The nature of the British Empire in the late eighteenth century has long been the subject of sustained scholarly debate. The geographical range, commercial benefits, and political impacts of empire continue to fuel historical discussion of this formative period in British history. Current academic consensus seems to have coalesced around the idea of “networks,” where empire was facilitated, consolidated, and expanded through a series of personal, political, commercial, and institutional connections. But how did these networks operate in practice? Were they geographically specific, or could they be easily transported and applied to other areas of the globe? What happened to such networks when imperial frameworks collapsed, as they did so spectacularly in thirteen American colonies in 1783? Fortunately, the two books under review here—one a collection of essays by leading scholars in their respective fields, the other a contribution by one of the foremost historians of the British Empire—offer answers to precisely these questions. Given the historiographical riches in this field, as well as its critical importance for understanding the development of empire, it is a testament to the respective contributions of these books (and their editors and authors) that they will undoubtedly quickly become “key texts” in the study of this phase of British imperialism. Taken together, they offer refreshing new perspectives on such scholarly debates, engaging with transoceanic and transnational approaches to provide exciting new ways of understanding the British Empire in the early modern period.

In many ways, both of these studies emanate from a long and healthy tradition of scholarship on the British Atlantic World (not least P. J. Marshall’s own work, such as *The Making and Unmaking of Empires*). For many years, historians of Britain’s commercial and imperial activities in North America and the Caribbean have recognized that approaches which locate historical events, people, and processes in an Atlantic arena can provide fruitful ways of understanding a variety of historical processes and phenomena: from religion to migration, slavery to collecting. Recently, however, scholars have begun to question how far we can regard the Atlantic system as being hermetically
sealed, and how far it was porous and open to influence from other oceanic systems and regions. In their introduction, Bowen, Mancke, and Reid cite Linda Colley’s observation that the “biggest flaw in the mighty conception of Atlanticism” lies in its inability to account for developments elsewhere in the world, most notably in Asia, but also in Africa and the Pacific (3). This is not an entirely new development. As early as 1940, Boise Penrose pointed out that many of the leading figures in the early history of the East India Company and of the Virginia colony took part in the activities of both enterprises. Penrose described people like Christopher Newport and Sir Thomas Dale—veterans of the Elizabethan wars with Spain and in Ireland, and founding fathers of the Virginia enterprise who subsequently died in Banten and Masulipatam respectively. Both books under review are part, then, of this process of interrogating and investigating the logical corollary of Penrose’s observation—the fundamentally interconnected nature of the early modern British Empire.

In both *Britain’s Oceanic Empire* and *Remaking the British Atlantic*, the British Empire is characterized as being based, to a large extent, on connections and exchanges. But these connections stretch well beyond the usual staples of the North-Atlantic trading world or the sea-route between London and Asia taken by the East India Company ships. Instead, a more complex and vibrant pattern emerges: one of continuity and stability, but also fluidity and flexibility across geographical and maritime spaces. In the case of the collection of essays, the editors have carefully located maritime connections at the heart of their interpretation of British imperial activity in the period. By focusing on the circulation of ships, goods, people, and ideas chapters explain the development of the early modern British Empire. In the case of P. J. Marshall’s work, the connections are those that endured after the granting of American independence, maintaining a fundamentally “British Atlantic” where, as he puts it, “there were now two [British-Atlantic] empires rather than one” (v).

*Remaking the British Atlantic* is an elaboration on this central theme of the continuity of connection between Britain and its former colonies on the eastern seaboard of mainland North America. Marshall magisterially balances the “story of great change and stability at one and the same time” (1) that he presents at the outset. For many contemporaries, American independence signaled an inevitable collapse in British power and prestige. No less a figure than George III was sure that it would “annihilate the rank in which the British empire stands among the European states” (119). And yet, despite the doom-mongers, Marshall offers powerful evidence that neither Britain nor the newly established United States suffered as much as many predicted. This was due in large measure, Marshall suggests, to the enduring connections between communities on both sides of the Atlantic.