

together so many illustrations of the town over the century and a half of its existence. In addition to hundreds of well-chosen monochrome photographs and sketches, there are several colour paintings and photographs. Even after this book, Scotter's volume and the publications of Baden Norris (fittingly recognized here), there is of course plenty of room for further research and writing about Lyttelton. Indeed, it is perhaps surprising that more postgraduate students in particular have not seen it as a convenient microstudy. If they do, they will find this volume an indispensable source of both written and pictorial information on the economic and institutional development of the town.

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Past Futures: The Impossible Necessity of History. By Ged Martin. University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 2004. 305 pp. US price: \$50.00. ISBN 0-8020-8979-8.

GED MARTIN USES A SWEEPING SURVEY OF IMPERIAL HISTORY, from sixteenth-century Scotland to Lord Palmerston, from pre-Confederation Canada to 1940 New Zealand, to uncover methodological historical conundrums that might cause a reviewer to regret his shameful lack of interest in the electoral politics of New Brunswick in the 1860s, and his unforgivable ignorance about the existence of a 'Grit'. Canada looms larger in this book than in any previous work on historical method because Martin, an English-born, Irish resident, British Imperial historian, used the 1996 Joanne Goodman Lectures at Western Ontario University to develop this interesting, if ultimately unconvincing, book. The revised text also retains the discursive weaknesses of published lectures. Martin contends that the partial survival of evidence, further distorted by assumptions that present values mark the triumphal end of history, makes historical explanation futile. Thus quarrelling more with Hegel than Marx, he insists that despite historians' defective methodologies and value-laden judgements, 'historical explanation must return to its rightful position at the centre of all studies of the world around us' (p.261). This requires replacing 'the knowing pretence of explanation' with assessments of 'significance', or 'the more subtle technique of locating events in time', which will emphasize the transience of present values (p.190). By 'significance' Martin means not privileging some events retrospectively through causal hypotheses, but identifying elements of the historical landscape basic enough to be overlooked, and recognizing 'the silent importance of what did not happen', then uniting both of these to identify underlying long-term developments recognizable in Braudel's 'social time'. Thus issues of duration, size and mortality in population history, the absence of violent revolution in London or the fact that World War II did not break out in 1942 or 1945, could all be utilized for a more intellectually democratic analysis than that currently practised in academic history. 'Significance' for Martin therefore involves 'locating events in time in relation to one another' so as to 'locate ourselves in the sweep of time' and make history central to the present. Not much to quarrel with there, then.

However, Martin's predicates raise a number of problems, quite apart from his unconscious emulation of post-structuralist posturings. His discovery in chapter two that past priorities differed from present concerns is hardly news — alert historians know just how 'foreign' that country is, and how misleading its language. Chapter three raises an apparently more profound problem, which the remainder of the book attempts to solve. Martin begins unconvincingly here by confusing narrative with 'the raw past', thus underestimating the analytical requirements of narrative, while introducing a rather strained argument about the impossibility of historical explanation. Seemingly denying Michael Oakeshott's claim that the only proper historical explanation is a complete account

of the antecedent events, he then effectively concedes the point, castigating the inherent circularity of causative hypotheses and dubious theories selectively mining the past for confirming data. Oakeshott's claim is of course philosophically, let alone historically, unverifiable. Most people who write or read history would find such an explanation as undesirable as it was unreadable. Martin comes close to this realization in concluding this chapter. There he acknowledges that although 'At best, we are left with partial explanation, dependent upon incomplete and provisional causal inferences', humans instinctively seek to make some sense out of the past (p.74). This seems an excellent brief definition of the historical craft but because of his acceptance of Oakeshott's standards of proof, Martin considers such a methodology defective. In other words, Martin struggled with a non-existent problem as he subjected his undoubtedly polite (well, they were Canadian) audience to detailed explanations wringing 'significance' out of the manoeuvrings of those New Brunswick 'Grits'. Abandoning any attempt at rationalizing the myriad human decisions making up historical time, he asserts the superior explanatory power of those lost 'past futures' which influenced historical decisions, but which appear only when those decisions are properly located in time. This underlines for him the fluctuating temporal separation between the present and the past, as contemporary perspectives change and possible futures disappear.

In other words, Martin's major point is that the ephemeral present constantly changes our perspective on the past. Again, this is hardly news, but recent events have undermined Martin's gloomy conclusion from that fact, that historical explanation, while desirable, is impossible. His concluding chapter, written after 11 September 2001, argues that current indignation against terrorist acts may fade, just as previous terrorists have been rehabilitated. What is that but historical explanation, and of the future, foresooth? He grumpily concludes that history's claims to cultural centrality are being undermined by over-specialization and a (logically contradictory) 'pretence to omniscience'. Yet the last four years have seen an enormous publication boom in histories of the Islamic world. Moreover, democratic historical explanation (no pun intended) is now more necessary than ever, and historians show no reluctance in meeting that need, since the bizarre decision-making that may deprive many in Iraq, Afghanistan and other countries of their futures is now a major threat to our fleeting present. From that perspective we may not be capable of complete historical explanation but at least we can keep the bastards honest.

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