

"ONLY AN ARTIST CAN MEASURE UP TO SUCH A PLACE":
PLACE AND IDENTITY IN CONTEMPORARY
NEWFOUNDLAND FICTION

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**“ONLY AN ARTIST CAN MEASURE UP TO SUCH A PLACE”:
PLACE AND IDENTITY IN CONTEMPORARY NEWFOUNDLAND FICTION**

by

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Abstract

This thesis is an examination of ten novels at the centre of the recent surge of artistic and literary production in Newfoundland. This rise is not only one of quantity but quality as well, as evidenced by the numerous national and international nominations and rewards garnered by these texts and the ever-expanding audience they attract both within and without Newfoundland. Annie Proulx's Pulitzer Prize-winning *The Shipping News* (1993) placed Newfoundland in a wider public consciousness as a harsh, unforgiving environment that paradoxically provides a nurturing and purifying home for the world-weary visitor. Reviews of Proulx's novel and the subsequent work of Newfoundland novelists like Wayne Johnston, Michael Crummey, and Lisa Moore have invariably included comments on the rugged yet beautiful landscape and its relationship to the hardy, joyful (and perhaps somewhat backward) people who occupy it.

The encompassing notion espoused by Newfoundland's burgeoning tourism industry of an unspoiled land loved and worked by a tenacious people is both compounded and confronted by the literature produced since the publication of *The Shipping News*. This thesis will examine how the authors of these works present Newfoundland and Newfoundlanders by focusing primarily on the characters and their relation to place.

Ideas central to postcolonial theory can be seen throughout the text as several of the protagonists are examined as postcolonial subjects striving for a notion of "home" on an island that continually changes identity. Patrick Kavanagh's *Gaff Topsails*, which tries to establish a physical and even erotic connection between its characters and the land, is

examined through an ecocritical lens. The examination of Edward Riche's *Rare Birds* relies heavily on recent touristic discourse, while the analyses of the urban novels by Moore, Michael Winter, Paul Bowdring, and Kenneth J. Harvey use Walter Benjamin's *flâneur* and scholarly investigations of urban literature to investigate the fraying connection between these metropolitan protagonists and their island. Always paramount throughout this thesis is the examination of Newfoundland identities presented by these authors as extensions of a foundational, mythologized and troubled relationship with the land.

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Finally, “Newfoundland literature” to me was joke books and Ted Russell before I was introduced to Michael Cook’s *Jacob’s Wake* in Professor Ronald Wallace’s undergraduate course on Canadian drama. Hearing of my interest in the subversive and scathing presentation of Newfoundland, Professor Wallace fed my curiosity with books from his own library: *House of Hate*, *Tomorrow Will Be Sunday*, *Random Passage*, and *Gaff Topsails*. This thesis is dedicated to him.

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**Introduction:
Place and Identity in Newfoundland Literature**

*I did not solve the paradox of Newfoundland or fathom the effect on me of
its peculiar beauty...*

*Perhaps only an artist can measure up to such a place or come to terms
with the impossibility of doing so.*

– “Joseph Smallwood,” *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams*

This thesis on contemporary Newfoundland fiction began as a response or sequel to Patrick O’Flaherty’s *The Rock Observed* (1979). However, it became apparent in the early stages that creating a simple continuation of O’Flaherty’s seminal survey of Newfoundland literature would be impossible. O’Flaherty was writing in the 1970s and therefore in the midst of what Sandra Gwyn termed the “Newfoundland renaissance” (38). While O’Flaherty does examine much of Newfoundland’s literature up to that point, he has little to discuss in the way of fiction beyond Harold Horwood, Percy Janes, and Ray Guy. Since the publication of *The Rock Observed*, Newfoundland has enjoyed at least one more literary revival – an increase in literary production so large that a thesis purporting to do what O’Flaherty did in 1979 would number in the thousands of pages. The notable authors who take Newfoundland as their subject not studied in this thesis could provide material for several similar texts: Bernice Morgan, Joel Thomas Hynes, Joan Clark, Helen Fogwell Porter, M. T. Dohaney, and Howard Norman, among others, to say nothing of the other novels by the authors whose works are studied here. The work of Wayne Johnston, whose *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams* is undeniably the centerpiece of this analysis, is certainly deserving of a singular critical text. Newfoundland literature has become so vast and varied that it can no longer be served by a simple survey.

In truth, the very concept of a "Newfoundland literature" is more troubled than solidified by this growing literary production. Both non-Newfoundland and Newfoundland-born authors take the island and its occupants as their subject and produce diverse depictions of Newfoundland existence: rural or urban; nostalgic and romantic or cynically realist; beleaguered by the past or unfettered and open to any possibility or interpretation. Newfoundland writing has expanded to such a degree that a student of literature can now focus on any particular era, area, or author and – equipped with the proper literary theories – produce any sort of valid reading. One need only conduct a preliminary perusal of recent publications and presentations on Newfoundland fiction to understand the variety that can no longer be contained by the heading "Newfoundland literature." Herb Wyile's "Historical Strip-Tease: Revelation and the *Bildungsroman* in Wayne Johnston's Writing" (*Antigonish Review* 141), Cynthia Sugars' "Original Sin, or, The Last of the First Ancestors: Michael Crummey's *River Thieves*" (*English Studies in Canada* 31.4), and Tiffany Johnstone's "The Language of Faith and American Exceptionalism in *The Lure of the Labrador Wild*" (*Newfoundland and Labrador Studies* 21.2) give evidence to the possibilities and benefits of reading Newfoundland literature through a particular lens. The opening chapter of this collection, which has previously been published in *Newfoundland and Labrador Studies*, attempts the task of reading *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams* as a postcolonial text. A recent issue of *Essays on Canadian Writing* dedicated to "The Literature of Newfoundland" contains diverse readings of myth and mysticism in Newfoundland literature and culture, both earnest and skeptical readings of Newfoundland romanticism, essays on touristic discourse and

regional stereotypes, and an essay on Michael Winter's *This All Happened*, by Terry Goldie, that can best be described as an exposition of the St. John's *metrosexual*.

Newfoundland literature has matured enough to sustain multiple readings and resist a narrow scope.

In his introduction to the Newfoundland literature edition of *Essays on Canadian Writing*, Lawrence Mathews discusses the "range of fiction about Newfoundland published in the last fifteen years," examining texts that focus on historical issues of identity (such as Johnston's fictionalization of Newfoundland premier Joe Smallwood) and juxtaposing them with literature that "seems to belong to a different literary culture" (Mathews 10, 14). Urban-centric novels by Paul Bowdring, Lisa Moore, and others have outgrown "the issues of collective identity" examined in the historical fictions, Mathews writes. They possess protagonists "not bedeviled by the past" (12, 14). Mathews mentions several reviews on Moore's *Open* to demonstrate how more attention is paid – by author and critic – to the characters and plot rather than place. Citing Kjeld Haraldsen's review in *Books in Canada*, Mathews notes how place is inevitably a part of Moore's fiction, but that her stories remain "[s]ite specific without being regionally straightjacketed" (14).

The one-sided relationship between person and place is at the core of many of these novels, especially *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams*. Nearing the end of a life that has seen Newfoundlanders "become the only people in history to voluntarily give up self-government after having won it," Fielding turns to a romantic and mythical underwriting of history, refashioning Newfoundlanders' claim to an island they seem to have declared

themselves unfit to claim (R. Gwyn 445). The final lines of the novel merge islanders with the island in an attempt to replace the moment when Newfoundlanders declared themselves unworthy of their land with a new mythology of Newfoundlanders as one with the land:

...the northern night, the barrens, the bogs, the rocks and ponds and hills of Newfoundland. The Straits of Belle Isle, from the island side of which I have seen the coast of Labrador.

These things, finally, primarily, are Newfoundland.

From a mind divesting itself of images, those of the land would be the last to go.

We are a people on whose minds these images have been imprinted.

We are a people in whose bodies old sea-seeking rivers roar with blood. (562)

In this dreamy depiction of mythical Newfoundlanders can be detected a desperation akin to Smallwood's frantic attempts at industrialization, a dire need to connect islander to island. A peculiar post-confederation (perhaps post-colonial) panic has gripped Fielding, who finds herself in the same predicament as Walter Benjamin's angel of history, caught in a storm that "irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned" (Benjamin 258). This storm of progress threatens to erase all markers of the Newfoundland she loves. "The past is literally another country now," she writes to Joe shortly after Confederation; the nation of Newfoundland has ceased to exist, and Fielding fears that it may be lost in memory as well (Johnston 3). The legitimacy of her fear is supported by Patrick O'Flaherty, who claims "there are few monuments or memorials" to Newfoundland's pre-confederation existence "because it was focused primarily upon the sea, and the sea does not show the marks of human industry" (O'Flaherty 4). Seeing, as O'Flaherty does, "the frailty of human effort, however heroic" (4), Fielding strives to preserve her Newfoundland by placing it within Newfoundlanders

“in whose bodies old sea-seeking rivers roar with blood.”

Fielding is, among other things, a *flâneur* (or a *flâneuse*, to borrow Deborah H. Parsons' term from *Streetwalking the Metropolis*), and her walks through St. John's and Newfoundland are tripled because they are discoveries of the island as it now exists, laments for what it once was, and concerns over what it will become. Fielding's leg, shriveled by tuberculosis, compounds her difficulty moving through a land that is at once her country but also the province of a nation she does not know. Fielding shares some of Smallwood's desperation, if not his aspirations. Her anxiety concerns not the now-or-never attitude toward modernization of Smallwood but rather the identity that threatens to be lost as the land she loves becomes, in essence, foreign territory, and its inhabitants become not just Newfoundlanders but Canadians. Fielding's and Smallwood's meditative relations with the land find an echo in the colonial penetrations of John Peyton and David Buchan in Michael Crummey's *River Thieves*. In particular, Peyton's voyages into Newfoundland's interior provide Crummey's protagonist with many moments of self-reflection as the young man retreats to the wild to work the land and forge himself: “The immersion in work was a divestment of his own, a conscious withdrawal from his father” (163). As the son of a man legendary in his cruelty to Newfoundland's original inhabitants, the Beothuk, Peyton carries his share of colonial guilt, and his expeditions to make contact with the Beothuk are journeys of self-creation in which he hopes to undo the evils of his father and foster a link between European settlers and their adoptive home that does not have the shame of genocide at its core.

The characters of Patrick Kavanagh's *Gaff Topsails* have much more than a

passing connection to the land. Several characters are scarred by previous battles with rock and ice, while others spend the day encompassing Kavanagh's narrative examining the ocean and the land that surrounds their community. Kavanagh steps outside the single day of the novel to detail the history of the community's founding father, a man who literally fell in love with his new island home and fathered a race attuned to the rhythms of the land. For three young boys in the novel, the quest to penetrate a passing iceberg becomes a journey of self-discovery. For the younger sibling of one of those boys, the land is eroticized through his sexual awakening. Each character's evolving identity is either reflected in the land or waiting to be carved from it. Kavanagh chooses as the day of his narrative June 24, 1948, which aside from being both the feast of St. John the Baptist and Discovery Day also, in that year, sat between the two referenda of June 3 and July 22 that would decide Newfoundland's fate as semi-independent nation or Canadian province. As in Johnston's novel, every event in *Gaff Topsails* is imbued with a particular poignancy, for soon, to paraphrase Fielding, the past will be another country. Once again island and identity appear indissolubly and naturally linked.

Michael Winter and Annie Proulx present two narratives in which the non-Newfoundland protagonists move to the island and become altered by their interaction with the land. Winter's *The Big Why* is an historical fiction somewhat in the spirit of *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams* and *River Thieves*. Like Johnston's and Crummey's novels, *The Big Why* is an invented narrative about an actual (though perhaps not as important) character from Newfoundland's past. Proulx's Pulitzer-winning novel focuses on the half-lived life of the downtrodden Quoye who finds identity, purpose, and love in

Newfoundland. Both texts adhere to the notion of the island as a place of rejuvenation and self-improvement, as set down in Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*.

The self-loathing of Riche's Dave Purcell in *Rare Birds* is amplified by the protagonist's seeming inability to succeed in his homeland. Voyages outside his restaurant into the untamed wilderness prove Dave to be seriously deficient in the survival skills that first enabled his forebears to settle the island. Weather and isolation conspire against Dave's success and make him bitter. Unlike Smallwood or Fielding, Dave has no desire to rekindle or preserve an affinity the island. Unlike Crummey's Peyton, he has no need to somehow right the wrongs and revive his relationship with the land. Interestingly, it is through a scheme hatched with his neighbour, Phonse Murphy, in which he falsifies the natural world around him (reports the sighting of a possibly extinct bird) that Dave finds his place. Riche's is certainly the most humorous of the novels studied here, and its reflections on identity and place are the most challenging.

The final two chapters of this thesis focus on novels that can be classified as urban. Given the depiction of Newfoundland in tourist advertisements and the packaging of texts in covers depicting leaning houses in lonesome coves, the modern, urban Newfoundlanders that people these texts could be considered walking contradictions. And they are, but not because they straddle the irreconcilable worlds of folksy, mythologized rural and cold, unromantic urban. As Mathews notes, Bowdring's and Moore's characters "don't look to the collective past for the causes of or the solutions to their current predicaments" (14). These Newfoundland characters contradict themselves

as any other character in any other well-written novel would – not because they are Newfoundlanders but because they are complex, evolved and evolving characters moving through a plot that forces them to reassess and reshape themselves. In *Surviving Confederation*, F. L. Jackson bemoans the arrival on Newfoundland shores of the hippie in search of the last bastion of unspoiled wilderness. In Moore's *Alligator* and Winter's *This All Happened*, the hippie has made way for the hipster, the ultra-urban, mega-modern artist/loafer very much at home on the streets and in the bars of present-day St. John's. In a word, these characters are cool – filmmakers, authors, actors, artists, and other characters who call to mind the ultimate modern hipster, *Seinfeld*'s Kramer, in their inexplicable ability to survive in the city without any definable means of income. For these characters, the struggles are not with the sea but with student loans; their laments are not about Confederation but missed romantic and artistic opportunities, and though some may have feelings of inadequacy, the inferiority complexes are their own, not the "island-wide" variety.

Bowdring's *The Night Season* and Winter's *This All Happened* focus on narrators who have much in common with Fielding in their *flânerie* and subsequent observations and idleness. Fielding's romanticizing of the St. John's of her present and past is repeated in the pensive strolls of Bowdring's Will Wiseman and the doubly reflective pauses before shop windows that mirror the man as he now appears and the man who walked before that window years before. Fielding's nostalgic notes on the disappearing identity and charm of St. John's, the unfurled sails on ships in the harbor, the potholes "so large and enduring that some were given nicknames" (Johnston 6), are repeated by Winter's

Gabriel English, possessed of a peculiar nostalgia for the present, who sees beauty in sunbeams hitting the oil tanks on St. John's South Side Hills and regards his city as "a bit like Dublin folded into Paris" (Winter 88). Undeniably modern and urban in their experience and desires, Wiseman and English use their moving within St. John's to formulate the fragmented versions of themselves. Yet they also look to the rural (English more so than Wiseman) and know that their identities as Newfoundlanders are somehow anchored there, possibly inaccessible to them as modern city dwellers. Both texts deal with the perceived incompleteness of each narrator and whether they can be made complete through interaction with others or with their island.

Moore's *Alligator* and Harvey's *Inside* revolutionize and restructure the dynamic between city and wilderness. The play in both novels is not between the rural and the urban but between the characters and the urban jungle they occupy. In *Alligator*, the characters are presented as either predator or prey, with Valentin, a scuttled Russian sailor, playing the role of a highly specialized hunter released into the unprepared environment of St. John's. Myrden, Harvey's protagonist, plays the urban lion in winter, an alpha male returned to his community upon his release from prison. Both novels present St. John's as a fierce and unforgiving landscape, possessing the unsympathetic attributes normally reserved for Newfoundland's more unsettled areas. As the plot and the characters progress, the readers become aware of another Newfoundland place, the St. John's underworld – a place not considered by the tourism industry or even the more deconstructive of the novels studied here. And yet like all these novels, the protagonists of *Alligator* and *Inside* measure themselves by their ability to survive in a land they have

already claimed as their own. They struggle with this identity as they move through this land and find it not as yielding as a place called home for generations should be. Whether it is Dave Purcell panting as he struggles to keep up with Phonse as they trudge through hip-deep snow, Peyton being clawed by stubborn branches and drenched by hidden ponds as he searches for the Beothuk, or Moore's hapless Frank wheeling his hotdog cart home through the crowded streets of downtown St. John's, so many of these Newfoundlanders find themselves at odds with a land from which they take their identity. Of all the characters within these novels, the one that seems most at ease with his place in Newfoundland at the end of his narrative is Quoyale, the American-born Prospero who finds identity and happiness in Proulx's dark fairytale Newfoundland. And even Quoyale's surety and homeliness is countered by the banishment from the island of his counterpart in *The Big Why*.

Johnston's Smallwood is left uncharacteristically speechless at the end of *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams*, destined to be perpetually baffled by the island and what it could be (or could have been). Fielding is wounded and heartbroken and lost to her nostalgic depictions of barrens, bogs, rocks, and ponds. Crummey's Newfoundlanders and Europeans fail in their attempts to save the Beothuk and are left at novel's end with only regret and an understanding that the core, ordinary chapters of human existence on their island have been lost to history. Even Kavanagh's outporters, romantically and sometimes eerily in tune with their island, are left uneasy as darkness consumes the day of their narrative, carrying with it an uncertain future. Dave Purcell has seemingly accepted uncertainty as the only certainty in his life as an island restaurateur, and Phonse,

the only character in *Rare Birds* who seems to have a true affinity with the island, appears to have died in an explosion at sea. Both Gabriel English and Will Wiseman at the end of their narratives look outside their St. John's existences for rejuvenation, having, in Gabriel's words, "used up" all they can within the confines of the city (Winter 285). The narratives of Harvey and (especially) Moore underscore the indifference of the place to the people who live in it, love it, and try to represent it. Moore's teenaged troublemaker, Colleen, a denizen of downtown bars and the Avalon Mall, finally understands this indifference when she sees herself in the eyes of an alligator that has surprised her at a Louisiana alligator farm. Reflected in the eyes of the reptile, Colleen is "tiny and fragile-looking in a long velvet tunnel," not a person with a purpose and a past (253). The impossibility to assert oneself to the point of becoming pivotal to a place, of becoming at one with a place, of becoming able to truly alter a place reinforces rather than weakens Colleen. She returns to St. John's not as a predator somehow above the rank and file of the city, but fully aware of her small part in a larger ecosystem. She returns the money she stole from Frank and enjoys rather than struggles to interpret the transformation of her city at the end of *Alligator*. It is a lesson Colleen's filmmaker aunt, Madeleine, never learns as she literally frets herself to an early death fighting to transform the story of one Newfoundlander into *the* Newfoundland story with her distinctive imprint.

