The second edition of J.L. Finlay and

10 Godfrey, "Canadian History Textbooks and the Maritimes", p. 134.

D.N. Sprague, *The Structure of Canadian History* (Scarborough, Ont., Prentice-Hall Canada, 1984) is the larger work and is designed primarily for undergraduates, while Desmond Morton's *A Short History of Canada* (Edmonton, Hurtig, 1983) is intended to demonstrate to the general reader that Canadian history, contrary to popular belief, is *not* "short, boring, and irrelevant" (p. 6). The Finlay and Sprague volume, in its first edition, quickly proved itself an effective textbook, but was criticized from an Atlantic perspective for its inadequate treatment of the post-Confederation era.¹¹ On earlier periods, the second edition has the same virtues as the first. Questions can be raised on specific points. The figure of 1000 for the Acadian population at the time of the conquest (p. 38), for example, is a serious underestimate.¹² Was the population in the Maritime colonies in the 1830s really "extremely homogeneous by class and ethnicity" (p. 115)? Many regional scholars would disagree with such a sweeping assertion.¹³ Yet the more general truth is that this is an intelligent and painstaking book, and that its analyses of, say, the role of the timber trade in economic development (pp. 89-92) or of the political reform impulse in the Atlantic colonies of the early 19th century (pp. 113-6) outweigh any minor weaknesses on the pre-Confederation years.

After Confederation, the authors have made efforts to respond to criticism of the first edition. The discussion of the 1920s, for example, now includes a fuller and more balanced discussion of Maritime Rights advocacy (pp. 317-8).¹⁴ Nevertheless, revision only goes so far. There are traces of "scissors-and-paste", as when the town of Amherst is introduced in similar terms on successive pages (pp. 315-6). How, in the same section, the expansion of the United Mine Workers in Cape Breton and of the One Big Union movement in Amherst can go under the general heading (left over from the first edition) of "Nostalgia in the Maritimes" is a puzzle that has no obvious answer. More serious yet is the way in which the Maritimes disappear almost completely from view after the 1920s, even when Maritime examples could illuminate general themes. In the discussion in chapter 20 of the "quest for restoration" in the 1930s, for example, there is no mention of Antigonish cooperatives. The entry of Newfoundland to Confederation is mentioned only in a parenthetical aside to a brief statement on iron ore development in the 1950s (p. 393). Newfoundland's conflicts with the Trudeau government over the constitution and the control of the offshore are duly noted (pp. 466, 472, 475), but the index lists no mention for any one of the three Maritime provinces after 1929. None of this makes *The Structure of*

11 *Ibid.*

12 See Andrew Hill Clark, *Acadia: The Geography of Early Nova Scotia to 1760* (Madison, Wisc., 1968), p. 130.

13 See, for example, J.M. Bumsted, "Ethnicity and Culture in Maritime Canada", in P.A. Buckner, ed., *Teaching Maritime Studies* (Fredericton, 1986), pp. 66-71.

14 See J.L. Finlay and D.N. Sprague, *The Structure of Canadian History* (1st ed.; Scarborough, Ont., 1979); also Godfrey, "Canadian History Textbooks and the Maritimes", p. 134.

Canadian History a bad book; but for the history of Atlantic Canada its main strengths still emphatically lie before Confederation rather than after.

The reverse can be said of Morton's *A Short History of Canada*. The book deals chiefly with the post-Confederation era, but it begins with a series of short chapters on the "different histories" of the territories that would go to make up the Dominion. The chapter on the "Lower Provinces" gets off to an inauspicious start. The early history of Acadia is summarized in a paragraph which deserves to be quoted in full, if only because of the wealth of inaccurate or misleading statements packed into only five sentences:

Most Acadians were heirs of the few French who had remained in the area when Champlain had chosen to move up the St. Lawrence. Tossed, for a few turbulent years, between French adventures and New England pirates, the Acadians were then left to themselves for a century. They learned to dike the rich bottom land of the Minas Basin against the Fundy tides. In 1713, when the Treaty of Utrecht transferred Acadia to the British, perhaps sixteen hundred Acadians were included. It seemed to make no difference to them (p. 53).

