

It's (Still) Complicated Region and Gender in Recent Works of Atlantic Canadian Women's and Gender History

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REVIEW ESSAYS/NOTES CRITIQUE

It's (Still) Complicated: Region and Gender in Recent Works of Atlantic Canadian Women's and Gender History

"REGION AND GENDER may be an unhappy (or at least complicated) marriage," wrote Suzanne Morton in a 2000 article for *Atlantis*. In "Gender, Place, and Region: Thoughts on the State of Women in Atlantic Canadian History," Morton pointed out the "difficulty of reconciling place with the theoretical concept of gender" and suggested that "the ongoing marginalization of Atlantic Canada from the dominant Canadian national narrative" only made such a reconciliation more challenging.¹ Morton's article was the latest in a series of assessments of the field stretching back 23 years, but unlike Ruth Roach Pierson in 1977, Margaret Conrad in 1983, or Gail Campbell in 1990, Morton was able to report that by 2000 "research and writing on women's and gender history in the Atlantic region is flourishing." Yet she also observed that this research had failed to advance much beyond token acknowledgement in Canadian women's historiography, and had made little or no substantial impact on Atlantic Canadian historiography.²

Morton presented a two-pronged agenda for change. First, she called on scholars to develop more ethnically diverse research, to study the intersections of empire and gender, to begin studying the history of sexuality, and to address the relationship between women and the state. She also echoed Gail Campbell's earlier call for comparative studies using place as a variable. Secondly, Morton recommended remedies for the uneasy fit between a feminist understanding of gender and the study of region: placing less emphasis on urban settings, paying more attention to the distinction between "local" and "regional," and recognizing "the potential for oppression and autonomy in women's lives" in the context of "independent commodity production based at the level of the household." Ultimately, she argued, women's and gender history would only begin to reshape Atlantic Canadian historiography if the traditional gulf separating political/economic and social/cultural studies could be bridged. Otherwise, with Atlantic Canada's historical narrative still so firmly centred on the theme of political marginalization and economic underdevelopment, women's and gender history would remain a flourishing but relatively invisible field.³

1 Suzanne Morton, "Gender, Place, and Region: Thoughts on the State of Women in Atlantic Canadian History," *Atlantis* 25, no. 1 (2000): 119-28.

2 Ruth Roach Pierson, "Women's History: The State of the Art in Atlantic Canada," *Acadiensis* VII, no. 1 (Fall 1977): 121-31; Margaret Conrad, "The Re-Birth of Canada's Past: A Decade of Women's History," *Acadiensis* XII, no. 2 (Spring 1983): 140-62; Gail G. Campbell, "Canadian Women's History: A View From Atlantic Canada," *Acadiensis* XX, no. 1 (Fall 1990): 184-99; Morton, "Gender, Place, and Region," 119.

3 Morton, "Gender, Place, and Region," 124-6.

Sarah Glassford, "It's (Still) Complicated: Region and Gender in Recent Works of Atlantic Canadian Women's and Gender History," *Acadiensis* XLIV, no. 1 (Winter/Spring 2015): 145-154.

