

Thinking About Mountains, Valleys and Solitudes: Historical Geography and the New Atlantic History

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Thinking About Mountains, Valleys and Solitudes: Historical Geography and the New Atlantic History

MY TITLE GESTURES TO Aldo Leopold, pays homage to Ernest Buckler, invokes Rainer Maria Rilke, draws from Eudora Welty – and clearly needs some explanation. This is, after all, an essay on historical geography and “the *Acadiensis* generation”, a late addition to the fascinating set of perspectives on regional scholarship offered under the title “Back to the Future: The New History of Atlantic Canada” in Volume XXX, Number 1 of this journal.¹ Written in the wake of those reflections, and thus in some sense prompted by and engaged with them, it is a personal meditation on an intricate tangle of characters and circumstances, ideas and events. Yet I trust that others will recognize “the soil, where we took root together”, and the leaves, flowers and stunted growth that sprang from it.² Thus these comments are offered as more than an idiosyncratic chronicle. Perhaps they will provide evidence for some future commentator on the “origins and development of the new regional history in Atlantic Canada”.³ Certainly I hope that they point to new horizons of inquiry, in exploration of which a new generation of scholars might find and sustain the exciting multi-disciplinary, collaborative and supportive scholarly environment that many of us once knew. Indeed, it is in quest of this holy grail that I enlist the Wisconsin prophet, the Nova Scotia novelist, a German poet and a highly civilized daughter of Jackson, Mississippi to add range and structure to this map of recollections.

Looking back over events in which we have played a part is no straightforward task. Writing about them is even less so. Once upon a time historians solved this problem by defining it out of existence. History ended (or at least gave way to political science, sociology and so on) a good lifetime before the present. No more. Indeed just the other day I was chastened to read a doctoral dissertation in history from a respected Ontario institution, in which statements and depositions from my graduate school contemporaries were cited in the footnotes – *as evidence*.

Feeling the need for a guide to steer me through taken-for-granted territory, I turn to Eudora Welty. In *One Writer's Beginnings*, a book of luminous autobiographical reflections, she considers the challenges of writing from life. Doing so, she insists, is a creative act. It provides “one way of discovering *sequence* in experience, of stumbling upon cause and effect in the happenings of [one's] own life”. This, observes Welty, is no easy task, because “each of us is moving, changing, with respect to others. As we discover, we remember; remembering, we discover”. In the process, but slowly, links and threads are revealed:

1 I thank my fellow-travellers Rosemary Ommer and Larry McCann for their contributions to the journey and for their helpful observations on a draft version of this discussion. I would also like to thank my colleagues Cole Harris and Matthew Evenden for their comments on my reflections.

2 Fred Cogswell, *The Stunted Strong* (Fredericton, 1954), cited by Gwendolyn Davies, “The Three Wise Men of Maritime Literature: A Personal Tribute”, *Acadiensis*, XXX, 1 (Autumn 2000), p. 31.

3 “Introduction”, *Acadiensis*, XXX, 1 (Autumn 2000), p. 3.

Like distant landmarks you are approaching, cause and effect begin to align themselves, draw closer together. Experiences too indefinite of outline in themselves to be recognized for themselves connect and are identified as a larger shape. And suddenly a light is thrown back, as when your train makes a curve, showing that there has been a mountain of meaning rising behind you on the way you've come, is rising there still, proven now through retrospect.

Locating this feature is one thing, exploring and mapping it another. Like all mountains, this one changes appearance as the curve of time extends and as ambient circumstances alter. As Welty suggests, learning is an erratic, pulse-like process; it “stamps you with its moments”. And to the historian’s discomfort, “the events in our lives happen in a sequence of time, but in their significance to ourselves they find their own order, a timetable not necessarily – perhaps not possibly – chronological”.⁴ About to embark along the road that climbs this mountain, I feel suddenly akin to Buckler’s David Canaan, “one great white naked eye of self-consciousness”.⁵ No matter. Finding a voice with which to give shape to experience (and at the same time to expose oneself to risk), Welty tells us, depends first on listening and then on learning to see.

Listening certainly marked this writer’s beginnings in Atlantic Canada studies. In the early summer of 1971, as I concentrated on 19th-century documents in the reading room of the New Brunswick Museum, a young man introduced himself to Marion Robertson, then the keeper of that sanctuary. He quickly announced that he was there to consult an early 20th-century “quarterly devoted to the interests of the Maritime Provinces of Canada”. This was David Russell Jack’s “antiquarian journal”, and the young man’s interest was in its cover which he sought to reproduce in a new publication of which he was the editor. Thus I learned of the modern *Acadiensis* and heard the first of many words from Phil Buckner. A few weeks before, I had listened to Buckner’s colleague, Stewart MacNutt, in his office at the University of New Brunswick. An earlier letter from Toronto, indicating that I was contemplating doctoral research on the province, and asking for such advice as he could offer, had elicited a warm response from the then Dean of Arts. He invited me to call on him and (unexpectedly) indicated his interest in learning something of historical geography because he had attended lectures by the great English practitioner, H.C. Darby, while a student in London. But the scholarly landscape revealed to me in the ensuing conversation seemed a singularly featureless plain. Burdened no doubt by the demands of office, MacNutt’s interest in learning more of historical geography was minimal (at least on that day). As I recollect, he seemed largely unaware of earlier geographical writing on the region and seemed little interested in or excited by the work of Andrew Hill Clark.⁶ Indeed, I fear that MacNutt was mainly inclined to

4 Eudora Welty, *One Writer’s Beginnings* (New York, 1985), pp. 98, 112, 10, 75.

5 Ernest Buckler, *The Mountain and the Valley* (Toronto, 1982), p. 281.

6 Reference to this earlier work can be found in the appropriate sections of Michael Conzen, Thomas Rumney and Graeme Wynn, *A Scholar’s Guide to Geographical Writing on the American and Canadian Past* (Chicago, 1993); here and in the notes that follow I do not provide a complete inventory of relevant work as this can be derived in large part from this volume. Andrew Hill Clark is best known for his two books on the region, *Three Centuries and the Island: A Historical*

ensure that I knew his two books, *New Brunswick* and *The Atlantic Provinces*.⁷

This was revealing. There was “no tradition of geography” in New Brunswick, nor for that matter in the Maritime Provinces (at least in an institutional sense). The little geographical work that had been undertaken focused heavily on Nova Scotia. Although the census data for Prince Edward Island had been mapped, New Brunswick figured hardly at all. Andrew Clark dominated this small stage by virtue of his remarkable commitment to a regional research programme. Others had made small, isolated contributions, but as a group, this loose band of scholars had produced a decidedly scattered literature. It adumbrated several themes that would be pursued – usually with more attention to context and nuance – in the years ahead, and it reflected – often rather heavy-handedly – several of the methodological concerns that preoccupied geographers in the 1950s and 1960s. In retrospect, settlement and land-use stand out as the most fundamental and recurrent themes of this work, but it offered no coherent perspective on the region. Even more disturbingly, this scholarship stood alone and had obviously failed to capture the attention and energize the work of other scholars. Although the new *Acadiensis* implied an upwelling of interest in regional scholarship, the line I had chosen to hew seemed as though it was going to be both lonely and long, especially after Andrew Clark’s early death in 1975.⁸

