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BOOK REVIEWS


*Le Concept de liberté au Canada à l’époque des Révolutions atlantiques (1776–1838)* by Michel Ducharme is a thorough study of Canadian political and intellectual history between the American Revolution and the rebellions of 1837–1838 in Haut and Bas-Canada. Ducharme does well to situate these rebellions in the framework of the Atlantic Revolutions that shook Europe and North America between 1776 and 1838. Anchored in a theoretical framework inspired by the work of intellectual historians of the Atlantic, this work treats in particular the importance of the concept of liberty in the development of the State in the two colonies. Ducharme shows that these two colonies begin to develop as early as 1791 by following the ideal of liberty that, while being different from that which was at the heart of the revolutionary movements at the end of the eighteenth century, was no less influenced by the Lumières (the Enlightenment). He equally demonstrates that the 1837–1838 rebellions as being partly the result of a confrontation between two very different concepts of liberty.

Ducharme divides his study into an introduction, six chapters plus a conclusion. The six chapters and the conclusion are: Liberté et Révolution dans le monde atlantique (Liberty and Revolution in the Atlantic World); La liberté dans la Province de Québec à l’époque des Révolutions américaine et française [1776–1805] (Liberty in the Province of Quebec at the Time of the American and French Revolutions [1776–1805]); La naissance des mouvements réformistes dans les Canadas (1805–1828) (The Birth of Reform Movements in the Canadas [1805–1828]); “Nous, le people” ou La Liberté républicaine dans les Canadas (1828–1838) (“We, the people,” or the Republican Liberty in the Canadas [1828–1838]); La primauté des droits ou La liberté moderne dans les Canadas (1828–1838) (The Primacy of Rights or Modern Liberty in the Canadas [1828–1838]); Aux armes, citoyens: les rebellions de 1837–1838 (Take Up Arms, Citizens, the Rebellions of 1837–1838); and, Conclusion: La liberté comme fondement de l’État au Canada (Conclusion: Liberty as Foundation of the Canadian State). In his introduction, Ducharme explains the two concepts of liberty that are key to his thesis argument and his methodological approach. Also of note is a detailed bibliography of printed sources that includes official documents, journals, collected works and reprints, and archival studies. Moreover, extremely helpful to Ducharme’s analyses are four tables: Comparaison entre la liberté républicaine et la liberté moderne (Comparison between Republican Liberty and Modern Liberty); Deux interprétations de la constitution britannique (Two interpretations of the British constitution); Les nominations au Conseil législatif du Bas-Canada de 1828 à 1837 (Nominations to the Legislative Council of Bas-Canada from 1828 to 1837); and, La Composition du Conseil législatif du Bas-Canada de 1828 à 1837 (Composition of the Legislative Council of Bas-Canada from 1828 to 1837).
In his acknowledgments, Ducharme attests to the fact his study on the concept of liberty in Canada during the time of the Atlantic revolutions is the result of the defense of his doctoral thesis at McGill University. However, there is no fear that Le Concept de liberté au Canada à l’époque des Révolutions atlantiques (1776–1838) will read as a doctoral thesis. Ducharme is clear and concise in his well-researched arguments. I, for example, would be able to use Ducharme’s introduction and parts of his first two chapters—specifically those sections that focus on the concept of liberty in the Age of Enlightenment, virtue versus wealth, civil rights versus political rights, and the development of liberty in Quebec—with my students in my undergraduate course on la Nouvelle France (new France) and the era of Samuel Champlain. In short, for today’s young scholars, it is imperative to have a sense of the historical development of how society evolved in the New World so as to be able to compare and contrast what happened in the past with what is currently occurring in society. Indeed, Ducharme’s valiant efforts do much to provide the necessary background for achieving this goal.

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Before Glenn Gould (1932–1982) rose to world fame in the mid-1950s, Canada was believed to be a cultural backwater. Canada adored the young pianist and continued to indulge him in subsequent decades when he turned to writing and broadcasting—most notably, producing The Solitude Trilogy of “contrapuntal radio” documentaries. In philosopher Georges Leroux’s eyes, it appears Gould could do no wrong, regardless of the field.

Such adulation would be disastrous for a biography with critical intentions, but fortunately Partita for Glenn Gould is more an extended essay or Inquiry (as the subtitle reads). Leroux delves into the life primarily to help make his case for the essence of genius. He is also refreshingly forthright about his reverence for Gould: Partita “should be viewed as a personal meditation [...] and, ultimately, a function of my admiration” (10). “Gould and Me” or “How Gould Makes me Think” would be equally apt titles for this book.

Since Partita pour Glenn Gould snapped up the Montreal’s Grand Prix du Livre in 2007 and was nominated for a Governor General’s Award in 2008, much more has been published about Gould—most saliently, about the sex life of this cultural icon previously assumed to be asexual—and Leroux has updated his already challenging book. The chapter titles themselves hint at tricky things to come: I: Toccata: Art and a Life’s Shape: Partita no. 6 in E minor; II Allemande: The Paradoxes of Genius: Partita no. 2 in C minor; III Courante: The Hands of Gould, the Body of Glenn: Partita no. 3 in A Minor, and so on.

Leroux asks difficult and abstract questions about the role of the artist and, in spite of Donald Winkler’s solid translation, they sound especially airy in English. For example, at the outset of “Toccata”: “An artist who would risk a lie by donning a mask that would misrepresent his relationship to the world could only produce inauthentic art, a simulacrum” (19). Two pages later: “An artist who produces no work is not inconceivable—his life is
compatible with the very ethic of creation; a work with no artist, on the other hand, is an absurdity” (21). For those inclined to be aesthetic head-scratchers, this is an ideal book (the second quotation reminded me of Mordecai Richler mocking his younger self as a non-writing writer: “Looking back, I fear that [. . . ] I did not so much want to write as to be a writer” in order to hobnob with “Ingrid Bergman”).

Leroux’s erudition is formidable, and he wears his scholarship a little too lightly at times. For example, in a passage on the challenges of describing, enjoying and understanding music, he notes, “We have only to read the work of Peter Kivy to measure what is at stake . . . ” (93f). That’s it. I have read a fair amount of that musicologist’s work, but this fleet-footed allusion escapes me. Though this is more the exception than the rule, one occasionally wishes Leroux were more explicit in his references and arguments.

