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Environmental History at Work: New Environmental Histories of Canada and Atlantic Canada

WHAT IS “ENVIRONMENTAL HISTORY”? Who produces it, and who is it for? These are questions environmental historians encounter often: while teaching, in grant proposals and book pitches, and in job application letters. In many ways, the three recent edited volumes in review here – Colin Coates and Graeme Wynn’s *The Nature of Canada*, Claire Campbell, Edward MacDonald, and Brian Payne’s *The Greater Gulf*, and Edward MacDonald, Joshua MacFadyen, and Irené Novaczek’s *Time and A Place* – all do what we expect from environmental histories.¹ They tell stories of human and non-human interactions with the natural world. They examine the environmental aspects of social, political, economic, and cultural change. They centre the winds and waters, the plants and animals, the rocks and trees and beaches. More than anything, though, these three volumes hint at all of the things that environmental history can *do*. The environmental history community in Canada is robust, as the Network in Canadian History and Environment (NiCHE) and the University of Calgary’s related open-access “Canadian History and Environment” series suggest.² These three volumes – the arguments, themes, etc. – engage with what we might call “traditional” Canadian environmental history, but also put it to work by expanding its boundaries. As a set of books, the *Nature of Canada*, the *Greater Gulf*, and *Time and a Place* act as a sort of matryoshka doll of the cutting edge of Canadian environmental history. Each makes its own critical and crucial intervention

1 Colin M. Coates and Graeme Wynn, eds., *The Nature of Canada* (Vancouver: On Point Press, UBC Press, 2019); Claire E. Campbell, Edward MacDonald, and Brian Payne, eds. *The Greater Gulf: Essays on the Environmental History of the Gulf of St Lawrence* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2019); Edward MacDonald, Joshua MacFadyen, and Irené Novaczek, eds., *Time and a Place: An Environmental History of Prince Edward Island* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2016).

2 The print books in the series cost money, but they are all available as free open-access e-books at <https://press.ucalgary.ca/openaccess/>.

by expanding under-studied areas, deflating over-studied ones, and opening the field to new practitioners and audiences, all while sitting comfortably within each other as a set of concentric narratives that generally cancel out each other's flaws. This essay will explore how these books probe the ways that environmental history is, has been, and can be *mobilized* as well as how the contributors to each engage with common themes in Canadian environmental history: economies, commodities, and work; geopolitics; tourism and culture; and the histories of non-human actors.³

The *Nature of Canada* is the broadest in temporal, thematic, and geographic scope, and the editors and authors have deliberately removed their "common scholarly blinkers" in favor of "provocative arguments" that present a highly nuanced and hopeful picture of the past, present, and future of human-nature interactions in Canada.⁴ The "nature" in the *Nature of Canada* has multiple meanings; not only are the contributors interested in what we might imagine as "the natural world" – trees, animals, rivers, minerals – but they also interrogate Canada's *nature* as a settler colony. What role has the environment played in constructions of Canada, they ask, and what have those constructions in turn done to the environment? To answer these questions, the contributors address both the content and context of environmental history in short essays written largely by historians or historical geographers that run from geological-scale "deep time" to the early 21st century. Because this book is focused on "the nature of Canada (and Canadians)," we hear voices that have long been central to thinking about Canadian environments, such as Tom Thomson, Northrop Frye, Lucy Maud Montgomery, and David Suzuki.⁵ But the contributors to the *Nature of Canada* also remind us to "listen for different stories." Julie Cruikshank is a good example of this as her essay forces us to re-consider who gets to be an "expert" on the environment and how even Indigenous "Traditional Environmental Knowledge" (TEK) is only seen as valuable once it is made palatable to the "modern bureaucratic state," forcing Indigenous ways of knowing nature into commensurability with settler time-spaces.⁶

Each of the essays in the *Nature of Canada*, by design, takes a fairly common topic in Canadian environmental history and manipulates it by looking for a

3 There is an inherent challenge to reviewing three edited volumes in one essay: how best to summarize and engage with more than 30 discrete arguments. I have arranged them thematically and by volume here.