In the 15 years since Morton's article appeared, Atlantic Canadian women's and gender history has continued to flourish. However, has it travelled in the directions Morton hoped it would? This essay reviews four recent publications in women's and gender history – three with an Atlantic Canadian focus and one that covers a national canvas – and tries to gauge, in light of Morton's observations and aspirations, whether scholars have managed to iron out any of the tensions in the marriage of region and gender. *Feminist History in Canada: New Essays on Women, Gender, Work, and Nation* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2013) grew out of a 2010 conference convened by the Canadian Committee on Women's History/Comité canadien de l'histoire des femmes (CCWH/CCHF).⁴ In editors Catherine Carstairs and Nancy Janovicek's telling, one surprising element of the conference was the striking similarity between the predominant topics and research questions of 2010 and those that interested pioneering feminist historians four decades earlier. Women's paid and unpaid labour, professional women's experiences, women's political action, and women's experiences of marriage and family emerged as four major areas of interest to scholars at the 2010 conference, and consequently animate the resulting collection (4). The other three books reviewed here similarly embrace these classic areas of inquiry. Mary McDonald-Rissanen's *In the Interval of the Wave: Prince Edward Island Women's Nineteenth- and Early Twentieth-Century Life Writing* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2014) uses a close reading of women's private writings to illuminate Prince Edward Island (PEI) women's lives; Suzanne Morton traces the development of professional social work through the life and career trajectory of one ordinary practitioner in *Wisdom, Justice, & Charity: Canadian Social Welfare through the Life of Jane B. Wisdom, 1884-1975* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014); and the essays in Linda Cullum and Marilyn Porter's *Creating This Place: Women, Family, and Class in St. John's, 1900-1950* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2014) explore elite Newfoundland women's lives in the half-century before Confederation with Canada, featuring prominent subthemes of labour and social activism. Collectively, these four works infuse their historical investigations with the concerns, techniques, and methodologies of biography, sociology, women's and gender studies, geography, social development studies, and literary studies. They pay close attention to the importance of women's networks, often situate their subjects within transnational contexts, and highlight the intersectionality of gender with not only class and race but also less-frequently studied variables such as age, marital status, religion, and family relationships. All four books offer new answers to venerable questions, and contribute to a richer understanding of women's historical experiences. Their relationships to that nebulous concept known as "Atlantic Canada" vary too widely for easy generalization, but they collectively show that the marriage between region and gender is still a complicated one.

Feminist History in Canada: New Essays on Women, Gender, Work and Nation is a valuable collection whose essays merit inclusion on course reading lists dealing

4 Carstairs and Janovicek explain that the 2010 conference, "Edging Forward, Acting Up: Gender and Women's History at the Cutting Edge of Scholarship and Social Action," emphasized histories of feminist activism, but also served as an opportunity to more broadly consider four decades of women's and gender history writing in Canada (x, 3).

with labour, education, science, empire, politics, and historical methodology as well as their obvious home in women's and gender history courses. The book aims to present "exciting new work" (4) and makes no claim to represent all regions of Canada, except in bringing together research by both anglophone and francophone scholars – a rare instance of Canada's two historiographical solitudes in conversation with one another. The resulting collection takes a scattershot approach to time and place, although, in keeping with wider trends in Canadian history, post-Confederation topics dominate. Biography and close readings of women's own words help several chapters stand out from the rest. These include Kristina Llewellyn's thoughtfully reflexive oral history of postwar home economics teacher Hazel Chong, Heidi MacDonald's use of three Depression-era diaries to discuss singleness, Adele Perry's keynote address-turned-essay (and winner of the 2014 Hilda Neatby Prize) on British Columbia's transnational Douglas-Connolly family, and Lorna McLean's piece on First World War pacifist Julia Grace Wales. Each demonstrates the powerful new insights that can be gained from viewing nation, empire, work, community, and socio-economic forces from the perspective of one individual or family.

Six of the essays are explicitly transnational or national in scope, while the other six home in on a single province or institution. Of the latter, New Brunswick is the Atlantic region's flag bearer: it serves as the setting for both Gail Campbell's study of 19th-century family and community as seen through men's and women's diaries and Anthony Hampton's analysis of feminist activism in opposition to the Meech Lake Accord. Rural New Brunswick also appears as the location of one of the three diarists studied by Heidi MacDonald in her consideration of women's "pathways to singleness or delayed marriage" in the 1930s (131), but place is not a key variable in the analysis. Although MacDonald suggests that this young woman's social circle (and therefore marriage prospects) narrowed upon her return to her small community, she primarily analyzes the influence of work, family, life events, class, and economic constraints.