And yet Leroux often soars. In the finest chapter, “Air and Sarabande: To Read, to Write, to Dream,” we gain insight into Gould the voracious reader. Departing from an analysis of Natsume Sōseki’s The Three-Cornered World (from which Gould once read on CBC radio), Leroux seeks parallels to Gould’s own vision of the creative individual’s need for solitude. Sōseki’s novel describes an artist travelling toward a monastery and enlightenment; his task and path to freedom are “to not become engaged, to renounce understanding, and to abandon himself to the ascetic idea that he himself is but a moving figure in a tableau” (128). But even as Leroux emphasizes how much Gould respected this book, he wisely refrains from going the full distance. “What Gould might have drawn from Sōseki’s transcendental aesthetic, we can only try to reconstruct” (128).

Such admirable restraint is typical for Partita. Again and again, Leroux leads you to the flame of Gould’s thought, then withdraws. Leroux’s modesty shines through: he reveres Gould, but there is little sense of propriety, of snaring the inevitable elusiveness of genius. In other words, he does not pretend to own Gould by offering the definitive take on his art and philosophy.

In a time when cutting down the greats is popular, when denial of genius is prominent, this book is romantically old-fashioned in the best sense. Leroux sits back and admires a great creator/interpreter, is moved to create something of his own, and kind enough to let us join him for the intellectual ride.

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A central concept in Canadian military history is the “militia myth,” or the belief that Canadians were natural fighters who would always perform well on the battlefield in time of war, without any prior training or preparation. Canadian historians see this concept as having originated during the War of 1812, and usually criticize it for holding back attempts by military supporters to create a more full-time, professional army, from 1867 to at least the 1920s. Yet as Wood argues in Militia Myths, support for the part-time militia is much older than the War of 1812, and came from English and French traditions during the medieval period, and a fear of standing armies that was heightened thanks to the army of Oliver.
Cromwell during the English Civil War. These memories shaped the views of early settlers in both Canada and the United States, and both countries continued to rely on part-time militias over standing armies right up to the twentieth century. Wood’s book in fact focuses on a third group of military supporters, who emerged in Canada in the late 1800s. They argued for the creation of a more distinctly Canadian “citizen army,” that was based on the older faith in the militia but also acknowledged the need for better training and preparation in order to meet the requirements of war in the twentieth century. Although Canada ultimately emerged from the First World War with a small, standing, professional army, Wood suggests that advocates of the “citizen army” helped bring Canadians to accept this new form of organization after 1918, by helping to reconcile fears of standing armies and notions about the importance of part-time militias, with the lessons of the War that these might no longer be sufficient. In the end, Wood’s book provides much insight into how supporters saw the concept of the militia and its place within Canadian society from the late 1800s to 1921, a subject that has not been studied in depth by Canadian military historians before now.

Wood’s book is part of the well-known series “Studies in Military History,” published by the University of British Columbia Press. He himself is a former doctoral student from Wilfrid Laurier University, which is a center for military studies in Canada, and the book is based on his doctoral thesis. It is organized chronologically, and traces the evolution of attitudes towards the militia from the 1890s, when Canadians were beginning to acknowledge that fear of attack from the United States might no longer provide it with its main rationale for existing, through the first two decades of the 1900s, when Canada’s military preparations came to be tied much more to British imperial ambitions and the possibility (and later reality) of war outside the continent. Advocates of the “citizen army” attempted to justify maintaining the militia before 1914 by connecting it more closely to Canadian society and improving its standards, through promoting its advantages to military authorities and the Canadian public, and by pressing governments to support civilian rifle associations, school cadet corps, and even compulsory military training, to prepare Canadians for service in time of war. They also increasingly accepted the need to highlight Canada’s imperial ties to Britain. But they always did this with a certain degree of discomfort, since their goal was to preserve a military force that would meet what they defined as more directly Canadian needs and goals. In making this conclusion, Wood supports what has become the traditional interpretation by Canadian historians of this period: that English Canadians no longer considered themselves to be only British but were also beginning to develop a more distinctly Canadian sense of identity.

The core sources for Wood’s study are the magazines and journals related to military affairs that were published in Canada at the time. As a result, unlike previous historians who have based their conclusions mostly on the papers of higher political and military authorities, Wood is able to provide a more complex and detailed analysis of how supporters viewed the militia on other levels within society. He seems to have located every existing military periodical from the period, along with published speeches and transactions from numerous additional organizations. This approach is not without its difficulties. For example, much of Chapter 6 is taken up in discussing the efforts of the Canadian Defence League to promote greater interest in compulsory military service among Canadians. But one wonders whether this was because of the importance of the topic to people at the time, or simply the fact that the League’s own organ of opinion, Canadian Defence, is a major source of information on views towards the military for those years, and thus tends to end up drawing more of Wood’s attention. Furthermore, Wood tends more than once to write as if the editors of these few military publications spoke for all Canadians of the time,
when arguably they reflected only the views of a relatively small group of people who were already interested in military affairs. This is especially noticeable in the final two chapters, where he makes a number of conclusions about how the First World War influenced Canadian attitudes towards the militia. While he is careful to acknowledge this difficulty at the beginning of his book, and he does note that to some degree the military journals reflected larger Canadian opinion by reprinting articles from civilian newspapers, it is still not certain to what extent the views he discusses registered in the minds of the broader Canadian public. Finally, because no military periodicals appear to have been published in French, Wood’s book is primarily a study of English Canadian attitudes towards the militia during the period.

Something that may be of particular interest to readers of ARCS, is the degree to which Wood also reveals that ties to the United States influenced the Canadian militia in the years before 1914. Canadian military writers followed the lessons of the US Civil War more closely than their European counterparts, and by the end of the nineteenth century, Canadian militia units and National Guard regiments from the US were increasingly taking part in exchanges and visits between the two countries. Ultimately the Canadian militia was more Canadian than British by this time, in Wood’s view, because it was based on an amalgamation of British and American influences, as opposed to the traditional conclusion of Canadian military historians that it was dominated by British imperial attitudes. Wood also shows an awareness of developments in other Dominions of the British Empire in the years before 1914, and how they influenced Canadian debates over military affairs. Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa all had similar debates, and considered variations on compulsory training laws in the same period. These connections have again received little attention from previous Canadian military historians.

