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Sverker So¨rlin, Paul Warde, eds. *Nature's End: History and the Environment.* Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009. xii + 368 pp. $95.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-230-20346-4.

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Both Everywhere and Nowhere? Environment and Current Historiography

In his afterword to this volume, Peter Burke suggests that environmental historiography has passed through a "heroic age" into a period of consolidation, and finally, during the past ten or twenty years, into an "age of synthesis," a time for writing national and even global environmental histories and for incorporating the field's insights into general surveys (p. 352). But the contributions to *Nature's End* are much more interested in new directions and new problems than in taking stock of the field's past accomplishments. They cover a very wide range indeed, with extensive discussion of almost all of the inhabited continents (South America alone receiving no sustained attention) and consideration of ancient, modern, and contemporary problems. The diversity of approach is even more marked; some authors focus on the history of environmental thought and politics, while others restrict themselves to biological facts about the natural world. The collective impression made by the nineteen authors, largely based in Britain but also representing Canadian, Australian, and Scandinavian institutions, is that current environmental historiography combines the creative energy of a field characterized by freedom, expansion, and possibility with a somewhat chaotic multiplicity of goals, interests, and methods. Environment is shown to be central to many aspects of history, but whether this makes environmental history a coherent field is less clear. Mark Elvin's gloss on his own chapter might thus also be applied to the book as a whole; "environmental history," Elvin suggests, is "both everywhere and nowhere" (p. 273).

Nature's End shows how environmental historians can reconsider familiar material and recast old narratives by placing environment and nature at the center of the story. Tim Cooper's stimulating survey of the idea of waste in modern Britain is an accomplished example of how this can work; he charts the evolution of "waste" from a type of land, the collectively exploited marginal lands in the early modern period, into a type of garbage, the planned and necessary residual of modern industrial production. Along the way, Cooper sketches histories of recycling, sewage, and the social disciplining necessary to achieve a landscape without litter. The heart of the chapter discusses the Victorian period's brief fascination with recycling but the eventual triumph of the "throw-away society." In Cooper's hands environmental history is a kind of green rereading of familiar historiographical themes. In debates regarding public health, economic thought, and the social question in Victorian England waste was everywhere.

Other studies also succeed in showing how our understanding of the traditional stuff of social, economic, and political history is enriched by attention to their environmental basis and constraints. Robert Dogshon shows how mountain communities in Scotland and Switzerland varied their allocation of risk and labor according to immensely variable local conditions. Because work and production in upland areas were so heavily constrained by factors like altitude, any satisfactory agrarian history is by necessity environmental history as well. Georgina Endfield similarly stresses interconnections between environment and social history, showing how drought, in conjunction with increasing economic inequality, exacerbated social unrest in colonial Mexico. Elvin goes in the other direction, using political history to explain environment, connecting tax policy to intensive farming and population density. Kirsten Hastrup suggests that environment was constitutive of all aspects of life in medieval Iceland, permeating basic structures of thought and identity and forming the basis for Icelandic understandings of community, work, space, and danger. As Richard W. Unger has observed in another recent collection, economic history of the premodern world is "almost by definition" environmental history as well, and several of the essays in this volume show what can

be gained by bringing connections between environment and economy to the fore.[1]

One trouble, however, with inserting environment into all aspects of historical enquiry is that it then evaporates as a field; if "environmental history is but history," as Hastrup writes, are there no specific problems that arise from paying more attention to environment and nature (p. 333)? This is implicit in a chapter on interdisciplinary history, in which a team from Stirling University describes how they collaborated to bring historical, economic, and scientific expertise to bear on Scotland's environmental history. Their discussion deserves longer consideration than is possible here, and will certainly be worthwhile to anyone interested in genuinely interdisciplinary work. But while they stress the need to maintain disciplinary rigor within each field, they do not explain how research questions can be arrived at which will be equally relevant for readers on both sides of the two cultures. The problem of environmental history, again, returns to its identity and agenda.[2]

Sverker Sörlin and Paul Warde themselves, however, do suggest such an agenda for the field, arguing that "the environmental" as a category of analysis should be historicized. Warde's chapter offers one such chronology, maintaining that Enlightenment agrarian reformers like Arthur Young conceptualized the farm as a closed system, outside of which, in the realm beyond human control (what seventeenth-century improvers like Samuel Hartlib categorized as "providence"), lay the environment. The "environmental" is thus created conceptually, largely here by economists and scientists, who divide it from the sphere of human action.