For the record, virtually none of the later Acadian population were heirs of the colonists of Champlain's era, unless in a vaguely symbolic sense; the continuous French occupation of Acadia began three years after Champlain's departure, and most Acadian families arrived in the colony later still. Certainly there were French adventurers and New England pirates, but there was more than that to the Acadian-New England relationship. To say that the Acadians were left to themselves for a century is simply wrong: New England interventions, military and economic, and attempts to assert French authority, were frequent and forceful. The Acadians did not learn their dyking skills on the Minas Basin, but in the Dauphin (Annapolis) valley decades before the Minas settlements were established. And to say that the conquest made no difference to the Acadian population ignores important and long-published evidence of post-conquest migrations, demographic trends, and cultural changes expressed in (for example) literacy rates.¹⁵ Not every historian needs to agree that pre-conquest Acadia was important — though some of us think it was — but at least if the subject is to be mentioned at all, the author might as well get it right. For good measure, the next page appears to exhume the myth of "thousands of once-wealthy Loyalists" (p. 54), a misinterpretation laid to rest more than 30 years ago by the work of Esther Clark Wright and buried even more deeply by subsequent Loyalist research.

¹⁵ Clark, *Acadia*, pp. 74-103; Jean Daigle, "L'Acadie, 1604-1763: synthèse historique", in Daigle, ed., *Les Acadiens des Maritimes: études thématiques* (Moncton, 1980), pp. 17-48; Gisa I. Hynes, "Some Aspects of the Demography of Port Royal, 1650-1755", *Acadiensis*, III, 1 (Autumn 1973), pp. 3-17.

After this, Morton's book can only get better: and so it does, strikingly in fact. By the end of the chapter on the Maritime colonies, firmer ground has been reached. Much can be forgiven in an author whose analysis of the region's economy in the 1850s and 1860s leads to a recognition that "it was not conservatism but a sense of dangerous, uncontrollable choices that hung over the Confederation debate in the Maritimes" (p. 60). In the chapters dealing with the era from Confederation to the Depression (pp. 70-187), the number of pages or paragraphs devoted specifically to the Maritime experience is not large. Yet what *is* said is enough to portray vividly and convincingly the complex rise and decline of Maritime fortunes in the economic and political life of the Dominion. Morton is a graceful writer and a skilled historical craftsman, and these qualities enable him to range easily over a mass of complex data to produce an account that is intelligible without being simplistic, and concise without slighting of important trends or events. The implications of the National Policy for the Maritimes are given due weight (pp. 94, 123-4), capital-labour disputes in Cape Breton set in both national and regional contexts (pp. 136, 163), and the overall impact of the 1920s on regional society convincingly appraised (pp. 163, 166). After the 1920s, it is true, solid analysis of Atlantic regional issues becomes less evident. Newfoundland appears — mushroom-like, as usual in general histories — in 1949, and the Smallwood-Diefenbaker disputes of the late 1950s are integrated into a discussion of provincial rights (p. 226). One might wish for more in these final chapters of the book. At its best, Morton's *A Short History of Canada* accomplishes its purposes with skill and flair. At its weakest, it provides clear illustration of the dangers attendant on writing general history without adequate research in up-to-date secondary sources. The book demonstrates the truth that, for good or ill, a firm grasp of regional issues is inseparable from convincing national interpretation.

This principle is further verified in volume 15 of the Canadian Centenary Series. In John Herd Thompson with Allen Seager, *Canada, 1922-1939: Decades of Discord* (Toronto, McClelland and Stewart, 1985), we gain a glimpse of the promised land of real synthesis in Canadian history. In some ways, the authors take a traditional approach. Thompson's preface notes that "there is perhaps more national and provincial political history in *Canada, 1922-1939* than is currently fashionable" (p. xiii). Certainly there is no lack of vivid portrayal of political leaders and their characteristics, whether the bathotic oratory of King (p. 20), the unwise acerbity of Meighen (p. 114), or the feverish work habits of Bennett in his attempt to "exorcise the devil of Depression from the soul of Canadian capitalism" (p. 214). The preface also makes clear that while the "limited identities" of class, region, ethnicity, and gender" are important, the authors nevertheless share "with the generation of historians who initiated the Centenary Series...the conviction that there is a national experience that can transcend these boundaries" (p. xiii). Thompson and Seager's book gives persuasive force to that conviction. Better still, it demonstrates that any

rendering of the national experience is made more, not less, convincing when based on a solid appreciation of regional and other differences. Above all — and this is where the book departs most clearly from traditionalism — it is “ordinary Canadians” who are “the real subjects” throughout (p. xiv).