Thus, for readers who are interested in what was one of the major formative periods in the development of the modern Canadian military, this book is worth the read. It fills a gap in our existing understanding of these years, and does so in a way that is interesting and thought-provoking.

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The Oxbridge quad and Jefferson’s “academical village” cast long shadows over university campuses worldwide. Founded on concepts of monastic isolation and meditation they defined the ultimate ivory tower—albeit more frequently built of stone, brick and concrete.

The University of New Brunswick (UNB) would appear to be no exception and this book usefully documents the history of the development of that institution by recording the construction of its campuses from origins as a place of higher learning for nineteen students in 1829 to a university that accommodated more than 5000 by the 1970s. That development is traced through examinations of buildings and plans as well as the insights of academic leaders.
On the basis of this book, the architecture of UNB is unlikely to win many design awards, however it quietly records significant acts of patronage, educational initiatives and the physical consequences embodied in buildings, land and spaces in ways that make it a fascinating read.

University campuses are like small cities. They not only provide housing and workspaces but recreational facilities and space for commerce as well as comprehensive infrastructures for servicing, security, information technology and parking. What is surprising about this book then is the lack of overall physical planning that it records on the UNB campus. The first mention of a campus master plan is in 1957 and aerial photographs show buildings unrelated one to another, little evidence of planned landscapes or public open spaces while campuses are frequently defined by windswept acres of parking.

The book effectively documents a dilemma of architecture on campus—is that campus viewed as a zoo of buildings with one of each species or a consistently clad group of buildings that, albeit easily dated, combine to create a sense of a single place? Former UNB President Colin B. Mackay was clearly an adamant supporter of the latter approach and while the architectural vision is conservative the book gives a good sense of the ambience that it has created in Fredericton. The subsequent creation of a second campus at St. Johns is also highlighted but this too is a campus that, like many created in the 1960s, is located away from the city and its sinful distractions.

The author acknowledges the lack of inspiring interior spaces at UNB. This is unfortunate—especially in a place where the academic year is defined by inclement weather. Certainly the images show very few tantalizing spaces, and one exterior photograph with snow piled high is worth a thousand words!

Universities in Canada continue to be impressive patrons of architecture, landscape, civic planning and design and the author cites several excellent examples. They range from the completely new campuses created at Scarborough to the more recent inspired infilling of the St. George campus of the University of Toronto. Based on this book UNB has yet to join that group. However, in recording interactions between patronage, money, politics and design that are often at the root of building a university, the book also describes territory that is too rarely documented.

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Although Tom Thomson only painted for about five years, and has been dead for almost a century, his paintings are iconic Canadiana. They sell for over $1 million dollars at auction, and are usually mentioned in the same breath with those of Canada’s arguably most famous artists, the Group of Seven. Although his key works are recognizable to most Canadians (as early as the 1940s he was listed by a prominent publication as one of the “top ten” Canadians), the details of his life story are unfamiliar even to many who admire his creative output. Few know, for instance, that speculation regarding the cause of the artist’s 1917 death rages among a circle of conspiracy buffs. Roy MacGregor’s Northern Light:
The Enduring Mystery of Tom Thomson and the Woman who Loved Him will certainly fuel this debate. In the book, MacGregor, a noted Canadian journalist, author, and Officer of the Order of Canada, attempts to unravel the tangled answers to questions surrounding Thomson’s death. Unfortunately, Northern Light, like much of the writing considering Thomson’s demise, suffers from less than rigorous research. Instead of resolving the confusion and misinformation associated with the case, MacGregor’s book unfortunately further muddles understanding of the case.

Although there are few details regarding Thomson’s death that are not disputed, the short version of the story is that on a calm July 1917 day the artist set out for a short fishing trip on Canoe Lake, deep in Ontario’s relatively new Algonquin Park, several hours’ train ride north of Toronto. More than a week later, his body surfaced in the lake, not far from where Thomson’s trip started. Within 24 hours, the cause of death was officially identified as accidental drowning.

In Northern Light, MacGregor proposes Thomson did not die by accident, but was killed by a park resident, perhaps over a debt or in a squabble regarding the possibility that a local woman was pregnant with Thomson’s child.

Unfortunately, Northern Light’s argument for foul play is based on flawed use of untrustworthy evidence. MacGregor creates a narrative of Thomson’s last days by editing together accounts that originated decades after the artist’s death, particularly depending on those provided by Algonquin Park Ranger Mark Robinson. Between 1917 and the mid-1950s, Robinson left three distinctly different accounts of Thomson’s death. MacGregor selectively culls details from each of these accounts, ignoring that Robinson included new events and details with each retelling.

For instance, in 1917, Robinson provided no account of how many paddles were found in Thomson’s abandoned canoe. In 1930, Robinson stated that one paddle was found. In the 1950s, he claimed two. Contrary to the logic used to assess historical evidence, MacGregor explicitly privileges the third version of Robinson’s story, the one told furthest from the events being described, as the authoritative description of what was found in Thomson’s canoe. This choice is particularly strange considering that an account by another man, written within a week of Thomson’s canoe being found, also claims that two paddles were located. This testimony seems to be far more trustworthy than the third version of a story given by a man more than three decades after the events in question.

Despite the passage of time and inevitable fading of memory, MacGregor more than once ascribes authority to claims made by Robinson long after Thomson’s death. In the 1950s, Robinson also claimed to have had a brief conversation with Thomson the morning the artist is presumed to have died. This is the first record of him ever mentioning the discussion in the more than 30 years since Thomson’s death. No one else, not even a third man Robinson claims was present, ever attested to the story. Making a similarly confounding decision as he did with regard to testimony regarding Thomson’s paddles, MacGregor uses Robinson’s suspicious claim as the accurate description of the events of Thomson’s last morning.

MacGregor’s selections from Robinson’s varying stories give undue credence to unreliable accounts of Thomson’s last days. In this regard, Northern Light creates a skewed and untrustworthy understanding of what can be confidently claimed about the artist’s demise.