Warde's is a useful formulation, but other contributions in the book propose quite different narratives, resting on divergent understandings of what "environment" ought to mean. In Holger Nehring's somewhat opaque discussion of the "ecological moment" in West German politics from the 1960s to the 80s, environment is used in a way precisely opposite to Warde's. For Nehring nature had become "objectified" by the 1970s, and "environment" was that which government should control through bureaucratic planning. Sörlin, in turn, offers another chronology of "the environmental" in his discussion of Swedish climate science, tracing how Sweden's leading school of glaciology rejected the notion that humans could manipulate climate. If Nehring's Germans agreed during the 1970s that environment was subject to human control, Sörlin's Swedish scientists worked hard to show the contrary.

The most wide-ranging, and most fraught, chapter in this collection, by Richard Grove and Vinita Damodaran, deals with this same theme, arguing for the central role of empire in the emergence of "global environmental history." This discussion usefully demonstrates that contemporary environmental historiography has much longer genealogies than is often supposed, reaching back beyond environmental politics of the 1960s to nineteenth-century colonial governance. This is important, but Grove and Damodaran push their agenda rather far, producing some questionable readings of the field. Thus, for example, Clarence J. Glacken's *Traces on the Rhodian Shore: Nature and Culture in Western Thought from Ancient Times to the End of the Eighteenth Century* (1967), whose very subtitle states its exclusive concern with Western intellectual history, is considered to be a global study of central importance, but Fernand Braudel is found to have exerted minimal influence. The Department of English Local History at Leicester University did work that was "implicitly local and global," but Alfred Crosby's *Columbian Exchange: Biological and Cultural Consequences of 1492* (1972) is found not global enough and Roderick Nash's work on nature in the United States is chastised for focusing on the United States. The nineteenth century, they find, has never been "properly treated by any environmental history either for Britain, America, or the Globe," a rather stunning dismissal of several of the most distinguished careers in the field (p. 33). Keith Thomas's 1983 work *Man and the Natural World: Changing Attitudes in England 1500-1800* is treated as a departure from his previous interests despite the obvious centrality of the natural environment to his 1971 magnum opus, *Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Belief in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century England* (see especially his prologue). In short, Grove and Damodaran show that many environmental historians' understanding of their own field is unduly limited, but their own narrative relies on criteria that are undefined and seemingly idiosyncratic.

Before returning to this book's virtues one additional complaint might be registered. Its list price of £65 ($95) seems rather high for a book without images or much proofreading by the publisher. The text and index are littered with scores of typos and small errors (a single line on page 124, for example, includes both an extraneous space and also a seemingly accidental lapse into German, while page 40 contains at least six errors), but one hopes that these will be corrected with a new, less expensive paperback edition due in April 2011.

Nature's End deserves a wide audience. Environmental historians of all sorts will find it useful, as few such collections can boast such a rich and diverse array of con-

tributions, ranging widely in geographical and chronological scope and presenting several methodological and conceptual approaches. It illuminates how many possible ways there are to incorporate nature and the environment into historical research, and in this respect internal disagreement among its contributors, as well as my own reactions against some of its assertions, are strengths rather than weaknesses. Altogether, *Nature's End* opens outward, showing that environmental history is very much a field in which innovation is ongoing, and offering several models for what historians of all kinds can gain by making humans and their environment part of the same story.

Notes

[1]. Richard W. Unger, "Introduction: Hoffmann in the Historiography of Environmental History," in *Ecologies and Economies in Medieval and Early Modern Europe: Studies in Environmental History for Richard C. Hoffmann*, ed. Scott G. Bruce (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2010), 3ff.

[2]. Many of the themes of this book are also addressed in Paul Warde and Sverker Sörlin, "The Problem of the Problem of Environmental History: A Re-reading of the Field," *Environmental History* 12 (2007): 107-130.

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