It is a testament to the vibrancy of Atlantic Canadian women's and gender history as a field that the Campbell and Hampton essays appear in Carstairs and Janovicek's collection (from which the Prairie provinces are conspicuously absent). However, their respective chapters do not easily assume the mantle of representing Atlantic Canada as a region. Campbell's essay offers many juicy tidbits about 19th-century rural life in New Brunswick, but is really an exploration of methodology as it relates to gender because, as Campbell shows, men and women tend to inscribe daily life differently; a full picture of women's integration into family, community, and work can only be gained from reading both sets of sources. Her essay answers Morton's 2000 call for Atlantic Canadian history to focus more on rural life and women's experiences in household commodity production, and demonstrates the richness of this vein of inquiry. It leaves open, however, the question of whether Campbell's findings are applicable to most rural communities (which seems likely), unique to 19th-century New Brunswick, or somehow shaped by the demography, economy, and society of the broader Atlantic region.

Hampton's essay, by contrast, is explicitly about feminist activism in one specific province. Although feminists elsewhere in Atlantic Canada and across the country shared many objections to the proposed Meech Lake Accord, a change of

government in New Brunswick during the ratification period made it the site of the ad hoc activism Hampton describes. Morton's insistence that scholars recognize the distinction between "local" and "regional" clearly applies in this instance. The Hampton, MacDonald, and Campbell essays demonstrate the ongoing tensions between region and gender as frameworks of study and analysis. Nevertheless, their presence in a national collection of "exciting new work" (4) is pleasing evidence of the strides made by Atlantic Canadian women's and gender history since 2000 in terms of asserting a place for Atlantic Canadian stories at the cutting edge of Canadian women's and gender history.

Since publishing her reflections on the state of the field in 2000, Suzanne Morton has followed her own recommendations for Atlantic Canadian women's and gender history. Her 2010 collection *Making Up the State: Women in 20th-Century Atlantic Canada*, co-edited with Janet Guildford, fixed a wide-angle lens on women's interactions with the state,⁵ while her new monograph, *Wisdom, Justice, and Charity: Canadian Social Welfare through the Life of Jane B. Wisdom, 1884-1975*, provides a more sharply focussed analysis of one woman's relationship with the welfare state.

Although biography has always been a popular genre among Canadian historians, it is in the midst of a resurgence, and *Wisdom, Justice, and Charity* is best understood as a dual-biography: of Jane Wisdom and of social work as a profession. For historians of women and gender the great advantage of biography is the way it enables the creation of "a nuanced portrait of the ways social forces shape individuals,"⁶ and Morton asserts that "the story of the Canadian welfare state can – indeed, must – be told through biography" (3). She chose Jane B. Wisdom as her entry point because New Brunswick-born Wisdom, one of the country's earliest professional social workers, "stands as a potent allegory for the limits and possibilities of individual action" (3). *Wisdom, Justice, and Charity* is a self-described "messy case file" – incomplete, subjective, and provisional (4) – in terms of both its subject's life and the birth and growth of the welfare state. Morton makes no attempt to chart Jane Wisdom's inner life, and sometimes allows Wisdom to disappear for extended periods as she tries to untangle elaborate professional networks and traces the contours of intellectual currents.

The overlapping networks of gender, family, profession, faith, and locale in which Wisdom lived her daily life, as well as the less tangible transnational networks of thought, action, and professional relationships radiating outward from London, New York, and Montreal, are convincingly reconstructed throughout the book. Biography proves to be an excellent lens through which to view the birth and expansion of both social work and the welfare state: as Wisdom moves from Saint John to Montreal to New York to Halifax, back to Montreal, and finally to Glace Bay, we watch her social and professional connections grow, her education and experiences either entrench or alter her outlook on particular issues, and her professional relationship to the state emerge. Morton also deftly and sensitively

5 Janet Guildford and Suzanne Morton, eds., *Making Up the State: Women in 20th-Century Atlantic Canada* (Fredericton: Acadiensis Press, 2010).

6 Carstairs and Janovick, *Feminist History in Canada*, 7.

explores how Wisdom's religious upbringing and lifelong faith shaped her understandings of and approaches to justice and charity, ultimately demonstrating that, rather than competing, religious and secular influences shaped her in tandem. This ability to see "both/and" instead of "either/or" also informs Morton's reframing of what have often been considered discrete phases in social work. Wisdom's simultaneous embrace of both investigative casework-based scientific philanthropy and the more cooperative settlement movement, in which social workers lived among their clients, is compelling evidence of social work's messy, non-linear emergence and evolution.