MacGregor attempts to buttress the evidence he draws from Robinson’s accounts by comparing it to testimony he says was provided by two other key participants: Shannon Fraser, the owner of the hotel where Thomson was living in the months prior to his death (and, at the risk of spoiling the story for potential readers, the man who MacGregor suggests was Thomson’s killer), and Martin Blecher, a German-American holidaying in the park.
MacGregor overlooks that much of what he credits to Fraser’s and Blecher’s accounts is drawn from Robinson’s 1930s and 1950s “retelling” of what he claimed these men testified in 1917. Blecher never publicly spoke out regarding the events surrounding Thomson’s death. Fraser’s only recorded communication regarding the case consists of a few sentences sent via telegrams and short letters to Thomson family members and friends in 1917. Once again, the apparent variety and weight of evidence used by MacGregor to build his case for Thomson’s suspicious death is taken predominantly from shaky accounts provided by one man over the course of almost four decades.

Nonetheless, MacGregor implies that Robinson’s testimony is reliable, for as he notes, Robinson kept “careful journals” (124). If this is true (and if the reader can suspend the doubt evolution in Robinson’s narratives should generate), it certainly raises a key question that MacGregor overlooks. MacGregor’s “foul play” proposal makes much of the claim that Thomson’s body had fishing line wound around one leg. How is it that neither the “careful” Robinson nor the doctor who examined Thomson’s corpse on the day after its discovery noted any signs indicating anything extraordinary or suspicious about the body? In 1917, the doctor stated the body did not show any signs of violence, and neither the doctor nor Robinson noted any fishing line wound around Thomson’s leg. MacGregor claims that Robinson noted the fishing line in 1917. Mention of it does not appear in any records from 1917, however, and most importantly this critical observation is not included in Robinson’s daily diary, where he recorded the search for Thomson and discovery of his body. The first time the fishing line is mentioned in any accounts is in Robinson’s 1930 response to a question posed by Thomson biographer Blodwen Davies, when he simply notes that fishing line around Thomson’s ankle was not part of the man’s regular gear. Raising additional doubt about the truth of the fishing line claim, Robinson embroidered his account in the 1950s, adding that the line was carefully wound around Thomson’s leg “sixteen or seventeen times.” Selective use of Robinson’s evolving, and often inconsistent testimony may support the idea that Thomson’s death was suspicious. The utter absence of support for Robinson’s wild claims, which MacGregor’s version of events depends on, seriously undermines his foul play theory.

MacGregor also attempts to tackle the question of where Thomson’s final resting place is. Popular understanding is that Thomson’s corpse was first buried in Algonquin Park, and soon thereafter exhumed and reburied in a family plot outside of Owen Sound, Ontario. In 1956, remains were found just outside the Park cemetery where Thomson was initially buried. At the time, forensic experts concluded that the remains were most likely those of an Aboriginal. Several archaeologists commissioned by MacGregor concluded that features visible in photographs of the unidentified corpse’s skull indicated that the remains were likely those of a European male. MacGregor concludes that the remains must be Thomson’s. To support his conclusion, MacGregor offers a forensic artist’s facial reconstruction developed from photos of the skull found in 1956, which looks remarkably like Thomson. The similarity of the visage to Thomson’s must be approached with some hesitation, however, seeing as the forensic artist was expressly told to draw the person as a Caucasian who was the same age as Thomson, and who wore his hair the same way Thomson did. Given these instructions, it would be surprising if the drawing did not come out bearing some resemblance to Thomson. Nonetheless, the scientific analysis of available evidence related to the case (as with the 2008 assessment of descriptions of the condition of Thomson’s corpse carried out by the Province of Ontario’s Chief Forensic Pathologist for the *Death On A Painted Lake: The Tom Thomson Tragedy* website) points in a possibly productive direction for future investigations.
MacGregor does make one intriguing contribution to research regarding Thomson’s life. He suggests that two undated photos taken by Thomson of a woman, who was identified in a 1970 National Gallery of Canada publication as Winnifred Trainor—the woman who may have been pregnant with Thomson’s child—are in fact not of Trainor at all. MacGregor knows this, he assures us, because Trainor was his aunt’s sister, lived close to his childhood home, and, as he spends much of a chapter relating, regularly visited his family well into his teens. His claim is intriguing, no doubt. It is also surprising because since the early 1970s MacGregor has written multiple magazine and newspaper articles exploring Thomson’s death, as well as a novel on the topic, and yet has never challenged the identification of the woman in the photos until now. Given that the photos were first published in 1970, and as MacGregor states, are included “in dozens of book and magazine accounts” (31), it is rather surprising that it would take him this long to realize that someone he claims to have been familiar with was misidentified in these photos he has almost surely known about for decades. Regardless, MacGregor’s claim regarding Trainor’s identity does not tremendously alter the central questions concerning the narrative of Thomson’s death, or MacGregor’s answers to them.

It is perhaps this discovery, however, that leads MacGregor to claim, “Winnie Trainor is the one who disappeared far more than Thomson” (195). In case anyone reading Northern Light might forget: Tom Thomson died in 1917, not Trainor. Hyperbole such as this claim about Trainor seriously weakens the impression left by MacGregor’s attempt to narrate Tom Thomson’s death. It is, though, the multitude of flawed decisions made regarding the primary sources, and the factual errors these decisions led to, which undermine the plausibility of MacGregor’s explanations of how Tom Thomson died and his speculation as to where Thomson’s body is buried.

(Reviewer’s note: Transcripts of the primary documents referenced in this review, as well as many other documents related to the death of Tom Thomson, can be viewed at at www.canadianmysteries.ca, created for the Great Unsolved Mysteries in Canadian History project in 2008.)

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Death On A Painted Lake: The Tom Thomson Tragedy
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The Canadian prairies were settled by a bewildering array of peoples, each stamping their own signature on the landscape. In this intriguing book historian Frances Swyripa turns her historian’s gaze to this land and its people, examining how and why ethnic and ethno-religious communities created, portrayed and symbolized their identities in the cultural landscape. Her focus rests squarely on issues of identity, the process of myth-making, the creation of group narratives and the choosing of symbols that represent old communities in a new land. The concept of place and its creation is pivotal to Swyripa’s argument. Places are created in many ways, by naming, through transferred patterns of land tenure and settlement, by the erection of monuments and buildings, and by placing symbols in the landscape. Creation of a sense of place can be unconscious but equally often expression
of ethnic identity in the landscape is deliberate, tied closely to imagined pasts and national founding myths.