The problem in conducting an examination of contemporary Newfoundland literature, then, appears to be that so much of what can be considered the best in that category completely deconstructs the notion of a literature that is definitively

"Newfoundland." As Mathews puts it, "Neither Moore nor her characters are interested in explicit discussion of Newfoundland identity," nor do they bear the trace of the "island-wide inferiority complex" or tragic past that marks so much of Newfoundland's fiction (14). The works of Moore, Bowdring, Winter, Edward Riche, and Kenneth J. Harvey are either fierce in their rejection or restructuring of established Newfoundland archetypes, or radical in their complete indifference to them. The modern Newfoundlander of these texts is more often urban and, like Riche's melancholy restaurateur Dave Purcell in *Rare Birds*, has very little attachment to the land, has no affinity with the rugged and romantic history, and is decidedly uninterested in defining himself as an extension or modernized version of the valorized Newfoundland fisherman and survivalist.

In the end, however, one has to acknowledge that Newfoundland as place still figures large in any novel which chooses the island as its setting. As Mathews noted in his call for papers to compile his edition of *Essays on Canadian Writing*, this recent wave of Newfoundland fiction really began with the publication of Johnston's *The Story of Bobby O'Malley* in 1985. While what has followed is a great expansion in the quality and quantity of fiction being produced on and about the island, it has still only been two decades. Newfoundland is still so novel and interesting that anyone reading a text by Johnston, Moore, or Hynes would probably first define it as a "Newfoundland book." Mathews turns to Luc Sante's review of *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams* to make this point: "Newfoundland is more than just a maritime province of Canada. Like few places these days, it seems remote, even exotic in a chilly way, and it's likely you haven't been there. It can therefore assert itself as a setting to the point of claiming a character role: a

vast, desolate mystery hovering just over our northeast flank" (4).

Whether the author is writing a sweeping historical epic or limiting himself to a few days on a few streets in downtown St. John's, the setting is so unique that it has to be explained, defined, and detailed to the reader. Even those who have never been to New York are familiar with it through countless literary and filmic depictions. Though *Law and Order*, *Sex and the City* and countless other renditions may present New York as an incongruously dangerous, romantic, and unpredictable location, the city is rarely, if ever, unknown to the audience. The pool of fictional depictions of Newfoundland is relatively shallow, so shallow, in fact, that any sizeable tome such as Johnston's threatens to become the representative, even *de facto* authoritative resource on the island. It seems it is still the responsibility of a fiction writer taking Newfoundland as his subject to truthfully reflect the place. Perhaps this sentiment grows from a thought voiced by Lisa Moore in the episode of CBC Newsworld's *Hot Type* dedicated to Newfoundland literature. As the narrator of "The Rocks Here Tell Stories," Moore notes that unlike New York, London, and other places that have been "papered over" with literature, Newfoundland is "uncharted territory" (*Hot Type*). Perhaps there exists in Newfoundland an anxiety over "getting it wrong."

This would explain the passionate criticisms of *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams* by Rex Murphy ("Alas, Joey Smallwood Was Larger than Fiction," *The Globe and Mail*, 3 October, 1998) and Stuart Pierson ("Johnston's Smallwood," *Newfoundland and Labrador Studies*, 14.2, 1998) who seemingly ignore the fact that Johnston's work is a novel and attack his unfaithful depictions of Smallwood and his times. Pierson goes so

far as to claim Johnston's novel carries Smallwood "with it as a kind of hostage" (288) and scolds Johnston for altering Newfoundland's geography so roads that run parallel now intersect and Corner Brook lies southwest of Stephenville.

One must also acknowledge that the portrayal of Newfoundland in any far-reaching piece of fiction is still so fresh as to still greatly interest and even thrill most Newfoundlanders. Comedian Greg Thomey captured this notion best (if not a little facetiously) several years ago on CBC's *This Hour Has 22 Minutes* when commenting on the commotion following the use of several Newfie jokes on the American sitcom *Ellen*: "They said Newfoundland on American television!" For both Newfoundland and non-Newfoundland audiences, fiction based in Newfoundland is undeniably anchored there, even if the characters are more concerned with the wide-ranging problems of love, hate, and self-awareness. Despite the placeless nature of the existentialist meanderings of Bowdring's protagonist, the primal viciousness of Harvey's anti-hero, or the lustful yearnings of Moore's characters, the mere mention of a distinctly Newfoundland place name, be it Botwood or Quidi Vidi Road, sends a particular message to the reader. Despite the authors' intentions, the setting of a Newfoundland novel tells the reader, though these characters may at times be modern, even universal, and their problems equally common, that what follows is a depiction of how these characters deal with these problems *there*.

It can be argued that this can be said of any fiction, but when one considers the cultural boom that has accompanied this rise in literary production, one must admit that the "here" of Newfoundland fiction looms considerably larger than in other novels. It is

worth noting that three of the novels discussed in this thesis involve protagonists who leave a vaguely described New York and attempt much more fulfilling existences in a vividly portrayed Newfoundland. Reading the above claims that Newfoundland literature can still be considered “unique” and “even exotic” can be cringe-inducing for most readers familiar with this subject because these terms have been used *ad nauseam* by a blossoming tourism industry that refers to Newfoundland as the “Far East of the Western World.” National television and newspaper advertisements sport vibrant images of quilts on clotheslines, St. John’s rowhouses, or icebergs in bays and claim that in Newfoundland “citizens and visitors alike, live in [nature’s] glorious shadow.” The people here, so says the Newfoundland and Labrador tourism website, are “genuine and uncomplicated” and possessed of an “old world charm” (newfoundlandlabrador.com). It is not the work of this thesis to take too stringently to task the claims of an agency selling an image, but it would be egregiously flippant to dismiss the effect of the tourism industry on literary depictions of life on the island.

Texts are packaged to sell, despite the authors’ artistic aspirations, and what seems to help sell these Newfoundland books are the tropes and images venerated by the tourism and culture industry. The covers of so many Newfoundland novels feature windswept characters on windswept shores, saltbox houses perilously perched on cliffs or being towed across the ocean, looming lighthouses and overturned dories. The first Canadian edition of *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams* features on its cover a photograph of a wooden-wall steamer, *circa* 1885, despite the fact that the narrative does not begin until twenty years later and concerns itself only momentarily with such vessels (Johnston

places his Smallwood aboard the *S.S. Newfoundland* during the sealing disaster of 1914). Such jacketed novels can be found surrounded on the shelves of souvenir and tourist shops by other items such as highway moose warning signs, cleverly phrased no-smoking logos ("No Puffin, Please") and t-shirts brandishing the definition for skeet or sleeveen. Despite their purpose, Newfoundland novels are being packaged to perpetuate myths of place and identity that have proved popular with both locals and visitors.

In *The Post-Colonial Exotic*, Graham Huggan uses the phrase "anthropological exotic" to describe a "culture" captured in texts and made readily consumable for outside readers: "The anthropological exotic...describes a mode of both perception and consumption...that gives the uninitiated reader access to the text and, by extension, the 'foreign culture' itself" (37). Focusing on African literature, Huggan notes that anthropological exoticism "allows for a reading of African literature as the more or less transparent window onto a richly detailed and culturally specific, but still somehow homogenous – and of course readily marketable – African world" (37). Shifting his gaze to India, Huggan explains how – regardless of the author's desires – a text can become an accepted "reliably informative guidebook to a nation's recent cultural past" (70). Such was the case with Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, a fact lamented by the author: "Many readers wanted [the book] to be a history, even the guide-book, which it was never meant to be.... These variously disappointed readers were judging the book not as a novel, but as some sort of inadequate reference book or encyclopaedia" (Rushdie in Huggan, 70-1). A similar fate befell *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams*. The novel has become something of a cultural handbook, the text one presses on another upon mention

of Newfoundland. Despite Johnston's creation of a fictional Newfoundland landscape, reviewers invariably comment on the "vast, haunting near-continent...already made familiar to American readers by Annie Proulx and Howard Norman" (Powell), as if after reading Johnston's text first-time visitors to the island could effortlessly navigate their way through every cove, bight, and tickle.

Huggan discusses how Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* refutes anthropological exoticist readings while at the same time parodying the romantic notion of salvaging "disappearing cultures" and "untrammelled cultural authenticity" (43). According to Huggan, the strength of *Things Fall Apart* is that it is a "self-consciously hybrid African novel [that] succeeds in attaching a local – largely ancestral, orally transmitted – body of cultural knowledge to an imported ironic sensibility, the sensibility of the modern European novel" (43). Ironic sensibilities are certainly more exported than imported in the case of Newfoundland (see *Codco, This Hour Has 22 Minutes, Rick Mercer Report*), and it is a self-awareness, at times touched with irony, that separates these novels from the anthropological exotic.

James Overton commented twenty years ago on the fetishization of Newfoundland: "Culture is on the march in Newfoundland. In the last decade or two it has become one of the most widely used words in the province" (6). Overton discusses how the perceived importance of preserving and reviving this seemingly disappearing way of life spawned cultural arguments on the necessity of the seal hunt, the apparent need to maintain arcane and no longer necessary means of labour and production, and even a cultural superhero, Captain Newfoundland, who "spouts a kind of mystical

nationalism from the comic cuts of the *Newfoundland Herald*" (6). F. L. Jackson has a slightly more cynical view of Newfoundland's cultural revival in *Surviving Confederation*: "we had no idea we were a living cultural goldmine until the anthropologists came along and told us so" (7). Regardless of its origins or its earnestness, the cult of Newfoundlandia still thrives today in art and acts that range between the constructively and deconstructively introspective to the basest forms of narcissistic navel-gazing.

If self-reflection can be considered a *zeitgeist*, then the novels studied in this thesis were produced during an age of increased introspection on the island. This self-reflexivity is present in each of these texts, and it seems intangibly intertwined with reflections on the land. Discussing his novel, Johnston claims Smallwood "saw Newfoundland's position in the world as being equivalent to his position in Newfoundland" (Morris 12). In part thanks to Fielding's unending jibes, Smallwood remains aware of his diminutive stature throughout the novel, and it fuels his desire for control and command. As a young man he even projects this play between puny and powerful onto his intentions for Newfoundland as he tells his drinking companions in New York, "Newfoundland...will be one of the great small nations of the earth...and I will be prime minister of Newfoundland" (Johnston 165). Though he admits near the end of the narrative to have never solved "the paradox of Newfoundland," there is an affinity (albeit one-sided) between this man and the island he occupies. Smallwood identifies, tests, and measures himself by the geography of Newfoundland. He sees in its remoteness and unremarkable history himself writ large (552). Lost in a blizzard during his attempts

to unionize Newfoundland's railway workers, he foresees his Shelleyian demise, consumed by the antique land he has tried to make his kingdom: "They would find me, perished here, I thought. Around the remains of that pathetic wretch, the lone and level snows stretched far away" (224-25). Haunted by his father's derisive proclamation, "They should have called it Old Lost Land, not Newfoundland, but Old Lost Land," Joe is determined to remove both himself and the island from the ranks of the unknown and combats the fear that either of them, once liberated from obscurity, should then fall into the depths of the forgotten (17). In acts that are both attempts at his own immortality and efforts to stimulate Newfoundland's economy, Smallwood as premier of Newfoundland litters the island with what Fielding calls "Come by Chance-like monoliths.... Quarries, mines, mills, plants smelters, airports, shipyards, refineries and factories" (555). There is a desperation in Smallwood's frenzied spending and industrialization, reflective of a fear that, like Ozymandias and the land he surveyed, both Smallwood and Newfoundland will disappear if not properly and promptly permitted to realize their potential.

In his preface to *Literature and Identity*, Ronald Rompkey notes "Newfoundland and Labrador is the only province with both a pre-Confederation and a post-Confederation consciousness," the only province who can count among its inhabitants some who have shifted from a colonial to a post-colonial mode of living, thinking, and imagining themselves (Rompkey x). Rompkey believes that Newfoundland and Labrador has for the past two generations "been struggling to find its voice in the post-colonial environment, to present a collection of images and narratives that will distinguish it from its past and establish it as a place, an imagined community reflected by its own people"

(x). In the literary world of Newfoundland, this struggle to distinguish Newfoundland from its past has occurred in at least two distinctive forms. The first is the ironic recording and restructuring of the past. In this respect, Newfoundland has produced at least four self-aware, self-reflexive historical metafiction: Johnston's *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams*, Crummey's *River Thieves*, Kavanagh's *Gaff Topsails*, and Winter's *The Big Why*. The first chapter of this thesis will consider Johnston's novel as a postcolonial text, for like so many postcolonial novels, it is concerned with the many presentations of identity that conflate, contend, and conspire to create a national (if not comprehensive) identity. At odds in Johnston's novel (and at times within a single character) are the contradictory but no less valid versions of Newfoundland identity: the resolute survivor, the self-defeatist loser, the eternal optimist, the earthy romantic, and the cynical humorist. Noah Richler may be right in *This is My Country, What's Yours?* when he identifies Johnston's book as the closest any has come to being the "Great Newfoundland Novel," for it does attempt to take on so many facets of the established and still developing Newfoundland identity (306). The other historical novels here are perhaps less ambitious or at the very least less sweeping historically and geographically. But each seems to embody at least one of the sentiments that drive Johnston's novel.

River Thieves is certainly the most cynical of these historical fictions, while *Gaff Topsails* extends Fielding's most romantic notions. Mathews contends these novels continue the debate that began with Horwood's *Tomorrow Will be Sunday* and Janes' *House of Hate*: "the (naïvely?) idealized possibility, presented as tantalizingly actual, opposed to the unsentimentally and uncompromisingly explored darker side of their

society's collective psyche" (17). Both novels consider the island community of Europeans and European descendants and their relationship with the land. Kavanagh's novel places at its heart the relationship between his first settler and the island that adopted, sheltered and nurtured him. The descendants of this folk hero understand the land as more than a home but an extension of themselves. The community and the island create an indissoluble whole powerful enough to absorb and heal other outsiders. Crummeys's settlers have no such commune with the island. They dig and tear at it, damage it as they claim it, and exist not in restorative communities but in isolating and isolated pockets of humanity. There is no healing at the end of *River Thieves*, only a further rending of the rift between settlers and the island they exploit but never understand.

The analysis of Winter's *The Big Why* has been coupled here with a reading of Proulx's *The Shipping News*. Winter fictionalizes the actual experience of American artist Rockwell Kent, who in the months before the First World War had a short and shaky stay in Brigus, Newfoundland. Winter converts Kent into a modern Crusoe, attempting to rediscover himself and his purpose on an island far from the civilization of New York. As an historical fiction, Winter's novel does much of the same work as *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams*, reconsidering and re-creating a people during a pivotal time in their history. Kent's eventual banishment from the island, which is due as much to his egotistical nature and eccentricities as to the islanders' xenophobia, is particularly poignant today as Newfoundland is being constantly portrayed as a welcoming and homey island ripe for exploring and full of inspiration. The contention that *The Big Why*

extends the cynicism of *River Thieves* and the darker points of Johnston's novel is reified through a comparison to Proulx's *The Shipping News*. The chapter dedicated to Winter and Proulx serves as a hinge in this thesis, a connection, or perhaps a break, between the historical and non-historical fictions that comprise this study.

To return to Rompkey's assertion, the other way in which Newfoundland writers have been working to present Newfoundland as a place distinguishable from its past is the novel set in the modern day that contains only passing references to the island and its history. In essence, the more concise and contemporary novels of Riche and others are probably less a reaction to the large historical novels of Johnston *et al* than they are a response to Proulx's romanticizing of the pure and primitive aspects she sees in Newfoundland. Though not an historical novel, *The Shipping News* certainly endeavors, like Johnston's text, to capture so much that can be considered Newfoundland. Though her depiction is at times as damning for Newfoundlanders as it is flattering, the island is, in the end, proven to be a largely welcoming place where even the most damaged and disillusioned can find happiness. Proulx's Quoye is another Crusoe who finds several Fridays to lead him to redemption. Winter's historical novel is certainly a response to this, for his Newfoundlanders, who do not occupy communities whose names would seem more at home on a pirate treasure map or possess names more suitable to Tolkien's hobbits, do not play the noble savage to Kent's world-weary colonizer.

An assessment of Riche's *Rare Birds* suitably follows the chapter focused on outsiders imposing and reshaping themselves on Newfoundland's shore. Like Frank Barry's *Wreckhouse*, a play set in a post-apocalyptic Newfoundland whose inhabitants

can only sing about “when we were real” (68), Riche’s novel is a scathing assessment of an island and a people who smilingly yet desperately parade their culture past outside consumers. That the concept of Newfoundland and its culture is as created as the actual island is real propels Riche’s novel because his characters seem to have no trouble promoting the island yet struggle constantly to survive on it. *Rare Birds* is the most aggressive in promoting its message, and Riche is the most obvious example of Rompkey’s Newfoundlander struggling to find his voice.

Though the publication of *Rare Birds* is actually pre-dated by one of the novels composing the final two chapters of this thesis, Riche’s confrontational approach to identity versus tradition in Newfoundland and Newfoundland writing is much older (see Jackson’s *Surviving Confederation*) and in many ways makes possible the radical disregard of culture and history in Winter’s *This All Happened* and Bowdring’s *The Night Season*. To read these texts is to experience another sort of Newfoundland entirely – a Newfoundland possessed of a homegrown intelligentsia, a Newfoundland of not just artisans but artists, and a Newfoundland where, for the first time since Europeans began straining to settle it, a large section of people can afford to be lazy, or as Bowdring’s Wiseman puts it, “do absolutely nothing” (117). In order to produce great artists, a culture must (arguably) attain a certain amount of prosperity to allow for decadence – or at the very least idle observation. Labourers labour, writers tell the labourers’ stories. As this wave of literary production continues to crest, it is only fitting that the reality of those riding it be considered part of the “Newfoundland” culture. Whether looking backward or simply around themselves, these authors create a culture from which they

remove themselves in order to observe it. It is these crises of identity that both propel and paralyze Wiseman and English.