How different the landscape looked five or six years later. Early in the 1970s, new departments of geography were established at Mount Allison and Saint Mary’s, and geographers from both McGill University and the Memorial University of Newfoundland were substantially involved in the “Colloque du Golfe du St. Laurent” convened at McGill in 1977. This was a landmark event. The brainchild of an energetic group of graduate students who had come to Montreal from Memorial University, it essayed a broad definition of the region and brought together a surprisingly large number of enthusiastic young scholars committed to historical and geographical work on people and places ranging from Blanc Sablon to the Avalon Peninsula, from the Strait of Belle Isle to southern New Brunswick. Among participants who would later make substantial contributions to the literature on Atlantic Canada were Rosemary Ommer (one of the driving forces behind the colloquium), Patricia Thornton, Larry McCann and myself. Others, more established, who shared and indeed helped foster the enthusiasm for work on the Atlantic Region that pervaded the conference, were John Mannion, Alan Macpherson and Gordon Handcock from St. John’s and Eric Waddell and Sherry Olsen from Montreal.⁹

Geography of Settlement and Agriculture in Prince Edward Island, Canada (Toronto, 1959) and *Acadia: The Geography of Early Nova Scotia to 1760* (Toronto, 1968).

7 W.S. MacNutt, *New Brunswick: A History, 1784-1867* (Toronto, 1963) and *The Atlantic Provinces: The Emergence of Colonial Society, 1712-1857* (Toronto, 1965).

8 Clark’s work on the Maritime Provinces is set in context in Graeme Wynn, “W.F. Ganong, A.H. Clark and the Historical Geography of Maritime Canada”, *Acadiensis*, X, 2 (Spring 1981), pp. 5-28, which also provides a reasonably comprehensive list of earlier geographical work on the region. For more on Clark as a geographer, see Donald Meinig, “Prologue: Andrew Hill Clark, Historical Geographer”, in J.R. Gibson, ed., *European Settlement and Development in North America: Essays in Honour and Memory of Andrew Hill Clark* (Toronto, 1978), pp. 3-26.

9 I work almost entirely from memory in writing about the “Colloque du Golfe” and its successor meetings. Ommer was in the McGill Ph.D. programme pursuing her work on the Jersey merchant triangle that later appeared as *From Outpost to Outport: A Structural Analysis of the Jersey-Gaspé*

In 1977, Memorial and McGill seemed likely to become twin centres of geographical scholarship on the Atlantic Provinces. Work at Memorial was led by Mannion, and McGill seemed set to capitalize on the advantage of being a Ph.D.-granting department relatively close to a region in which only Memorial offered graduate work in geography (and that solely at the Masters level). From the heady excitement of the “Colloque du Golfe” emerged a commitment to convene similar gatherings in the future. Known initially as “Atlantic Conferences”, these meetings were explicit in their adherence to a workshop format, their encouragement of “work-in-progress” presentations by young scholars and openness to all, regardless of discipline or affiliation. On average, meetings were held every two years: Sackville in 1979, Halifax in 1981 and Caraquet in 1983.¹⁰ Public historians, archivists, students and faculty from several disciplines played substantial parts in these early conferences, the organization of which advanced, in time, to a new generation of emerging scholars. They properly signaled the co-operative, supportive intent that had distinguished these gatherings from the beginning by calling them the Atlantic Canada Workshops.

At the same time, geography’s institutional profile began to rise within the Maritime Provinces. The department established at Mount Allison with the appointment of Eric Ross quickly became an important node of interest in historical geography. Ross himself is best known for his work on the west and the Canadas, but as a native of Moncton with family roots in neighbouring Nova Scotia, he took interest in and delight from the local scene. Ross was soon joined in Sackville by Peter Ennals and Larry McCann. There they welcomed as colleagues, for a few years each, historical geographers Deryck Holdsworth, Stephen Bell and Gordon Winder.¹¹ At Saint Mary’s members of the small department gave new visibility to the merit of

Cod Fishery, 1767-1886 (Montreal and Kingston, 1991). Patricia Thornton was teaching at Concordia and working on her University of Aberdeen Ph.D. after completing an M.A. at Memorial. Frank Remiggi, also in the McGill programme from Memorial, reported on Blanc Sablon. For an encapsulation of the work of this generation of Memorial geography students, see J.J. Mannion, ed., *The Peopling of Newfoundland: Essays in Historical Geography* (St. John’s, 1977). Larry McCann had been at Mount Allison since 1974 and was developing his interest in staples and the new industrialism in the growth of Halifax. I gave a very early version of a paper that much later, and after further research in Scotland, became “‘A Share of the Necessaries of Life’: Remarks on Migration, Development and Dependency in Atlantic Canada”, in Berkeley Fleming, ed., *Beyond Anger and Longing: Community and Development in Atlantic Canada* (Fredericton, 1988), pp. 17-55. With the exception of Eric Waddell et Claire Dolan, “Les Franco-Terre-Neuviens: survie et renaissance equivoques”, *Cahiers de géographie du Québec*, 23, 58 (1979), pp. 143-5, neither Waddell nor Olsen published on the eastern provinces, but both encouraged younger scholars in their enthusiasms.

- 10 Others were held in Louisbourg, Fredericton and Lunenburg, as I recall. The spirit of discovery and a sense of the importance of work on the region was only enhanced when Rosemary Ommer joined the Atlantic Canada Shipping Project (ACSP) and several of the Atlantic Conference group came to participate in ACSP conferences, where links between geography and history were explored and connections were made with David Alexander, Eric Sager, Keith Matthews and others. Indeed the 1978 ACSP conference in St. John’s, which focused on the “entrepreneurial failure” hypothesis, was billed as a joint effort with the Atlantic Conference group, making the 1981 Halifax meeting the fourth Atlantic Conference by some counts.
- 11 Eric Ross, *Beyond the River and the Bay* (Toronto, 1970) and *Full of Hope and Promise: The Canadas in 1841* (Montreal and Kingston, 1991) are classic examples of a genre of historical geographical description “in the style of the times”. For Ross on the Maritimes, see “The Rise and

geographical perspectives on the Maritime provinces. This was achieved, perhaps most obviously, through Bob McCalla's *Maritime Provinces Atlas* and the publication of *Geographical Perspectives on the Maritime Provinces*, a collection of essays edited by Doug Day for the Canadian Association of Geographers' first meeting in Halifax in 1988.¹² At much the same time, the development (in the French academic tradition) of a combined Département d'histoire et de géographie at l'Université de Moncton and the establishment there of le Centre d'études acadiennes in 1968 brought the two disciplines into productive engagement and opened a distinctive, and important, window of scholarship on the Acadian past of the region.¹³