Although Morton follows Jane B. Wisdom from childhood to retirement, Jane-the-woman remains a shadowy figure at the end of the book; the very brief discussion of how she spent her retirement somehow humanizes her more than all the preceding chapters. It is difficult to criticize Morton for this: she lacks adequate sources for delving more deeply into Wisdom's personal life, has a massive canvas to cover that necessitates frequent digressions into the history of social work, the welfare state, and various charities, and warns readers at the outset that this is a career-focused biography. Still, the most engaging sections of the book are those that keep Wisdom herself front and centre. Most of the clients with whom Wisdom worked also stand in the shadows – again, largely for lack of sources. Wisdom's work in the wake of the 1917 explosion in Halifax Harbour is a highlight of the book, because the sources allow Morton to describe specific clients, their needs, and Wisdom's interventions on their behalf – adding an otherwise missing depth to the story. As a whole, Morton's book thought-provokingly illuminates the complexity of an emergent social work profession, the influence of transnational thought and professional networks on the Canadian welfare state, and the intriguing career path of one professional woman.

Wisdom, Justice, and Charity's relationship to region is, again, complicated. On a basic level this is an Atlantic Canadian story: Jane B. Wisdom was born and raised in New Brunswick, was embraced as a Nova Scotian thanks to her family roots, and worked in both Halifax and Cape Breton. Morton is careful to show the ways Wisdom's life and work were rooted in and shaped by these places and their people. Yet Morton herself cautioned in her 2000 article against conflating "regional" and "local,"⁷ and she also shows that Wisdom was equally formed by her work and experiences in Montreal and New York and was part of a transnational network of thought and practice. Wisdom's story cannot be understood as an exclusively regional one. Morton's own explanation is that this is "specifically an eastern story" (6), but she uses the term to distinguish it from Western Canada and not as a synonym for Atlantic Canada. She also takes pains to point out the distinctiveness of approaches to charity and social welfare in individual provinces, cities, religious denominations, and organizations – all of which defy easy regional generalization.

It is never clear whether Wisdom's gender identity is influenced by her New Brunswick and Nova Scotia ties, nor whether her experiences as a woman are any different in Atlantic Canada than in Quebec or New York. The book's focus on Wisdom and the highly feminized caring profession of social work makes it an

7 Morton, "Gender, Place, and Region," 125.

important and insightful contribution to women's and gender history, but Morton never claims that Jane B. Wisdom is representative of her entire sex or profession. Instead, she is a lens through which to view professional and state formation. Thus, the book attempts to achieve another of Morton's goals for Atlantic Canadian history: breaking down the traditional walls between political/economic and social/cultural studies.⁸ Since Morton has framed her masterful examination of the emerging Canadian welfare state within Wisdom's career, it will be virtually impossible for future scholars of the Canadian welfare state to ignore the role of women in its on-the-ground construction. *Wisdom, Justice, and Charity* does not, overall, facilitate a thoroughly happy marriage between gender and region, but it does achieve Morton's larger goals of vaulting aspects of Atlantic Canadian history squarely into the national narrative, and further integrating women into Atlantic Canadian narratives.

In *Creating This Place: Women, Family and Class in St. John's, 1900-1950*, sociologists Linda Cullum and Marilyn Porter have assembled a collection that focuses on St. John's as a venue for understanding the creation of Newfoundland as a "self-conscious national entity" during the tumultuous 50 years before it joined Canada (3). Collectively, the contributors examine the role of women's everyday work in constituting middle and upper class worlds in St. John's while simultaneously interrogating gender relations within and between different class positions, ethnicities, religious denominations, and family forms (3).