The final chapter is a discussion of two separate examinations of the St. John's urban jungle. Moore's *Alligator* has more in common with the above urban novels in that it possesses an eccentric and egocentric artist, a young (though rather seasoned) patron of the downtown bar scene and a listless actress. These characters, like the narrators of Bowdring and Winter's novels, have no problem imposing their identity on the urban landscape that surrounds them. Moore probes deeper into St. John's, however, to give readers a glimpse of those tactfully avoided by Gabriel English and Will Wiseman. Through Frank, his mother, and his friends, Moore enters the realm of those who live below the poverty line, who dwell in the non-gentrified St. John's row houses that do not appear in Richard Steele paintings. Moore also reveals that European migration to Newfoundland is not over, since Valentin assumes the role of the indifferent, brutal colonizer, and the new "native" Newfoundlanders find themselves as unprepared as the Beothuk to deal with this new menace. Harvey's *Inside* is a complete break from the other urban novels in that it never offers a glimpse of nostalgia or romanticism. Harvey's characters live in a world that could not be made beautiful by even the most sepia-soaked of Fielding's reminiscences. Yet the characters of *Inside* are as fiercely proud and protective of their homeland as Fielding or Smallwood. That the reality of Myrden's world does not allow for romantic reflection makes for a unique and important novel: the capturing of a people and a place that is not only void of sentiment but where sentiment is not even a possibility.

Moore's dying filmmaker perhaps best approaches the contemplation of place called for by Smallwood near the end of *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams*: "Perhaps only an artist can measure up to such a place or come to terms with the impossibility of doing so" (552). Madeleine dies before completing the film that was to contain in it everything Newfoundland, an ambition as lofty and impossible as Joe's desire to completely modernize Newfoundland in his lifetime. Though Madeleine and Fielding do provide useful bookends to this examination of Newfoundland literature. Both travelers and students of the island's history, both driven to somehow capture before it is lost all the reality and romanticism that makes a place, yet both ultimately urban dwellers, they themselves represent the impossible paradox of Newfoundland identity. And both exhibit the self-reflexivity that seems to be the unifying Newfoundland trait.

In an interview with Herb Wyile for *Speaking in the Past Tense*, Johnston notes that "there was a time, a very recent time, when Newfoundland was more or less a country" (110). It is that uncertain "more or less" that is such a powerful sentiment in Newfoundland culture and literature, as Johnston is well aware: "Newfoundland...had a very well-defined culture and character and that is what I am writing about...either the loss or the perceived loss of those things or the fear that some time in the future those things will be lost" (110). Johnston echoes Chief Bromden's "But it's the truth even if it didn't happen" (Kesey 13) when discussing this (perceived) loss of culture and potential in Newfoundland: "Whether it is true or not is not really the point. The point is that it is there" (Wyile 119). That so much of Johnston's novel (along with other historical novels and a culture industry) is focused not on actual loss but on loss of potential – potential

autonomy, potential use of resources – means that his “historical” novel must be focused on psyche rather than actual events, for the most important historical events in shaping Newfoundland’s identity appear to be the ones that did not happen. To examine Newfoundland history is to examine a culture that has been doubly shaped by colonialism – as the aggressor to the Beothuk and as underlings to British imperialism. Most importantly, to examine Newfoundland history is to examine a people who willingly declared themselves unfit for nationhood. Such an admission of defeat leaves a “psychic wound,” as historian Jerry Bannister puts it (132), a nagging notion of failure at the core of Newfoundland identity. Any such fictionalization of this history and identity would be deeply self-reflexive.

In discussing contemporary Canadian historical fiction like Rudy Wiebe’s *The Temptations of Big Bear*, Linda Hutcheon coins the term “historical metafiction” (Hutcheon 25). She claims these texts “are not quite historical novels in the traditional sense, for they are metafictional in their attention to the acts of writing, reading, and interpreting. Thus, they are self-consciously fictive but also concerned with the acts and consequences of reading and writing stories, both historical and fictional” (26). In *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams*, Johnston has a young Joe visit an aged Judge Prowse to have his father’s copy of *A History of Newfoundland* autographed. In contrast to Winter’s depiction of Prowse in *The Big Why* as an authoritative and vigorous “well-built man” with the physique of an “Austrian skier” (Winter 217, 238), Johnston’s Prowse is a stroke-addled old man “all but buried in the detritus of scholarship,” suffering from agraphia and illegibly scrawling an addendum to his history, in which he details the life

of Cluney Aylward – the “representative Newfoundlander” who is in reality a “stroke-inspired fiction” (Johnston 47,48,49). The implication here is obvious, as Wyile explains: “The termination of the ideal of historiographical comprehensiveness, Johnston playfully suggests, is madness, pathological solipsism” (*Speculative* 155). As Prowse himself notes, “The history of the Colony is only very partially contained in printed books; it lies buried under great rubbish heaps of unpublished records” (Prowse vii). Moreover, as Crummey demonstrates (perhaps more artfully than Johnston), limiting oneself to what has been written, published or otherwise, further foregoes the possibility of a comprehensive Newfoundland history.

One of the trappers who joins Peyton on his expedition has a shelter deep in the Newfoundland interior. Richmond’s tilt is representative of the creeping colonialism practiced by these settlers. Most notably, the walls of the hut are “papered with...the pages of a Methodist missionary magazine” (Crummey 245). When asked about it, Richmond replies, “Can’t read meself.... Keeps the draught down a bit” (245-46). This use of language to breach the Newfoundland unknown recalls an earlier expedition in which Peyton and his fellows “dropped names behind themselves like stones set to mark the path out of the wilderness – Cull’s Knoll; Buchan’s Island; Deep Woody Point; Surprise Brook for a stream that Peyton had fallen into through the ice” (98-99). What is most telling in Richmond’s situation is his illiteracy, the fact that his history is “overwriting” the history of the Beothuk, yet neither can read the language in which the “official” history will be recorded. Here it becomes obvious what Crummey means when he writes of the “story that circles and circles” the demise of the Beothuk. Loss encircles

loss, and the recorded history spirals further and further away from the events and those who lived them.

The early chapters of *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams* are punctuated by the drunken rages of Smallwood's father lambasting his native "Old Lost Land." It does not take long for Charlie Smallwood to shift focus from the island to his son, himself, and all Newfoundlanders: "You're ruined boy, you're ruined.... We're *both* ruined, we're *all* ruined, we're done for now" (65). Consummated in these ravings is a sense of loss and "perpetual belatedness" (Kertzer 162) that permeates much of what can be classified as contemporary Newfoundland historical fiction. Something fundamental has been lost in these narratives, and what remains is ruined, or at best less than it could have been. Moreover, protagonists like Smallwood occupy a space that is, as Jonathan Kertzer puts it, "resolutely after the fact, where the 'fact' is any principle defining period or place" (162). For Johnston, this formative fact is Newfoundland's renunciation of nationhood and subsequent confederation with Canada. For Crummey, this determining and detrimental moment is the eradication of Newfoundland's native inhabitants, the Beothuk. Irreparably and irritatingly, the central characters of both novels arrive too late to prevent this loss but are nonetheless defined by it and driven to somehow recoup or replace it. The result in both texts is not a romantic recapturing of lost potential but the realization that the "pointless preoccupation with things as they were not and never could have been" is as much a constant part of Newfoundland heritage and identity as are the ocean and the land (Johnston 452).

At the end of Johnston's text, Fielding, awash in nostalgia and regret, laments,

"We have joined a nation that we do not know, a nation that does not know us" (*Colony* 560). Perhaps Crummey would counter we are a nation that we do not know. The ambiguity at the core of the Newfoundland identity is reflected in Peyton's final, indefinite statement: "All my life I've loved what didn't belong to me" (Crummey 327). It is uncertain at the time if he means Cassie Jure, his onetime housekeeper, tutor, and unrequited love, or the land, with which he has had the most intimate relationship: "He understood the backcountry, the habits of the animals, the patterns of the weather. And it was this knowledge that made him feel he was closest here to belonging, to loving something that might, in some unconscious way, love him in return" (166). Even this hope of a reciprocal relationship is plagued by uncertainty, as the promise of an expedition to contact the Beothuk brings with it an anxiety that followed Peyton "into the woods and would not leave him," instilling in him the unshakeable sensation "of being watched" (166). The island he loves is not his.

The "perpetual belatedness" of Peyton, Smallwood and Fielding means they begin their narratives in a Newfoundland already shaped and scarred by those who came before them. As Crummey tells Wyile, "what happened to the Beothuk is something that Newfoundland will never get past....we are always going to be picking at that scab, never really knowing exactly what we want" (298). Johnston's "nagging tug of the past" will always plague Newfoundlanders, as will the "pointless preoccupation with things as they were not and never could have been" (*Colony* 452). No revisionist history can recoup these losses, but it can reveal another story, present another possibility, and perhaps lift one more voice from the history of lost potential.

Mathews claims that Kavanagh's *Gaff Topsails* can be read as a companion piece to *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams*. This rings true because both novels revolve around Confederation with Canada and what that means for Newfoundland's future and identity. Both novels also reserve a special space – a space both inside and outside the main narrative – for a supplemental history. Through what Hutcheon would undoubtedly qualify as historically metafictional means, both Johnston and Kavanagh make obvious that their narratives are occurring within and as a result of a larger history. Johnston interlaces his narrative with excerpts from Fielding's *Condensed History of Newfoundland*, a response to Prowse's history which plagues both Fielding and Smallwood throughout the novel. In the middle of Kavanagh's examination of one day in a Newfoundland outpost he places an impossible and mythical history of Tomas Croft, the first European to settle in Newfoundland. Through the inclusion of these histories, both novelists are acknowledging the need to educate their readers on Newfoundland even as they write a fictionalized version of the island. The act of preserving on the page of their fictions the history they are fictionalizing is the mark of Hutcheon's historical metafiction. It is as if both Johnston and Kavanagh are gripped by the same panic as Smallwood or Fielding, the panic to save or at least record everything Newfoundland before it is too late. What Kavanagh cannot include in his history of Tomas Croft he forces into his narrative through the pet names he has one of his characters continuously bestow upon her son. Some of the names are from a Newfoundland history that borders on folklore while others are important but obscured names from pivotal moments in Newfoundland's actual history, Peter Easton and Sir Alexander Clutterbuck being two notable examples.

Johnston goes so far to make history, or at least Judge Prowse's rendition of it, a central plot device in his narrative. To borrow a phrase from film studies, Prowse's *History of Newfoundland* functions as a "MacGuffin" in Johnston's novel – an object that motivates the protagonists and advances the plot. One copy of Prowse's text is used to write the anonymous letter that shames a young Smallwood and motivates him to drop out of Bishop Feild College. Another copy causes an avalanche that kills a man and burdens both Joe and his mother with lifelong guilt. Joe carries a copy with him on his cross-island and off-island adventures. Fielding's writings seem to be divided between responses to Smallwood's present actions and responses to Prowse's version of history. In each of these historical fictions, one is made constantly aware that the "actual" history is being both conserved and questioned.

To stay momentarily in the parlance of film, the more famous Newfoundland historical figures are reduced to cameos in Winter's *The Big Why*. Smallwood gets short shrift as a former premier eager to please a visiting artist, while Winter's vigorous Prowse may be metafictional not as a reaction to history but to Johnston's pitiful version of the man in *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams*. Winter's fictionalization of Rockwell Kent's life in Newfoundland is metafictional in its reading and re-creating of these characters, but it is also willing to greatly expand to the point of deconstructing these characters. Winter's Bob Bartlett, who in his lifetime was a bachelor and in his death an icon, is incredibly human in his confessional speeches to Kent concerning his insecurities and a moment of sexual awakening shared with a man in New York. To so drastically alter (or speculate on) the life of an actual individual may seem extreme even to those

who emphatically claim historical fiction is still fiction. Bartlett's revealing statements appear near the end of the novel and compile the last images the readers have of the man. Winter has made certain that this presentation of Bartlett will be one of the moments the readers take with them upon completing the novel. Winter's purpose here is probably best revealed in one of the discussion questions that appear in the first paperback edition of *The Big Why*: "Near the end of the novel we hear Bob Bartlett confessing that his fist had travelled heart-deep through the rectum of another man. Is *The Big Why* an historical novel?" (378). The question may appear odd or even hilarious in its apparent jump in logic, but in attempting to answer it one may find the purpose and problems not only of Winter's novel, but Newfoundland historical fiction.

When Kent meets Bartlett at The Explorers Club in New York, the sailor is old, no longer exploring, and drunk. Kent does not pry the confession from Bartlett. The story comes unbidden, catching both Kent and the readers by surprise: "A few years ago, he said, I met this man in New York. A married man, much younger than me. And we got into it... We went back to my room at the Murray Hill Hotel and got into it. The man guided me. I ended up with my fist in the man. I had my hand up the man's rectum. The man showed me how to follow the course of the large intestine to the solar plexus... I could feel the man's heart beat" (371). Such creative license makes Johnston's decision to fashion a fictional love interest for Smallwood comparatively minor. Yet the creation of Sheilagh Fielding did cause a small stir in Newfoundland. Perhaps Winter's jarring depiction of Bartlett is a commentary on this reaction or possibly an attempt to generate the same sort of response. But the discussion question gives light to the fact that this

moment is a metaphor. To create historical fiction is to plunge fist-first into the life of another person, "to follow the course of the large intestine" to the man's heart. To re-enter history this way is to bypass all the predigested knowledge of the man to get to the beating heart and, in fictionalizing him somehow humanize him in a way "actual" history cannot. Historical fiction is more than taking an historical figure captive, as Pierson claims Johnston did to Smallwood; it is to enter the life of another person in the most intimate way and convert him to some sort of puppet, a ventriloquist's dummy speaking the words of the author as though they were his own.

That Winter is at the end of his novel playing with the notion of historical figure as author's puppet is compounded through Bartlett's discussion of the other places he and the man visited prior to retiring to the explorer's hotel room: "We'd been to a bar where a man was aloft, his legs in straps, and you could go over to him. You could manoeuvre his thighs and stand between them. The man did this, and fucked him from behind. I watched the man do this. It was a strange new world, it was" (371). Placing such a stark and memorable image at the end of his narrative, Winter seems to be more than coyly hinting at what he is doing through his historical metafiction. As in Hutcheon's definition, Winter's novel appears to be "self-consciously fictive but also concerned with the acts and consequences of reading and writing stories" (25). Where Johnston and Crummey represent this through using actual literature within their narratives and Kavanagh does so by continuous name-dropping of historical figures, Winter uses an actual man as a text to remind the readers that this history is being manipulated. Moreover, through the image of the man hanging marionette-style in the bar, Winter seems to be telling his audience that

what he is doing is simply (but intimately) toying with history. Bartlett's story is a powerful one, for it may raise the ire of some who are not comfortable with this portrayal, yet on a metaphorical level, it reveals how foolish it would be to be upset by it. Like the hanging man, these characters, inspired by actual people now deceased, can only passively accept the manipulations of the author. These characters are poked and prodded by the authors, placed into situations unknown to their historical namesakes, and used to speculate on some possible, missed, or unrequited moments in history. As Aristotle writes in *Poetics*, the poet differs from the historian in that "the function of the poet is not to say what *has* happened, but to say the kind of thing that *would* happen" (16). Or, as Chief Bromden puts it, "it's the truth even if it didn't happen."

Winter's profound and peculiar penetration of Newfoundland history has a closer affinity to the texts studied in the second half of this thesis, the decidedly non-historical novels. There is a desire inherent in each to write about Newfoundland without being confined by the history, or by somehow including in the narrative some sort of catch-all explanation of the island on which the story occurs. It seems increasingly difficult to present a particular rendition of life in Newfoundland without first paying homage or at the very least acknowledging prior, perhaps, more accepted versions of the place and people. This is why Winter's depiction of Bartlett and his proclivities is so profound; it is a conscious effort to push aside this obligation to history, to cast off any imposing notions of Newfoundland existence. This sentiment is echoed several times in the works of Riche, Moore, and others who set their narratives in contemporary Newfoundland.

One of the more insightful moments in "The Rocks Here Tell Stories" happens

during an interview with Edward Riche. Following excerpts from interviews with poets, academics, and other authors discussing the tangible and intangible qualities of Newfoundland culture, Riche declares, "I've had it up to here with authenticity." Riche goes on to say he would like to bulldoze the "heritage" buildings in St. John's and replace them with ultramodern steel and glass monstrosities. Riche does not rely on sly inferences in *Rare Birds* to continue his attack on Newfoundland culture. From the "odious twins, Damhnait and Sinead" of Dave's friend Larry Doyle, whose names, Dave contends, are one of Larry's desperate attempts to hold onto his "uncertain Irishness," to the "Victorianized" old homes of downtown St. John's, Dave's critical eye does not miss the chance to reveal the artifice behind the presumed authenticity (Riche 25, 96). Riche also reveals how this clinging to heritage condemns as readily as it saves.

Newfoundland's history is one of failure, as the tourism industry continues to remind Dave: "Newfoundland had, in 1948, voted itself out of existence. The battered and bewildered nation, the sport of historic misfortune, the Cinderella of the British Empire, had ended its suffering by taking its own life" (150). Riche reminds his readers that a reification of this history is the valorization of a nation that declared itself unfit for self-government. The push of culture and heritage goes hand-in-glove with the primitive portrayals of Newfoundland and Newfoundlanders. The islanders of Riche's novel are referred to as barbarians and destroyers by outside officials. Authoritative texts scanned by Phonse and Dave in search of a likely bird to be the subject of their hoax reveals a widespread prejudice of these savage Newfoundlanders: "Some authors were firm and certain in their condemnation of Newfoundlanders in the case of the [great auk's]

extinction, telling of blood-thirsty boatloads heading out to the Funk Islands and pummeling the utterly helpless, flightless birds all the way to oblivion. Newfoundlanders, it was said, had a propensity for bashing things" (78). Details are also given of the Newfoundlander's joy in killing baby seals. In his own sardonic way, Riche also touches on the guilt that no doubt drives Crummey's *River Thieves*: "Guns and disease were the weapons of choice for the stupid Newfs' undeclared, somnambulatory campaign to rid the island of its native Beothuk Indians" (78). It is not hard to understand why so many authors are trying to distinguish themselves and their work from this history.