4 Coates and Wynn, "Introduction," *Nature of Canada*, 12.

5 Coates and Wynn, "Introduction," *Nature of Canada*, 3.

6 Julie Cruikshank, "Listening for Different Stories," *Nature of Canada*, 96.

different story, listening for a different voice, or asking an existential question. More than anything, the authors look to the past to try to better understand the present and future. Ken Cruikshank asks what will happen to the Canadian preoccupation with using communications technologies to have control over the “Dominion” as they are forced to restrain and re-train those networks to avoid disrupting the mobilities of non-human species.⁷ Arn Keeling and John Sandlos remind us that hard rock mining, a favorite topic of both politicians and raconteurs such as Stompin’ Tom Connors, is not as sustainable as industry leaders have claimed.⁸ A mine is “never just a hole in the ground,” they argue. It is accompanied by all sorts of development activities that leave deep scars – physical and otherwise – on the landscape, which are often hidden from the everyday consumers of mineral products.⁹ Each contribution to this volume, which average fewer than 20 pages and are all richly illustrated, do this clever twisting. Even the final reflective essay by education scholar Heather McGregor is equal parts post-divorce introspection and meditation on what it is like to simply *be* in a warming world in which the stories we tell must be anchored in time and place.¹⁰

The *Nature of Canada* is environmental history at its most provocative because it has been assembled for a popular audience; the calls to action and pointed glances towards the future outnumber the footnotes. This is certainly enough for a popular readership or for an undergraduate environmental history class – I have already assigned an essay or two in my “Introduction to Environmental History” course – but it may not be enough for an academic audience. But this is not a criticism! First, each essay has a significant “References and Further Reading” section – sometimes structured as a

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- 7 Ken Cruikshank, “Every Creeping Thing . . .,” *Nature of Canada*, 223–42. There have been many treatments of Canadian communications technologies such as railways, roadways, waterways, and airways and “the environment.” See, for example, Edward Jones-Imhotep, *The Unreliable Nation: Hostile Nature and Technological Failure in the Cold War* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2017); the “Environments” section of Jones-Imhotep and Tina Adcock, eds., *Made Modern: Science and Technology in Canadian History* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2018); and Ben Bradley, Colin Coates, and Jay Young, eds. *Moving Natures: Mobility and the Environment in Canadian History* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2016).
 - 8 For some recent studies of mining as not just a “hole in the ground,” see Jessica van Horssen, *A Town Called Asbestos: Environmental Contamination, Health, and Resilience in a Resource Community* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2016); Liza Piper, *The Industrial Transformation of Subarctic Canada* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010); and Arn Keeling and John Sandlos, eds. *Mining and Communities in Northern Canada: History, Politics, and Memory* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2015).
 - 9 Arn Keeling and John Sandlos, “Never Just a Hole in the Ground,” *Nature of Canada*, 205.
 - 10 Heather McGregor, “Time Chased Me Down, and I Stopped Looking Away,” *Nature of Canada*, 335–52.

historiographic essay, sometimes structured as a more traditional bibliography, sometimes in the form of a personal narrative, and sometimes structured as a combination of these approaches. Second, North American environmental history's history is grounded in environmental activism and emerged, as many other social movements did, in the second half of the 20th century. Rhetorically moving away from the academy by eschewing its most conventional form allows the contributors to explore "nature" and "the environment" through the lens of activism, whether the authors are *literally* writing about activism, as Graeme Wynn and Jennifer Bonnell and Joanna Dean do in their respective essays about David Suzuki and the women of Greenpeace, or simply reminding us of the constructed nature of the terms themselves.¹¹