This determination to write the history of Canadians in all their collective complexity is what gives *Canada, 1922-1939* its cutting edge. A precise benchmark is made in the first chapter, in which an analysis of the findings of the 1921 census reveals a host of national characteristics, documenting changes since 1911 in such diverse areas as the increase in non-British, non-French population groups, or the increasing importance of office work for women. Also revealing are inter-regional comparisons. “The Maritimes, with the exception of Prince Edward Island”, the authors note, “had a better-developed industrial base than the Prairies, but the slow pace of industrialization was underlined by the larger percentage of the workforce in fishing and the smaller percentage in transportation and construction jobs” (p. 13). As the book goes on, the refusal to write “top-down” history becomes even more evident in theme chapters on, for example, “Ordinary Canadians” — focusing chiefly on women, youth, and the working class — or on “The Conundrum of Culture”, giving attention to sport and popular culture as well as to major literary and artistic movements. The authors bring a scepticism to their treatment of the rich and the powerful that at times becomes cynicism directed at “the narrow vision that was the hallmark of Canada’s political leaders during these years of frustration” (p. 332). Cynicism, however, is never allowed to predominate over the task of crafting a fully textured account of the national experience.

Among the work’s strengths from the Maritime perspective is its effort to place the 1920s and 1930s in an accurate economic context. The deindustrialization of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick in the early 1920s is fully set out, and both capital-labour conflict and political protest are connected to this disastrous product of the depression of the first half of the 1920s. Nor do the authors make the common assumption that the reform tradition in the Maritimes came to an end with that decade: the role of Nova Scotia as “the centre of CIO strength in Canada”, for example, and the linkage between this and the province’s innovative labour legislation of 1937, is fully established (p. 290). Not but what one might ask for more. The co-operative movement is one element of reformism that has been slighted by comparison with the attention justifiably given to direct class conflict. The spread of the co-operative ideal on the prairies in the 1920s is briefly treated, but of the movement in the 1930s or in the Maritime region there is hardly a mention. Nor does Newfoundland appear, either in the index or in any substantive way in the text. To some extent, the omission is forgivable in that Newfoundland obviously was a separate political entity throughout the entire period covered by the book. Yet, even if the work of David Alexander were not sufficient to convince the authors of the relevance to Canada of comparative economic analysis of the “Atlantic region” before 1949,

the chapters on external affairs might still have provided the setting for some examination of Canada's relationship with one of its closest neighbours. Finally, a small but significant error appears on p. 106: the increase of 111 per cent in freight rates between 1918 and 1922 was not for the Maritime provinces, but for eastern Canada as a whole; increases in Maritime rates were much higher, ranging up to 216 per cent.¹⁶

Ultimately, Canadian history and its readers have been well served by *Canada, 1922-1939*. The Centenary Series sets high goals for its authors. Each volume is enjoined to combine narrative coherence with economic, political, and social analysis, and to be "at once useful to the student and interesting to the general reader". How seriously Thompson and Seager took this mandate is evident from the range and depth of sources used: the preface appropriately uses mountaineering terminology to describe the "books, articles, theses, and manuscript collections that had to be conquered" (p. xiii). Yet if the authors' research was laborious, the book itself is not laborious to read. Complexity is leavened by wit, generalization by well-chosen example. The authors are in deadly earnest when deploring "the domestic wounds of two decades of discord" (p. 332), but theirs is the kind of earnestness that is never deadly dull.