The characters of Moore's *Alligator* or Bowdring's *The Night Season* are not perpetually belated, at least not in the way Kertzer means it. Nor are their personal tragedies somehow connected to the tragic history of the island they inhabit. The problem with solidifying this thesis as an examination of Newfoundland identity and literature is that the Newfoundland presented in each of these narratives is so radically different. The fact that the setting is Newfoundland also becomes far less important as one moves through this thesis from *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams* to *Inside*. In discussing the literary history of Newfoundland, Rompkey notes that "critical writing, especially the work of graduate students at Memorial University, has started to place that history in perspective, but much remains to be said, both for the benefit of the student and the general reader" (x). It is in this spirit that this thesis is presented, not as a definitive examination of Newfoundland literature or culture, but as one voice among other graduate students and scholars and non-academics attempting to put into perspective (but also challenge) Newfoundland's lived and literary history. Much does remain to be said,

and it is to be hoped that this thesis will facilitate some of these dialogues.

Two more things must be made clear before leaving this introduction. First, this is an examination of the literature of Newfoundland, not Labrador. Or even Newfoundland and Labrador. As was said about the other Newfoundland novels not studied here, the range of texts taking Labrador as their subject could provide ample inspiration for several theses. An attempt to examine some of these texts in this thesis would be more dismissive than inclusive. Novels like Horwood's *White Eskimo* and John Steffler's *The Afterlife of George Cartwright*, as well as the "creative non-fiction" of Randall Silvis' *Hearts So Hungry* and the seminal *Lure of the Labrador Wild* which inspired it, all need to be considered as a presentation of Labrador identity. But to combine them with an examination of Newfoundland literature would be incongruous at best. Labrador remains here as it does in *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams*, glimpsed by Fielding from the island side, acknowledged but not examined.

Second, there is no overarching theory through which these texts are viewed. This thesis is governed by the desire to examine identity and place as they are presented in Newfoundland fiction, and in that sense it owes much to postcolonial theory and the possibilities it provides for reading identities as conflicting and ever-evolving entities. The opening chapter on *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams* is an overt attempt at a postcolonial reading of that text. The following chapter on *River Thieves* could be classified as postcolonial in that both novel and chapter focus on the effects of colonization, but it is more focused on loss and uses in large part the Freudian writings of Jacques Lacan to examine that loss. The examination of *Gaff Topsails* relies mostly on

the work of ecocritical theorists. At its best, ecocriticism provides valuable insight into the connection between people and place. At its worst, it can appear as simply a new way to talk about setting. Faced with the erotic presentation of the land, the people's relationship to it, and the rejuvenating nature of Kavanagh's "womb-cove" community, the only proper way to read the identity created there is to employ ecocritical readings. Kavanagh's text is more than a simple presentation of a unique landscape; it is the examination of a concept of home that goes beyond naming a place or even constructing a house. *The Shipping News* and *The Big Why*, both concerned with an outsider's attempt to foster a new life on the island, seem to naturally lend themselves to postcolonial criticism. Modern Prosperos and Crusoes, Quoye and Kent, view the island through the eyes of the occident and see among the islanders many Calibans and noble savages. The consideration of Riche's *Rare Birds* does draw somewhat on postcolonial theory but is not so much concerned with colonizer and colonized as it is with tourist and host. The work on tourism and culture by John Urry and Daniel Boorstin drives most of the analysis in this chapter.

The examination of the "urban" novels is certainly free of any postcolonial notions. The chapter on *The Night Season* and *This All Happened* depends deeply on Walter Benjamin's work on the *flâneur* in *The Arcades Project* and other texts. The protagonists of both texts are urban idlers, reflective amblers who are content to do nothing or appear to do nothing. Their St. John's of shop windows, art galleries, restaurants, and bars is not unlike Benjamin's arcade. The examination of the island *flâneur* is a pivotal chapter because it presents a new and different Newfoundland not

considered in the other texts. The final chapter on *Alligator* and *Inside* is both a companion and a contradiction to the other urban chapter. The critical sources here are considerations of the city not as a romantic arcade but as a primal danger zone. Raymond Williams' work on the city and the country figures here, but so too does the work of others who take as their subject recognized urban jungles like Detroit and New York. This chapter is radically different from those that precede it, and it threatens to undermine the possibility of a "Newfoundland" literature.

The theories used here are not necessarily related, but they are all related to place, be it the (post)colonial contention for land, the idle wandering through streets, or the mystical connection to landscape. The particular interpretations, like the novels, were chosen because they promised to be the most rewarding and challenging. The driving purpose throughout this thesis was not to find the Newfoundland identity but to examine the many ways in which Newfoundland identity is presented in contemporary fiction. This thesis began with the belief in the importance of answering Smallwood's call in *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams*, not to "solve" Newfoundland but to "come to terms with the impossibility of doing so." This thesis also originated in the belief of the value of examining closely several of the novels that mark a cultural renaissance in Newfoundland. Accompanied as it is at times by the boosterism of a sometimes jingoistic culture and tourism industry, this new literary surge must be examined as a critical examination of Newfoundland identity rather than simply an extension of that culture. Place and identity are certainly intertwined in these texts, but they are also frequently threatened with separation either by out-migration, Confederation, or other forms of

colonialism. To examine people and place in Newfoundland literature is to examine the two most complementary yet conflicting concepts of Newfoundland identity.

Chapter 1

A Postcolonial Reading of Wayne Johnston's *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams*

In his contribution to the *Royal Commission on Renewing and Strengthening Our Place in Canada* historian Jerry Bannister notes that Newfoundland is one of many "post-colonial societies ... confront[ing] the effects of imperialism" (Bannister 151). At the forefront of this confrontation, according to Bannister, is a "wave of new writing based on literary interpretations of the province's past" (137). Wayne Johnston's *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams* figures prominently in Bannister's article, and the historian claims that such examples of "historical impressionism" (139) have begun to play a major role in (re)defining Newfoundland's culture and history. While the Newfoundland postcolonial condition needs to be considered, a postcolonial reading of Johnston's novel would best demonstrate how *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams* is an investigation of Newfoundland identity that subverts and rejects various myths and tropes perpetrated by both islanders and outsiders.

Jim Zuccherro discusses the benefits of "postcolonial reading" in his contribution to *Is Canada Postcolonial?* when he says, "Theories of hybridity and ambivalence emerging out of current postcolonial studies provide useful models and methods ... for rethinking Canadian narratives ... by reorientating us to ideas about diaspora, cultural identity and cultural belonging" (Zuccherro 253). While Johnston's novel deals only briefly with the "Newfoundland diaspora" (his protagonist at one point does leave the island to find work in New York), it does deal extensively with the notion of Newfoundlanders "leaving" their colony/nation and "arriving" in a strange new country.

As Sheilagh Fielding puts it in the opening lines of *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams*, “The past is literally another country now” (Johnston 3).

The anxiety generated by the loss of “cultural identity and cultural belonging” brought on by such a unique “diaspora” is reiterated by Fielding near the end of the novel when she claims, “[w]e have joined a nation that we do not know, a nation that does not know us” (560). Yet to know Newfoundland proves to be as difficult a task for Newfoundlanders as it is for the sometimes bemused, always baffled colonial educators, vice-regal representatives, and appointed commissioners who try to define and govern the island throughout the novel. Johnston and his characters at different times paradoxically regard the island with earnest romanticism and cutting cynicism, limitless enthusiasm and self-ironic realism. A postcolonial reading of Johnston’s characters will demonstrate how their ambivalence and the failure to establish a singular Newfoundland identity may actually empower Newfoundlanders whom Johnston is trying to liberate from notions of defeatism and the “culture of grievance” (Simpson A15) that is said to permeate this island.

Johnston rightly chooses former premier Joseph R. Smallwood as the protagonist of his novel. Smallwood’s life marks a period of great change and uncertainty. Newfoundland itself during this period shifted identity several times from an independent country to an unwanted British colony to a have-not Canadian province to a potential goldmine of exploitable resources. By setting his novel in this century of turmoil, Johnston is able to use Smallwood’s life as a microcosm of Newfoundland history, culture, and identity. As a direct reaction to the “contagion of self-debasement” (Johnston

338) epitomized by Smallwood's father Charlie and several other Newfoundlanders throughout the novel, Johnston depicts Joey as an optimist driven by failure, desperate to forge a new Newfoundland identity based upon the tenet that Newfoundlanders "always succeed every time they get a decent chance" (386). As if to counter (but not always contradict) Smallwood's positivism, Johnston creates the character of Sheilagh Fielding, an ironist, a seemingly boundless satirist (she goes so far as to assume a *nom de plume* to wage a political war of words against herself through St. John's rival newspapers), and a distant cynical realist who (privately) romanticizes the past while meeting each attempt to deride or improve or otherwise know Newfoundlanders with the same acrid sarcasm. Both Smallwood and Fielding are personifications of Newfoundland, so contradictory yet so undeniably of the island that they threaten to debunk forever any notion of a singular Newfoundland character.

Johnston's *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams* seems to fulfill several of the criteria of postcolonial literature as defined by literary critics. According to Saree S. Makdisi, many postcolonial narratives are "presented through a number of often conflicting voices" (542). Johnston's work is more a rejection of what Newfoundlanders are not than a quest to discover what they are. His subject proves so multi-faceted that Johnston is forced to employ two contradictory narrators to tell his tale. The authors of *The Empire Writes Back* claim that "[a] major feature of postcolonial literatures is the concern with place and displacement" (Ashcroft 8) and "a pervasive concern with the myths of identity and authenticity" (9). Fielding's unease over losing her home without ever actually leaving it reflects the postcolonial anxiety over finding one's place in an

altered world. In Johnston's hands Smallwood's life becomes a campaign to debunk the "myths of identity and authenticity" perpetrated by D. W. Prowse in *A History of Newfoundland* (1895) and believed by outside officials as well as Newfoundlanders. Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin also claim that postcolonial literatures "crack asunder the apparently inescapable dialectic of history" (35). Recorded history is "tampered with, rewritten, and realigned from the point of view of the victims of its destructive progress" (34). Johnston re-enters Newfoundland's history and gives voice to those who were denied it originally. The "[r]eceived history" (34) discussed in *The Empire Writes Back* is reduced by Johnston to just one story among many that contribute to Newfoundland's history and identity. Anne McClintock would call Johnston's novel a "hybrid history" (McClintock 292) in which multiple pasts are used to buttress an unlimited future.

While Johnston's work possesses many attributes of the postcolonial novel, this reading of *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams* must first consider Newfoundland's claim to the postcolonial condition. If a postcolonial novel is a "counternarrative" (Makdisi 535) displaying "an inevitable tendency towards subversion" (Ashcroft 33), it is necessary first to determine exactly what narrative of Newfoundland Johnston is trying to counter and subvert through his "scuttlework of empire" (Johnston 442).

Is Newfoundland Postcolonial?

In an essay discussing his novel, Johnston claims *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams* "was written in the belief that in this story of Newfoundland, this love story whose two main players are characters inspired by Joe Smallwood and the wholly imaginary Sheilagh Fielding, readers everywhere would see reflected their own attempts to crawl

out from underneath the avalanche of history with their human individuality intact” (Johnston, “Treatment”). Johnston releases his “inspired” and “wholly imagined” characters into Newfoundland’s past in order to begin the usurpation of a Newfoundland identity fostered by this “received history” (Ashcroft 34):

The Colony of Unrequited Dreams is not biography or history, it is a novel, fiction, a work of the imagination in part inspired by historical events and set in what Michael Ondaatje calls “historical time”.... My intention in writing *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams* was to fashion out of the formless infinitude of “facts” about Smallwood and Newfoundland a story, a novel, a work of art that would express a felt, emotional truth that an adherence to an often untrustworthy and inevitably incomplete historical record would have made impossible. (Johnston, “Treatment”)

Such novels replace mono-historic certainty with a problematic plurality. The legitimized history is contaminated by the hitherto unrecognized voices of those Johnston believes are “crawl[ing] out from underneath the avalanche of history.” The result is what postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha terms a “hybrid national narrative” which “turns the nostalgic past into a disruptive ‘anterior’ and displaces the historical present – opens it up to other histories and incommensurable narrative subjects” (Bhabha 167). But what exactly is this “often untrustworthy and inevitably incomplete historical record” that Johnston believes is covering other Newfoundland histories?

A major source of the history Johnston is underwriting in his novel is the “grand narrative of struggle” (Bannister 128) that is Judge Prowse’s *History of Newfoundland*.

Bannister notes that Prowse's text is a central plot device throughout *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams*. Words are cut from it and pasted to the scandalous letter that leads to Smallwood's dismissal from Bishop Feild School. Charlie Smallwood's autographed copy of the text actually causes a fatal avalanche when his wife tosses it from their home. Smallwood "compulsively carries [a copy] with him throughout his journey of self-discovery" (Bannister 138) and reads it again and again as he walks across the island unionizing Newfoundland's railway section men. Charlie Smallwood refers to the text only as "the Book" (Johnston 65), at times revering it, at other times railing against it: "[t]hat cursed Book...I wish to God I'd never seen that Book" (65). A counter-history which runs throughout the novel, Fielding's "Condensed *History of Newfoundland*" dedicates a chapter to "the cursed book" (406) she is dismantling: "That BOOK! Had we departed from this world ignorant of its existence we should have been happier than we expect to be when the final curtain falls. Little comfort is it now that upon the publication of our History all memory of his will from the minds of the reading public be erased. If not from mine. No, never from mine, unless one of the balms of heaven be amnesia" (406).

Prowse's *History of Newfoundland* stands as the accepted narrative of Newfoundland against which Johnston's self-determining characters must establish themselves. Bannister notes, "Johnston goes so far as to depict Prowse's *History* as the secular Bible of the island's people" (Bannister 125). Writing a century after Prowse, Johnston cannot help but notice how "Prowse's view still dominates popular conceptions of history," creating a "basic prism" (125) through which Newfoundlanders regard

themselves and their culture – a determining factor in the formation of the Newfoundland psyche. A text born of a “paradigm of repression” (126) which works hard to maintain that narrative, *A History of Newfoundland* is depicted as a central contributor to the sorrow and self-debasement that inflicts so many islanders in Johnston’s text.

To Bannister, Prowse’s history is “an account of how Newfoundland had triumphed in the face of adversity” (125). Prowse’s text has gone on to inspire literature that continually

collapses the distance between historical epochs into a single meta-narrative which deliberately blurs the line between the past and the present. Rather than triumphing over their history of oppression, according to this view, Newfoundlanders are haunted by it. We are not free from our past but trapped by it, forced to endure seemingly endless cycles of economic failure and social misery. (125-26)

This history of abuse and exploitation at the hands of the British enabled Newfoundlanders to establish a postcolonial identity like other postcolonial nations trying to recover from British imperialism. According to Bannister, many (including former premier Brian Peckford) believe that such a history “inflicted a debilitating psychic wound from which it was not certain Newfoundland could recover” (132). Newfoundlanders were suffering from “a kind of post-traumatic stress disorder” (132) that left them uncertain, unhappy, and forever behind in economic and social development.

Though he cannot be entirely blamed for the creation of the colonized and downtrodden Newfoundlander, Prowse certainly played his part in perpetrating and

solidifying this myth. According to Prowse, Newfoundland – at best neglected, at worse oppressed by the British Crown – is a fundamental though exploited and overlooked player in British imperialism. Prowse promises to immortalize the dismissed heroics of “old Devon sailors who, against tremendous odds, retained this island for England without the slightest help from the Crown” (Prowse xxv). Prowse later claims that “our unfortunate Colony,” beleaguered as it was by wars and attacks from “French privateers,” was the strong link that kept Britain connected with the New World: “we were certainly the cock-pit of America” (236). Despite their apparently pivotal part in the consolidation of Britain’s presence in the New World, these Newfoundland settlers were, according to Prowse, subjugated from the beginning:

Newfoundland was colonised not by aristocratic and fantastic patentees, but by hard-working humble settlers from the West of England; oppressed by the harsh laws of the Stuarts, and persecuted by the western adventurers, they clung with sturdy tenacity to the land they had made their home. (113-14)

Prowse creates from the descendants of Irish, English, and French immigrants a pseudo-race of natural born fisherfolk, labourers, and survivalists who have endured enough “successive disasters...to fill up the cup of our woe” (536). Prowse gives birth to a culture that is not only destined to suffer, but knows how to suffer.

Prowse goes on to write how this capacity for surviving in deprived and detrimental conditions would serve Newfoundlanders well, for they were to be mistreated and misunderstood by their British oppressors. Prowse’s depiction of the British fishing admiral commemorates the abuse Newfoundlanders suffered at the hands of the

“Devonshire adventurers” who enacted laws “entirely to suit their selfish monopoly and greed” (Prowse 144). Prowse portrays the fishing admiral, representative of British authority, as a thief and a rum-runner who “freely dispensed [Justice] to the suitor who paid the most for it” (226). Bannister deconstructs this portrait in his article “The Fishing Admirals in Eighteenth-Century Newfoundland” when he claims that Prowse’s depiction is based on (at best) fourth-hand information. Prowse had never seen a fishing admiral and was relying on generations-old accounts given by Patrick Morris, who was himself drawing on earlier assertions made by Lewis Amadeus Anspach. Both Morris and Anspach were “heavily influenced by John Reeves’ seminal *History of the Government of the Island of Newfoundland*” (Bannister 2001, 166). “Time would fail to recount all the enormities and barbarities of these ignorant vulgar tyrants,” Prowse laments, a failing he aims to remedy by recording narratives of Newfoundlanders who claim fishing admirals “fined, triangled, and whipped at their pleasure every unfortunate wretch who earned their displeasure” (Prowse 226). Prowse cites as his source that every person was whipped a Mr. Pearce of Twillingate who “remembered as a boy seeing a man triangled” (226). The tyranny of British officials, which had by the time of the events depicted in Johnston’s novel become one of the central “facts” behind Newfoundland’s dire financial and social situation, was “based on little more than local legend and political hearsay” (Bannister 166).

