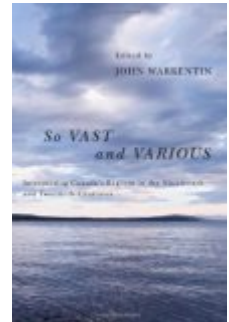


**John Warkentin, ed..** *So Vast and Various: Interpreting Canada's Regions in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*. Carlton Library Series. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010. xi + 508 pp. \$34.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-7735-3738-5.



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**Published on** H-Canada (August, 2011)

**Commissioned by** Stephanie Bangarth (King's University College, UWO)

There is a long history of scholarly and applied writing on the complexity and diversity of the spatial relationships and differentiation of physical resources, settlement, culture, and politics that have shaped the Canada we know today. At times, this complexity and diversity has created tensions that threaten to fragment a young nation; at other times, a search for shared identity unites peoples from these diverse regions gathered into a federated state. This volume, edited by John Warkentin and the latest in the well-recognized Carlton Library Series, addresses some of the historical complexity of the diverse regions that have determined the political, economic, and social functioning of the Canadian enterprise both prior to Confederation and in the subsequent century. Gathering together selected parts of seven major historical commentaries (ranging in dates from 1831 to 1977), Warkentin provides the student of Canadian regional identity with a comprehensive interpretation of the major themes that have shaped the discourse of our study of Canada, particularly the underpinning of scholarly and

policy debate by the realities of resource exploitation and its regional consequences.

Warkentin is well placed to assemble this volume and provide interpretive commentary. Professor emeritus of geography at York University, Warkentin has authored major texts on Canadian regional geography and has delved deeply into Canadian regions and the conceptual basis of regional geography as a method of study. Warkentin's most obvious contribution in this volume is to assemble in one place appropriately edited versions of several key writings that have shaped views of Canada's regions. Given the variety of forms of publication, motive, and writing style, this is a significant accomplishment of much value to those teaching undergraduate courses in Canadian regional geographies, the history of Canada's regions, and comparative methods courses in history and historical geography.

The introductory essay is a useful overview of the various approaches that have been taken to the study of Canada's regions. Warkentin divides

regional writing on Canada into three very broad periods: 1752-1832, descriptive and statistical accounts of exploration and trade; 1832-95, consolidation of geographical knowledge, particularly to educate a new nation; and 1895-1977, broadly conceived surveys of the dynamics of trade and settlement with increasingly sophisticated theoretical views of each region and its functioning in a national system. One can certainly take issue with this simple periodization; there is considerable overlapping of themes across these periods and writings and yet dramatic differences in motive between the authors: from George R. Parkin's imperial concerns, to Harold Innis's focus on political economy, to Bruce Hutchison's idiosyncratic and personalized exploration, and to Thomas R. Berger's social and cultural context for a major energy project and its policy consequences. A key commonality of each of these three periods, however, is the foundation of an understanding of the regions of Canada that we recognize today, based on colonial settlement patterns but conceptualized into a useful national whole, and, in some cases in this volume, drawing on innovative theoretical understandings of spatial analysis as it emerged in the later twentieth century. The reader could ask for a more developed periodization, including more discussion of its conceptual significance, in terms of organizing the selected extracts that make up the bulk of the book. While it is clear that the organization flows effectively along chronological lines, the conceptual significance of each choice is not always made clear, despite Warkentin's introductory interpretations of each selection. For example, rather than organizing the book by chronological author, there might be value in a more thematic organization that considers larger themes that conditioned the search for and expression of geographical knowledge in these writings. These might include motives for settlement, shifting natural resource dependencies, modern concepts of political space, and the imperatives of a geographically educated, regionally aware electorate.

The first substantive selection, characterizing the earliest of Warkentin's three periods, is drawn from Joseph Bouchette's *The British Dominions in North America*, published in London, England, in 1831 in two volumes. Surveyor-general of Lower Canada from 1804 to 1840, Bouchette was in a unique position to describe the Canadian colonies of this period. Warkentin argues that Bouchette provided the first detailed reasons for describing Canada as a group of connected regions (rather than a collection of disparate colonial enterprises), linking his analysis to broader themes (such as spatial arrangements of resources, transport patterns, and settlement) that would emerge in regional geographies of the later nineteenth century. A large part of Bouchette's text is quoted--and the reader is then immersed in the detail of Bouchette's descriptions, aided only occasionally by Warkentin's brief interventions. Bouchette ranged widely across British North America, defining first the "Indian Territories," then "Upper Canada," "the River St. Lawrence – Great Lakes – the Gulf – Canals" before turning to "Lower Canada" and shorter analyses of regions in present-day Atlantic Canada defined largely on provincial lines (including the colonies of Cape Breton and Newfoundland). Bouchette's eye for the resources of each region is well demonstrated, including his concerns that some activities, particularly the timber trade and the fishery in the Atlantic colonies, had "seduced the short-sighted and those eager for rapid returns" (p. 161). Bouchette's political views are never far below the surface and he clearly saw his survey as encouraging particular types of settlement in the future, involving settlers of particular national character based on descriptions we would find offensive today.