The book concentrates on elite urban women in order to fill a gap in Newfoundland historiography, but one of the strengths of the collection is the amount of attention it pays to working class women. The various essays demonstrate how, through their activism, organizational work, and behind-the-scenes influence with elite men, elite St. John's women actively created the version of Newfoundland that would become Canada's tenth province (6). But they also emphasize the importance of working class women's domestic labour in freeing elite women to engage in activism, some of it (such as the Jubilee Guilds) directed toward the welfare of working women themselves. Chapters worthy of particular note include Linda Cullum's essay on domestic service, which brings together both sides of the equation – servants and mistresses – in one nuanced study, and two biographical essays that shed light on particular forms of work and activism: Helen Woodrow's portrait of Julia Salter Earle's tireless union work and Margot Duley's analysis of Armine Nutting Gosling's evolution from society wife to committed suffragist. Both Woodrow and Duley bring their protagonists vividly to life, grounding them in the context of St. John's as well as transnational currents of activism. The intricacies of denominational life are given due emphasis throughout the book, but the authors are hindered in their attempts to examine the influence of ethnicity by the "overwhelming 'whiteness'" of Newfoundland in this period (10). Although they manage to at least comment on the resulting silences in surviving sources, *Creating This Place* ends up arguing primarily for the "centrality of gender in the construction of class" (8).

Each essay in this highly interdisciplinary collection is solidly grounded in relevant historiography (primarily Newfoundland, but also Canadian and British),

8 Morton, "Gender, Place, and Region," 126.

and archival sources are well used throughout. It is an unusually coherent collection, in part because of the focus on a single city across only 50 years but also thanks to a wealth of references to the other chapters in each essay. The final two essays, which deal with Junior Thrift Clubs and letters to the future Premier Smallwood in the period 1939-1949, stand apart somewhat from the others in subject matter and time period, but the preceding seven chapters overlap in their focus on the earlier decades to the point of feeling like companion pieces to one another. Together they cover religion, education, activism, literary life, domestic help, and specific women's experiences, painting a complex and revealing picture of early 20th-century life for elite women in the capital.

The collection as a whole is a delight to read, unfolding in smooth, jargon-free prose, with strong narrative lines enlivening solid analysis. Helpful maps of St. John's and the Avalon Peninsula, as well as a thorough introduction that reviews not only the themes of the book but also Newfoundland history, make this collection highly accessible to non-specialists. This is deliberate: Cullum and Porter appeal to readers not to leave pre-Confederation Newfoundland out of Canadian history, arguing that it is a "core, and often neglected element to the story of how Canada came to be put together politically, socially, and regionally" (24).

Cullum and Porter's excellent collection carries on a tradition of Atlantic Canadian research that delves deeply and instructively into constructions of gender, or gendered aspects of class or institutions, in specific locations. As Morton argued in 2000, these studies are so strong precisely because of their grounding in one place, and the St. John's focus in this collection is no exception. But as she points out, "this very specificity raises the issue of whether or not this body of work tells us anything of the larger region."⁹ Early 20th-century St. John's, this book makes plain, was radically different from the Newfoundland outports, and presumably also from rural areas of the three Maritime provinces. Conversely, despite the editors' careful framing of pre-Confederation Newfoundland as a unique place, the authors' frequent references to Canadian and British parallels make a case for transnational similarities among elite urban women – an example of the universalizing tendency in Atlantic Canadian historiography identified by Morton. Cullum and Porter's goal of asserting a place for Newfoundland in broader Canadian narratives echoes that of Atlantic Canadian historians as a whole, but also inadvertently suggests the fragility of the notion of "region" itself. Arguably, Newfoundland's pre-1949 history does not easily find a place in Canadian narratives (Atlantic or otherwise) precisely because it had developed the kind of distinct Newfoundland identity Cullum and Porter have devoted their collection to exploring. This is not to say that the effort is not worthwhile, but merely that it is anachronistic; many pre-1949 Newfoundlanders themselves would not have identified with any "Atlantic Canadian region" and therefore this will probably always be a somewhat awkward fit.