The supposed corruption of British officials and their attitudes toward their Newfoundland subjects would continue to serve Newfoundland historians in the generations following Prowse. Patrick O’Flaherty’s *Old Newfoundland: A History to*

1843 cites a well-known seventeenth-century British aphorism which is meant to encapsulate the English attitude toward Newfoundland settlers: "An Englishman transplanted ... was not the same kind of Englishman" (O'Flaherty 54). O'Flaherty's text abounds with unflattering depictions of Newfoundland settlers set down by British observers: "The [Newfoundland] inhabitants were unruly, took up the best places for fishing and debauched the seamen by selling them wine and brandy.... Newfoundland, once summer ended [and the British authorities departed] was pictured as a cesspool of vice, laziness, and drunkenness" (43). By the time Johnston begins writing *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams*, fishing admirals, merchants, and other British officials had long been established through Prowse's history and other subsequent histories and textbooks as the villains in the story of early Newfoundland. Derogatory depictions of Newfoundlanders such as those mentioned by O'Flaherty confirmed the smugness and self-supposed superiority of those who not only ruled Newfoundlanders but regarded them as a fallen people. Newfoundlanders' claim to the postcolonial condition shared by former colonies like India may be tenuous, but it was certainly heartily believed. In "The Politics of Cultural Memory," Bannister questions this type of Newfoundland history by claiming it "has perpetuated romantic myths rooted in an interpretation of Newfoundlanders as victims" (Bannister 145). Richard Gwyn, in *Smallwood: The Unlikely Revolutionary* does Bannister one better when he writes that the "Newfoundland pride" that rises from this supposed legacy of abuse not only "represented a triumph over adversity, it represented also a triumph over reality" (Gwyn 76).

In his biography of Smallwood, Gwyn cites "the most eloquent speech

[Smallwood] has ever made" (97), that the future premier gave at the National Convention on 27 October 1946. A public forum to discuss Newfoundland's possible confederation with Canada, the Convention enabled Smallwood to tackle all the myths of Newfoundland and Newfoundlanders that had been created and compounded since Prowse. Smallwood begins by reiterating a common lament: "The history of this island is an unbroken history of struggle.... We live more poorly, more shabbily, more meanly [than our brothers on the mainland]. Our life is more a struggle. Our struggle is tougher, more naked, more hopeless" (97). Rather than continue the tradition of transferring the blame for Newfoundland's lot on Britain, Smallwood encourages Newfoundlanders to take responsibility for their situation. Smallwood quickly moves on to say that as Newfoundlanders, "[w]e take for granted our lower standards, our poverty. We are not indignant about them, we save our indignation for those who publish such facts" (97). A people who are "poor but proud" (97) must realize that it is their decision to remain that way, that their deplorable state is an extension of a perverse need to be forever looking back at themselves as a neglected nation. Smallwood explodes this desire by exclaiming, "Our danger, so it seems to me, is that of nursing delusions of grandeur. We are not a nation" (97). Newfoundlanders can accept their supposed destiny as a nation condemned by others more successful, Newfoundlanders can regard the "incredibly higher standards" of other nations and "dope ourselves into the hopeless belief that such things are not for us" (98), or Newfoundlanders can shirk this identity of isolation and ineptitude and join "in the march of time" (98). As Gwyn notes, this speech was a *précis* of "all that is essential in the sociology of Newfoundland: the long history of struggle and the pride of

having endured; the inexplicable wayward charm of the land and of its people; the pathetic, unending poverty to which all but a handful were condemned" (98).

Johnston owes much to *Smallwood: The Unlikely Revolutionary* (he credits it in the acknowledgements), but this isolated moment of Joey Smallwood reiterated by Gwyn is arguably the inspiration for Johnston's protagonist. Gwyn claims that Johnston's Smallwood is "far too reflexive and introspective" to become the modern "medieval monarch" (437) he believes the real Joey became. The source of this self-reflexivity is hinted at in "The Politics of Cultural Memory" when Bannister notes that "Johnston was criticized for projecting too much of himself onto his subject and veering into autobiography" (Bannister 138), an accusation that has some merit when one considers that Johnston was writing the autobiographical *Baltimore's Mansion* at the same time. Though it is undeniable that the author will leave a trace of himself on his characters, the Joey of *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams* remains remarkably true to the Smallwood of 27 October 1946 – the Smallwood who denies all notions of defeatism, rejects all moments of romanticism, and refuses to regard Newfoundland as anything less than an island waiting for the right leader to make known her limitless potential.

The Newfoundland into which Johnston's Smallwood is born appears to be one of continuous political and economic failure, forever being saved by the British, that race of people from which many Newfoundlanders are descended but whose grandeur so few Newfoundlanders can attain. The Amulree Commission represents the *coup de grace* of Newfoundland nationality, marking once and forever Newfoundland's inability to govern itself. Sociologist James Overton notes that this ruling irreparably stained the character of

Newfoundlanders:

...the Amulree Commission suggested that Newfoundland surrender responsible government for government by commission. Part of the Amulree Commission's argument was that the country's problems were of a moral nature. The people had proved incapable of sustaining parliamentary democracy because of their deficiencies.... The political events of the early 1930s, and the finding of the Commission, put Newfoundland's "national character...under a shade." (Overton 12)

Johnston makes Smallwood an appalled observer to the investigations and findings of the Amulree Commission. The ruling is accepted by a population that has long viewed "Newfoundland history [as] an unbroken tale of mistakes and missed opportunities" (Bannister 133):

A contagion of self-debasement swept the land, as if we had lived in denial of our innate inferiority for centuries and at last were owning up to it. There was more than a hint of boasting in it, a perverse pride in our ability to do anything, even fail, on so grand a scale. Whether our distinguishing national trait was resourcefulness or laziness, ineptitude or competence, honesty or corruptibility, did not seem to matter as long as we were famous for it, as long as we were acknowledged as being unmatched in the world for something. (Johnston 338)

It is onto this sea of conceded incompetence that Johnston launches his protagonists.

Johnston's characters are born of this failure and they are born into it. Sir William

Warrender Mackenzie, first baron Amulree, leader of the commission of inquiry into the state of Newfoundland society and economy that bears his name, is depicted by Johnston as a typical colonial authority who has already determined before meeting his Newfoundland subjects that they are inferior, peculiar, and unruly: "He was the most open-minded man I had ever met. Told two contradictory versions of the same event, he believed both, as long as each reflected badly on the character of Newfoundlanders. I have never met a man so eager to have his sensibilities offended. A day was not complete until he had professed himself shocked by something" (338). Yet it must be noted that the baron was treated to a country-wide admission of misconduct and inadequacy by the people he had come to observe and condemn: "The baron and his commission were received like parents in whose absence we had torn the house apart and to whom we were now relieved to unburden ourselves of our guilt, having lived with it so long" (337). These people of Newfoundland, the sealers, the railway workers, the fishermen, the countless isolated families, have all lived under the shade their character cast over them long before the Amulree Commission, and they have come to accept their fate as a flawed people. A Spaniard's Bay native becomes the mouthpiece for these self-abnegating individuals during one of the Amulree hearings: "where I comes from your honour, all we does is drink, even the women is at it; half the children don't know who their fathers is. Oh my, oh my, it's something shocking is what it is, I don't know why we acts like that. We're just low-born I suppose, we don't know no better" (337-38).

While working as a reporter aboard the *S.S. Newfoundland*, Smallwood notices "a kind of shy awe" (98) displayed by the sealers when they discover what he is doing:

“They could not read or write and had never met someone whom they perceived to be the epitome of reading and writing, a newspaper man” (98). Smallwood witnesses the same sort of servility during his quest to unionize the fishermen of Newfoundland. Joining a fisherman one morning to handline for cod, Smallwood cannot help but notice the fisherman’s typically Newfoundland tendency to avoid eye contact:

I faced him in the boat as he took the oars and, with his eyes averted from mine, looking out across the water, rowed for hours without changing his pace or his expression. He was, he told me later, keeping his eyes fixed on some landmark, but landmark or not I’m sure he would have looked the other way. I had yet to have someone look me in the eye for long, as if to do so would have been an impertinence. (352)

It is this sort of head-down, eyes-averted timidity that is epitomized by so many Newfoundlanders in this text, as if this “contagion of self-debasement” had so infiltrated each character that they believed themselves unworthy of interaction with an individual of stature. This hangdog humility is best demonstrated by Smallwood’s father Charlie, who roars against his social betters in private yet balks at the opportunity to meet Prowse, deeming himself unworthy:

My father seemed almost terrified at the thought of meeting the judge.
 “No, no, my God, no,” he said, as if I had made some dreadful blunder, pacing about the floor of the front room, shaking his head, worried that Prowse might already have arranged the meeting and the judge might be expecting him. I assured him this was not the case, but asked him why he

did not want to meet someone whose work he so admired.

“I don’t know why,” my father said. “I don’t want to meet a man like that, that’s all I know.”

“Meet not the judge lest ye be judged,” my mother said. (46-47)

It is as if characters such as Charlie, the man with whom Smallwood shares a dory, the sealers, and the shifty and eccentric families working and living along the railway turn both their heads and their eyes downward in the face of those they perceive to be their social betters for fear of meeting their eyes and finding themselves lacking. Rather than face that continuous reminder of their supposed inadequacy, these characters avoid interaction and accept their failings. The people Smallwood meets during his voyages across Newfoundland all seem to suffer from a form of island paranoia – they all view outsiders as dangerous harbingers of changes beyond their scope of understanding.

Charlie Smallwood is the most outspoken of these paranoid islanders, and he haunts the early pages of Johnston’s novel, roaring into the fog and the darkness from his back deck on “the Brow,” cursing and renaming the island of his birth: “They should have called it Old Lost Land, not Newfoundland but Old Lost Land” (17). In his eyes, Newfoundlanders have already fallen – they are irreparably and primarily failures because they are Newfoundlanders. The elder Smallwood subscribes to the rhetoric of “if only” discussed by Bannister in “The Politics of Cultural Memory.” This form of “determinism remains at the core of Newfoundland nationalism,” Bannister contends. “*If only* Newfoundland had been granted a different constitutional regime, so the argument runs, then its economy would have prospered” (Bannister 148). The narrative of

Newfoundland is full of many such “if only” moments, it appears, and Charlie has many late night soliloquies looking down at St. John’s while he laments, “We’re not good enough, it seems” (Johnston 16). Charlie sees himself as the product of a long line of failure, and while he readily rages against his fate, he as eagerly accepts it. “You’re ruined, boy, you’re ruined,” he bawls at Joey during one of his drunken tirades. “We’re *both* ruined, we’re *all* ruined” (65). Faced with an extensive narrative of Newfoundland failure, Charlie accepts his lot and laments the glory that could have been, if only. It is into this life of self-inflicted abnegation that Joseph R. Smallwood is born.

Postcolonial Reading

It is useless to dismiss completely the notion that Newfoundland is postcolonial. A former colony of Britain, Newfoundland does exist in a world that is (arguably) post-colonization. Yet it is harder for Newfoundland to claim the postcolonial condition shared by India, South Africa, and other countries who were occupied and oppressed by foreign powers. Poverty and struggle are undeniably and inextricably part of Newfoundland history, but the source of this suffering is not a colonizing power bent on domination of Newfoundlanders. Newfoundland is a settler society – a settler society that entirely eradicated this island’s aboriginal population. As Vijay Mishra and Bob Hodge note, “[w]hite settler colonies...as fragments of the metropolitan centre, were treated very differently by Britain” (Mishra 285) than were non-white colonies. Newfoundland is an instance of “complicit postcolonialism” (284) where Britain was not an oppressive other but “the Mother Country” (285). Notions of Newfoundlanders regarding themselves as a breed apart are tempered by the willingness of young Newfoundland men to fight for

Britain in both world wars and most notably by Prowse's use of "we" when discussing both Newfoundlanders and the British who wrested this land from French "invaders." Bannister asserts that the idea of "Newfoundlanders as a special people with a unique past...[suffering] unremitting tyranny under the system of naval government" was "a history tailor-made" to suit the goals of "St. John's reformers [campaigning prior to 1832] for greater local autonomy" (Bannister 147). Such a claim raises serious suspicions around Newfoundland's existence as a conquered colony.

In his contribution to *Is Canada Postcolonial?* Terry Goldie writes, "For me, the best answer to 'Is Canada Postcolonial?' is another question: what opportunities for understanding Canada are provided by the question?" (Goldie 311). The same can be said of Newfoundland and a postcolonial reading of Johnston's text. In the same collection, Neil Besner includes *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams* among several texts he believes offer "wider opportunities...for a postcolonial critic, not because these texts are now lifted out of a national context, but because, on the contrary, they can be read as more deeply embedded in a more various understanding of Canada" (Besner 46). Besner believes that postcolonial readings of novels like *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams*, Alistair MacLeod's *No Great Mischief* or Hugh MacLennan's *Barometer Rising* reopen foreclosed notions of identity: "the postcolonial approach can open out the categories of region and nation again, and differently" (47). Such texts provide what Edward Said calls a "contrapuntal reading" (Said 66) of received history. In these texts several dissenting voices are given the opportunity to reinsert themselves into recorded history and rework and requestion accepted "facts."

The result is never a new history regarded as the story of a particular people or place but is closer to the “felt, emotional truth” Johnston is looking for through his “scuttlework” of Newfoundland history. As Laura Moss puts it, the answer to such a question reveals that there is not one but a “plurality of Canadas” (Moss 4). Multiple stories arise that are not “right or wrong but both” (Zuccherro 265). Readings of nations and narrations conducted by postcolonial critics have revealed a hybridity and an ambiguity at the heart of any place or people. A nation/colony/province like Newfoundland can only be read postcolonially, for such a reading strategy is the only one that will respect the amalgam of “truths” that is Newfoundland: “Postcolonial reading strategies confer neither moral superiority nor inferiority on either the critic or the subject matter; rather postcolonial reading strategies attend to the material conditions in which the critic finds herself, conditions that are seldom morally clear cut” (Brydon 1995, 9). In other words, the multiple readings of Newfoundland found through a postcolonial reading of *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams* are neither right nor wrong but both. While this move toward a hybrid “Newfoundlandness” is a disconcerting leap from the comforting (though also limiting) certainty of Newfoundland identity, it is an act of liberation for Newfoundlanders, an emancipatory break from the “unbroken history of struggle.”

Johnston’s work certainly meets the criteria of Bhabha’s “hybrid national narrative” as wholly fictional and partly fictionalized characters witness, experience, and criticize the historical moments that have come to define Newfoundland and Newfoundlanders. The definitive history of Newfoundland is literally doubled as Johnston permits both Smallwood and Fielding to tell their “story of Newfoundland.”

This alternative history is doubled again as Smallwood and Fielding exchange narrative authority within Johnston's work – emphasizing the ambivalence at the core of any singular Newfoundland identity. Through his creation of Joey Smallwood, Johnston is able to re-enter Newfoundland history and provide a different voice than the ones recorded in the official narratives of struggle and failure. In Smallwood, Johnston creates a character who exists outside this oppressive history. Though surrounded by notions of Newfoundland hopelessness, Smallwood becomes an optimist who refuses to be trapped in the unending cycle of Newfoundland defeatism.

For Johnston's Joey, the mantle of inadequacy which Charlie Smallwood assumes for himself and his "luckless brood" (Johnston 8) is compounded by the education the boy receives at Bishop Feild College, a bastion of English ideals, fashioned in the "Tudor-style" (23) with a "turret-crowned entrance" (23) – a venerable fortress of Englishness placed at the edge of civilization in the hopes of plucking from the fire a few brands who may rise above their fate as Newfoundlanders. Nothing of Newfoundland is taught in this school, though the instructors do set aside time quite readily to deride the nation in which they find themselves by "itemizing its deficiencies and the many ways it fell short of being England" (34). If Newfoundland was not England, then these Newfoundlanders were certainly a far cry from Englishmen – a point Headmaster Reeves discusses on numerous occasions:

The worst of our lot comes over here, inbreeds for several hundred years
and the end-product is a hundred thousand Newfoundlanders with
Smallwood at the bottom of the barrel.... many of you are descended from

people who couldn't even make the grade in Ireland, a country of bog-born barbarians, or in Scotland, whose culture peaked with the invention of the bagpipes. My God, it boggles the mind. If you lot are the elite of Newfoundland, what must the rest be like? Smallwood here we may think of as the riff-raff's shining star. Try to imagine someone in comparison with whom he would seem to be a shining star. No, the mind balks, it is beyond imagining. The riff-raff are out there, we know by extrapolation from Smallwood that they exist, but luckily for us, we cannot picture them. (36, 38)

Despite witnessing his father's continued self-beratement at home and receiving the brunt of his instructor's anti-Newfoundland sentiment at school, Smallwood maintains a pride and a positivity that baffles his teachers: "[t]he masters never seemed to know quite what to make of me" (35). Smallwood receives the barbs of his "wittily scornful" (34) masters and returns them with equal flare. Knowing full well that a posting in St. John's meant a failure on the part of his headmaster "to find a place at some public school in Britain or some colony more highly prized than Newfoundland" (34), Smallwood is as quick to highlight the shortcomings of his teacher: "'Your parents must be very proud of you, sir.... Your having got such a superb posting as Bishop Feild, I mean. Have they been to visit lately?'" (37). Smallwood represents an unknown entity to these professors, a Newfoundlander unashamed of his heritage and unwilling to be transformed into a colonial mimic man. Such an enigma would seem impossible to these "itinerant Englishmen" (33) who saw the inhabitants of the island they were forced to temporarily

occupy as “nothing more than savages descended from the ‘dregs of England’” (34).

Spawned from failure and motivated by it for the rest of his life, Joey remains irrepressible, determined to counter these past failures with future successes beyond anyone’s imagination.