Beyond these knolls and hillocks, a substantial body of historical geographical scholarship on the Atlantic Region took shape in the 1980s. Few would dispute that the *Historical Atlas of Canada* was a high point.¹⁴ In Volume I, 14 of 69 plates are devoted exclusively to "The Atlantic Realm", and several others include the region in treatments of pre-history, environmental change and exploration. Norse voyagers, migratory fishermen, the settlers of Trinity, St. John's, the trans-Atlantic cod trade, Louisbourg, Acadians and the New Englanders who came to Nova Scotia after 1755 are given their substantial due. For all that the focus is often narrowed to particular places, the region is seen as an interacting, dynamic whole. No little credit for this is owed the volume editor, Cole Harris. Harris held a clear view of the profoundly fragmented quality of early Canadian settlement and possessed the necessary vision to bring the disparate pieces into coherence. This coherence was achieved, at least in part, by convening a stimulating meeting of most of those involved in Atlas work on the Atlantic Region (including several historians) at Fortress Louisbourg in 1980. For the "Atlantic Realm", as for the larger territory with which it is concerned, Volume I "lays out the geographical pattern of [the area] so as to make accessible what was scattered, and tangible what was much more vaguely discerned".¹⁵ Much of this achievement was the work of geographers, but historians also made important

Fall of Pictou Island", in L.D. McCann, ed., *People and Place: Studies of Small Town Life in the Maritimes* (Fredericton, 1987), pp. 161-90 and "Growth and Decay in the Rural Maritimes: The Example of Pictou Island", in G.M. Robinson, ed., *A Social Geography of Canada: Essays in Honour of J. Wreford Watson* (Toronto, 1991), pp. 359-72. Of "the Allisonians" mentioned here, only Bell is unknown in the regional literature. But one and all influenced several Mount Allison undergraduates, not solely geographers, who did distinguished work in graduate programmes beyond the region.

12 R.J. McCalla, *The Maritime Provinces Atlas* (Halifax, 1988); Douglas Day, ed., *Geographical Perspectives on the Maritime Provinces* (Halifax, 1988).

13 Again, an atlas was one of the earliest and most visible products of this conjuncture. See Samuel Arsenault, Jean Daigle, Jacques Schroeder and Jean Vernex, *Atlas de l'Acadie: petit atlas des francophones des Maritimes* (Moncton, 1976). But the threads extended in various directions, from Jean Daigle's involvement with the *Historical Atlas of Canada* project to Raymond Léger's M.A. thesis in history subsequently published as "L'Industrie du bois dans la Péninsule acadienne (Nouveau-Brunswick) de 1875 à 1900", in *La revue d'histoire de la société Nicolas Denys*, XVI, 2 (mai-août 1988). This thesis takes up and extends some of the themes in my *Timber Colony: A Historical Geography of Early Nineteenth-Century New Brunswick* (Toronto, 1981).

14 Cole Harris, ed. and G.J. Matthews, cartographer, *The Historical Atlas of Canada*, Volume I *From the Beginning to 1800*; R.L. Gentilcore, ed. and G.J. Matthews, cartographer, Volume II *The Land Transformed, 1800-1891* and Donald Kerr and D.W. Holdsworth, eds. and G.J. Matthews, cartographer, Volume III *Addressing the Twentieth Century, 1891-1961* (Toronto, 1987, 1993, 1990).

15 Harris, *The Historical Atlas of Canada*, Volume I, "Preface", p. xv.

contributions that were given spatial expression, geographical import and visual appeal by the volume's cartographer, Geoffrey Matthews.¹⁶

In the more teleological national vision articulated in Volume II of the *Atlas*, the Maritime/Atlantic Provinces hardly figure as a distinct concern. Beyond plates on "Agriculture", "Ships and Shipping" and "The Fisheries", which focus on Atlantic Canada (even as their titles proclaim some of them to be "Canadian" in scope) and a fourth on the origins of Newfoundland's population in 1836, the region is generally wrapped into broader treatments of (eastern) Canada in this volume. Still, a small handful of authors, not otherwise known for work on the region, extended the compass of their plates to include an example or two from the Maritime Provinces or Newfoundland. All in all these contributions offer a considerable amount of information about the region, even if together they lack the coherence characteristic of the "Atlantic Realm" treatment in Volume I.¹⁷

Concomitant with the diminishing place of the Maritime Provinces in an expanding Confederation during the 20th century, Volume III accords even less explicit coverage to the region. Larry McCann's interests in industrialization and the Maritimes are represented in a plate under that title and another on port development in Halifax. Eric Sager and John Mannion treat Atlantic fishermen and their catches in a plate and a half. Debra McNabb maps Glace Bay into a broader treatment of "Working Worlds". New Brunswick sport fishing fills a corner of a plate on recreational lands. St. John's appears in Chris Sharpe's plate on the Great War by virtue of the carnage suffered by the Royal Newfoundland Regiment at the Battle of the Somme. By and large, the plates of Volume III are national in scale and emphases. Any divergence from this perspective is more often to focus on facets of Central and Western Canada than the east. Taken together, however, the three volumes of the *Historical Atlas* present vast amounts of information about the region. And this is crucial, because as Cole Harris observed as work on Volume I drew to a close, "an atlas may lead research in some ways, but more commonly it must follow, reflecting the literature in which it is situated".¹⁸

Viewed en tout, this bedrock literature bears comparison with the geology of the Cape Breton coalfield: it includes many strata, attributable to different periods and variously contorted, attenuated, truncated and even somewhat metamorphosed. A complete mapping of this stratigraphy would quickly lead beyond the limits of this discussion, so I pause at a couple of tell-tale exposures and trace only three of its seams, simply to suggest something of the form and richness of the whole. The

16 Contributing geographers included Richard Ruggles on exploration; Selma and Michael Barkham, John Mannion, Gordon Handcock, Grant Head, and Alan Macpherson on Newfoundland; Robert LeBlanc, Larry McCann, Debra McNabb and Graeme Wynn on Nova Scotia. The historians included Jean Daigle, Christopher Moore and Ralph Pastore.

17 Still, the list of contributors reveals many with research interests in the Maritimes or Newfoundland: geographers Peter Ennals, Handcock, Head, Deryck Holdsworth, MacKinnon, Macpherson, Mannion, Rosemary Ommer, Patricia Thornton and Graeme Wynn and historians Rosemarie Langhout, Del Muisse and David Sutherland. The non-Atlantic specialists include, for instance, Peter Goheen, Plate 58 and Susan Houston and Susan Laskin, Plate 56. For an extended commentary on this series of historical atlases see Graeme Wynn, "Maps and Dreams of Nationhood: A (Re)view of the *Historical Atlas of Canada*", *Canadian Historical Review*, 76, 3 (September 1995), pp. 482-510.

18 *Historical Atlas of Canada*, Volume I, "Preface", p. xv.

“exposures” are revealing outcrops, points at which something of the underlying structure and processes of change in regional scholarship can be apprehended. The “seams” are accumulations of disparate material that delineate central themes of geographical writing on the region: the look of the land, rural life and staple trades and the urban-industrial transition. In the interest of brevity, each of these seams is characterized by reference to a few symptomatic works.