*Storied Landscapes* tackles all these issues and more, and does so thematically in nine sequential chapters. After an introduction that describes the book’s genesis and lays out the organization of material, Chapter 1 provides a brief overview of the complex geography of prairie settlement. Chapter 2 reviews the ways in which immigrants sought to appropriate territory by transferring old world toponyms or by embedding national mythologies in their places’ names. Chapter 3 examines the role of founding stories, the creation of heroes and mythologies of arrival in the west. Chapter 4 situates the prairie experience, showing how immigrant narratives of arrival and survival became integrated into broader national narratives, often not without some creative reinterpretation of recorded “facts.” The role of homelands, or lack thereof, is addressed in the following chapter. Groups with a history of serial migration, such as the Mennonites, held a very different relationship to their prairie places than groups that have no history of step-migration, and so their founding stories and prairie identities were constructed and expressed very differently. The last two substantive chapters deal with the landscape symbolism of ethnic and ethno-religious groups on the prairies and the commemoration and preservation of the past.

Swyrupa draws her examples from a variety of ethno-religious groups, but Mennonites, Ukrainians, Icelanders and Doukhobors dominate the study. Hutterites, who have become a highly visible part of prairie life since 1919, receive little if any attention. Not every landscape element or ethno-religious group can be considered, but this seems an unfortunate omission as Hutterites provide yet another dimension to prairie identity.

*Storied Landscapes* is well written; the arguments are presented clearly and are free of jargon. The depth and breadth of research are impressive. Information was gleaned from an array of regional libraries and archives, supplemented by exhaustive field research. Although not overtly theoretical, it rests on a body of theory developed by historians and geographers concerned with collective memory and interpretation of the past. This debt is acknowledged in the notes but does not intrude unnecessarily into the text. The book is thoroughly documented and is complemented by some 70 photographs, many taken by the author, and four maps. An index enables easy location of places and peoples.

The focus of *Storied Landscapes* is regional but the questions posed within it transcend the geographical limits of the prairies. Questions of how group and national identities are conceptualized and expressed, how national, regional and group symbols are selected, and how group consciousness affects attitudes to heritage preservation are crucial to an understanding of who we are and how we relate to places that we call our own. This is an important book that throws much needed light on the complex processes underlying the relationship between people, their identity and the places they create.

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Canadians are surprisingly unaware of what their country’s contribution consists of as far as the war in Afghanistan. Many simply have no clear idea of what is actually going on
in this country, so far from home and it is only the death of a soldier—of which there has been close to 150 tragedies since 2001—that jars them out of their distanced complacency.

As well, Canadians sometimes find themselves having to explain their actions, no matter how noble, in ways which Americans take for granted. The enormous role that the Canadian Forces played in Afghanistan, and in Kandahar province specifically, is one such example and Captain Ray Wiss’s diary is an attempt to shed light on the sacrifices, as well as how large the commitment is, in comparative terms.

Wiss, a reservist, former infantry, and importantly, an emergency room physician, offers a compelling, informative and unique contribution to the war diary genre. The writing combines an awareness of the goals of the mission, his personal thoughts and reflections, a soldier’s insight, and the Canadian perspective, all from the vantage and perspective of an MD. This is Wiss’s second tour of Afghanistan, and his second book about the conflict.

For almost four months, from the end of May 2009 until September of that year, Wiss embarks on a tour of duty that has him positioned as a medical officer in three outposts, or Forward Operating Bases—far and away from the luxuries of home and even the comforts of more established and “urban” Afghani locales. To highlight exactly where he is, or rather isn’t, Wiss provides data on the amount of dust covering everything in his operating room and the constant rocket attacks, not to mention the noise of shelling—all things that most readers in the West cannot possibly comprehend.

The vantage point of a doctor comes through in so much that he sees and documents. He is a healer and this lens provides more than just a clinical perspective. Numerous passages detail the battlefield, the injured, actions and emergency surgery procedures that allow him to reflect on a variety of conditions beyond the medical. As an emergency surgeon and as someone who is enormously educated in medicine, his prowess comes out in his recollections of various situations. Interspersed with a fast paced narrative are sidebars on medical procedures, new techniques, and the impact of certain drugs and specific anesthetics. His seminal role in the creation of a portable ultrasound machine capable of diagnosing hidden injuries is also front and center. At the core of much of this discourse are the devastating consequences of improvised explosive devices and other Taliban weapons.

What sets the book apart from academic and journalistic treatments is the candor. There are telling anecdotes, substantial amounts of blunt information, direct criticisms, apologies and justifications. A selection of revelatory facts such as the seminal role of artillery, the lethalness of The Quiet Ones, The Canadian Special Forces, and the functions of the National Investigation Service (NIC) provide insight into areas that most have never read about.

As a skillful writer, Wiss juxtaposes experiences with his own political reactions and numerous critiques, directed at the brass, the media and most of all, the critics of the war. These seem to be offered up as correctives to those who do not understand the role the Canadians are playing, and also towards the Canadian media, especially the CBC, which sets the agenda for the story. In his opinion, the CBC rarely correct. A significant tenor of the book is that of a curative to the misguided and detrimental reporting that takes place by journalists who take things out of context, and who do not fully comprehend the sacrifice that the soldiers are making. In a number of passages, the good work that the medics, soldiers and others do is never reported. The care that is taken to prevent civilian casualties, especially from a brutal enemy which positions themselves in the middle of crowds, is something, he regrets, is never discussed in the media.

There are also surprisingly personal revelations about his family, his beliefs and his humanity. Wiss is especially effective when discussing his daughter and the impact his
tour is having on her. At times, depressing, even gut-wrenching, the poignancy of the passages in which he discusses Michelle are heart-breaking to read. And this distance is magnified when juxtaposed with the story of the tragic death of a young Afghani girl his daughter’s age.