In an interview with the *Telegram*, Johnston explains the parallel he draws between Smallwood and Newfoundland: “In Smallwood’s case, he identified with Newfoundland because he saw Newfoundland’s position in the world as being equivalent to his position in Newfoundland. They were sort of at the bottom of the barrel. His personal struggle for success eventually became synonymous with Newfoundland’s struggle to raise itself beyond Third World levels” (Morris 12). Smallwood’s desire to succeed is directly linked with his desire for the improvement of his home country as he displays in a drunken speech to his socialist comrades in New York:

“Newfoundland...will be one of the great small nations of the earth, a self-governing, self-supporting, self-defending, self-reliant nation, and I will be prime minister of Newfoundland” (Johnston 165).

Following the damning Amulree Commission, failure further entrenches itself as a fundamental part of Newfoundland identity. Just as the Newfoundlanders Smallwood meets during his tour with the baron accept their large-scale failure as assurance that they are “acknowledged as being unmatched in the world for something” (338), Charlie Smallwood willingly accepts the continued failure of his province and his fellows as justification for his own lack of success:

My father at first welcomed the Commission of Government, and I could

understand why. He had himself been just such a commission for decades now, endlessly taking stock of himself and the world, postponing action until all the findings were in, knowing they never would be. It was as if, at last, the rest of the country were in step with him, as if this new national development vindicated the way he had lived his life, as if he had known the country was headed down a dead end and would have to double back and for this reason remained aloof. The failure of an individual in a country fated for failure was inevitable, excusable. (339)

Joey will have none of his father's fatalism and takes to the airwaves in defiance of the failing grade his country's culture had received.

The boy once described as "bottom of the barrel" was now the "Barrelman," an uncontained booster of Newfoundland and Newfoundlanders who reminds his countrymen of the limitless potential inherent in them: "I read on the air stories I encouraged my listeners to send me, stories that showed 'how brave, hardy, smart, strong, proud, intelligent and successful Newfoundlanders are'" (385). Smallwood becomes obsessed with creating a new Newfoundland identity on the ruins of the old one. This desire follows Joey into the premier's office as he squanders millions of Canadian resource dollars on impossible schemes and shaky enterprises. It is Joey's sole purpose to show that Newfoundland, once thought of as a place where nothing could be done, is now a place where anything can happen: "Someone convinced me there was no better place in the world to manufacture gloves made entirely from the skins of gazelles than Newfoundland. Into this scheme went half a million dollars; out of it came not so much

as a single pair of gloves" (502). It is Joey's desire to refocus Newfoundlanders' pride from their perceived perseverance in the face of adversity to their potential as a productive and modern people. He believes the only way he can foster this change is by creating successes as monumental as the failures by which Newfoundlanders identify themselves. Smallwood's drive for colossal success was most recently considered by Rex Murphy, who claims the former premier was "unduly influenced by the example of the pharaohs.... If a project was massive, grand, monumental, it had intrinsic appeal" (Murphy A23). Joey did "drag his people into the twentieth century" (Gwyn 437), but he desired too much too quickly and left Newfoundland much the same as he found it – economically unsound and dependent upon another nation for assistance.

Newfoundland is spotted not with testaments to Smallwood's successes but with disabled and deflated reminders of his shortcomings. The ruins of the refinery at Come by Chance and other such failed and forgotten structures are described by Fielding near the end of the novel: "This country is strewn with Come by Chance-like monoliths, the masterpieces of some sculptor who worked on a grand scale and whose medium was rust. Quarries, mines, mills, plants, smelters, airports, shipyards, refineries and factories, to all of which paved roads still lead, though no one travels on them any more" (Johnston 555). Unfortunately, Smallwood's legacy as the man who brought Newfoundland into Confederation and the modern era is inseparably linked to his infamy as a leader who held on too long, threw his province's finances and future away on ridiculous schemes and unreliable supporters, and "all but gave away Churchill Falls" (555). Regardless of his fate, the Joseph R. Smallwood of Johnston's novel is representative of a narrative of

optimism underwriting the history of failure. Smallwood's enthusiasm demanded a leap which his fellow Newfoundlanders were unwilling to take, and his vision of an industrialized, vibrant "small nation" would become one more unrequited dream.

Fielding

The authors of *The Empire Writes Back* are only partially right when they claim that through postcolonial novels "the perspective changes to that of the 'Other'" (Ashcroft 34). A truly hybrid narrative makes possible the perspective of multiple others – the histories of Bhabha's "incommensurable narrative subjects" from which "emerges a strange, empowering knowledge for the migrant that is at once schizoid and subversive" (Bhabha 168). Bhabha refers to postcolonial subjects as migrants, for he believes they are never truly home in a place they are forced to negotiate continually. Sheilagh Fielding's voice not only subverts accepted Newfoundland history – it also rivals Smallwood's voice of progress and industry. In Fielding, Johnston creates a truly postcolonial narrator, a Benjaminian "angel of history" who is propelled "into the future to which [her] back is turned" (Benjamin 258). Fielding is a romantic bound to the ever-progressive Smallwood yet consumed by what Gayatri Spivak calls "a nostalgia for lost origins" (Spivak 87). Smallwood's industrialize-or-perish attitude is tempered by Fielding's lament for the Newfoundland his modernizing threatens to destroy. Through Fielding, the readers can witness the "schizoid and subversive" nature of the postcolonial subject. Fielding's romanticism is countered with cynicism; her inability to claim a home does not prevent her from idealizing, defending, and mourning her homeland; her newspaper articles and condensed history of Newfoundland deconstruct Newfoundland history while

paradoxically preserving a Newfoundland identity.

Fielding, Smallwood's fictional (and unrequited) love interest and foil, is given the first and last words in the novel. At times romantic, at others caustic, Fielding seems to embody not only Johnston's novel but the essence of Newfoundland itself. Refusing Charlie Smallwood's resignation while refuting Smallwood's reformation, Sheilagh Fielding is Newfoundland. A sickly, crippled child of the New and Old Worlds, in her own words "at once self-ironic and humorously scornful of others" (Johnston 27), beleaguered by alcoholism and the loss of her children but fortified by her wit and wistfulness, Fielding represents so much that is Newfoundland.

The most beautiful moments of nostalgia come from Fielding, the following passage being a lament for a past forever lost:

After it rained, the schooners would unfurl their sails to let them dry, a stationary fleet under full sail, the whole harbour a mass of flapping canvas you could hear a mile away. How high those sails were. If they had not been translucent, they would have cast a shadow in the evening halfway across the city.

Instead, in the evening, in the morning, the sun shone through the sails and cast an amber-coloured light across the harbour and the streets, a light I have not seen in twenty years. (6)

Fielding's romantic turn toward the past works in stark contrast to Smallwood's desire to construct a future of prosperity to overshadow a past of poverty. One of Johnston's sources for Fielding is undeniably the *Telegram* columnist Ray Guy, whom Bannister

notes painted idyllic portraits of Newfoundland which Guy himself admits “drew in large measure on a nostalgia for a past that never actually existed, but...was necessary as a way to combat the propaganda of the Smallwood regime” (Bannister 129). Fielding names one of the participants in the “war of words...between her two imaginary selves” (Johnston 256) “Ray Joy,” an obvious tribute to the man described by Patrick O’Flaherty as “what the fool was to King Lear, a cranky, disconcerting, insistent reminder of a previous dignity, now violated” (S. Gwyn 45). Fielding follows Guy’s credo, not just tempering Smallwood’s modernization but also refusing to acknowledge that this move forward only amplifies the backwardness of Newfoundland’s past. Guy has said that his motivation for writing is to counteract the image proffered by “Joey and his crowd” that before Confederation in Newfoundland “there was only depravity, poverty and corruption” (Paddock 9). Smallwood’s failure to create a prosperous Newfoundland could easily be dragged into the narrative of disappointment Joey is working against. It is Fielding’s whimsy and wit that truly scuttles this history and turns this narrative of Smallwood into a narrative of hope.

The most obvious moments of underwriting a “received history” come through “Fielding’s Condensed *History of Newfoundland*.” Fielding’s tiny history is what Mishra and Hodge would term “a supplement” (Mishra 280). Fielding’s work is “a form of intervention that questions, as supplements always do, the very adequacy of a theory” (280). In her concluding remarks to *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams*, Fielding claims that her life “for forty years was a pair of rivers, the river that might have been beside the one that was” (Johnston 560). Johnston’s novel reads like a multiplicity of rivers all

running side by side, and Fielding's condensed history runs parallel to Prowse's "official" history, though at times running deeper as it diverges momentarily from the common path.

Said would call Fielding's work "revisionist scholarship" (Said xxiv) – a work that retraces the steps of supposedly authoritative histories and not only offers alternatives but blatantly questions the validity of the accepted text. Prowse's several-times-removed sources of information which Bannister questions are openly ridiculed by Fielding in her history. William Vaughan, a source oft used by Prowse, is said by Fielding to have never visited "his colony" (Johnston 67), though he writes an authoritative text on the island: "Vaughan...is writing *The Newlander's Cure*, a tract of advice for settlers about how to survive the perils of life in Newfoundland, which, though he has never experienced, he, being a writer, is able to imagine so vividly that other people who have never been to Newfoundland find the book convincing and it sells quite well" (77). Having painted a rather dubious picture of Vaughan, Fielding demonstrates how Prowse's history is flawed through dependence on *The Newlander's Cure* and other "nonsense that Vaughan is churning out" (83). The judge credited with recording the history of Newfoundland "was completely taken in by Vaughan," according to Fielding, "to the point of believing that Vaughan travelled to Newfoundland and began a colony at Trepassey, when in fact he never in his life sailed far enough from England to lose sight of shore" (83).

Fielding is not content with discrediting one of Prowse's sources; her corrective history also dismisses the notion that Newfoundland has been for generations the colonial

whipping post of an insatiably imperialistic Britain. Chief Justice John Reeves's *History of the Government of the Island of Newfoundland* is a major source for Prowse's assertions that "England has for three hundred years been exploiting Newfoundland" (Johnston 209). According to Fielding, "John Reeves was a peevish crank who wrote an entire history of Newfoundland just to get back at some West Country merchants who, he said, 'are so miserly that, were I to allow it, they would be constantly contesting in my court some Newfoundlander's right to breathe their air'" (209-10). Fielding/Johnston follows the same line of historiography as Bannister in "The Politics of Cultural Memory," noting that from Anspach to Prowse, countless Newfoundland historians "repeat in their histories this heinous lie of [Reeves] as though it were the gospel truth" (210).

Thus problematizing Prowse's sources and "facts," Fielding unearths alternative histories she claims were dismissed as nonsense by Prowse and others. Fielding claims to have found the original version of Robert Hayman's *Quodlibets*, a "corrective" (83) to Vaughan's *The Newlander's Cure* that is never properly published. She also claims to have found the alternate "Ode to Newfoundland" with considerably less patriotic verses: "When rotting sculpins line thy shore,/ When capelin swarm thy strand,/ The stench is such one hears men roar,/ "thou reekest, wind-swept land" (475). The ambiguity of Fielding's postcolonial self is revealed through her recreation of Sir Cavendish Boyle's ode, as in the final alternative verse Fielding reveals that she too is moved by the legacy of the exploited Newfoundlander: "As lived our fathers, we live not,/ Where once they knelt, we stand./ With God nor King to guard our lot,/ *We'll guard thee, Newfoundland*"

(475).

Fielding's obscurity permits her to continue battling the notion of Newfoundlanders as a failed "neo-primitive white culture" (Peacock xix) while not being entirely consumed by Smallwood's enthusiasm, an attitude Harry Hiller has classified as "Newfoundlanders against the world" (Hiller 264). Smallwood is often at the mercy of Fielding's wit, especially during her parody of the jingoistic Barrelman:

"Newfoundlanders, send me your recipes, your sayings, your local customs. All over Newfoundland the old ways are dying out. I for one would want nothing to do with a Newfoundland in which it was no longer the tradition to shoot the Christmas pudding out of a pot with a shotgun. BONG" (Johnston 387). For all her ability to sweep the legs out from under any cause, Fielding's purpose seems to be irony exclusively. Fielding rarely comes out for or against a particular cause. In a rather masterful metaphor, Johnston has Fielding literally demonstrate her fence-straddling tendencies during one of the definitive moments in Newfoundland's history – a moment when everyone would presumably be on one side or the other. During the storming of the Colonial Building, Smallwood begs Fielding to join him on a rescue mission for Sir Richard Squires. Despite Smallwood's desperation, Fielding remains indifferent but finally decides to join Smallwood for, as she puts it, "I'm sure there's a column in it" (316). Fielding maintains a judgemental and ironic distance as she surveys the mob before joining Smallwood: "With one leg on either side, standing on top of the fence, she paused to look out over the crowd, shook her head" (316).

Yet an ironic position is most certainly an impotent one, and Fielding is often

found beside Smallwood despite her scathing articles and send-ups. In one of their last meetings, Fielding admits to Smallwood that she feigned her passion for socialism as a young woman so she could be near him: "I didn't tell [my father] about you converting me to socialism, which by the way you never did, I just pretended so I could be with you – My God Smallwood, how many shades of purple are you capable of turning? I've never seen that one before" (549). Despite Smallwood's blush upon learning this secret, it is doubtful that Fielding wanted to be around Smallwood for sexual reasons. More than likely it was the optimism he exuded that so attracted her. Fielding, both bolstered and beleaguered with a nostalgia for a lost home and a readily deployed sarcasm for those who try and know and change that home, is herself saved by Smallwood's buoyancy. Without his optimism to hold onto, Fielding would remain either forever looking backward or consumed by her cynicism.

Fielding's conflicting moments of mockery and myth-making find their roots in what Richard Gwyn calls Newfoundland's "national surrender" (R. Gwyn 445). Newfoundlanders had inflicted their greatest defeat "upon themselves when, in 1933, they became the only people in history to voluntarily give up self-government after having won it" (445). Fielding becomes a revisionist, not only underwriting the history of Newfoundland, but recreating Newfoundlanders' claim to this island. Faced with a people who have declared themselves not fit for self-government, Fielding tries to bolster their spirits (and hers) by waxing poetic about Newfoundlanders' mystical connection to the land. The last lines of the novel try somehow to mingle her people with their island, an attempt perhaps to replace the moment in 1933 when Newfoundlanders judged

themselves unworthy of their land with a new mythology of Newfoundlanders as one with the land:

...the northern night, the barrens, the bogs, the rocks and ponds and hills of Newfoundland. The Straits of Belle Isle, from the island side of which I have seen the coast of Labrador.

These things, finally, primarily, are Newfoundland.

From a mind divesting itself of images, those of the land would be the last to go.

We are a people on whose minds these images have been imprinted.

We are a people in whose bodies old sea-seeking rivers roar with blood. (562)

In his concluding remarks, Johnston tunes into a tendency that occurs too often in literature about Newfoundland – the description of characters as somehow being mystically of the land. In Annie Proulx's *The Shipping News*, the characters are as windswept, creviced, untamed, and unkempt as the land itself: "Diddy Shovel's skin was like asphalt, fissured and cracked, thickened by a lifetime of weather, the scruf of age. Stubble worked through the craquelured surface" (Proulx 79). Diddy has the beaten and blasted appearance of a boulder left behind by a glacier; he is somehow inseparably and originally of the island. In *Gaff Topsails*, Patrick Kavanagh extends the metaphor even further, having the founding father of his village actually make love to the land in order to symbolically create a hybrid offspring that are as much island as they are human. They

are born of a community Kavanagh describes as a “womb-cove” (Kavanagh 139) and live their lives in “rhythms [which] echo...the touch of the sea upon the land” (139).

While such dreamy depictions of Newfoundland may be fanciful and moving, inspiring people like Justin Trudeau (who championed Johnston’s novel on the 2003 edition of CBC’s *Canada Reads*) to describe Newfoundland as a “barren rock upon which nothing was expected to grow...least of all a people as tragically beautiful and noble as Newfoundlanders” (Trudeau 2003), they overlook the fact that Newfoundlanders are not of the island but have worked against it for generations. This impractical picture of a Newfoundland people is arguably an attempt to create a home for Newfoundlanders who have surrendered their nationhood, been cut loose by Britain, and taken in by Canada – that “nation we do not know.” Fielding’s attempt to romanticize a race that is as rough and regal as the land itself is counterbalanced by her realization that, though she loves this land, it can never be hers.

It is interesting to note that during her final assessment of Joey, herself, and the island they occupy, Fielding compares herself as a young girl inflicted with tuberculosis to Shawnawdithit, the last of the Beothuk:

...when I was in the San[atorium], I was drawn, morbidly drawn perhaps, to read and re-read Howley’s book [i.e. *The Beothuks or Red Indians*], and I was young enough to think that Nancy and I had a lot in common.... My father could not bear to watch me die. When he was told my death was certain, he stopped coming to the San to see me.... It was partly my father’s abandonment of me that made me identify with Nancy. I fancied

that Cormack had been in love with her and had gone away because he could not bear to watch her die. There are times when I still think it might be so.

She made a great impression on people long before they knew that she would be the last Beothuk. But it is hard to think of her as that, "the last Beothuk," perhaps presumptuous to try in what is, after all, an address to absence, silence. (558, 559)

Though writing in 1959, and therefore only sixty, Fielding perhaps foresees her entrance into the absence and silence occupied by Shawnawdithit and the Beothuk. Fielding projects a time when Newfoundland's past life as a colony or an independent country will no longer exist in living memory and any talk of such times will be an address to a lost and unanswering past.

Fielding's affinity with Shawnawdithit (or Nancy April as she was renamed by her captors) stems from her feelings of abandonment and loss not only during her time in the sanatorium, but also as a Newfoundlander ten years after Confederation with Canada. Like Shawnawdithit, Fielding has lost the Newfoundland in which she lived and grew up. Like Shawnawdithit, whom Fielding notes "left behind her in the interior two children about whom she 'fretted constantly'" (559), Fielding knows that her children (one who died in the Second World War and the other who lives in New York) will never know the Newfoundland of their mother. Most importantly, Fielding knows that her life, much like Shawnawdithit's, was overrun by an all-consuming, progressive force – a double-edged sword that would ensure the continued existence of many Newfoundlanders only by

bringing about changes that would make necessary the loss of a few. For Shawnawdithit, this loss came in the form of the genocide of her people; in Fielding's case the genocide was of a spiritual, personal nature in which many Newfoundlanders were now forced to refer to themselves as Canadians – the weak link in “a nation that does not know us.” Shawnawdithit and the Beothuk represent the sacrifices that must be made to achieve progress and survival – the casting off of a fundamental and foundational part of the self that no longer has a place in a changing world.