First, exposures. In 1981, the first special issue of *Acadiensis* appeared. Welcomed, encouraged and facilitated by Phil Buckner, it was dedicated to the memory of Andrew Hill Clark and aimed, more specifically, at suggesting the relevance of geographical perspectives to understanding the region’s past. The issue included the work of historians as well as geographers and ranged widely to engage several motifs pertinent to a larger comprehension of the Atlantic Region. There were contributions on regional historiography, immigration, the inshore fishery, vernacular architecture, the transition from mercantile to industrial capitalism, settlement patterns, “living history” museums, photographic records of life in the region and forts and fortifications as “monuments to empire”.¹⁹ Perhaps as importantly this special issue symbolized the extent to which the work of geographers stood alongside and was increasingly engaged in reciprocal interchange with that of historians and others working on the region. In this sense it was a monument to the conjoint and collaborative character of regional scholarship during the 1970s. That this collaboration continued is made evident in my second “exposure”, *The Atlantic Provinces in Confederation* and *The Atlantic Region to Confederation: A History* – two large volumes surveying the history of the Atlantic Region published in 1993 and 1994. In these pages, geographers are not only included as contributors, but also find their work cited by and incorporated into essays by other scholars. Perhaps most revealing of the intersection of sensibilities that had grown up over the previous decades, however, is the fact that both of these surveys include specially drawn maps as integral parts of their accounts of the region.²⁰

Second, seams. Although they have a noble pedigree, landscape studies are a relatively recent addition to the literature on Atlantic Canada. In the 1940s Andrew

19 *Acadiensis*, X, 2 (Spring 1981). Contributors included: J.M. Bumsted on the migration of Highland Scots, Peter Ennals and Deryck Holdsworth on vernacular architecture and the cultural landscape, Larry McCann on the transition in the metal towns of Pictou County, Rosemary Ommer on property resource rights in the fishery and Graeme Wynn on the contributions of Clark and W.F. Ganong to regional scholarship. Review essays were written by Cole Harris on photographic “essays”, Joan M. Schwartz on pictorial collections, Stephen Hornsby and Graeme Wynn on outdoor museums, M. Brook Taylor on 19th-century county histories, Terry Crowley on forts and fortifications and Peter Ennals on atlases. Wynn also contributed a set of population maps for early New Brunswick. A.A. Brookes’s inherently geographical treatment of late 19th-century out-migration from Canning, Nova Scotia was originally scheduled for inclusion in this issue but had to be deferred to the next issue of the journal.

20 E.R. Forbes and D.A. Muise, eds., *The Atlantic Provinces in Confederation* (Fredericton and Toronto, 1993) and Phillip A. Buckner and John G. Reid, eds., *The Atlantic Provinces to Confederation: A History* (Fredericton and Toronto, 1994); here the 1800s are treated by Wynn, the 1830s by Ommer (then long since a migrant to the history department at Memorial University, but still a geographer at heart) and the 1890s by McCann. A third “exposure” that further solidifies the argument here is provided by P.A. Buckner, ed., *Teaching Maritime Studies* (Fredericton, 1986) the proceedings of a multi-disciplinary conference which included contributions from Ennals, McCann and Wynn.

Clark claimed that the essential concern of his work on the origins and development of land-use patterns in Nova Scotia was “the nature of the present cultural rural landscape”. Yet neither the historical nor the contemporary look of the land was much elaborated upon in his writing.²¹ John Mannion made considerable strides to address this deficit with his 1974 study of cultural transfer and adaptation by 19th-century Irish immigrants to Newfoundland and the Miramichi.²² The topic remained a central focus of much of his own later work and that of others who worked with him at Memorial University. Studies of building forms and of evolving outport settlement patterns and field boundaries were carried out “in the field” using ethnographical methods – extended interviews with local residents rather than traditional archival research. As a result, the distinctive, seemingly disordered landscapes of the out-settlements were made suddenly and deeply intelligible.²³ In the Maritime Provinces, Peter Ennals and Deryck Holdsworth worked singly and together to demonstrate the value of dwelling forms as sources of insight into economic, cultural and regional differences within the region. These studies, and a small handful of other more specialized or more locally-oriented contributions, provide a distinct perspective on the region’s past. Taken as a whole this scholarship illustrates the close connections between landscapes and livelihoods and reminds us of the several changing strands of aesthetic and cultural influence that linked people in Atlantic Canada variously to New England, across the Atlantic and to the emerging Canadian state.²⁴

In commenting on geographical work on rural life and staple trades, I feel more than usually compromised because much of my own work and that of several excellent University of British Columbia graduate students (Stephen Hornsby, Robert MacKinnon, Debra McNabb and Katie Pickles) has been concentrated in this realm.²⁵ The west has by no means monopolized the field, however. Eric Ross has written

- 21 Andrew Hill Clark, “The Origins and Development of Patterns and Practices of Land Use in Maritime Canada” (unpublished manuscript with emendations [1948]), MG1, vol. 1517, no. 7, p. 5, Public Archives of Nova Scotia, Halifax, Nova Scotia.
- 22 See J.J. Mannion, *Irish Settlements in Eastern Canada: A Study of Cultural Transfer and Adaptation* (Toronto, 1974).
- 23 Perhaps the best evidence in support of these claims is provided by J.J. Mannion, *Point Lance in Transition: The Transformation of a Newfoundland Outport* (Toronto, 1976). See also D.B. Mills, “The Development of Folk Architecture in Trinity Bay”, in Mannion, *Peopling*, pp. 77-101. One cannot ignore, of course, the somewhat parallel work of Newfoundland anthropologists, who pursued similar questions, for example, J.C. Faris, *Cat Harbour* (St. John’s, 1972) and folklorists such as Gerald Pocius, *A place to belong: community order and everyday space in Calvert, Newfoundland* (Montreal and Kingston, 1991) with whom Mannion and his students interacted.
- 24 Peter Ennals and Deryck Holdsworth, “Vernacular Architecture and the Cultural Landscape”, *Acadiensis*, X, 2 (Spring 1981), pp 86-106; “The Cultural Landscape of the Maritime Provinces”, in Day, ed., *Geographical Perspectives*, pp. 1-14; *Homeplace: The Making of the Canadian Dwelling Over Three Centuries* (Toronto, 1998); Ennals, “The Folk Legacy in Acadian Domestic Architecture: A Study in Mislaid Self-Images”, in Shane O’Dea and Gerald Pocius, eds., *Dimensions of Canadian Architecture* (Ottawa, 1984), pp. 8-12; D.A. McNabb and Lewis Parker, *Old Sydney Town* (Sydney, 1986); Deborah Trask and D.A. McNabb, “Carved in Stone: Material Evidence in the Graveyards of King’s County, Nova Scotia”, *Material History Bulletin*, 23 (1986), pp. 35-42.
- 25 Stephen Hornsby, “An Historical Geography of Cape Breton Island in the Nineteenth Century”, Ph.D. thesis, University of British Columbia, 1986, revised and published as *Nineteenth Century Cape Breton: A Historical Geography* (Montreal and Kingston, 1992); Robert MacKinnon, “The Historical Geography of Agriculture in Nova Scotia, 1851-1951”, Ph.D. thesis, University of British Columbia,