Like all good diaries and memoirs, *A Line in The Sand* has its cast of characters, some of whom unfortunately do not survive. The profiles of different people he meets and gets to know tend towards the hagiographic. Even though, most, in his eyes, are quite special, there is a tendency in the book to think them too perfect, to glorify them.

Wiss provides eloquent descriptions on the geography of the various regions as well as the climate that must be endured. But these are not frivolous travelogue-like images. In some cases they can impact a soldier’s life. Information is also shared on key military attributes such as how to load one’s magazine properly, which was fascinating to this reader but may not be as appealing to the general reader. As well, in a number of places, he is quite blunt about the evilness of the Taliban and the necessity of this war.

Wiss is no angel, despite his lofty ideals and noble intentions. He is a doctor and a very good one, but he is also a soldier. Angels rarely have a place in the theater of war and as he writes, “he could kill” if he had to. If ever there was a book that sought to dispel the stereotype of the Canadian solider as a noble but one dimensional peace-keeper and to recast them as supreme warriors—efficient, lethal, professional—this could be it. And coming from the perspective of an innovative MD, this is all the more impressive.

Because this book acts as a primer for those interested in everything from the structure of the CF and all of its intricacies, it is a valuable addition to the literature on the war in Afghanistan from the Canadian perspective.

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It is axiomatic for most Canadians, and for other interested observers, that hockey is Canada’s game. Nearly half of the country’s population tuned into the final game in men’s hockey at the Vancouver 2010 Olympics; reflecting a deep national passion and the reach of the modern Olympic Games marketing. Despite the fanaticism associated with the game, and its ongoing presence in Canadian popular culture for several decades, there has not been a single academic monograph that critically analyzes literature focused on Canadian hockey. With the publishing of Jason Blake’s, *Canadian Hockey Literature*, that lacuna has been addressed. Blake has written a thoughtful and comprehensive examination of a surprisingly large and diverse body of hockey literature by dozens of Canadian authors.

Jason Blake, who grew up in Toronto, is a professor of English at the University of Ljubljana in Slovenia. His passion for the game infects the text, but it is in a positive way, as Blake does not allow himself a great deal of metaphorical flag-waving. For Blake, Canadian hockey literature includes novels, short stories, poetry, and plays, and he emphasizes that it has been the past 25 years that have seen a huge growth in the writing of hockey literature. He does argue that the increasing use of hockey in Canadian literature is welcomed as he infers that the search for a pan-Canadian identity might be found in literature in which
hockey plays a prominent role—debateable and possibly misguided to many, but interesting nonetheless. Blake’s central position, and it is difficult to refute it, is that hockey saturates life in Canada to an absurd extent in that it used to sell any number of consumer products by advertisers who rank it just behind sex for peddling products. He does not argue that it is Canada’s essence, however, the game is closely associated with the country by both Canadians and foreigners, thus making it a useful point of entry to understanding one aspect of Canadian culture.

Blake organizes the book by what he has determined to be the five most common themes found in body of literature. This is effective as a purely chronological study would have been heavily tilted to the recent past when much of the literature has been produced—leaving few texts from earlier periods. Blake’s first chapter explores hockey as a symbol of pan-Canadian nationhood and its effectiveness as a unifying symbol for such a diverse country. The second chapter examines the idealization of hockey as dream and concomitant concepts such as myth, nostalgia and memory. The third chapter is primarily concerned with representations of violence and its prominence in the minds of most writers of hockey fiction. It also discusses the ironies of Canadian myths including peacekeeping, tolerance and so forth versus the inherent aggressiveness and violence that marks the national sport. The fourth chapter focuses on “our” national identity and hockey. One of Blake’s main concerns is to look at the enduring popularity of hockey for many Canadians, both new and old, within the nation-state, despite competition from several other entertainment and recreational options. Blake’s final chapter looks at the family game and how hockey contributes to the family dynamic, both positively and negatively in hockey literature. Unfortunately, mothers, wives, and daughters are noticeably absent from much of the writing about hockey in Canada. Unsurprisingly, female authors also are not prominent in the overall numbers of authors represented in the writing despite Blake’s obvious efforts to locate them.

The overall strengths of this book far outweigh its weaknesses. Blake’s writing style is crisp and the book flows well. The research for the book is excellent. While I am sure that some readers will find a missing poem or short story, Blake has found the bulk of significant works that have hockey as a main motif or even as a cursory strand. He does make innumerable references to the broader non-fiction writing on hockey, and combined with a great deal of social, cultural, and political context, the study moves well beyond a purely textual reading. While several titles are used in more than one chapter I would argue that Blake is not repetitive in the book despite the limited number of titles available for analysis at certain points. Blake has also done an excellent job of including fiction directed primarily at both juveniles and children. It is the rare work in Canadian literary fiction that does not focus exclusively on either fiction for adults or fiction for younger readers. Another strength is that while Blake references a wide range of thinkers such as Aristotle, Marshall McLuhan and Roland Barthes, he provides the necessary context for the reader who may be uncomfortable with theory associated with the disciplines of philosophy or cultural studies and they will not feel overwhelmed. Additionally, a reader who may be more of a hockey fan, less of a literary aficionado, and who may not have a great deal of knowledge of some of the more prominent Canadian literature writers from the past 25 years such as Atwood, Quarrington, Richards, and Wagamese, is not marginalized. Blake’s succinct analysis and ability to recognize that his readership will likely include general interest readers along with academics and post-secondary students reflects his skills as a writer.

While there are many more strengths than failings in the book, there are some points of weakness that should be noted. Blake’s literature review in the first chapter does not contain much of the author insofar as sustained critical analysis. At times it devolves into
several consecutive paragraphs of summaries that prove informative, but ultimately do not reflect much else to the reader. A second criticism is that Blake does not analyze the significant point that Canada does not have a relatively rich history of fiction relating to hockey, in comparison to the canon of American fiction relating to America’s national pastime, baseball, in any detail in the book—a salient point that would have enriched his otherwise solid analysis. Related to this weakness is that the book suffers from no comparative analyses to other nations and their “national” sports. Blake’s knowledge of this topic cannot be questioned, however, a reference to Russia and its hockey literary traditions, and a brief discussion of other countries that are strongly identified with a single sport like Brazil and soccer, England and football, and so forth, would have helped contextualize the central position of the book.