Also never dull is the more recently published volume 19 of the Centenary Series. J.L. Granatstein's *Canada, 1957-1967: The Years of Uncertainty and Innovation* (Toronto, McClelland and Stewart, 1986) is the work of an expert in conveying the drama of political struggle. The Diefenbaker-Pearson years have a unique fascination in recent Canadian history, and Granatstein's interviews with surviving protagonists, along with his exhaustive search of government records and available private papers, equip him to bring out with great effect the back-room manoeuvring that lay behind the major developments. The book portrays personality with depth and conviction — as in the case of the "sometimes frightening and total self-confidence" of the apparently easygoing Pearson (p. 198) — and shows persuasively the origins of policy shifts in crucial areas such as defence and language.

The problem is that Granatstein's account is firmly anchored in Ottawa. The first chapter does present a sketch of changes in process in society at large in 1957: the influence of the preceeding years of economic expansion, immigration, the early stirrings of discontent among women, native people, and the young. There is a justifiably sceptical treatment of the increasing use of government subsidies to lure business investment to Atlantic Canada and other regions of high unemployment (p. 10). Yet by the end of the chapter the focus has shifted to the pipeline debate and the state of the federal political parties. From then on, federal politics retain pride of place. It is true that the reader is taken on an excursion to Saskatchewan for the medicare debate of 1961-62 (pp. 164-97), and that a later chapter poses the question that so puzzled contemporaries: "what

16 Ernest R. Forbes, *The Maritime Rights Movement 1919-1927: A Study in Canadian Regionalism* (Montreal, 1979), p. 68.

does Quebec want?" Even these issues, however, are closely linked to federal policy. Similarly, the discussion of "culture and scholarship" (pp. 139-68), is centered largely in the Ottawa office of the Canada Council. Outside of the introductory chapter, the three Maritime provinces are barely mentioned, and Newfoundland comes off marginally better only because of Premier Smallwood's clashes with Prime Minister Diefenbaker in 1958-59 (p. 40).

The limitations of this approach are both methodological and geographical. If the old definition of social history was "history with the politics left out", then this kind of history could be described as political science with the theory left out. Except insofar as they are revealed in the political process, we gain little understanding of the dynamics of change in a complex country. Those who believe regionalism to be essential to an understanding of Canada will find slim pickings in *Canada, 1957-1967*, although there are hardly grounds for claiming special discrimination against Atlantic Canada: Ontario (the part that lies outside of Ottawa), Manitoba, Alberta, British Columbia, and the Territories get short shrift as well. The book was written in the virtual absence of secondary literature, on Atlantic Canada or elsewhere, and conversely the primary sources used have been voluminous. What Granatstein promises — "a first scholarly attempt to sketch in the outlining of a critical period of uncertainty in Canadian politics and policy" (p. xiii) — is influenced by this simultaneous feast and famine. The promise is fulfilled, and as a history of the federal government and its interaction with society the book succeeds admirably. Outside of the realm of "politics and policy", Granatstein has much less to offer. Scholarly and readable as it is, this book is not a general history of Canada.

Scholarship, readability, accessibility: the 1980s have seen the publication of a variety of works in Canadian history that have attempted to combine these goals. That the insights generated by the new fields of enquiry of the 1960s and 1970s are capable of being integrated into the larger picture is evident, at least from the best of the work that has appeared. Thompson and Seager's *Canada, 1922-1939*, along with the stronger sections of other works reviewed, demonstrates that there is no reason why historians of any region of Canada, any more than historians of women or the working class, should necessarily be sceptical of efforts to synthesize. The recently-published collections of readings have also been influenced heavily by the new regional scholarship. This is as it should be, for regional and national history are interdependent. Regional history can never be written in pure isolation, just as national history can never be wholly independent of an international context. Conversely, international history as such — whether comparative, or focusing on international relations — cannot be written without solid grounding in national histories, and national history without sound regional foundations is unlikely to succeed in a country as diverse in regional experience as Canada.

To descend from these heights of historiographical idealism, however, the reality is that general histories of Canada continue to present the Atlantic

regional historian with a spotty picture. From a regional standpoint, two basic demands can legitimately be made on national history of any kind. First, any references made to the Maritimes and Newfoundland should be accurate and should be informed by current scholarship. Overall, the works reviewed show that progress has been made in this regard during the 1980s, though glaring exceptions can be found. Secondly, due attention should be given to Maritime and Newfoundland history, insofar as needed in order to reach a full understanding of the overall Canadian experience. It is on this point that major problems remain evident in the writing of Canadian history.