In Canada, in particular, "the environment" has been central to how the nation's history has been imagined since before Confederation. Confederation-era politicians used Canada's apparently unique climatic conditions to articulate a deep history for themselves that stretched back to the Norse and allowed them to appear different from their overseas metropole and American neighbours.¹² Harold Innis and Donald Creighton, in their 1930s "staples" and "Laurentian" theses, saw environmental factors as drivers of Canadian economic development.¹³ Space, climate, and geographic complexity have coloured Canadian cultural output of all types, so much so that Margaret Atwood has argued that "survival" in the face of a threatening environment may be the most prominent theme in Canadian literature.¹⁴ The contributors to the *Nature of Canada* recognize this centrality and use it to power their analyses, which is what makes them so compelling. For example, Liza Piper links popular perceptions of Canada as a "winter" place – something that any reader would recognize – with the "deep time" history of climate cycles, Victorian-era meteorology, Indigenous ways of understanding climates

11 Graeme Wynn with Jennifer Bonnell, "Advocates and Activists," *Nature of Canada*, 299–318; Joanna Dean, "A Gendered Sense of Nature," *Nature of Canada*, 281–98.

12 See Carl Berger, *The Sense of Power: Studies in the Ideas of Canadian Imperialism*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013).

13 Harold Innis, *The Fur Trade in Canada* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1930); Donald Creighton, *The Commercial Empire of the St. Lawrence, 1760–1850* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1937). These "theses" no longer stand monolithically in Canadian environmental history, as Daniel Macfarlane and Ruth Sandwell suggest. See Macfarlane, *Negotiating a River: Canada, the US, and the St. Lawrence Seaway* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2014) and Sandwell, ed., *Powering Up Canada: A History of Power, Fuel, and Energy from 1600* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill–Queen's University Press, 2016).

14 Margaret Atwood, *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* (Toronto: House of Anansi, 2012).

and seasons, and anthropogenic climate change. She argues that “climate and climate change are human-generated concepts,” something that is only recognizable once we engage with “longer and broader views of the interface” between humans and their environments.¹⁵ This is a theme that runs across these essays: we must look longer and broader at our environments if we are to preserve “Canadian nature.”

Readers thirsty for water content – there is relatively little in the *Nature of Canada* – will be fully quenched by the *Greater Gulf* and *Time and a Place*, both of which explicitly centre the waters of the Gulf of St Lawrence.¹⁶ When nested inside *Nature of Canada*’s sweeping arguments about the past and future of Canadian environmental thought, *The Greater Gulf: Essays on the Environmental History of the Gulf of St Lawrence* appears at first glance to be more limited in scope and theme. However, the contributors to both volumes question the constants – the “environments” and “natures” – upon which environmental history sits. This is the explicit purpose of the *Greater Gulf*, which prods at the edges of the Gulf of St Lawrence, descends to the bottom of the sea floor, pushes out to the fuzzy, shifting borders between nation-states, traces the global impact of local commodities, and flows over the overlapping land-use practices of settler and Indigenous Gulf inhabitants. The *Greater Gulf* also literally contributes to “borderlands studies” by adding environmental concerns, as scholarship that focuses on political borderlands can miss bio-regionality.¹⁷ Nor, as Matthew McKenzie suggests in his historiographic review, do borderlands studies traditionally look beyond the terrestrial.¹⁸ Unlike in what might be seen as the *Greater Gulf*’s closest cousin, *Land and Sea*:

15 Liza Piper, “Climates of Our Times,” *Nature of Canada*, 332.

16 Tina Loo’s essay “Questions of Scale” comes closest, but is mostly engaged with “high modernist” projects.

17 In general, the “borderlands” of Western North America have received more environmental history attention than those of the East. See, for example, Sterling Evans, ed., *The Borderlands of the American and Canadian Wests: Essays on Regional History of the Forty-Ninth Parallel* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006) and Kenneth S. Coates and John M. Findlay, eds. *Parallel Destinies: Canadian-American Relations West of the Rockies* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2002). Two notable exceptions are Stephen Hornsby, Victor Konrad, and James Herlan, eds., *The Northeastern Borderlands: Four Centuries of Interaction* (Fredericton: Acadiensis Press, 1989) and Hornsby and John Reid, eds. *New England and the Maritime Provinces: Connections and Comparisons* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2005). The introduction to *Greater Gulf*, especially pp. 6–9, also offers an excellent survey of borderlands studies east of the Great Lakes.