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Canadian Hockey Literature holds broad appeal. General readers, university students and senior academics will find much to discuss and debate after reading it. The book is suitable for undergraduate and graduate student coursework in the disciplines of English, Cultural Studies and Canadian Studies. In the final analysis, this book is an important addition to the field of Canadian literary criticism and in particular, how it relates to hockey, “our” national game.

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Rudyard Griffiths is concerned. Bereft of strong leadership since the 1960s, Canada has devolved into an “ornery amalgam of regional statelets and grievance-ridden minorities” jockeying for advantage regardless of the consequences for the country as a whole (xiv). While Canadians’ ignorance of their history is lamentable, their academic, political and intellectual elites’ embrace of a chic post-nationalism has betrayed “Canada’s past” and left the country dangerously ill-prepared to meet looming challenges, including a rapidly aging population and climate change.

What can be done to halt this decline and rebuild the stores of solidarity needed to avoid disaster? Griffiths’ jeremiad aims to shake Canadians out of their lethargy, dusting away the fashionable myths that obscure their vision (post-nationalism chief among them) and reminding them of a forgotten but enduring truth: that Canada is a singular, coherent nation, with a distinctive and proud history founded on shared civic values and secular democratic institutions. Griffiths counsels a fresh appreciation of Canadian history, particularly of the achievements of the men who developed responsible government in the mid-nineteenth century and national social programs in the years after World War II (women are conspicuously absent from his account). These foundational projects may serve as examples for similarly ambitious efforts in the future.

Griffiths’ lament is replete with villains as well as heroes. While Lafontaine, Baldwin and St. Laurent are put on pedestals, Stephen Harper is criticized for opportunistically acknowledging Quebec’s status as “a nation within a united Canada” (1–3). Liberal leaders since St. Laurent fare even worse. Pierre Trudeau is singled out for charting a foreign policy independent of the United States and recklessly extending Canada’s social programs to the
point of collapse in a fit of anti-American pique. In Griffiths’ estimation, Canada’s social safety net was expanded in the 1960s “to differentiate Canada from the United States” (141). The “just society” (whatever its merits) was thus pursued for narrowly nationalistic, anti-American ends.

Worse still, Trudeau jettisoned Canada’s colonial heritage in the name of a new (and in Griffiths’ judgment decidedly inferior) national project:

[T]he Red Ensign was replaced by the Maple Leaf flag. The Dominion government became the federal government, and later Dominion Day was replaced by Canada Day. The word “Royal” in the names of Crown agencies was replaced by “Canada.” The bicultural foundation of Canadian nationhood was augmented with a multicultural pillar supporting the idea that the country was made up of various minority groups that defined themselves as unique and wished to remain so. These changes, along with countless others, were all part and parcel of a systematic and sustained overhaul of the country’s institutions, symbols and civic traditions. (144)

The comfortably familiar, solidly built Canadian home was thus transformed into an alienating hotel, peopled by amnesiacs who identify with Canada in coldly calculating terms, while shirking their civic responsibilities. A common civic identity has languished as newly empowered groups vie for power and advantage. Canada has lost its way.

Griffiths’ précis of Canadian history is remarkably narrow. Canada’s nineteenth century heroes’ “single goal... [was] the establishment of a new nation, Canada, as an egalitarian, democratic, economically ambitious and less sectarian society” (149). He has very little to say regarding their interest in maintaining Canada’s identity as a “white man’s country,” through racially discriminatory immigration and naturalization policies, or of “civilizing” First Nations through forcible assimilation. These and other “items on [Canada’s] list of collective sins of omission and commission” are reduced to “setbacks” in a country that nevertheless “remained true” to its enduring civic/democratic ideals (150).

Griffiths’ casual dismissal of the “dark side” of Canadian nation-building leads him to underestimate how profoundly Canada’s pre-WWII history shaped its postwar development. As Alan Cairns has convincingly demonstrated in Citizens Plus and other writings, the changes undertaken in the 1960s and entrenched in the 1970s and 1980s (especially through the adoption of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms) constitute a process of “coming to terms with the past”—of moving away from a colonial value orientation to one rooted in the distinctive context shaped by reactions to World War II, the Holocaust, decolonization and the emergence of a global human rights regime. The nationalism of the 1960s was thus formulated under a vastly different set of normative expectations and orientations; it could not but distance itself from its past, given the “sins” committed by previous generations of nation-builders.

Seen through this lens, Canada’s recognition of group identities, toleration of dual citizenship, and bestowal of rights to previously disenfranchised groups are precisely what one would expect from a country claiming a civic identity founded on democratic institutions. The revolution in membership politics that emerged in the 1960s and continues to gather steam is thus part and parcel of Canada’s slow groping toward a genuinely civic identity in a postcolonial context. That Griffiths prefers to cast it as a denial of civic identity speaks to his idiosyncratic reading of Canadian history and preference for golden ages that were anything but for those groups and individuals denied recognition, respect and equal membership.

The response to Griffiths’ book among pundits and policymakers has been quite positive. Indeed, the current Conservative government has revised the handbook given to prospective citizens so that it contains more material on Canada’s military history and
colonial heritage. Canada’s national newspaper, *The Globe and Mail*, has also demanded that multiculturalism be struck “from the nation’s vocabulary” and replaced by a renewed sense of civic identity. This trend is in line with similar efforts to “revalue” citizenship in other liberal–democratic states. Whether Canada is in need of a thicker national identity is, however, questionable. Given that all boundaries exclude to some degree, Canadians might think carefully before reinforcing theirs.

If there is a lesson to be learned from Canadian history, it is that efforts to impose a coherent national identity premised on a discreet and narrow range of markers have come at high costs for groups that did not fit the bill. Griffiths’ denigration of “citizens of convenience” and “civic shirkers” suggests that he either has not learned this lesson or would prefer to ignore it in the name of affirming his peculiar understanding of who (and how) Canadians ought to be.