The recurrent slighting of Acadian and Newfoundland history in general Canadian historiography is especially significant. Neither of these areas can readily be made to fit the traditional patterns of Canadian history. To escape the conventional view of the colony of Acadia as a minor appendage of the St. Lawrence settlements, by taking seriously the divergent character of Acadian society at least from 1654 onwards, would entail a major interpretive leap in the entire historiography of New France. The ultimate consequence might be the recognition that the French empire in America was just as complex — though smaller in population — as either the English or the Spanish, and that the existence of diverse societies was basic to its character. How much easier, though, to maintain the traditional focus on the colony of Canada and its commercial network. How logical to move smoothly on to the notion that Acadian society has never been more than part of the cultural fringe of Quebec and of the socio-economic fringe of the Maritimes, and thus avoid any need to come to terms with the distinctness of “*acadianité*” and of the resulting nationalist traditions. How easy, how logical, and how wrong.

It is all too simple as well to eliminate Newfoundland, at least until it joined Canada in 1949. Even after that time, its small population and shaky economy can be taken as relegating the newest province to marginal status. Yet the reality is that, regardless of political decisions of the 1860s and the 1940s, Newfoundland has always had close enough links to the mainland to make it worth studying within the wider framework of Algonkian society, northeastern North American colonial settlement, British North America, and ultimately Canada. Conversely, in terms of these larger identities, Newfoundland's experience has been distinctive. Its social, economic, and political development does not conform to the conventional periodization of Canadian history. From this, it is reasonable to infer that Newfoundland history can stand alone and apart from Canadian history, and so, to an extent, it can and has done.¹⁷ Yet to expect any scholar or student to understand, say, the development of merchant capitalism in British North America as a whole without considering the structure of the Newfoundland fishery, or to grasp the significance for Canada of the 1949

17 See Peter Neary, “The Writing of Newfoundland History: An Introductory Survey”, in James Hiller and Peter Neary, eds., *Newfoundland in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries: Essays in Interpretation* (Toronto, 1980), pp. 3-15.

Confederation agreement without any examination of Newfoundland society over the previous 80 years, is to ask the impossible. In effect, demands of that kind are made in all the works reviewed in this essay.

Often, too, the history of the Maritime provinces after 1867-73 continues to be interpreted in a static and inadequate way. We have moved on, it is true, from the era when Frank Underhill could safely declare on national radio that in the Maritime provinces "nothing, of course, ever happens...".¹⁸ In the 1980s, general post-Confederation histories normally include at least a nod in the direction of regional protest. To focus exclusively on protest movements, however — especially in the all-too-frequent absence of any careful delineation of the origins and the targets of protest — is to leave undisturbed the myth that Maritime history since Confederation has been a story of simple and unrelieved economic misery. To ignore the creation of regional underdevelopment, the human misery it has caused, and the resistance movements which occasionally have resulted, would of course be entirely wrong. But the fact remains that the Maritime experience of the 120 years since the creation of Canada cannot justifiably be reduced to a formula by imagining a continuous depression, punctuated only by bouts of nostalgic protest. The reality was far from formulaic, involving fluctuations, dilemmas, and the interactions of complex determinants. To recognize these is the least that the study of Canada's first post-industrial society demands.

Recent general treatments of Canadian history, therefore, are apt to leave an Atlantic Canadian historian with ambivalent feelings. The work of the 1980s has not so far borne out the contention of Careless that regional study, among other specialized fields within Canadian history, might imply a threat to intellectual coherence. On the contrary, the most effective national history has been written by authors who have incorporated the new approaches in their work. Gutman's vision of the emergence of a transcendent synthesis, however, is far from full realization in Canadian history. Regional stereotypes, resulting from sins of both omission and commission, are still to be found in the work of authors who should know better. On the whole, it can hardly be denied that an understanding of the Canadian past has become more accessible, both to undergraduates and to general readers, through the publication of the works reviewed in this essay. To render that understanding more accurate, more refined, and more comprehensive will be the task for the late 1980s and beyond.

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18 Frank H. Underhill, *The Image of Confederation* (Toronto, 1964), p. 63.