Building on Bouchette's foundation, Parkin's *The Great Dominion: Studies of Canada* (1895) reinforced and integrated geographical knowledge about a new nation. Transport innovations, particularly railways, had created new connections between regions and were altering settlement patterns and opening new areas in western Cana-

da. Importantly, Parkin devoted considerable attention to the significance of a newly united Canada (politically and economically) within the wider British Empire. He also engaged a typically environmentally determinist view of the impact of these “regions so vast and various” on shaping national character: “There are those who believe it is a country peculiarly fitted to rear a people whose northern vigour will give them weight in the world, and will add strength and character to the nation of which they form a part” (p. 171). Parkin’s regional analysis affirmed many of the geographies outlined by Bouchette, beginning first with “The North-West,” a region offering “the most readily accessible areas in the Empire” (p. 172). That this was an imperial project was reinforced by Parkin’s contention that the North-West provinces would soon be filled with “millions of people, English-speaking, and for the most part of British blood” and also “foreign emigrants who are willing to add to the strength of the Empire by adopting British citizenship” (p. 172). Warkentin noted Parkin’s insistence that the eastern provinces remain the center of “political force, of the country’s progress, wealth, and culture” and the essay contains prescient comments about agricultural exports in particular, ranging from the impact of refrigeration technologies on the export of tomatoes to England to the prospects for producing good wines on the Niagara Peninsula (p. 188). Parkin included a brief analysis of the Ontario urban system, including the dominance of Toronto and its rivalry with Montreal. In later sections, Parkin was highly critical of the lack of business success in Maritime Canada, suggesting that “business fatalism ... careless habits of farm work ... partly the hope constantly indulged of help from some god’s hand thrust out from the political machine” undermined the region’s potential for success (p. 195). The suggestion that this region had “moral influence and intellectual power” was hardly consolation. Parkin’s attention to Quebec reflected his overtly political concerns with French-Canadian nationalism as a direct chal-

lenge to the success of the Canadian Dominion within the empire. He concluded “that what it most needs is some great awakening of the people to the splendid opportunities which lie before them if they would but throw themselves more heartily into the tide of Canadian progress” (p. 213). The extent of Parkin’s attention to physical resources and their potential for exploitation is illustrated in his identification of a large “petroleum field” of “sandy soil” saturated with tar or asphalt on the banks of the Athabasca and Mackenzie rivers (p. 223). The difficulty of bringing in appropriate machinery was all that was lacking in the prosecution of these tar sands.

Warkentin devotes two chapters to selections from J. D. Rogers’s *A Historical Geography of the British Colonies, Canada* (1911) and a similarly titled volume on Newfoundland (1911, but edited and republished in 1931). In exploring Rogers’s detailed regional interpretation, Warkentin highlights the author’s distinctive approach to spatial analysis, particularly his use of terminologies and concepts to generalize the processes of settlement. More so than earlier authors, Rogers applied geometric patterns to his analysis, referring to Ontario as a “great fertile triangle” and the prairies as an “oblong,” and noting the influence of belts of transportation and settlement (p. 231). While Warkentin notes that the terminologies are unusual, they reflect an innovative modeling of settlement processes, prefiguring later and more strongly developed systems, such as Walter Christaller’s central place theory. Rogers was similarly outside the mainstream in using radically different descriptions for Canada’s regions: “The Far North-Land,” “The Far East,” “the Core of Canada,” for example. Rogers’s analysis was structured especially around relationships between towns and cities, the areas in between being sources of resources and transport corridors. While considerable detail was presented, Rogers was at pains to generalize and model wherever possible, as his description of New Brunswick suggests: “New Brunswick is still an oblong exhibit-

ing a different type of civilization on it two longer sides--Military and Loyalist on the west, Scotch and Acadian on the east.... the two types still meet along well-worn routes by river, road, and rail ... means by which the two civilizations are indissolubly welded together" (p. 244). Rogers interpreted the multiple waves of settlement across the country, particularly to western Canada in the preceding three decades, as evidence of the creation of a new national identity--similar to Parkin's clearly imperialist project: "the thousand and one nationalities will fuse themselves in a single crucible, and will emerge British, not exactly in the sense which we know" (p. 291).