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In 2009, the Canadian Cinema series, co-published by the Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF) and the University of Toronto Press, began putting out short monographic books by film scholars, art historians and writers on Canadian films. The two most recent—Darren Wershler’s *Guy Maddin’s My Winnipeg* and Zoë Druick’s *Allan King’s A Married Couple*—show the range of approaches such a task invites. (Miléna Santoro reviewed the second book in this series, André Loiselle’s *Deny Arcand’s Le Déclin de l’empire améri-cain and Les Invasions barbares* [2009], in these pages in December 2009.) These two authors, presumably given the same brief from the press, could not be more different in their handling of the respective films. In the former, a complex film is made all the more expansive by a wide-ranging, if at times disorienting, “critical mix” (15), while in the latter, a rather simple film is made more profound and deeply resonant through careful, restrained exegesis.

Darren Wershler’s *Guy Maddin’s My Winnipeg* takes the Canadian director’s most recent (2007), and perhaps best-known, feature film as its principal focus. But what looks to be an introductory text sketches a broad theoretical complex. In his introduction, Wershler invokes Victor Burgin’s notion of film as assemblage only to pass over it in favor of Marjorie Perloff’s “differential media” (9). With “differential media,” Wershler argues for *My Winnipeg* an “assemblage where no element necessarily takes priority over any other” (10)—in other words, the trailer, clips, associated short films, publicity material, official website and texts circulating around the film proper all inform—and, in Wershler’s view, indeed form—the composite “text” known as *My Winnipeg*. Whether this “differential media” model is more suited to Maddin’s film than any other, however, remains in doubt. He revisits the discussion only in the conclusion, and even then very briefly.
Wershler’s invocation of Slavoj Žižek near the close of his introduction sets the tone for much of the rest of the book: the reader finds little ekphrasis and far more theoretical riffing. Chapters 2 and 3 remain more grounded: the second, “Transfusions: Biography and Filmography,” provides just that, with a psychobiographical reading of Maddin’s formative childhood and a broader discussion of his oeuvre. In the third, Wershler deftly handles the circumstances surrounding the film’s conception; Maddin’s own influences in the form of “walking literature”; the screenplay and score; casting; and technique. In the fourth and fifth chapters, Wershler takes up the question “exactly what sort of film is My Winnipeg anyway?” (51). In other words, what is its genre? With Chapter 4, he establishes the distinct poles of documentary and melodrama, and proposes the film’s indebtedness to the “city symphony.” It is only in the subsequent chapter, however, with Michel de Certeau’s The Practice of Everyday Life (1980) as his guide, that Wershler takes up the form of the “city symphony.” (He borrows Scott Macdonald’s definition of the genre as “choreographed depictions of a representative day in the life of the modern city” [73].) Rather unexpectedly, in the sixth chapter, Wershler takes up queer, homosocial desire at work in Maddin’s film. Chapter 7 explores sound and narration: Maddin’s fascination with “early aural forms of cinema” (98) and the use of live commentators. With Chapter 8, Wershler sets out to discuss the film’s more spectral, ghostly, qualities; however, the discussion quickly turns to Maddin’s distinctive editing style, which he calls “scrolling,” and its relationship to the director’s own neurophysiological ailment, myoclonus (104). Wershler then revisits the archive and its ties to spiritualism.

In his brief conclusion, we return to two earlier arguments—perhaps the book’s most significant. First, My Winnipeg’s relationship to the genre of city symphony and the ways in which Maddin re-imagines it to show a metropolis in decline rather than at “its beginning” (117); and second, the digital possibilities of “differential media,” and an allusion to the forthcoming, web-based collaboration between Maddin and poet John Ashbery. Granted, My Winnipeg “has no overarching plot to describe and no ‘round’ characters to analyse” (79), but Wershler could have provided a more steady hand in guiding us through Maddin’s complex, at times mystifying “situationist psychogeography” (40).

With Zoë Druick’s Allen King’s A Married Couple, we find a similar grappling with the question of genre and the meaning of documentary in film. Though here, Druick begins by laying out the narrative and relevant actions. Her larger argument in the book is signaled early on: “an adequate examination of the film,” Druick suggests, “must imagine it in the context of the emergence and maturation of observational cinema, feminist challenges to post-war conservative visions of the family, and the popularization of post-Freudian therapeutic discourse” (4). Positioning King’s “actuality dramas”—of which A Married Couple (1969) is perhaps the best known—in their proper historical context does great justice to him as a seriously underrated Canadian director.

Druick begins her second chapter by discussing the conception of the film, which follows the life of the Edwards family through the summer of 1968 in Toronto. With more than 70 hours of footage, shot over 10 weeks, whittled down to just 96 minutes, Druick explores the back-story to this fascinating socio-filmic experiment. An experiment which, she rightly points out, prefigures the glut of today’s reality-based television. Invoking performativity theory, with recourse to Erving Goffman’s influential The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life (1959), Druick finds an apt model for interrogating the Edwards’ self-consciousness and exhibitionism in the film. With the third chapter, Druick undertakes a detailed analysis, practically scene by scene. Through these close readings, she manages to elaborate the major concerns of the film. This is especially evident in her nuanced interpretation of Billy Edwards’ frequent use of advertising discourse as a foil for the authenticity
of the film’s action: positioning the film and its actors in their proper milieu of a bourgeois family under advanced capitalism. The remainder of the chapter takes up the role of melodrama as genre, and its psychoanalytic resonances.

Chapter 4 deals, at perhaps a little too much length, with the film’s promotion and reception. The lengthy excerpting of reviews might be forgiven owing to the lack of material on the film, however, they could have been footnotes to a shorter discussion. In Chapter 5, among the most persuasive sections, Druick argues against understanding the film as a hybrid form of documentary and fiction. Instead, she navigates her way between (and beyond) the established forms of mockumentary and docudrama, situating *A Married Couple* along mimetic lines as an “imitation of life” (80).

In her conclusion, Druick positions the film alongside its later and more famous southerly companion, *An American Family* (1973), justifiably suggesting a “debt of inspiration” (86). Druick goes on to argue that with *A Married Couple*, Canadian cinema broke away from the dominance of the National Film Board and Canadian Broadcasting Company and “helped to put Canadian cinema on an international map” (86). “Incredible and terrifying in its ordinariness” (89), Druick’s capable study establishes *A Married Couple* as a landmark achievement in postwar Canadian cinema.