18 Matthew McKenzie, “Reassembling the Greater Gulf: Northwest Atlantic Environmental History and the Gulf of St Lawrence System,” *Greater Gulf*, 16.

Environmental History in Atlantic Canada,¹⁹ even the idea of what makes a “region” is in question here; the Gulf is a borderland place, but also a place of many different types of borders that the contributors to this volume seek to interrogate.

In order to explore how the environmental history of the Gulf of St Lawrence “challenges our familiar sense of borders and space [and] . . . also challenges our usual sense of the narrative,” the essays in this volume often focus on movement in, out, and within the Gulf.²⁰ The ancient Greek saying that no man steps in the same river twice certainly applies to the Gulf, as no historical actor from any of these contributions is interacting with the Gulf in quite the same way. It is a point of convergence and confluence, and, because its borders are slippery and liminal, many of the essays in the *Greater Gulf* address it as contested space. A neighbouring trio of studies by Rainer Baehre, Daniel Soucier, and John Reid engage with the Gulf as a military theatre in the 18th and 19th centuries. All three argue that environmental history can disclose a great deal about diplomatic and military relations between France, Britain, the United States, and the Indigenous and settler inhabitants of the lands surrounding the Gulf. Baehre argues that the fisheries along the western coast of Newfoundland were a “central focus” of French-British-American tensions between the Seven Years’ War and the American War of Independence.²¹ The western coast, or “French Shore,” was a borderland frontier defined through imperial, colonial, and diplomatic means as it became a bargaining chip in a knotty geopolitical situation. Soucier and Reid both look at the symbolic and material consequences of European control of the Gulf’s maritime and terrestrial spaces. Soucier frames his analysis in terms of commodities – for example, a British goal during the Seven Years’ War was to prevent the French from sustaining their war effort by controlling “built, natural, and hybrid landscapes” such as the fisheries – while Reid is more interested in the formal and informal mobilizations of “neutrality” that shaped Indigenous-settler relations.²² In all three cases, by engaging with what Reid refers to as “imperial

19 Claire Campbell and Robert Summerby-Murray, *Land and Sea: Environmental History in Atlantic Canada* (Fredericton: Acadiensis Press, 2013).

20 Campbell, MacDonald, and Payne, “Introduction: Environmental History in the Greater Gulf,” *Greater Gulf*, 10.

21 Rainer Baehre, “Newfoundland’s West Coast and the Gulf of St Lawrence Fishery, ca. 1755–83: A Case Study of War, Fish, and Empire,” *Greater Gulf*, 70.

22 Daniel S. Soucier, “‘We have done a great deal of mischief – spread the terror of his Majesty’s Arms thru the whole Gulph’: The British Strategy of Resource Control during the Seven Years’ War in North America, 1758–59,” *Greater Gulf*, 117.

perceptions of vulnerability” in various Gulf land-and-waterscapes, the Gulf is framed as a place whose borders and boundaries matter, but are purposefully never fully defined.²³