Innis's *History of the Canadian Pacific Railway* (1923) is the next selection, with Warkentin drawing parallels between it and the role of railways referred by Parkin twenty-eight years earlier. Innis's work refined elements of Rogers's innovative spatial analysis but set it within a more theoretically developed framework emphasizing forces of movement, interaction, and regional transformation through transport innovation. By the 1920s, it was possible to conceive of a *longue durée* of Canadian settlement and political economy and to see interconnections and shifts in technologies emerging over time. Innis set the scene for railway development by assessing the progress of economies and settlement in the various regions, especially transitions in economies from furs, timber, minerals, and the eastern fishery and the geopolitical relationships determining the nature of subsequent exploitation of these resources. A brief selection from R. C. Wallace's *The Book of Canada* (1930) reinforces the resource exploitation theme, providing an important precedent for the social and cultural concerns over northern industrialization considered by Berger (1977) later in the volume.

A more idiosyncratic and populist approach characterizes the next three chapters, drawn from Hutchison's *The Unknown Country: Canada and Her People* (1942) and *Canada: Tomorrow's Giant*

(1957). Hutchison's conversational style reflected his work as a distinguished Ottawa-based journalist. Unlike some of the other authors considered in this volume, Hutchison traveled the country, interpreting what Warkentin describes as the personality of each region, drawing frequently on interviews and conversations. His success in this task was confirmed by the longevity of his 1942 book: it remained available in paperback until 1985. Highly opinionated and sometimes fearlessly inaccurate or critical, Hutchison's interpretations reinforced many stereotypes of the post-1945 era. Warkentin's decision to include extensive portions of Hutchison's work (such as his specific treatment of Canadian cities) speaks to the significance of Hutchison's writing in shaping the popular imagination of Canada, including the tensions between regions around resource development and the beginnings of the incorporation of multiculturalism into a reworked national identity.

A final brief excerpt from Berger's (1977) *Northern Frontier – Northern Homeland: The Report of the Mackenzie Valley Pipeline Inquiry* rounds out the volume, largely by presenting Berger's views on the social, cultural, economic, and political disruption of First Nations people affected by this large energy project. The key point of Berger's report is a concern with the impacts of resource exploitation, the primacy of economic development, and capitalist growth that has persisted across several centuries of settlement histories and geographies, particularly in the North but applicable right across the country. In giving Berger the last word, Warkentin provides an appropriate questioning of the themes that underpin every other selection included in this volume.

The goal of this book is to make available a selection of key texts interpreting Canada's geography and history. This goal is achieved, in a relatively accessible format, but there is little here of later twentieth- or early twenty-first-century discussion that would situate the selected texts in re-

lation to current issues around oil revenues, geographies of transfer payments and equalization, differential health care access, and a host of other issues. These are particularly important where recent changes have disrupted the traditional interpretations explored in the selected texts (such as the emergence of Newfoundland as a net contributor to federal equalization programs as a result of recent oil revenues). There is considerable merit in allowing the selected texts to speak for themselves but at times a heavier interpretive hand would be warranted. In addition, the editing decision to include Warkentin's interpretive comments with only minor differentiation from the selected text makes it more difficult for the reader to distinguish authorship. Using italics or a side-bar arrangement to differentiate the text would have been useful. Related, while Warkentin's introductory essay provides a masterful exploration of the approaches to historical writing on Canada's regions, the volume cries out for an afterword of some sort, some means of drawing together the themes beyond the brief commentary on pages 32 and 33 and explaining why these historical writings are important for the present-day student and policy maker. While this volume was conceived with the laudable intent of making important historical writings accessible, the themes within them are significant not only for understanding the nature of past discourse about Canada's regions but also for shaping our present and future policy decisions. For example, Berger's report was published in 1977; twenty-four years on, have we incorporated any of this report's findings into our approaches to northern resources and populations, and, if so, how? A recent statement from Canada's retiring auditor-general, Sheila Fraser, suggests that we have learned little from Berger's comments and have made very little progress, if any.

Technically, this volume is well presented, although beset with some typographical errors. Some of these are clearly (and perhaps unsurprisingly) the product of the use of optical character

recognition software to scan historical texts. Examples include obvious letter/numeral confusions, "171I" for "1711" (p. 284), and "fiat" for "flat" (p. 443); and some word omissions and phonetic substitution ("muscle" for "mussel" [p. 162], which may well be in the original; and "barn" for "born" [p. 489]). The suggestion that the Oak Ridges Moraine and the Niagara Escarpment join near Hamilton to create a "great loop at the eastern" (rather than western) end of Lake Ontario is, thankfully, an obvious error (p. 55). Given the diversity of text used as a source for this volume, these errors are very minor, but more thorough copyediting should have identified and removed them. These are but small concerns given the comprehensive sweep of this collection and its aim to present a significant selection of writings on the "vast and various" nature of Canada's regions. Warkentin states his hope that the collection will encourage readers to seek out the original texts and form their own views, but this volume and its important editorial interpretations stand in their own right as an important contribution to our understanding of Canada's regions, their geographies, and histories.

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**Citation:** Robert E. Summerby-Murray. Review of Warkentin, John, ed. *So Vast and Various: Interpreting Canada's Regions in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*. H-Canada, H-Net Reviews. August, 2011.

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