

Christian Riegel, Herb Wylie, Karen Overbye and Don Perkins, eds. *A Sense of Place: Re-Evaluating Regionalism in Canadian and American Writing*. Edmonton: U of Alberta P, 1998. 133pp. \$24.95.

This unassuming volume, first published as an issue of *Textual Studies in Canada* (vol. 9, spring 1997), provides an important re-evaluation of regionalism, one that clarifies why it is important and necessary to re-tool this hoary analytical construct. As the editors point out in their Introduction, "current global trends are investing the term with new significance, necessitating a new look at the way [it] has been and can be used to examine social, cultural and political relationships" (ix).

The "trends" they have in mind include decentralization, regionalization (in terms of sensibilities), and globalization, all of which have undercut the power of the nation state, while at the same time pressuring "local economies and cultures . . . and forcing a redefinition of community." Also important, they point out, are developments in critical theory, particularly post-structuralism, itself "part of a larger critique of cultural hegemony and a recognition and celebration of diversity" (xii). In short, it is high time for literary critics to take a fresh look at regionalism, and to define it clearly in relation to postmodern culture.

This collection largely succeeds at the task — particularly in regard to Canada. The first article, "Toward the Ends of Regionalism" by Frank Davey, provides a substantive point of departure. Appropriately wide-ranging and interdisciplinary, Davey's analysis sees region and regionalism "not as locations but as ideologies" (1). His article highlights the ambiguity that surrounds regionalism, which is seen at times as integrative and authentic, at other times as disintegrative and atavistic. Davey also scrutinizes Canadian literary scholarship on regionalism, indicating its major deficiencies (2) and offering a corrective analysis. He identifies three processes/phenomena against which regionalism must be understood: the nation state, colonialism, and the global economy. For Davey, as for most of the analysts whose work appears in *A Sense of Place*, regionalism is ultimately a complex social construct. Able to foster both diversity and homogenization, it is "a strategy" that "operates within a large interplay of power relations" (7), a discourse that can resist "meanings generated by others in a nation state" (4). Thus it becomes one of several available "discourses of dissent" (7). At the same time, a sense of regionalism is potentially advantageous to the nation state, as when "the myth of geographic determinism allows a national government to avoid responsibility for regional downturns" (5). Davey also points to the influence of global capitalism, which fosters the commodification of regions as a "technique for cultural competition and survival" (14).

The six articles that follow skillfully develop, illustrate, and nuance the conversation begun by Davey. In "Writing Out of the Gap: Regionalism, Resistance, and Relational Reading," Marjorie Pryse defines regionalism as "the deep structure of local knowledge, where geographical and literary landscape become imbued and interwoven with features of culture" (19). Arguing that Edward Said's notion of "contrapuntal reading" offers a reading practice that enables recognition of "differences between American canonical fiction and the texts of regionalism" (20), Pryse compares James' *The Portrait of a Lady* with works by such "regionalist" writers as Sarah Orne Jewett, Charles Waddell Chesnutt, Alice Dunbar-Nelson, and Mary Wilkins Freeman. Drawing on an eclectic mix of theories, she argues that "regionalism represents . . . a sense of place that reflects a gap between dominant ideological and aesthetic interests and the interests and stories of persons who reside in the locale." It is, in effect, "writing out of that gap" (24).

In "'Regionalist' Fiction and the Problem of Cultural Knowledge," David Martin suggests quite a different reading of regionalism, showing its "deep functional affinity" with cultural anthropology (37). Like Pryse, he grounds his discussion in nineteenth-century American regional literature. Martin's questions foreground the problematic positioning of regional writers vis à vis their subjects: "What . . . does it mean to 'understand' a culture? Is this understanding reserved . . . for members, or can a cultural 'outsider' achieve it? How does one attain both a properly 'objective' understanding . . . and a deeply intersubjective one . . . the classic paradox of the anthropological method?" (38). He points to the potential that regionalism (like anthropology) has for domination as well as empowerment.

The remaining articles address the Canadian scene. Alison Calder's "Reassessing Prairie Realism" raises important questions about the criticism and pedagogy of prairie regionalism. Why, for example, are "the prairies continually being reportrayed in the classroom as hostile, life-denying, and imaginatively sterile?" Why do we "read and teach only a literature that places the prairies solely in the context of the past?" (51) Her answers suggest that a continuing emphasis on prairie "realism" effaces differences within the region while serving the interests of national hegemony. In "West of 'Woman,' Or, Where No Man Has Gone Before: Geofeminism in Aritha Van Herk," V. M. Verhoeven provides an illuminating, if not entirely convincing argument, that Van Herk's fiction ultimately fails to "subvert a particular (regionally grounded) ideology of gender" that "privileges male over female" (70). Jeanette Lynes' "Is Newfoundland Inside that TV? Regionalism, Postmodernism, and Wayne Johnston's *Human Amusements*" offers a perceptive analysis of Johnston's novel as "a compelling site for examining the intersection of regionalism, postmodernism and globalism"

(82). Richard Pickard's "Magic Environmentalism Writing/Logging (in) British Columbia" illustrates the impact of global capitalism on local culture by discussing fiction about corporate logging by such writers as Peter Trower, Jack Hodgins, and Brian Fawcett, as a "site of resistance to mainstream culture" (97).

The volume concludes with an Afterword by Jonathan Hart, who provides a valuable antidote to oversimplification by suggesting that "we all inhabit an eccentric geometry of being on the rim and in the middle at once" (115).

While *A Sense of Place* may disappoint readers looking for a wide-ranging discussion of American regionalism, it is a must read for those interested in regionalism in Canada.

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Myra Jehlen and Michael Warner, eds. *The English Literatures of America: 1500-1800*. New York and London: Routledge, 1997. Pp. 1118. \$46.95 pb.

Jehlen and Warner's work collects and comments on the writings from the rich, turbulent periods of colonial and revolutionary America. Destined to become an essential resource for students and teachers of American and New World literature and history, this genuinely comprehensive anthology of the "written culture" (xvii) of the Anglophone New World from first contact to 1800 so effectively mobilizes the multi-disciplinary theoretical and pedagogical approaches of cultural studies that it should become essential reading for anyone interested in seeing how the core questions of contemporary theory can be applied to refocus and revitalize a traditional field of study.

"There are many ways of using this book," Michael Warner specifies in the General Introduction. He explains that the anthology is organized according to general chronology, so that "a reader who moves from the beginning to the end will be able to appreciate the historical context," but sections are also organized according to region, genre, contexts of discourse, and topic (xxii). To enumerate all that is covered is perhaps unnecessary — the fourteen chapters of the anthology, each containing between ten and thirty textual excerpts and at least one piece in its entirety, include far more than they exclude. Relying on an expanded definition of "literature" from both renowned and unknown "explorers, creole settlers, the peoples they subjugated, and Englishmen who viewed the Americas only from the banks of the Thames" (xvii), *The English Literatures of America* collects personal and official letters, reports, journal and diary entries, speeches, novels, plays, manifestoes, poems, confessions, broadsides, pamphlets, newspaper advertisements, medical advisories, literary criticism, and poet-