evocatively of growth and decay in the rural Maritimes, and work by the German scholar Axel Wieger on New Brunswick exhibits many parallels with MacKinnon's completely independent study of Nova Scotia. Nor can any discussion of this theme pass by Rosemary Ommer's considerable oeuvre on the fisheries and the truck system.²⁶ In time, work on this theme spans the two and a half centuries since the Acadian expulsion; in scale it ranges from McNabb's meticulous analysis of 18th-century Horton Township, through Hornsby's nicely-turned examination of Cape Breton Island to the provincial-scale inquiries of MacKinnon and Wieger. Inevitably, in a region where "occupational pluralism" has long been a way of life, much of this literature deals with rural life and the economies that sustained it in a relatively broad, social frame. Hewers of wood, fishers of cod, builders of ships, servants and schoolteachers, and their spouses and children have a place in the complex "rural" worlds explored and mapped in this body of scholarship. Larry McCann has effectively encapsulated this complexity by describing several variants of it as "Living a Double Life".²⁷ Perhaps it is fair to say that much of this work has been central to the reconfiguration of our understanding of the region's rural past and to the revelation of a countryside marked by diversity and tension, wealth and poverty and intricate patterns of interdependence among its inhabitants.²⁸

Work on the urban-industrial transition has been part of what Kris Inwood once called "the modern scholarly passion for smokestacks".²⁹ One of the persistent concerns of this literature has been to chart the industrialization and (more pointedly) the de-industrialization of the region to "explain" the economic difficulties that marked the Maritime Provinces for much of the 20th century. With its coalfields and steel mills, Pictou County stands near the centre of this story, but other areas receive their due. For example, Hugh Millward has explored changing patterns of exploitation on the Cape Breton coalfield, Brian Macowan's doctoral dissertation traces the evolution of the regional urban network, and McCann has written on Halifax and – importantly – on the take-over of Maritime business by Central Canadian capital. This

- 1991; Debra McNabb, "Land and Families in Horton Township, Nova Scotia, 1760-1830", M.A. thesis, University of British Columbia, 1986; Catherine Pickles, "Lives of Girls and Women in Mid-Nineteenth Century Pictou County, Nova Scotia", M.A. thesis, University of British Columbia, 1991.
- 26 Ross, "Rise and Fall" and "Growth and Decay"; Axel Wieger, *Agrarkolonisation, Landnutzung und Kulturlandschaftsverfall in der Provinz New Brunswick (Kanada)* (Aachen, 1990) and "Die erste Wüstungsphase in der atlantischen Provinz New Brunswick (Kanada): 1871 bis ca 1930", *Geographische Zeitschrift*, 70, 3 (1982), pp. 201-22; Ommer, *Outpost to Outport* and ed., *Merchant Credit in Historical Perspective* (Fredericton, 1990).
- 27 L.D. McCann, "'Living a Double Life': Town and Country in the Industrialization of the Maritimes", in Day, ed., *Geographical Perspectives*, pp. 93-113. See also McCann, "Seasons of Labor: Family, Work, and Land in a Nineteenth-Century Nova Scotia Shipbuilding Community", *The History of the Family* 4, 4 (2000), pp. 485-527. Earlier references to this pattern can be found in the writings of Harold Innis and in Wynn, *Timber Colony*.
- 28 Rusty Bittermann, Robert MacKinnon and Graeme Wynn, "Of Inequality and Interdependence in the Nova Scotian Countryside", *Canadian Historical Review*, 74, 1 (March 1993), pp. 1-43; Rosemary Ommer, "Primitive Accumulation and the Scottish *Clann* in the Old World and the New", *Journal of Historical Geography*, 12, 2 (April 1986), pp. 121-41 and "Highland Scots Migration to Southwestern Newfoundland", in Mannion, *Peopling*, pp. 213-33.
- 29 Kris Inwood, "Maritime Industrialization from 1870 to 1910: A Review of the Evidence and Its Interpretation", *Acadiensis*, XXI, 1 (Autumn 1991), p.155.

work has illuminated what has become the central “problematic” of the post-Confederation period – the rise and fall of the “Busy East” – but McCann’s “Double Life” apart, it says very little about the circumstances of everyday existence within the region during these years. We are nonetheless reminded of the difficulties many encountered by Pat Thornton’s arresting estimates of migration from the Atlantic Region, which ran, by her count, at almost 100,000 people per decade in the early 20th century.³⁰

Where there are mountains there must be valleys. If historical geographers have emphasized these themes in their work on the Atlantic Region over the last 30 years, they have also left questions unasked – or yet unanswered. Among the more obvious of the resulting gaps and silences is the failure to place women more squarely within the analytical frame. As a result, there is a corollary dearth of attention in the literature to women’s characteristic experiences as im-/emigrants, settlers, mothers, children and contributors to the economic, emotional and communal lives of families, villages and neighbourhoods.³¹ Much the same could be said about the relative lack of attention geographers have afforded native peoples, certain migrant groups and others in the region. There has also surely been a degree of neglect in the scant attention historical geographers have paid to developing a wider “Atlantic perspective” on the Atlantic Region. A few limited forays into this realm have done nothing to undercut the potential for thoughtful engagement with the sort of large-frame geographical analysis that Donald Meinig pointed to in his treatment of *Atlantic America*.³² Likewise, and particularly surprising given the considerable contributions of historical geographers to understanding urban development elsewhere in Canada, there has been little geographical work on the internal geographies, the morphologies and socio-spatial structure of the cities and larger towns of the Atlantic Region.³³

- 30 McCann, “Mercantile-Industrial Transition” and “Fragmented Integration: The Nova Scotia Steel and Coal Company and the Anatomy of an Urban Industrial Landscape”, *Urban History Review*, 22, 2 (June 1994), pp. 139-58; L.A. Sandberg, “The De-industrialization of Pictou County, Nova Scotia: Capital, Labour and the Process of Regional Decline, 1881-1921”, Ph.D. thesis, York University, 1986; H.A. Millward, “The Development, Decline and Revival of Mining on the Sydney Coalfield”, *Canadian Geographer*, 28, 2 (Summer 1984), pp. 180-5 and “A Model of Coalfield Development: Six Stages Exemplified by the Sydney Field”, *Canadian Geographer*, 29, 3 (Fall 1985), pp. 234-48; B.H. Macowan, “The Evolution of a Regional Urban Network: New Brunswick and Nova Scotia, 1871-1971”, Ph.D. thesis, University of Waterloo, 1986; Patricia Thornton, “The Problem of Out-Migration from Atlantic Canada, 1871-1921: A New Look”, *Acadiensis*, XV, 1 (Autumn 1985), pp. 3-34.
- 31 Jeanne Kay drew attention to this gap in the historical geographical literature in “Landscapes of Women and Men: Rethinking the Regional Historical Geography of the United States and Canada”, *Journal of Historical Geography*, 17, 4 (October 1991), pp. 435-52. There is an unassailable logic to the claim that scholarship should be inclusive and more needs to be done in using new sources and in interrogating old ones in new ways to address the issues raised here. But the picture is not entirely bleak.
- 32 Donald Meinig, *The Shaping of America: A Geographical Perspective on 500 Years of History*, Volume I *Atlantic America: 1491-1800* (New York, 1986) For some engagement with this perspective, see McNabb, “Land and Families”, Stephen Hornsby’s important forthcoming work on the North American seaboard and more tangentially several pieces of my own.
- 33 Larry McCann has led the way in these matters. See “Class, Ethnicity and Residential Differentiation in Mid-Victorian Halifax”, in Richard E. Preston and Bruce Mitchell, eds., *Reflections and Visions: 25 years of Geography at Waterloo* (Waterloo, 1990), pp. 240-65.