The Beothuk haunt the last pages of Johnston's narrative. They are the indigenous peoples Mishra and Hodge claim were once silenced by settlers but can no longer be ignored. According to them, indigenous ghosts “invade the texts of the dominant tradition” (Mishra 289). Their eradication is a reminder to Newfoundlanders that they are not this island's native inhabitants. Their eradication is also a warning that this island is always in a state of flux and that what may seem like home may actually be a new colony/nation/province in which certain Newfoundlanders no longer have a place. It is the unhomely feeling felt by Fielding as she tries to find her home that is the true postcolonial aspect of *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams*.

In *Is Canada Postcolonial?* Mridula Nath Chakraborty claims that “nostalgic narratives” such as those told by Fielding enable the postcolonial, unhomed subject to find “not only a memory of home, but a home in memory” (Chakraborty 128). Fielding walks a line between “feeling out of place in [her] new country” (128) while remaining familiar with it. “The past is literally another country now,” and Fielding, forever the “angel of history,” is hurled into the future while facing the past. The “pile of debris”

Walter Benjamin describes as “grow[ing] skyward” (Benjamin 258) before the angel is the multiple interpretations of a comforting past, the “home in memory” which gives succour to the subject being thrown into a new and unsettling “homeland.” This desire for a noble and triumphant past that never was is also part of the “avalanche of history” from which Johnston is trying to dislodge his province.

The fate of one so submerged in history is demonstrated by Johnston when he has a young Smallwood visit the aged Judge Prowse to have his father’s copy of *A History of Newfoundland* autographed. The judge is first seen “all but buried in the detritus of scholarship” (Johnston 47). Debilitated both physically and mentally by a stroke, Prowse has been revising his history since 1905 to include “new documents that had come to light, documents ages old of which there seemed to be no end” (47). Almost suffocating in the debris of history, Prowse suffers from agraphia and has filled “page after page of illegible scrawl” (49) recording the history of Newfoundland and the life of Cluney Aylward, “the representative Newfoundlander” (48) Smallwood very quickly discovers to be a “stroke-inspired fiction” (49).

There is no definitive Newfoundlander, just as there is no definitive Newfoundland history. It must be noted that Fielding’s depiction of a St. John’s bathed in amber “in the evening, in the morning” by sun shining through unfurled sails is impossible. Anyone possessed with a rudimentary knowledge of St. John’s would know that the setting sun could never pass through the sails of schooners docked in the harbour and cast a glow across the streets. Fielding is creating a “home in memory,” a version of Newfoundland so that she may stave off the realization Smallwood has at the end of his

narrative: "I did not solve the paradox of Newfoundland or fathom the effect on me of its peculiar beauty. It stirred in me, as all great things did, a longing to accomplish or create something commensurate with it. I thought Confederation might be it, but I was wrong" (552).

That Newfoundland is a paradox is at first unsettling for the postcolonial subject, craving as she does a home from which to combat outwardly imposed imperialism and progress. Throughout the novel, Fielding is confronted with depressing histories, valorizing myths, and troubling changes that she counters with either romanticism or scorn. That multiple interpretations of Newfoundland can be countered in a multitude of ways always forces Fielding to realize that these ideas of Newfoundland are not "right or wrong but both." This moment of realization is described rather turgidly by Bhabha in *The Location of Culture*: "The unhomely moment relates the traumatic ambivalences of a personal, psychic history to the wider disjunctions of political existence" (Bhabha 11). More simply put, the personal perceptions of place and identity, no matter how passionately believed, must be regarded as but one of the ever increasing "realities" of a place. The Beothuk, the British, the Americans, and the Canadians enter the narrative of Newfoundland and "the home turns into another world" (10).

Joey is driven to find the "something" that is Newfoundland, or at least find a definition of himself and Newfoundland that would set him "free of Fielding and the nagging tug of the past, my pointless preoccupation with things as they were not and never could have been" (Johnston 452). Fielding can never shake free of this preoccupation and is forced in the end to create Newfoundlanders through whose hearts

pump “old sea-seeking rivers.” Fearing the loss of her culture as her home transforms itself into another country, Fielding places Newfoundland within Newfoundlanders.

A peculiar form of immigrant, the Newfoundlander occupies the in-between space of identity. A hybrid production of past narratives and future possibilities, the Newfoundlander, like any postcolonial subject cannot be contained within a definitive identity. Yet it is not easy for Newfoundlanders to dig out of this avalanche of identity, culture, heritage and history. There remains always a longing for a return to what never was – the colony of Newfoundland if only things had turned out differently. This is the narrative that haunts Newfoundlanders, not a definite past but a probable past from which would supposedly be engendered a prosperous future.

In his concluding remarks to “The Politics of Cultural Memory,” Jerry Bannister writes, “[s]tudying the province’s history is absolutely critical to understanding our current challenges, but we must keep in mind that the past is as messy and complex as the present” (152). *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams* inspires postcolonial readings of the province’s history – readings that regard the past as hybrid and multi-faceted, full of conflicting “truths” that create not one Newfoundland history but a Newfoundland and Newfoundlanders that contain multitudes. Through such readings the present does not become the latest chapter in a narrative of loss and failure but a possibility among infinite possibilities. A novel like Johnston’s inspires its audience to become postcolonial readers who refuse to lament, valorize, or dismiss the idea of a successful Newfoundland as another unrequited dream.

Chapter 2:

Loss and the Beothuk in Michael Crummey's *River Thieves*

To write about the Beothuk is to write about loss. To write about Newfoundland is to write about the same thing. The loss of the island's original inhabitants is only one of many oft-lamented losses that have forged the collective psyche of Newfoundlanders and left a distinctive trace on their art and literature. The loss of independence, the loss of the cod fishery, the loss of countless lives to the sea, and the loss of opportunity have been the prevalent and persistent themes and inspirations for many works of literature by or about Newfoundlanders. The Joey Smallwood of Wayne Johnston's *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams* knows that he (like so many other Newfoundlanders) is driven to discover the "something" (452) that will somehow recoup this loss and enable him to "be free of...the nagging tug of the past, [his] pointless preoccupation with things as they were not and never could have been" (452). As befits a novel with such a title as Johnston's, Smallwood never fully grasps the "something" that would make both him and his island whole.

Michael Crummey sets out on a similar journey in *River Thieves*, a revisionist mystery which takes its readers back to the time of the first great loss suffered by Newfoundland: the eradication of the Beothuk. Crummey effectively studies the beginnings of this island-wide "preoccupation with things as they were and never could have been" as he writes of the fundamental loss in Newfoundland's history – the originary moment when what could have been was separated from what is. Crummey's fictionalization of the events surrounding the capture and death of Demasduit, one of the

last Beothuk, is a psychological voyage into the Newfoundland unconscious in which nightmare-ridden, guilt-laden characters vainly try to recapture a destiny that is already lost. Crummey offers his readers a long look into Newfoundland's heart of darkness where the Congo has been replaced by the Exploits River and the British Empire has given way to a collection of European castaways struggling to manufacture and maintain a sense of identity.

Johnston's *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams* is largely concerned with the event its author so obviously considers to be the moment, the turning point, the historical instance which separated possibility from destiny: confederation with Canada in 1949. The fictional Sheilagh Fielding, who shares narrative duties with Smallwood throughout the novel, begins the story with an entry from her journal, which she often addresses to Joey: "You may not know it yet, but I am back in St. John's. Six months since Confederation. The past is literally another country now" (3). Displaying a nostalgia that seems at odds with her acerbic nature, Fielding describes St. John's as it once was, alive with the noise of horses clopping along cobblestone streets tinted amber by the sun shining through the unfurled sails of schooners docked in the harbour – "a light," Fielding laments, "I have not seen in twenty years" (6). Confederation has long been regarded as the moment when Joey Smallwood dragged his province kicking and screaming into the twentieth century, the moment when cars, highways and technology replaced horses, isolation, and impoverishment. Confederation has also been cursed by many as the moment when the "something" for which both Johnston and Joey are searching was lost. To echo Fielding, it is the moment Newfoundland became another

country. Whether one argues for or against Confederation, it is undeniable that the province as it is now is decidedly different from the Newfoundland that could have been. Though the novel, its author, and its characters constantly wrestle with the positive and negative aspects of Confederation and its impact on Newfoundland identity and destiny, neither comes any closer to capturing that particular something that was “lost” after Confederation. Perhaps this is because this loss goes back much further.

In her review of *River Thieves*, Aida Edemariam asserts that “Newfoundland has a guilty conscience” (23), and while this may or may not be true, it is certain that Newfoundlanders (at least the Newfoundlanders portrayed in the novels of Crummey and Johnston) seem to be suffering from a form of separation anxiety, or even a type of buyer’s remorse. The price paid for the continued existence of Newfoundland has been too high and has involved the relinquishing of independence and the erasure of an entire people. Newfoundlanders have made decisions that have forever separated them from what they could have been, and such guilt and regret has been the driving force behind many Newfoundland novels. While characters such as Fielding will look at Confederation with shame and sorrow, it is the Beothuk who have come to embody Newfoundland’s sense of loss and remorse.

River Thieves is not the first place where the Beothuk have played this role in recent Newfoundland fiction. In Michael Cook’s play *On the Rim of the Curve*, the Beothuk are portrayed as heavenly innocents occupying an island of Eden – a people and a paradise lost with the landfall of the white man. Bernice Morgan’s *Random Passage* provides the mysterious Beothuk with a brief walk-on appearance – an eventually lethal

altercation that is indicative of the Beothuk's brief and tragic role in colonial history. Cree writer Bernard Assiniwi's *The Beothuk Saga* gives the Beothuk a voice and a history, revealing an advanced and intelligent society whose oneness with the island could have benefited and enlightened the colonizing culture if only European fear and disease had not wiped the island clear of its native inhabitants. Even Michael Harris in his investigation of the collapse of the cod fishery, notes that this tradition of annihilation began when "[t]he last Beothic Indian died in Newfoundland in 1829" (332). The extinction of the Beothuk has left a distinctive trace on the literature and identity of Newfoundland. More so than any other work on the subject, Crummey's *River Thieves* delves into the emotional and psychological ramifications of such an enormous loss on those left behind – the European settlers and their descendants who would assume the mantle of native Newfoundlanders. The Beothuk of Michael Crummey's *River Thieves* function more as an absence than a presence and are thus inseparable from the notion of loss that has become a fundamental part of Newfoundland's culture.

In an interview discussing *River Thieves*, Crummey stresses that this novel so often referred to as a book about the Beothuk is not a book about the Beothuk:

...I'm dealing with the historical reality of the extinction of an entire race of people, the Beothuk.... I was hoping the novel would give some sense of the enormity of that loss.... But I felt it would be wrong to write a novel about the Beothuk – to write as if we know more about them than we do, or to try to give them a voice that is absent from the historical record. Their absence, to my mind, is the point. The Beothuk are a shadowy

presence in *River Thieves*, just as they are in what we know of the past....

In the end, *River Thieves* is a book about regret. For the individual characters, it's usually regret of a personal nature. For me, and hopefully for a reader, it goes somewhere beyond that, encompasses something larger. ("A Conversation with Michael Crummey")

Crummey's novel is not so much about the Beothuk as it is about the European settlers who in some way participated in the extinction of these people and who now must deal with the reality that their very existence as Newfoundlanders is a result of this genocide. The Peytons and the other characters can never be comfortably at home on this island because they always exist where someone else was supposed to have existed. Crummey imbues his novel and his characters with this nagging unhomeliness.

The characters of other Newfoundland novels sometimes find their home on the island through a merging of person and place. Johnston converts the blood flowing through the veins of Newfoundlanders into "old sea-seeking rivers" (Johnston 562), Kavanagh attaches his characters erotically and metaphysically to their surroundings, while Proulx's Newfoundlanders seem to rise or ooze from the crags and bogs of Newfoundland. Crummey threatens to fall into this quixotic quagmire near the beginning of the text when he describes John Peyton Senior: "He was past sixty and grey-haired but there was an air of lumbering vitality to the man, a deliberate granite stubbornness. Lines across the forehead like runnels in a dry riverbed. The closely shaven face looked hard enough to stop an axe" (7). Lest his readers assume that John Senior is somehow at harmony with the natural world around him, hewn of the same stuff that makes the rocks,

the rivers and the trees, Crummey is quick to point out that this man's stone-like demeanour was fostered not through working with the land and its people but by doing ungodly things to them: "Peyton [Junior] had heard stories enough from other men on the shore to think his father had earned that look. It made him afraid for himself to dwell on what it was" (7). Serious students of Newfoundland history will know that in reading about John Peyton Senior they are reading about one of the most notorious and prolific Beothuk killers in the island's history – a man who once beat a Beothuk to death with a steel trap.

While the animosity between man and island is most starkly demonstrated by John Senior, Crummey is careful to craft a clash of wills throughout his novel. The toughness, the crassness of these characters does not grow out of the island – these people have been toughened by their battle with the land and the water. This is familiar ground for Crummey who describes the hands of a fisherman in *Hard Light*: "What the water does to your hands when you're fishing, well there's no telling it really. Blisters, open sores, cracks webbed around the knuckles, the salt water burning like iodine on a paper cut. Sometimes the skin roughs up, thickens into leather around the joints, you can barely close your hand to make a fist" (18). The section of humanity that occupies the island of Newfoundland in *River Thieves* is not so much like/of the land as it is like the "Labrador icefield chafing its way south" (166) – once immovable and impressive entities that have been ground down by interaction with this harsh and unforgiving land. It is worth noting that John Senior, having exhausted a large part of his life churning out an existence on the island, spends a large part of this narrative in bed.

The land seems to begrudge the Europeans' desire to know and claim it. On his first expedition up the Exploits to find the Beothuk with Lieutenant David Buchan, Peyton notes that "[w]ith a full week of heavy toil behind them, most of the men were haggard and sluggish by nightfall" (94). Their progress is hampered by "dead snow on the river that made the hauling [of their supplies] heavy" (94). Movement in the interior is described with words like drag, trudge, the men "so tired and in such a frozen state they stumbled and moved drunkenly about" (81). The characters rarely feel any affinity with the land through which they are struggling. A young English officer on one of Peyton's last voyages inland asks permission to speak freely before exclaiming, "What a bastard country you live in, sir" (321). In stark contrast to Patrick Kavanagh's depiction of man making love to the land, Harry Miller, a friend of John Senior, describes the land as a valuable but vindictive whore:

Miller stood at the gunnel of the sloop and opened the spair of his trousers to piss into the harbour. "How does she strike you, Mr. Peyton?" he asked.... Miller grunted. He fastened his trousers and spat into the water. "She's a whore is what she is," he said. The country he was talking about, the place itself. "She'll spread her legs for you, but you'll have to pay for the privilege, don't forget it." (256)

Pissing and spitting onto the island even before he steps foot upon it, Miller demonstrates an animalistic claim to the place, but not without acknowledging that this "whore" will take as much from him as he will from her and he will never truly own her.

Though Buchan and the younger Peyton are depicted as the heroes, or at least the

most readily redeemable characters of this novel, they are not above this egotistical impulse to claim Newfoundland as their own. During their first attempt to make contact with the Beothuk, the men alleviate the anxiety of walking through the unknown by naming each major landmark:

Above Badger Bay Brook the landmarks and features they passed were mostly nameless, and whenever the party came upon a river feeding into the Exploits or crossed a significant point of land, Buchan called the men into a huddle and they shouted suggestions over the wind. They dropped names behind themselves like stones set to mark the path out of wilderness – Cull's Knoll; Buchan's Island; Deep Woody Point; Surprise Brook for a stream that Peyton had fallen into through the ice. (98-99)

Despite repeated journeys into the interior, naming and claiming rivers, rocks, and even people, any movement within the wilderness of this island is nevertheless referred to as a "hard chafe" near the end of the novel. The new natives of this island still get a sense of being "rubbed the wrong way" as they move through "their" country. Not even time can pass without a struggle it seems – John Peyton, awaiting the day when he will lead the next expedition up the Exploits, "feel[s] the appointed month grinding towards him" (166). It is as if these Newfoundlanders do not fit within the country they have decided to call home – in truth they never experience the comfort of being at home. Even within the walls of his own house, John Senior is plagued by incessant visits from "the hag."

Crummey introduces the first part of his novel with a definition of the hag. According to the excerpt he has lifted from the *Dictionary of Newfoundland English*, "old

hag” is the term used by fishermen to describe a particularly trying nightmare: “a man...told me he had been ridden to death by an old hag” (3). Next only to death by drowning and the bemoaning of Confederation, the old hag is one of the most frequently used motifs in Newfoundland literature. An anomaly supposedly experienced only by Newfoundlanders, the hag sits on that hazy line between folk and fact and is as much a part of the Newfoundland identity as the Beothuk. Though the definition of the hag varies from person to person, Wayne Johnston gives a rather clear and expert description of it in *The Story of Bobby O'Malley*:

When I woke, the night was drawn so close I could not breathe or move. The air itself was black and thick and wrapped like arms around me. The hag, to those who have not known her, cannot be described. Awake, but somehow still locked into sleep, so self-contained you cannot move, you know the hag is off to one side, watching. And it could be her breath, or the sound of a dress so long it sweeps the floor, that lets you know she's coming. (66-67)

Having established the land as something that breaks down and claws at those who dare try to tame it, Crummey now fully enters into the psyches of these fishermen, farmers, and trappers who have struggled so hard to settle this island. Writing under the ominous stare of the old hag, Crummey is attempting to surface the suppressed and subconscious aspects of the Newfoundland identity. In uncovering what it is “that shook John Senior out of sleep, set him screaming into the dark” (7), Crummey is coming closer to defining and reclaiming the loss, “the nagging tug of the past” that ensnares the minds of

Newfoundlanders in the same way the Newfoundland interior catches and impedes John Peyton on his quest to find the Beothuk.