On a similar note of asserting a place for local stories in broader narratives, Mary McDonald-Rissanen hopes her monograph *In the Interval of the Wave: Prince Edward Island Women's Nineteenth- and Early Twentieth-Century Life Writing* will earn a place for Prince Edward Island women diarists within PEI and Canadian

9 Morton, "Gender, Place, and Region," 122.

history. Her goal serves as a reminder that even after four decades of this kind of recuperative scholarship, there are still many women in Canada's past who have yet to gain their place within national, regional, and local narratives. McDonald-Rissanen's parallel goal is "to interrogate the process of writing" and see what the study of language reveals about the past (23). Her monograph, which nestles its close reading of PEI women's unpublished diaries within a dense web of literary theory and life-writing scholarship, will no doubt be thoroughly appreciated by literary scholars but may be less gratifying to historians. In *Feminist History in Canada*, Carstairs and Janovicek argue that the "linguistic turn," which so significantly influenced historical study as a whole, has been balanced within the field of Canadian women's and gender history by an ongoing concern with material existence and daily experience (6-7). *In the Interval of the Wave* provides fascinating glimpses into the lives of Island women, but luxuriates in the linguistic turn at the expense of more thoroughly investigating the material experience of the women whose lives it purports to explore. To her credit, McDonald-Rissanen situates her close reading of the diaries within a wider context of depictions of writing about PEI women; selected period newspapers, historical paintings, local history, and scholarly history all receive some attention. But where a historian would see different types of primary and secondary sources, each meriting a particular type of interrogation and consideration, McDonald-Rissanen's literary training leads her to see "texts" of equal weight. The resulting analyses of these contextual materials lack nuance or depth. For a historian, *In the Interval of the Wave* tantalizes without ever fully satisfying.

On the subject of the diaries themselves, the book has much to offer. The author reminds readers that "perceiving the autobiographical artifact exclusively as a realistic depiction of life ignores the author/creator's role in the artifact," and emphasizes that each female diarist "was not merely pasting her life on the pages of her diary but was generating her life through the cumulative effect of writing, reading, and reflecting on her own life's experience: producing a text of her life in a mediated form" (119). McDonald-Rissanen embroiders a recurring motif throughout the book, arguing that diaries were where "Island women . . . wrote themselves into existence" (xiii). Although this feels a little disingenuous (surely a woman may possess a sense of self even if she never puts pen to paper?), historians would do well to keep in mind, in their own use of diaries as primary sources, that life-writing is always a form of performance – for oneself, if not more consciously for posterity.¹⁰

10 For more on this point and the efficacy of diaries as historical sources generally, see Bonnie Huskins and Michael Boudreau, "'Daily Allowances': Literary Conventions and Daily Life in the Diaries of Ida Louise Martin (nee Friars), Saint John, New Brunswick, 1945-1992," *Acadiensis* XXXIV, no. 2 (Spring 2005): 88-108. The concept of the woman who "writes herself . . . into being" also appears in Shelagh Wilkinson, "By and About Women," in *Changing Patterns: Women in Canada*, ed. Sandra D. Burt, Lorraine Code, and Lindsay Dorney (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1988), 209, where Wilkinson discusses the role of women authors who address women's issues in their published fiction, poetry, and drama. She convincingly argues for the importance of such literary representations in creating a space and voice for women within society and the role such works play in empowering women readers by reflecting their experiences. She focuses on the public literary conversation, however, and does not suggest that women need to write in order to have a private, personal sense of self.

From pioneer Emma Chadwick Stretch's late-1850s jottings in her account ledger to the extensive diaries of elite 20th-century urbanite Wanda Lefurgey Wyatt, the diaries examined span very different time periods, places, and modes of living. With the exception of several travel journals examined together, each chapter covers a specific time period and/or segment of PEI society. The portion of chapter 6 that focuses on Margaret Gray Lord is especially noteworthy: it is engagingly narrated, insightful, and unencumbered by the overabundant quotations from secondary literature that weigh down some sections of the book. As the daughter of Father of Confederation John Hamilton Gray and wife of prominent businessman and civil servant Artemas Lord, Margaret Gray Lord lived her whole life as a wealthy and well-connected member of the Charlottetown elite. The three Gray Lord diaries examined convey facets of her urban bourgeois life, ranging from the potential scandal of a sister pregnant on her wedding day to Gray Lord's religious convictions and extensive involvement in social reform and philanthropy. Throughout this section, the author allows Gray Lord herself to take centre stage, and in the process strikes what historians will consider an ideal balance between the linguistic turn and a concern for daily existence and material experience.