What, then, to make of this landscape? Clearly historical geographers have contributed their mite to the outpouring of scholarship on Atlantic Canada since the founding of *Acadiensis* in 1971. Much of their work has been incorporated into evolving accounts of the region, just as it has drawn upon and been shaped by the contributions of historians and others to understanding the regional past.³⁴ In some sense, disciplinary boundaries have blurred, even become imperceptible. The two solitudes of 30 years ago have joined in a shared and satisfying enterprise. Thus some of my own contributions to this expanding literature have been described as various types of hyphenated history, administrative-, agricultural-, economic-, intellectual- and social-, rather than as historical geography. Over the years many geographers have found their most intellectually congenial interactions with other students of the regional past, at Atlantic Canada Studies and Planter Studies conferences, in the pages of this journal and in other forms of exchange.

There is much to celebrate and to cherish in this. But boundaries have their benefits and their implications, and I hesitate to erase them from my map. Recognizing both the pleasure and the fruitfulness of interactions between geographers and historians of the Atlantic Region over the last three decades, it remains important to consider the characteristics that distinguish history and geography. To do this is to better appreciate both the underpinnings of earlier work and the potentially distinctive contribution that geographical perspectives might make to future understanding of the region's past. Here I echo Rainer Maria Rilke, whose "Love consists in this, that two solitudes protect and touch and greet each other" gave Hugh MacLennan his most famous title. For surely it is true of academic disciplines (as Rilke insists in love) "that even between the *closest*, infinite distances continue to exist". And to recognize as much allows the development of "a wonderful living side by side" so long as each recognizes the differences that make "it possible . . . to see the other whole against the sky".³⁵

A good deal has been made of the concept of "limited identities" in discussing the emergence of "the *Acadiensis* generation" of regional scholars. "Historians in Atlantic Canada", Phil Buckner tells us, "eagerly espoused the concept of 'limited identities'".³⁶ For Donald Swainson, who was critical of the shift away from larger national perspectives, there seemed to be an air of "inevitability" about the reformation of scholarly consciousness that he identified with the 1960s: "Historians and social scientists, in an impressive display of herd scholarship, went to the regions, the roots, the minorities". In their developing view, he argued, "There really was no

34 As one measure of "incorporation", by my count 24 of the 28 chapters contributed to *The Atlantic Region to Confederation* and *The Atlantic Provinces in Confederation* by non-geographers include reference to the work of geographers in their footnotes. For my part I well recall my interactions with a number of University of New Brunswick M.A. students of the late 1960s and early 1970s, whose community micro-studies were of considerable interest to me. Likewise, I cannot separate my developing understanding of the region from my reading of the very different work of a slightly later group of Dalhousie students. The essays by Judith Fingard and E.R. Forbes in *Acadiensis* XXX, 1 (Autumn 2000), pp. 38-44 and 45-49 provide additional context for these observations.

35 Rainer Maria Rilke, *Letters to a Young Poet*, cited in *Bartlett's Familiar Quotations*, 16th Edition (Boston, 1992), p. 630.

36 P.A. Buckner, "'Limited Identities' Revisited: Regionalism and Nationalism in Canadian History", *Acadiensis*, XXX, 1 (Autumn 2000), p. 5.

Canada; there were only provinces, regions, limited identities”.³⁷ And so the debate has continued, with those whose interests focused on parts of the country beyond the centre increasingly portrayed as “ideological regionalists” whose cumulative labours (and in some versions, their explicit intentions) served to undermine (and eventually cause the collapse of) Canadian (read “national”) history. A mountain of meaning has risen here that is still being proven through retrospect.³⁸

Yet the light thrown back catches only a fraction of the larger shape of things. From my perspective as a geographer the terrain looks somewhat different. Far from dominating the view, the national/regional dichotomy becomes only one element in a more complex landscape, a particular legacy of disciplinary circumstances. Into the 1960s, English-speaking historians generally emphasized the singularity of Canadian experience in the passage from colony to nation. Their self-appointed task “was to minimize the significance of internal divisions within Canadian society by focusing on the things which united Canadians and distinguished them from other peoples”.³⁹ To turn, as a new generation of scholars did, to the study of ethnicity, class and region was, inevitably, to challenge the consensual assumptions of the older school whose attachment to a nationalist perspective was arguably as firm and as unquestioning as the economists’ embrace of general equilibrium theory. For geographers, however, the world is a lumpy thing, full of differences from place to place. Just as they believe that uneven economic development is something to be expected rather than an anomaly, a quality to be explained rather than a challenge to equilibrium expectations, so geographers have rarely forgotten – as nationalist historians arguably did – “that Canada is far from a homogeneous country”.⁴⁰ Patriots they might be, but for the *Acadiensis* generation of geographers at least, an appreciation of scale and an interest in the differences that set places apart were bred in the bone.

There was no “nationalist geography” of Canada to rebel against, no teleology that mandated the embrace of a single Canadian “geographical realm” – indeed the very idea is absurd.⁴¹ The chansonnier might be admired for proclaiming “Mon pays c’est l’hiver”, but no geographer (from British Columbia at least) could hope to get away with such a claim. So we proceeded, quite “naturally”, to frame our inquiries on a scale that seemed appropriate to the questions we sought to address (and that was manageable, in a purely pragmatic sense). Although we saw and talked and thought about regional disparities, we hardly believed that what we wrote would redress the imbalances of Confederation. Nor, as I recall, were we intent on denying the value or

37 Donald Swainson, “Regionalism and the Social Sciences”, *Acadiensis*, X, 1 (Autumn 1980), p. 143.

38 Michael Bliss, “Privatizing the Mind: The Sundering of Canadian History, the Sundering of Canada”, *Journal of Canadian Studies*, 26, 4 (Winter 1991-2), pp. 5-17; J.L. Granatstein, *Who Killed Canadian History?* (Toronto, 1998); Doug Owsram, “Narrow Circles: the Historiography of Recent Canadian Historiography”, *National History*, 1, 1 (Winter 1997), pp. 11-18.

39 Buckner, “‘Limited Identities’ Revisited”, p. 5.

40 Ramsay Cook, “Nationalism in Canada”, *The Maple Leaf Forever: Essays on Nationalism and Politics in Canada* (Toronto, 1971), p. 213.