People, resources, and information moved through the Gulf for military and diplomatic purposes, but they also moved for commercial purposes. Labour histories support the *Greater Gulf* in a variety of ways: the diplomatic work necessary to establish various treaties, the cultural work of defining the Gulf in literature and popular culture (discussed below), and, most obviously, the work of harvesting, processing, and shipping the natural resources for which the Gulf has been known since the early modern period. More than anything, the *Greater Gulf* is about sea life: the plants and animals that make their lives in the water as well as the communities that are anchored by it. Not only are lobsters, oysters, and mackerel incapable of recognizing national, provincial, or imperial borders, but where one territory ends and another begins is difficult to interpret while out at sea. Therefore, the contributors to the *Greater Gulf* argue that the borderlands nature of the Gulf is made explicit in the study of the fishery. Both Brian Payne and Suzanne Morton, in their essays on Prince Edward Island within and without the 19th-century Canadian fishery and American influences on Gulf lobster canneries respectively, complicate the idea of an “outside influence” on a regional or provincial industry. Payne points out that in the middle decades of the 19th century, Prince Edward Islanders were not catching fish themselves. Instead the Island acted as a base of operations and point of transshipment for American fishing schooners after Nova Scotia joined Confederation. The Island’s “unique” status and location turned the region into a borderland where the “gaps between colonial, Canadian, and imperial authority” were exploited by American fishers.²⁴ Morton looks at American influences on Gulf products as well. Unlike other marine life, lobster had to be canned where it was caught and this meant that the “ecology of the fish directly shaped the technological choices that followed”; late-19th-century Maine canners brought their techniques, technologies, and, in some cases, themselves to the Gulf to take advantage of Gulf lobster.²⁵ Then, those cans were shipped outside of Canada to places such as Britain. By focusing

23 John G. Reid, “Environmental Change, War, and Neutrality in Imperial-Indigenous Relations in the Maritime Colonies, 1793-1815,” *Greater Gulf*, 151.

24 Brian Payne, “‘The best fishing station’: The Fish Trade of Prince Edward Island and Resource Transfer in the Gulf of St. Lawrence, 1854-73,” *Greater Gulf*, 167.

25 Suzanne Morton, “‘Alien concerns’: American Canners in the Gulf of St. Lawrence Lobster Fishery, 1870-1914,” *Greater Gulf*, 226.

on what one of Morton's historical actors called "alien concerns" crossing the Gulf's nebulous borders, the essays in this volume show that "the Gulf" as a geographic location pushes farther out than it seems: across the Atlantic, down past what is currently the American border, and deep into the sea floor.

Time and a Place: An Environmental History of Prince Edward Island is the tightest of the three volumes in terms of geographic scope. If the *Nature of Canada* is a potentially whiplash-inducing overview of major themes in Canadian environmental thought, and the *Greater Gulf* scatters micro- and meso-sized case studies across a large geographic borderland, then *Time and a Place* provides the balm of being both a big-picture analysis of a single Canadian province and an extremely close read of a very small place. The contributors to *Time and a Place* are interested in a relatively small geographic area, but they represent a much wider range of disciplines than the other two volumes at issue here, including biology, marine ecology, and archaeology alongside environmental history and historical geography. This is an exercise in "island studies," a relatively new interdisciplinary field that combines scientific and humanistic approaches to islands as both physical and cultural places.²⁶ Island studies scholars are interested in the powerful island imaginary that sees island spaces as discrete, isolated, and entirely bounded by water, which has led them to be central to modern environmental awareness. However, as John Gillis argues in his historiographic contribution to *Time and a Place*, this imaginary has consequences because "islands continue to be portrayed socially and politically as bounded, isolated entities, existing outside the flow of time" and outside the water that surrounds them. Like the Gulf, Prince Edward Island is defined by its water despite the generally "land-locked disciplines" of environmental sciences and humanities.²⁷ The contributors to this volume treat land and sea as porous boundaries and drift between them in a number of ways. For instance, beaches become borderland-like spaces in which both mainland tourists may engage with the ocean for the first time and local mossers gather valuable seaplants to sell commercially. Just as there is no Prince Edward Island without the sea, there is no *understanding* Prince Edward Island without making sense of the history of these connections between land and water.

26 "Island studies" is a global field of scholarship, but has an influential home at the Institute of Island Studies at the University of Prince Edward Island, which publishes the *Island Studies Journal* at islandstudies.ca.