McDonald-Rissanen tills fertile fields in her close attention to gaps and silences in the diaries, the subtleties of penmanship, and other material aspects of the documents themselves. For instance, she gleans insights into diarists' states of mind from patterns in their handwriting even when the words themselves are unforthcoming. Her analysis of inclusions and exclusions in Margaret Gray Lord and Wanda Lefurgey Wyatt's obituaries is similarly instructive, and McDonald-Rissanen is especially insightful when examining her grandmother Amy Darby Tanton Andrew's five years of line-a-day writing. Comparing the diary entry for a particularly harrowing experience with the story of this same event recounted to McDonald-Rissanen as a child offers a rare opportunity to compare written and oral records of Andrew's life. The importance of nature, weather, and the seasons in setting the tone for rural life and daily experience also comes through clearly in this chapter.

In the Interval of the Wave upholds Morton's observation in her 2000 article that for "most Atlantic Canadianists, rurality and class matter more to the construction of gender than region."¹¹ McDonald-Rissanen invokes characteristic attributes of Prince Edward Island in her title, prologue, and first chapter – the sea, red sandstone, L.M. Montgomery – to evoke a certain "islandness" at the outset, but these distinguishing features give way in subsequent chapters to an intense scrutiny of women's writings that focuses upon what they illuminate with regard to class, urban and rural life, and, above all, gender. Women's literary constructions of self are the author's central concern, and through most of the book any sense of island – let alone the wider region – disappears. The discussions of weather and seasons appear, in this context, to reflect a universal experience of rural life, rather than anything specific to PEI or the women who lived there. This kind of research will eventually help facilitate the comparative studies Morton hopes to see. Yet it is telling to note this further example of the universalizing tendency Morton identified in Atlantic Canadian history.

11 Morton, "Gender, Place, and Region," 121.

Of course it is impossible to assess the state of an entire field on the basis of only four new books, but it does seem reasonable to suggest two things. First, Atlantic Canadian women's and gender history has made positive inroads into the national historiography of women and gender since 2000, and it is a dynamic, methodologically innovative field. In addition to the social history trinity of race, class, and gender, many of the authors represented here deepen their analyses by examining variables such as family, age, marital status, female networks, transnational connections, and religion. Notably missing from the works examined here, however, is much discussion of race and ethnicity as factors shaping Atlantic Canadian women's lives. Aboriginal women, African Nova Scotian women, and Acadian women do not appear anywhere in these works, and remain understudied in Atlantic Canadian women's history as a whole. In the religious realm, Catholic women are underrepresented as well. Second, the marriage between gender and region in Atlantic Canadian history remains a complicated one. Despite some progress, Suzanne Morton's turn-of-the-millennium agenda for easing the tensions in the relationship remains entirely relevant a decade and a half later: study rural and small town life and not just urban areas, pay attention to trends that are local versus those that are region-wide, study non-Caucasian groups of women, and bridge the gap between political/economic and social/cultural history. Ian McKay supports the latter in his 2000 article "A Note on 'Region' in Writing the History of Atlantic Canada," where he proposes that historians use "the new tools of cultural theory and the old tools of political narrative and economic analysis to illuminate specific and well-defined issues." He goes on to urge historians to resist and counter the ways the label "Atlantic Canada" has been used to "Other" the region and its people in a central Canadian-driven national historiography.¹² Both region and gender are notoriously slippery, historically contingent concepts, so finding ways to get them to pull together in analytical harness will likely always be a difficult task. At the same time, it is important to remain open to the possibility that perhaps, in some cases, place does not matter but gender does, or vice versa. Morton's other recommendation – more comparative work within and across regions – would go a long way toward illuminating those trends, events, and circumstances in women's and gender history where place does or does not matter. If historians of women and gender de-centred Central Canada as McKay suggests, Canadian women's and gender history might end up looking very different indeed.

SARAH GLASSFORD

12 Ian McKay, "A Note on 'Region' in Writing the History of Atlantic Canada," *Acadiensis* XXIX, no. 2 (Spring 2000): 91, 99-100.