41 The Canadian Association of Geographers’ Centennial project was comprised of a series of regional essays. These included David Erskine, “The Atlantic Region”, pp. 231-80, as well as essays on such topics as landforms, water, economic development, and separate discussions of “Metropolitan Dominance” and “Regionalism and Nationalism in Canada”: John Warkentin, ed., *Canada: A Geographical Interpretation* (Toronto: 1968).

possibility of “national history”, even if we did aspire to bring the eastern provinces more clearly and fully into broader views of Canada. Rarely, at least initially, did we trouble ourselves with defining a (or “the”) region (although much geographical ink had been spent on this general question in the past). I was seen, by my colleagues, as “working on the Maritimes”, but so too was Andrew Clark long before “limited identities” appeared in the literature. And in truth both of us carved thematic and sub-regional (or “provincial”) furrows more assiduously than we engaged questions of regionalism or sought to identify the distinguishing marks of this part of the world.⁴² As a group we reflected our disciplinary affiliations by taking place and space seriously, by recognizing the roles of connection and distance in shaping circumstances, and by seeking to document and better understand human-induced changes to the face of the earth. If, as Phil Buckner has written, “regionalism ultimately begins with the proposition that geographic location – or a sense of place – matters in shaping identities”, then much of what we wrought may have helped expose the roots of Atlantic (or Maritime, or other) regionalisms, but, I believe it fair to say that this was not our first purpose.⁴³

In his review of *The Atlantic Provinces in Confederation*, Ramsay Cook points to another of the distinct sensibilities that geographers have brought to their work on eastern Canada. Commenting on the chapter dealing with the 1890s, Cook notes that its author, Larry McCann, “is more interested than other contributors in large categories such as ‘fragmentation’, ‘metropolitanism’ and ‘dependence’”.⁴⁴ These “abstractions” (as Cook calls them) have indeed been characteristic of much of McCann’s scholarship. They were integral to the conceptual frame developed in his highly successful *Heartland and Hinterland: A Geography of Canada* and recur in the titles and the substance of many of his articles. But he is not alone, at least among geographers, in this predilection.

Consider briefly, by way of examples, three geographer’s books on facets of the region’s past: Rosemary Ommer’s *Outpost to Outport*, Stephen Hornsby’s *Nineteenth Century Cape Breton* and my own *Timber Colony*. Although they are very different, each of these works speaks to questions of broader import than their specific focus might suggest. Ommer offers a detailed “structural and theoretical” analysis of the merchant triangle that tied the Gaspé fishery to management in Jersey and markets in the West Indies and the Mediterranean. This enterprise, she writes, “brought people to Gaspé and wealth to Jersey. It brought development to the metropole and left a legacy of underdevelopment in the colony”.⁴⁵ Hornsby is more interested in telling the

42 This is not to say that we completely eschewed the notion of “region” either. But attempts to represent this part of the world this way typically grew from other endeavours and were influenced by a number of considerations. Thus my essay on “The Maritimes” in L.D. McCann, ed., *Heartland and Hinterland: A Geography of Canada* (Scarborough, 1982) responded to an invitation to consider the three provinces together in a book that sought to put the regional geography of Canada in a new, more theoretical framework. The press of market forces, and other things, led eventually to the elimination of Michael Staveley’s separate chapter on Newfoundland (in the original volume) and the request to present a new synthesis embracing Atlantic Canada for the most recent edition of the book, viz.: “Places at the Margin: The Atlantic Provinces”, in L.D. McCann and Angus Gunn, eds., *Heartland and Hinterland: A Geography of Canada* (Scarborough, Ont., 1998), pp. 169-226.

43 Buckner, “‘Limited Identities’ Revisited”, p. 12.

44 Ramsay Cook, “The New History of Atlantic Canada”, *Acadiensis*, XXIII, 1 (Autumn 1993), p. 149.

45 Ommer, *Outpost to Outport*, p. 199.

dramatic story of Cape Breton's transformation – by Scottish immigration and incorporation into the new industrial world – than he is in structural analysis, but in his hands “this small peripheral island” becomes the epitome of larger patterns and processes and “offers a simple somewhat stark encapsulation of some of the salient developments in Canada during the nineteenth century”.⁴⁶ So, in a similar sense, my early attempt to recount an essential geographical story by describing New Brunswick as a part of the earth transformed by human action has been seen to frame “the Canadian developmental neurosis” and to offer up the province as a metaphor for Canada as a whole by showing how development “swept through the region, plundering its resources, creating momentary wealth in the commercial nexus, but leaving a small disadvantaged society to subsist in its wake”.⁴⁷ Significantly, it seems to me, each of these books engages in one way or another with Harold Innis's staples view of economic development (though this is not the only line of influence in their intellectual genealogies) and each works to refine, extend, or amplify this “abstraction”. Each stands alone, each possesses its own integrity, but each also reaches for farther horizons than those that define the small parts of the world and human experience with which it is most immediately concerned.

I am reminded here of Aldo Leopold's splendid essay in *A Sand County Almanac* in which he reflects on the felling and splitting of an old lightning-struck oak for firewood. As the men did their work, the saw blade dug deeper through the rings that marked the growth of this fine tree until, eventually, it was brought to ground and split with maul and wedge. Stroke by stroke, observed Leopold, “fragrant little chips of history spewed from the saw cut”, and he began to think allegorically about the different functions of saw and wedge, and of what they revealed of the past “witnessed” by the tree and chronicled by the grain of its wood. The saw, he reckoned, worked across the years: “From each year the raker teeth pull little chips of fact, which accumulate in little piles, called sawdust by woodsmen and archives by historians; both judge the character of what lies within by the character of the samples thus made visible without”. The wedge, driven into the end grain on the diagonal, by contrast, split the wood radially, to yield “a collective view of all the years at once”.⁴⁸ I do not mean this to imply that historians saw and geographers split, that some moil and others cleave, or that history is about annals and chronicle while geography is marked by bold interpretations. Any such inferences would be completely inaccurate. Leopold knew that both approaches, both views – the careful chronological accounting and the radically incisive synopsis – were as essential to good history as were saw and wedge to making good oak for the fireplace. Indeed, Leopold's allegory is far from perfect. Those sawdust-archives are all mixed up, as any but the first and last cuts of the blade must draw evidence from several years. And once the saw has done its work, the

46 Hornsby, *Nineteenth Century Cape Breton*, p. xvi. See also Hornsby, “Staple Trades, Subsistence Agriculture, and Nineteenth Century Cape Breton Island”, *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 79, 3 (1989), pp. 411-34 for an encapsulation of these themes.

47 See Wynn, *Timber Colony* and H.V. Nelles, “Looking Backward: Interpreting Canadian Economic Development”, in John Lennox, ed., *Se Connaître: Politics and Culture in Canada* (Downsview, 1985), pp. 19-21.