27 John R. Gillis, "Muddying the Waters of Environmental History: Islands as Ecotones," *Time and a Place*, 20.

Due to its island-ness, Prince Edward Island has been imagined as existing outside space and time, progressing at a different pace and home to different sorts of communities. Millions of Canadians have undertaken pilgrimages to the “nostalgic culture” of Green Gables, and this nostalgia – seeing islands in general and Prince Edward Island in particular as spaces out of time – allows the contributors to engage with “time” in some other meaningful ways.²⁸ Although all three volumes in this review essay work with the scale of “deep time,” the temporal scope of the individual pieces in *Time and a Place* is on average much longer. Edward MacDonald’s contribution to the *Greater Gulf* on the oyster fishery on Prince Edward Island, for example, covers approximately 60 years, but his co-authored essay with Boyde Beck in *Time and a Place* deliberately uses “the long sweep of history” – 10,000 years of it – to trace how desirability, sustainability, and attainability have shaped the Island’s fisheries.²⁹ The tendency of the essays in *Time and a Place* to play with time not only methodologically but rhetorically forces the historian-reader to get uncomfortable with how we think about the human and non-human forces in the past; as MacDonald and Beck suggest, we can never truly know what goes on beneath the surface of the oceans. The one type of “time” notably absent from *Time and a Place* is “island time,” which literature and cultural studies scholars have used to address human perceptions of time on island communities. This would have been a welcome addition; using “island time” as an analytic would have created a bridge between the literal explorations of deep time and the figurative manipulation of time and nostalgia that run parallel in *Time and a Place*.³⁰

Despite the focus on water, there is plenty of “land” to be had in *Time and a Place*. For example, Joshua McFadyen and Jean-Paul Arseneault both examine

28 Kathleen Stuart, “Two Centuries of Energy on Prince Edward Island,” *Time and a Place*, 266. For more on nostalgic landscapes, see Alan MacEachern, “The Landscapes of Tourism: Scenic Images of Prince Edward Island Tourism Literature” in *Time and a Place*, 246–63; Edward MacDonald, “A Landscape . . . with Figures: Tourism and Environment on Prince Edward Island,” in Campbell and Summerby-Murray, *Land and Sea*, 61–77; and Ian Mackay and Robin Bates, *In the Province of History: The Making of the Public Past in Twentieth-Century Nova Scotia* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2010).

29 Edward MacDonald and Boyde Beck, “Lines in the Water: Time and Place in a Fishery,” *Time and a Place*, 218. See also MacDonald, “Shell Games: The Marine Commons, Economic Policy, and Oyster Culture in Prince Edward Island, 1865–1928,” *Greater Gulf*, 192–223.

30 See Phillip Vannini, *Ferry Tales: Mobility, Place, and Time on Canada’s West Coast* (New York: Routledge, 2012) and Rudyard Kipling, *Time Travel in the Latin American and Caribbean Imagination: Rereading History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

the Island's agriculture using the potato – easily the Island's most famous crop – as a jumping-off point. McFadyen's contribution is an analysis of the Island's "golden age" of agriculture (1861-1971). Despite encouraging mechanization and large-scale farming and turning the Island's countryside into a landscape of nostalgic tourism, potato farming was much less important to Island agroecosystems than hay, oats, and mixed husbandry. Hay, oats, and ruminants may be "less glamorous" than the Island's famous tubers, McFadyen argues, but they can reveal longer, deeper patterns of land stewardship and human-non-human relations.³¹ Even then, the Island's land depended on the Island's water. Coastal farmers relied on oyster shells as a lime replacement in their soils, and "mussel mud" enriched from the Island's oyster beds was a prized soil treatment.³² Arsenault picks up where McFadyen leaves off by focusing on the last 50 years or so, and is more prescriptive in his analysis of the ways in which agriculture has had a negative impact on the environments of the Island: threats to soil, water, and wildlife have been exacerbated by a myopic focus on potato production.³³ Even as the potato has become a cultural icon for Prince Edward Island, it has hurt the environments that have given it its iconic status.

