Candida Rifkind, *Comrades and Critics: Women, Literature, and the Left in 1930s Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009).

In *Comrades and Critics: Women, Literature and the Left in 1930s Canada*, Candida Rifkind examines the "the writing, activism, and politics of the 1930s literary left in English Canada as well as their reception in English-Canadian literary history and their place in national cultural memory over the past eighty years." (4) Focusing on women in particular, *Comrades and Critics* revisits the issues of women's participation on the left, and the place of the 1930s literary left in Canada's national literary history. In regards to Canadian literature, Rifkind counters previous analyses of leftist women's work that have "marginalized and even excluded them from dominant narratives of English-Canadian literary history." (6) As she explains, more broadly, "there has yet to be an acknowledgement by the English-Canadian literary institution…that the 1930s literary left is a recognizable and diverse movement holding a distinct aesthetic position within national literary history." (6) In addition, *Comrades and Critics* also contributes to the literature on Canadian women's leftist activism. While other scholars have documented women's participation in leftist political parties and organizations, Rifkind focuses on leftist women's poetry, novels, and theatrical productions. By situating these works in their particular historical circumstances, and by providing an in-depth analysis of their production and reception, Rifkind explores the challenges and contributions of leftist women literary figures in the 1930s.

Rifkind combines historical and literary analyses to examine the work of several leftist women writers, playwrights, and theatre workers. In particular, she looks at the works of such women as Dorothy Livesay, Anne Marriott, Irene Baird, Toby Gordon Ryan, Mildred Goldberg, Elsie Park Gown, Minnie Evans Bicknell, and Mary Reynolds. At times, Rifkind broadens her focus to include the people with whom these women worked and "who form the backdrop of national and international socialist modernism in 1930s Canada." (4) Rifkind's central argument is two-fold: First, she contends that "as individual lives and the nation itself seemed to disintegrate under immense economic hardships and political discontent, literary forms documenting and transforming this social reality begin to cohere." Second, Rifkind argues that "the reception of these women's anti-capitalist writings by both critics and the Canadian public reveals the extent to which leftist ideologies and socialist aesthetics had been absorbed into the liberal mainstream of English-Canadian culture by the end of the decade." (5) The result is a book that serves as an important addition to the historiography on Canadian literature, and on women and the left in Canada.

While *Comrades and Critics* represents a significant addition to Canadian historiography, it does have minor weaknesses. First, given the use of "Canada" in the title, one expects *Comrade and Critics* to examine women from both French

and English Canada. However, throughout the book, Rifkind emphasizes that *Comrades and Critics* is a study of English Canada only. The reason for this decision is not clearly communicated to the reader and thus begs the question: What about women in French Canada? A simple footnote explaining the decision to focus only on English Canada could have addressed this issue. Second, in her analysis of women, literature, and the left, Rifkind relies heavily on Ian McKay's work on Canadian socialism, without adequately situating his research in relation to the broader historiography. For example, she writes "McKay breaks with historiographical tradition to propose a different starting point for understanding socialism in Canada, one that sets aside factional disputes over the time, place, or personalities of authentic Marxism in favour of interrogating the broader project of the Canadian left in the twentieth century" (6). This statement is supported with a reference to McKay; however, no reference is made to any specific examples of the previous "historiographical tradition" with which McKay's work supposedly breaks. While lengthy discursive footnotes can be dry and cumbersome, situating research in relation to previous works is a crucial part of producing responsible and informed scholarship.

These criticisms aside, *Comrades and Critics* nevertheless provides an important analysis of leftist women's literary contributions during the 1930s, and is thus an important addition to the historiographies on Canadian literature, and on women and the left in Canada.

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Ian McKay and Robin Bates, *In The Province of History: The Making of the Public Past in Twentieth-Century Nova Scotia* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queens University Press, 2010).

Ian McKay is one of Canada's most prolific and well-respected historians. Among his diverse body of work is a series of attempts to deal with the views of Nova Scotia's past of organic intellectuals. So, when I saw this most recent book, I immediately wondered how *In the Province of History* differed from his highly-regarded *Quest of the Folk* and his earlier essays on Peggy's Cove, the tourist gaze and the imagined Scottishness of Nova Scotia. As he tells the reader in a footnote, this volume (and another book yet to come) is an installment in his not yet completed study of the creation of a past for Nova Scotia that was useful as a tourist destination and supporting the racial and economic status quo.

Something of the evolution of McKay's thought can be gleaned from his theoretical debts, although his work cannot be reduced to playing out other's theories. Early on he was reading (among many dozens of other historians) Raymond Williams on the representations of the rural pastoral and Hobsbawm and Ranger