48 Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac, and Sketches Here and There* (New York, 1949), pp. 6-18.

stump surely yields a collective view of the epoch – albeit one somewhat different from that exposed by the wedge.⁴⁹

For all that, I am reluctant to give up on the basic notion that I find in Leopold's essay: that different tools, different strategies of approach to and different angles of encounter with the wood of the past yield somewhat different ways of regarding it. It has long seemed to me that historical geographers have brought a somewhat distinct tool-kit to their work. Even as we have seen ourselves as fellow-travellers with historians, many of us have found possession of this tool-kit energizing and liberating – although it has surely also imposed constraints. The constraints stem largely from the struggle to hold a place for time in a discipline defined by its focus on space and have tended to limit engagement with contemporary thought and ideas. But these need not detain us here. The opportunities grow from these self-same circumstances: they lie in a certain freedom to cut orthogonally (wedge-like?) into the stream of time (in descriptive “cross-sections” or thematic analyses of process); in the underlying materialist emphasis of geographical inquiry (the look of the land, patterns of settlement); in a heightened appreciation of the importance of space (and the friction of distance), place (a human construct) and scale (as it affects phenomena and their investigation); and in a commitment to understanding the role of humans in changing the face of the earth.⁵⁰ Scholars have, of course, responded to these opportunities differently, led by their personal inclinations as well as by the sources and topics under investigation, but taken as a whole, historical geography is distinguished from other historical scholarship on the Atlantic Region by these foundational attributes. They seem to have helped historical geographers to see the world somewhat differently. Insofar as this view has appeared revealing to others, it might not be too much to claim that it has had some influence upon the shape of historical writing in the span of that first “*Acadiensis* generation”.

But the world changes, and “each of us is moving, changing with respect to others”.⁵¹ As I look back over the 1970s and 1980s, from a discipline caught up, with many others in the academy, in debates about authorship, appropriation, representation, the “culture wars” and the linguistic turn, I am struck by two things – how divorced from current preoccupations most of the work that I have touched on here seems and how much historical geography's influence has waned. It would be easy to fall into nostalgia, for a “Golden Age” of scholarship passed, and to see the last decade – much as Ernest Buckler portrays the influence of modernity on rural life – as a journey out of Eden. Yet just as reading Buckler requires attention to “the

49 Leopold extends his allegory to include the axe but hardly develops this dimension of his metaphor. In his view, “The axe functions only at an angle diagonal to the years, and this only for the peripheral rings of the recent past”: *Sand County Almanac*, p. 17.

50 These are tendencies rather than stark choices. Just as H.C Darby pointed out long ago that some of the most vivid “cross-sectional” descriptions of particular territories had been written by historians rather than geographers, so do I not mean to imply that any of these emphases is the exclusive preserve of geographers. See H.C. Darby, “Historical Geography”, in H.P.R. Finberg, ed., *Approaches to History* (London, 1962), pp. 128-9. The English historian Lewis Namier identified two forms of historical practice: following “a stream as a diarist on the move might” or building two dams across the river and settling down “to study that section's significant detail”: cited by Bernard Bailyn, “The Challenge of Modern Historiography”, *American Historical Review*, 87, 1 (February 1982), p. 7.

51 Welty, *One Writer's Beginnings*, p. 98.

continuous dialogue between the social, spatial and historical relations of moderns and pre-moderns”, so it is important now to “look for threads” between the relations – vide Buckler – of moderns and post-moderns.⁵²

Two strategies suggest themselves. One is to incorporate elements of the new intellectual enthusiasm for discourse analysis, the study of identity construction and so on with established templates of inquiry – to use these approaches to build on, to reshape and to enhance what has been achieved to date. This is not as daunting a task as first appearances might suggest. Many current concerns – with “the quotidian”, with “the ethnos”, with the construction of meaning and with the blurring of disciplinary boundaries – are (and have long been) central to the work of historical geographers. Think of the emphases on understanding everyday lives, on questions of ethnic group settlement and cultural transfer, and on seeing the land with the eyes of its former inhabitants, as they are threaded through the literature considered above. These topics have rarely been treated in quite the same ways as they are engaged by the perspectives of postmodern and critical theory. But they are both familiar and important. If recent conference programmes and thesis titles testify to current enthusiasms for studies of representation in a pluralistic world, there are still fundamental questions to ask about the ways in which economies and societies work (in past and present). We ignore these at our peril. I am unreservedly with Colin Howell here, when he writes that “analyses of the processes of cultural production can never be fully convincing if they are not fully grounded in a materialist context”. For historical geographers (and others) some of the most reverberant accounts to emerge from the present commotion may well be those that blend traditional strengths – in grounded work attentive to the experience of people and the shaping of places – with the insights offered by “critical theory” (loosely so-called) to offer fresh, intelligent and meaningful accounts of the regional past.⁵³

A second strategy – not entirely separable from the first – also grafts established roots to recent concerns. Decades have passed since the fierce fire fading in the eye of a dying wolf brought Aldo Leopold to frame a “land ethic” – a point of view which “enlarges the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants and animals, or collectively: the land” and sees humans as members of this community rather than as its conquerors.⁵⁴ Yet interest in such an ecological perspective on human affairs has been slow to take root. Fueled by concerns about pollution, global

52 Erik Kristiansen, “Time, Memory and Rural Transformation: Rereading History in the Fiction of Charles Bruce and Ernest Buckler”, in Daniel Samson, ed., *Contested Countryside: Rural Workers and Modern Society in Atlantic Canada, 1800-1950* (Fredericton, 1994), p. 255.

53 For an effort to assess these developments, see Graeme Wynn, “A Fine Balance? Geography at the Millennium”, *Canadian Geographer*, 43, 3 (Fall 1999), pp. 220-43 and Colin Howell, “Development, Deconstruction and the Region: A Personal Memoir”, *Acadiensis*, XXX, 1 (Autumn 2000), p. 27. I attempted an early foray along the lines suggested here in “Ideology, Society, and State in the Maritime Colonies of British North America, 1840-1860”, in Allan Greer and Ian Radforth, eds., *Colonial Leviathan: State Formation in Mid-Nineteenth Century Canada* (Toronto, 1992), pp. 284-328. An excellent example of the insight to be gained from this approach is provided by Cole Harris, *The Resettlement of British Columbia: Essays on Colonialism and Geographical Change* (Vancouver, 1997).

54 Leopold, *Sand County Almanac*, pp. 129-30, 204. It was the encounter with the dying wolf that led Leopold to consider the possibility of “Thinking Like a Mountain”.

warming and the international political discussion of “sustainability”, the fundamental questions it raises are now matters of pressing public importance. In the United States and elsewhere the vigorous new field of environmental history has grown from this conjuncture. In Canada, by contrast, the response has been faltering. Perhaps this owes something to the relative strength of historical geography in Canada in comparison with the United States, because work on the human-environment interface has certainly fallen within the traditional bounds of that discipline. But there is irony in the scant attention that geographers have paid this element of their “birthright”. With the potential for meaningful engagement with physical, biological and social scientific, as well as humanistic, perspectives on the world inherent in their discipline, few are better situated than historical geographers to respond to Leopold’s call to recognize that “many historical events, hitherto explained solely in terms of human enterprise, were actually biotic interactions between people and land”.⁵⁵ Few have done so, and this has left enormous opportunities. To give voice to the great story of human-environmental interaction in the transformation of (Atlantic) Canada, or parts thereof – to think about the ways in which men and women have interacted alone and collectively, with mountains and valleys and shorelines and plains to produce, in Leopold’s sense of the word, new lands, is surely a challenge worthy of the new millennium. It is my hope that it is also one to inspire a cohort of scholars to mark the pages of this journal with the distinctive stamp of a new *Acadiensis* generation.

GRAEME WYNN

55 Leopold, *Sand County Almanac*, p. 205.