As McFadyen and Arsenault's work on the potato suggests, all three of these volumes address how *place* gets defined environmentally and how those environmental place-makers in turn shape intrinsic and extrinsic approaches to the environments in question – that is, they all interrogate how environments make us feel as though we belong to a place, to a region, to an island, or to a nation. And nearly unanimously, the contributors to all three volumes isolate the quantum nature of Canadian environmental identities: trying to truly capture their essence changes the outcome. Identifying one type of place-definition exposes the others from which it emerged, which in turn lead us to question the nature of "belonging" in the first place. In their contribution to *Time and a Place*, for example, David Keenlyside and Helen Kristmanson point out that rhyolite from what is currently known as Ingonish Island was deliberately carried to Prince Edward Island between 10,000 and 3,000 years ago for the creation of spearheads, a kind of geological métissage.³⁴ And in

31 Joshua MacFadyen, "The Fertile Crescent: Agricultural Land Use on Prince Edward Island, 1861-1971," *Time and a Place*, 162-3.

32 MacFadyen, "Fertile Crescent," *Time and a Place*, 170-1.

33 Jean-Paul Arsenault, "Agriculture and the Environment on Prince Edward Island, 1969-2014: An Uneasy Relationship," *Time and a Place*, 216.

34 David Keenlyside and Helen Kristmanson, "The Palaeo-Environment and the Peopling of Prince Edward Island: An Archaeological Perspective," *Time and a Place*, 67.

the *Greater Gulf*, Jack Bouchard argues that 16th century contacts between European, Innu, Mi'kmaq, and Beothuk were so "close and continuous" that European observers claimed that Innu could speak European languages by the 1540s and that Basque words were incorporated into other Algonkian languages.³⁵ The Gulf of St Lawrence, Prince Edward Island, and even Canada itself are obviously not unchanging, ahistorical, apolitical, objective places, even if there are relatively obvious physical boundaries. This is especially evident in Graeme Wynn's essay "Painting the Map Red" in the *Nature of Canada*, which compares three maps of the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence region: a 17th-century map from Samuel de Champlain, a 20th-century map promoting the St Lawrence Seaway and Power Project, and a 21st-century art installation by Anishinaabe artist Bonnie Devine. By juxtaposing settler political boundaries with an Anishinaabe "distinctive sense of place in their environment," Devine and Wynn remind us of the "social and environmental injustices" that are the consequences of attempts to create a singular thing called Canada.³⁶ Just as Prince Edward Island is an ecotone – an "edge" ecosystem – and the Gulf is a borderland, attempts to define Canada's "nature" flirt with liminal spaces, boundaries, and in-between-ness.

And, of course, it is not just *humans* who belong to a place. Because the contributors vary in disciplinary background, the essays in *Time and a Place* in particular also engage with non-human "belonging." In his essay on the Island's forest varieties over time, environmental biologist Douglas Sobey argues that the soil chemistry, tree species density, and topography has had "important effects on the patterns of forest use by Islanders" and subsequently the Island's arboreal composition.³⁷ Activist and marine ecologist Irené Novaczek traces the migrations of seaplants over millions of years to show how the waters of Malpeque Bay are something of a "sweet spot" for species infrequently found elsewhere in Atlantic Canada or the northeastern United States. This ecosystem has provided a way for Island women to pursue "dignified seasonal employment" in a potentially unforgiving environment.³⁸ And, as Ken Cruikshank argues in his contribution to the *Nature of Canada*, the human impulse to "belong" to environments infringes on the rights-of-way

35 Jack Bouchard, "'Gens sauvages et étrangères': Amerindians and the Early Fishery in the Sixteenth-Century Gulf of St Lawrence," *Greater Gulf*, 35, 49.

36 Graeme Wynn, "Painting the Map Red," *Nature of Canada*, 75, 79.

37 Douglas Sobey, "The Forests of Prince Edward Island, 1720-1900," *Time and a Place*, 107.

38 Irené Novaczek, "The Mermaid's Tresses: Seaplants in the Culture and Economy of Prince Edward Island," *Time and a Place*, 155.

of other species. Canada's transcontinental networks of rail and road have replaced animal through-ways with human ones.

