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*The Slender Thread: Irish Women on the Southern Avalon,
1750–1860* (review)

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United States embodied liberal individualism as least as much as the Dominion of Canada, if not more so. Indeed, there is a vast literature on the ways in which American life has been informed by Lockean and other liberal ideas from the eighteenth century onwards. To draw an analogy from European history, emphasizing that the Soviet Union was a Marxist project of rule does not explain why Stalin formally annexed Lithuania but left Marxist Czechoslovakia nominally independent.

Bannister's paper on the 'loyalist order framework' provides a far better explanation for why most of northern North America did not become part of the republic and instead coalesced into a separate country. He reminds us that the leaders of the scattered British colonies were united by a desire to remain British subjects and that Britishness was central to the Canadian identity until the mid-twentieth century. Bannister is correct to suggest that it is the loyalist order and its legacies, not liberalism, that make Canada distinctive from the United States. Unfortunately, McKay's essay 'Actually Existing Canadian Liberalisms,' which was ostensibly written in reply to the other papers in this volume, completely fails to address Bannister's powerful critique of the liberal order framework.

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The Slender Thread: Irish Women on the Southern Avalon, 1750–1860.
WILLEEN G. KEOUGH. New York: Columbia University Press, 2008.
Pp. 560, \$60.00

This weighty micro-history (inspired in part by Keough's family history) is situated within the historiography on Irish migration to Newfoundland and Canada, and engages less with the literature on 'cultural transfer' and on gender and work, though these themes are explored at length in the study. Keough argues that cliometricians have encountered the limits of a narrow evidentiary base, and describes her study as one that employs the lenses and practices of both empiricism and poststructuralism to 'hook' into the past, interweaving analyses of legal records, official and unofficial correspondence, and diaries with oral tradition to illuminate 'lived experience.' In practice, she relies sparingly (and wisely so) on the last source set. Though often limited in extent, Keough's sources serve her well as she explores rural Irish women's agency and adaptive livelihood strategies in the small outharbours of the southern Avalon. She examines these themes within the context of the eclipsing migratory fishery and a

restructuring of the planter fishery by the late eighteenth century, and the rise of the family as the principal unit of production. Within this unit, she finds considerable evidence of women's vital contributions, whether in fish processing, in subsistence agriculture, or in the tasks of housewifery (forms of unpaid work on which there is a wide literature). She also seeks to examine activities such as salvaging, and thereby underscore how features of local economic and social regimes influenced specific forms of female labour, though here she encounters a paucity of documentation. One would welcome a more sustained study of how these forms of labour were reproduced within the flexible family unit and how skills were acquired and then transmitted through generations (as she contends that they were enduring). The same holds for the systems of paid labour that Keough documents, from fishing to domestic service to washing, sewing, and midwifery. In subsequent chapters Keough uses court records and other documents effectively – though in places her methodology raises questions (for example, her argument that sexually indeterminate language such as *people* appearing in contemporary documents might imply women's engagement in salvaging and their presence at specific events, including incidents of 'collective action' in 1788 and 1835). Here, references to a body of literature examining relevant discursive issues would do much to support her claim. Keough's discussion of women's agency in the legal system, though drawing on a modest source base, shows their engagement in litigation and petitioning, and again contributes to understanding the operation of the law in these small communities. She notes that silences may not reflect the absence of particular crimes, but rather the peculiar nature of this small place – there are no surviving reports of infanticide or prostitution in official records. And she argues convincingly that the operation of specific inheritance practices (in intestacy, for instance) bestowed on women in Newfoundland provided significant advantages in property transfer compared with other jurisdictions. Keough's illumination of how women's agency was expressed within economic production and community formation, as well in as the operation of the legal regime, is excellent. In other places, such as her discussion of the Roman Catholic Church's efforts to circumscribe such agency, scantier local evidence is marshalled to support broad claims. There is no doubt, however, that Keough offers a valuable window onto the lives of 'plebeian' women in rural Newfoundland through changing times, illuminating their strategies and agency in perceptive ways.

Keough's study is part of the Gutenberg series of history monographs, available through an open-access website. The book bears out

the advantages and limitations of this initiative. It is to be lauded for its efforts to extend access to quality scholarship. At the same time, it tends to promote an unwieldiness in the printed version, which in this case amounts to, in addition to almost one hundred pages of footnotes, a glossary of terms that are already (or could be easily) explained in the body of the text, a 'case file archive' of typescript court records and correspondence, and a second appendix that returns to a discussion of issues in historiography, much of which already appears in the first chapter. Since the book version reviewed here occupies a liminal space between the conventional monograph, the PhD dissertation, and the e-book (the last includes images of primary sources embedded within the text, as well as additional appendices, Web links, and audio supplements, including oral histories), consulting the parallel published and online versions can be both enriching and frustrating, not least because readers wrestle with different pagination. The e-book concept is evolving, and it would be unfair to place Keough's study in the crosshairs on account of issues associated with the noble effort to lay bare source material and democratize scholarship. However, there is still much to be said in favour of the disciplined, analytic distillation required for the production of a conventional monograph. This is an altogether different enterprise. In the spirit of both broadening access to (and greatly reducing the expense of) such publications, prospective readers of this valuable study are encouraged to print the book from the website and thereby spare themselves the cost of purchasing the printed copy.

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Backwoods Consumers and Homespun Capitalists: The Rise of a Market Culture in Eastern Canada. BÉATRICE CRAIG. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009. Pp. 320, \$75.00

Backwoods Consumers and Homespun Capitalists examines the history of rural life in the Madawaska region of the Upper Saint John River Valley from early non-Indigenous settlement in the 1780s to the closing years of the third quarter of the nineteenth century. Thus, although the title suggests otherwise, it is a story that unfolds primarily within the history of British North America and the United States rather than the new Canadian nation-state. Although cast in large part as an exploration of questions raised by a literature concerning the presence or absence of capitalism in rural North America, Craig's study offers valuable insights to those who have little patience