When we can think critically about how "the environment" as both a physical location and as a concept have helped us create identities for ourselves and others, we can also think critically about how "the environment" has been *used* to accomplish different goals. Of course, sometimes those uses are commercial, as Payne, MacDonald, and Morton show in the *Greater Gulf* and Stephen Hornsby and Graeme Wynn show in the *Nature of Canada*.³⁹ Other times, the environment provides literal power. Kathleen Stuart (in *Time and a Place*) and Steve Penfold (in the *Nature of Canada*) use energy as an analytic to explore "power" in different contexts. In both cases, the authors use energy as "a unifying thread to the other narratives" explored in their respective volumes, and both show that the humans-controlling-nature teleology so popular in public-facing stories about energy must be dismantled, or at least made complicated.⁴⁰ We must remember that energy is a "socionatural creation . . . embedded in the environment" that at the same time requires human intervention to be extracted from it.⁴¹ From the collapse of the Island's limited and short-lived wooden shipbuilding industry that signaled the Island's turn to imported forms of energy to Canada's long and complex pipeline history, "energy" and "power" in these contexts remind us of how deeply rooted we are in our larger environments.⁴² Making the environment "work" in Canada to produce "power" has long been a "hybrid of national dreams and geographic realities."⁴³

And at other times still, the goals "the environment" helps accomplish are much more abstract; describing and displaying environments in different contexts encourages tourism, builds a literary imaginary, and provides the cultural adhesive that holds communities together. In his study of Prince Edward Island tourism literature, for example, Alan MacEachern points out how "what elements of nature are deemed worthy of people's attention" has changed over the past hundred years; early brochures and travel guides featuring the Island's pastoral, bucolic countryside environments were replaced by images of happy families on the North Shore's beaches by midcentury.

39 Stephen Hornsby and Graeme Wynn, "Eldorado North?," *Nature of Canada*, 101-22.

40 Kathleen Stuart, "Two Centuries of Energy on Prince Edward Island," *Time and a Place*, 266.

41 Steve Penfold, "The Power of Canada," *Nature of Canada*, 245.

42 Stuart, "Two Centuries of Energy on Prince Edward Island," *Time and a Place*, 272.

43 Penfold, "Power of Canada," *Nature of Canada*, 256.

Contemporary tourism imagery reflects the Island's changing demographics in a sort of "taking for granted of the pastoral landscape itself," which suggests that environmental imaginaries can do as much "work" as physical environments.⁴⁴ The *Greater Gulf* has an extremely compelling section devoted to the environmental imagination of the Gulf of St Lawrence as well: J.I. Little explores how 19th-century travel writers constructed various locations in the Gulf and Caitlin Charmin and Claire Campbell interrogate regionality, industrialization, and connections to the sea in a pair of essays on the work of W. Albert Hickman and Lucy Maud Montgomery. Like her contribution to the *Nature of Canada*, in the *Greater Gulf* Campbell wonders aloud how literary and cultural understandings of a place influence what that place means to contemporary Canadians – from Group of Seven paintings to touristic pilgrimages to Green Gables.

The environment does a lot of work in these books, from the perspectives of both the contributors and the human and non-human actors they study. So too does environmental *history*. In the *Nature of Canada*, it is mobilized as a way to encourage non-specialist audiences to think critically about where Canada's "nature" comes from and the threats that this "nature" faces. In the *Greater Gulf*, it is a lens through which a region that has for so long had liminal boundaries can begin to be defined. In *Time and a Place*, environmental history is deliberately undertaken by non-historians to make sense of "the Island" as both an actual place and as a concept. All three of these volumes work separately and in concert to reveal how environmental history as both a framing discipline and a set of methodological practices has been and can be mobilized to answer big questions about who we are, where we belong, and where we are going. Most importantly, the environmental history in these volumes reminds us that we are not alone on our national, regional, or provincial "islands" and to remember our obligations to the future. That is both what environmental history is *and* what it ought to be.

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44 MacEachern, "Landscapes of Tourism," *Time and a Place*, 247, 261.

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