Edemariam's allegation that Newfoundland has a guilty conscience seems to prove true in the case of John Senior. The narrative begins with John Peyton awakening to "the sound of his father's voice ... a half-strangled shouting across the narrow hall" (5). Discussing the old man's nightmare the following morning with the younger Peyton, housekeeper and tutor Cassie Jure dismisses John Senior's restlessness as "just the Old Hag" (7). According to Sigmund Freud, nightmares of such power should not be so readily dismissed. In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud cites the findings of the ancient Greeks when he notes that nightmares are a part of the class of dreams that is "influenced by the present or past" (3), giving weight to the notion that it is past transgressions that rouse John Senior from his sleep. In this light, Cassie's playful citation of *The Rape of Lucrece* in answer to John Peyton's inquiry as to what makes his father so "heatable in his sleep like that" (Crummey 6) also seems a little more ominous: "O unseen shame, invisible disgrace!... O unfelt sore, crest-wounding private scar!" (6).

The hag seems to fit neatly within the notion of "hysterical paralysis" (Freud 563) discussed briefly by Freud in *The Interpretation of Dreams*. According to Freud, a "repressed idea" (563) hides itself in the unconscious "by establishing a connection with an idea which already belongs to the preconscious, by transferring its intensity onto it and by getting itself 'covered' by it" (562). This "transference" becomes a very intimate tie within the construction of the self and "an idea which is bound by a very intimate tie in one direction, tends, as it were, to repel whole groups of new ties" (563). Despite

evidence to the contrary, the subject believes his perception of himself to be true. The incongruities multiply and then manifest themselves through “hysterical paralysis” – the repressed idea subconsciously surfaces and effectively shuts down the subject. On a literal level, John Senior’s hag-ridden dreams are obviously the violent resurfacing of the horrible transactions he is trying to suppress. Fortunately for his readers (especially those who wish to write about *River Thieves*), Crummey elevates this notion of the guilt-created hag to a much more figurative stratum.

All of the European characters are introduced in this section which begins with the unsettling notion of the hag. If the hag is truly manifested by some repressed notions of guilt or shame, then it is appropriate that each character seems to be harbouring something, some fundamental part that he or she wishes to hide. The novel reads like a psychological analysis in which each character is forced to acknowledge and share this repressed part of the ego. As John Peyton continues his quest for the Beothuk, he uncovers the secret, the unseen shame that hides within each character.

John Senior not only harbours guilt concerning his relentless persecution of the Beothuk – he also shelters the shame he feels about the small role he played in Cassie’s life. John Senior had a passing acquaintance with Cassie’s father from his “visits to St. John’s to market the catch of salmon in the old days” (150). One evening, John Senior and Harry Miller, having drunk their fill at Cassie’s father’s tavern, joined the owner for a few more drinks at his home, while Cassie and her mother cowered upstairs: “Miller shouted propositions to the two women who’d taken refuge upstairs and Cassie’s father, far from being insulted, laughed and urged him on. He got up from his seat then and

leaned low over Miller, as if he were crying over the man's shoulder. They nodded together and Cassie's father slapped Miller's shoulder several times and then went drunkenly up the stairs" (150). Though Miller listens intently to the noise upstairs, all the while fingering expectantly at his crotch, John Senior begins to feel nauseous and bursts out of the house having "pushed and kicked and slapped Miller ahead of him" (152). Though not partaking in whatever form of debauchery Cassie's father was preparing for him, John Senior is always plagued by his failure to remove Cassie from that situation sooner, his mind forever burning with the question he left unasked the next time he saw Cassie's father: "John Senior...looked into the man's eyes a long moment, searching for the alcohol-dampened flicker of them, thinking he might be able to tell just from that. Which one had he gone upstairs for, his wife or his daughter?" (152). It is this guilt, combined with his murderous past, that sets John Senior screaming from his sleep and drives him to "thr[o]w back shots of rum with the heartsick determination of a man trying to drown an animal he can no longer afford to feed" (26).

The unasked questions about unseen shames also live within Cassie Jure. Though she does not drink or experience any difficulties sleeping, her shameful wounds manifest themselves in other ways. Much like Johnston's Fielding, Cassie limps her way through this novel: "She went to the pantry for sugar and fresh cream. Her movements were slow and slightly distracted, as if she was the stranger in this house and was unsure where things were kept. Buchan was surprised he hadn't noticed the limp before, the buckle in her step" (33). Although Cassie tells Buchan that her hobble is a result of a childhood attempt to "separate her father from the bottle he was working his way through" after

which her father threw “her down the stairs of her house” (33), it is not until the end of the novel that Peyton and the readers discover the truth – Cassie’s mother threw her down the stairs after discovering what she and her father had been doing. This revelation comes near the end of the novel and seems as important to the narrative as the fate of the Beothuk. In truth, as Peyton is desperately trying to uncover any traces of the Beothuk, he is equally concerned with unravelling the mysteries of the woman his father selected to educate him. Just as he takes so many wrong turns, both literally and figuratively, in his attempts to save the Beothuk, so too does he make false assumptions when trying to better understand Cassie. Having stumbled quite inadvertently upon her just after an abortion, Peyton incorrectly assumes that his father is also the father of Cassie’s lost child. It is not until the end, after equally inadvertently stumbling upon Buchan’s journal, that he realizes the navy man was Cassie’s lover.

Peyton also discovers secret shames of the men who join him on his quest to find the Beothuk. Dick Richmond, one of the more unsavoury members of Peyton’s party, carries within him the role he played in the capture of a young Beothuk girl who was later exhibited to crowds of curious onlookers in Poole. The likeable Joseph Reilly bears on the back of his hand the mutilated mark of a thief, a reminder of his tucked-away days as a criminal in England. Each member of Peyton’s party also carries within him the secret of how Mary March was captured. Crummey passes the halfway point of his novel before he finally brings Peyton and Mary together – and even then he uses a very ominous, Ondaatje-esque gap to keep secret from the reader and the prying Lieutenant Buchan the events surrounding Mary’s capture. One chapter ends with Peyton warning his men, “No

one fires...without my say-so" (192), while the following chapter begins with the description of a burial: "After they gathered spruce branches and stones from the near point to fashion a crude burial mound and kicked snow over the blood stains on the ice, the white men retraced their steps across the lake to the Indian camp" (192). From that point onward, the novel reads like an investigation (Crummey actually lifts excerpts from official letters and inquiries), and the only certainty seems to be that no one is as he or she seems.

Crummey adorns his novel with references to Shakespeare's *Othello* – a choice that may seem arbitrary until one realises that both the play and *River Thieves* propel their plots through misunderstandings, misconceptions, and deceptions. Each character seems to play the part of Iago from time to time, revealing either to Peyton or the reader that "I am not what I am" (*Othello* I.1.64). Cassie echoes *Othello*'s single-sighted credo when she condemns both Buchan and herself after her lover has explained why he must keep their affair secret from his wife:

He nodded a moment and then sat still. He said, "You were not the only woman....since I've been married....There have been others."

"A navy man, Captain. Surely your wife could have expected as much."

"Perhaps....Early on, perhaps she might have. But it seems I am very convincing. Over the years she has learned to think better of me....I've almost lost her twice now. In childbirth. Her constitution has become very delicate. I'm not sure how well she would survive knowing me for who I am."

Cassie said, "Men should be what they seem." (Crummey 322-23)

Othello and *River Thieves* are tragedies – tragedies revolving around deaths that could have been prevented and misunderstandings that could have been clarified. Each work also orbits a lead character who "loved not wisely, but too well" (*Othello* V.2.344).

John Peyton, Jr. is certainly Crummeys' *Othello*. Like the Moor of Venice, Peyton is possessed with resoluteness and a conviction that he is doing the right thing. Crummeys notes that Peyton takes on the duties of the retiring John Senior "with the same single-mindedness, the same myopic drive as his father" (163). Peyton truly believes that men should be as they seem and he describes his father quite literally to Buchan: "He is what he is" (275). Like *Othello*, Peyton believes in what he perceives to be the truth, concocting disturbing and distracting love triangles such as the one (unconsummated on all counts) between himself, Cassie, and his father. It is this love triangle, combined with a grander, deeper triad of disrupted and unrequited love that enables Crummeys to finally penetrate the Newfoundland psyche.

According to Harold Bloom, Shakespeare "invented psychoanalysis by inventing the psyche" (Bloom 57). While this statement remains highly debatable, it is undeniably true that Shakespeare was investigating the ramifications of the Oedipus complex within the human psyche centuries before Freud brought it into vogue. *Hamlet* is particularly laden with Oedipal sentiments, but *Othello* also examines this psychological threesome. Iago wants to be Othello. He wants everything his general has: success, status, and love. Such is the lament of the son in the Oedipal triangle, possessed as he is of an irrepressible desire to take the place of the father. Iago reveals his desires to take over Othello's duties

in a soliloquy drenched with Oedipal overtones:

I hate the Moor,
And it is thought abroad that 'twixt my sheets
H'as done my office. I know not if't be true,
But I, for mere suspicion of that kind,
Will do as if for surety. (*Othello* II.1.378-82)

John Peyton, in addition to possessing Othello's blinkered resolve, is also infused with Iago's Oedipal ambition to usurp the father and possess the mother. When Iago realizes the impossibility of his in-born ambition, he vows to kill both Othello and Desdemona; when Peyton realizes the futility of desire for his tutor/mother-figure, he channels those stifled emotions into his takeover of his father's business:

John Senior had long since given up working his own traplines. For years he had been slowly divesting himself of responsibilities in the family enterprise and Peyton had taken them on.... He pushed himself relentlessly, spending weeks alone on the water each summer inspecting the salmon weirs and the quality of the cure, working a trapline in the country each winter. The immersion in work was a divestment of his own, a conscious withdrawal from his father, from Cassie. And this fall in particular he'd been chafing to get away from them as soon as he could manage it. (*River Thieves* 163)

Both Iago and Peyton permit their belief that twixt their sheets someone else is doing their duties to become a driving force behind their methodical march to alpha-maledom.

Just as Peyton is chafing to leave his father's house so that he may take over his father's business, so too does Iago feel "beled" and frustrated upon being passed over by Othello for lieutenantcy (*Othello* I.1.29). Alone in a dory with Cassie, whom he believes to be his father's lover, Peyton notices that "[h]is skin felt tight around him, as if it was no longer large enough to accommodate everything that was going on inside it" (Crummey 123). Suspecting that "the lusty Moor/ Hath leaped into [his] seat" (*Othello* II.1.291-3), Iago claims "the thought whereof/ Doth, like a poisonous mineral, gnaw my inwards" (II.1.293-4). Both men refuse to be contained by the position in which they find themselves. As Iago says at the beginning of *Othello*, "I know my price; I am worth no worse a place" (I.1.11) – both Iago and Peyton are determined to sever their ties with their father-figures and assume their rightful role. Peyton's journey to discover and earn his place in history becomes a metaphor for Newfoundland's search for identity.

Peyton's desire in *River Thieves* to make peaceful contact with the Beothuk is undoubtedly fuelled by a need to separate himself from his father's savagery. John Senior scoffs at Buchan's proposal to find and then befriend the Beothuk, proclaiming rather ominously that peaceful co-existence with the Natives is not the only way to put a stop to the "thieving and vandalism" (23). John Senior echoes Kurtz's "Exterminate the brutes!" (Conrad 84) when he discusses what should be done with the Beothuk: "The Red Indians....haven't got but a civil bone in their bodies and there's no amount of charity will teach them any manners....We had a right to spill some blood as I saw it" (Crummey 23-24). The younger Peyton is very much like Marlow, following the previous generation of colonizers into the unknown in an attempt to rectify irrectifiable wrongs. Like Marlow,

whose voyage down the Congo caused him to question the propriety of the English colonial enterprise, Peyton comes out of his adventure with a new if somewhat unsettled (and unsettling) view of what it means to be a Newfoundlander.

While Buchan may be motivated to search the Newfoundland interior for Beothuk by an "instinctual devotion to duty and Empire" (19), Peyton's reasons for entering the unknown are of a much deeper nature. At times Peyton seem like a Sherpa guide, a Native informant, leading the colonials into *terra incognita*. Buchan often defers to Peyton's knowledge when handling the locals, such as the moment on the first trip up the River Exploits when Dick Richmond and Tom Taylor threaten to become violent:

They began to argue about something and fell into a shouting match, cursing one another with a practiced ease that attracted the attention of the entire party. Buchan made his way across to Peyton. "Should I intervene in this?" he asked.

Peyton shook his head. "It's just their way....We'd best get started," he said. "If we wait for them to simmer down, we'll be here till dark." (76)

Crummey lifts Peyton from this secondary role of guide, Man Friday, and local expert by filling him with a psychological desire to discover himself in this wilderness. Though he retreats so often to the backcountry to avoid his father, Peyton comes closest to knowing John Senior when he is in the wilderness. Camping one night with Reilly, Peyton finally gives voice to the questions that have been burning inside him: "Is it true what I've heard about John Senior?... Did he beat that old Indian to death with a trap-bed?" (50). Receiving a diversionary (albeit confessional) story from Reilly, Peyton seems to turn to

the dark void of rough country to answer his questions:

Peyton lifted his mug in acquiescence and then threw back the cold remains of his tea into the snow. His companion took out his black prayer beads and rolled them through his fingers as he muttered those ancient prayers to himself. The dog got up from its place beside the fire, walked a little ways outside the circle of light and began barking wildly into the woods. Reilly interrupted his rosary to quiet the dog but it would not come back to the fire. The hair was ridged along its spine and it stood there growling into the dark. Peyton felt like crawling out beside the animal and joining in himself. (58)

Peyton also comes closest to knowing himself when he is working in the interior: "He understood the backcountry, the habits of the animals, the patterns of the weather. And it was this knowledge that made him feel he was closest here to belonging, to loving something that might, in some unconscious way, love him in return" (166). Yet it is in this wilderness that Peyton catches lingering traces of something, a nagging, unsettling element that restricts him from feeling completely at home in the forest. "Something was following John Peyton through the bush," Crummey writes without specifying if that something is physical or spiritual (163). As he idles away time on his traplines, awaiting the expedition to find the Beothuk, Peyton is filled with an "anxiety [that] followed him into the woods and would not leave him" (166). The anxiety grows into a continuous niggling presence that unsettles him: "There was also that sense he had just now of being watched. Not concrete at all, he admitted to himself. He trudged on, deliberately not

looking over his shoulder, not flicking sidelong glances into the trees to the left or the right. He was at a loss, for the moment, as to how to shake it" (166). Peyton knows as he walks through the forests and rows through the rivers of "his" island that he is traipsing on the traces of those who existed there before him. He is also aware that the traplines he tends to and the fishing grounds he exploits are his only through the transgressions of his father. In order to know himself, to rid himself of the lingering questions that plague him at home and in the bush, Peyton must make contact with the Beothuk, who up until this point in his life have existed only as shadows and traces, living half-lives in half-told stories that conceal as much or more than they reveal.

This insatiable search for the elusive other is a psychological phenomenon intimately investigated by the Freudian psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, whose "Subversion of the Subject" explains the human subject's need for an "other" to help him understand himself. It is a concept best made clear by Bice Benvenuto and Roger Kennedy in *The Works of Jacques Lacan*:

...the subject is like the questioner of the tarot, who has to question the reader of the tarot cards before he can know the meaning of his own destiny lying before him. The subject is the one who has to question somebody else, an Other, in order to know the truth about himself – whether this Other be magician, sphinx, analyst, his own master or slave.... The subject comes into being at this point, when he experiences a lack of cohesion, a moment of "discord", where his own words and knowledge of himself fade away. (169-70)

According to Lacan, this all-knowing other must have come before the subject, in some way predicated the subject, and somehow occupied the space now inhabited by the subject: "There where it was just now, there where it was for a while, between an extinction that is still glowing and a birth that is retarded, 'I' can come into being and disappear from what I say" (Lacan 300). In other words, "Where once they [the Other] stood, we [the subject] stand."

In a letter to Governor Charles Hamilton, the real John Peyton, Jr., does not hide his frustration at being repeatedly relieved of his property by the Beothuk but contends that his purpose for entering into the interior in the winter of 1819 was to "take some of the Indians and thus through them open a friendly communication with the rest" (Howley 106). Kevin Major expands on Peyton's purpose in *As Near to Heaven by Sea*: "In March 1819 Demasduit was abducted at Red Indian Lake by the son of the dreaded John Peyton. If we are to believe Peyton, Jr., the foremost reason for the taking of Demasduit was to have her live with white settlers for a time, in order to show her how charitable they could be. When she was returned to her people, Peyton contended it would help establish friendly relations" (212). Crummey reinforces this notion in *River Thieves* by making Peyton's role in the expedition not only that of leader but of peacekeeper: "Peyton couldn't countenance allowing John Senior to take his men after the Indians without being there himself to keep a leash on their anger, and he had agreed to mount an expedition to the lake in March. Reparation was what John Senior spoke of, but he could see it was revenge that animated his father" (166). Experiencing this book through the lens of history, readers cannot help but regard Peyton in much the same way they regard

Oedipus, as a man ignorant of his destiny and place in history. Peyton is fated to fail, and the Beothuk are destined to die out. Yet where this story becomes oddly but overtly Oedipal is in the European settlers' desire to take the exotic other and not only come to know her but to make themselves known through this abduction.

In this Oedipal triangle that Crummey creates, Demasduit (whom Crummey refers to only as Mary March) is obviously the mother figure. In truth, it is the fact that she has delivered a baby less than a month before her encounter with Peyton that prevents her from escaping:

The baby had come only three weeks before and the tearing pain below her belly burned into her legs and up the length of her back as she ran. The weight of her son like a beach-rock in her arms. She called to her husband and he came back to take the boy, still she fell further behind them. She heard the voice of the white man she had seen on the finger of land again and when she looked over her shoulder he was nearly upon her. She ran another hundred yards before she fell to the ice and knelt there, choking on the cold air and crying. (2)

Peyton and his men have literally captured the mother, who proves her status by revealing the most fetishized feature of women: "She turned where she knelt to face the stranger, loosening the belt and lifting her cassock over her head to reveal her breasts in an appeal for mercy, the nipples barely visible beneath the red paint that covered her torso" (190). Baring her breasts and revealing her femininity not only establishes Demasduit as the "weaker" sex and therefore an unthreatening entity in the European

mindset but also confirms her existence as a desirable object. According to Lacan, "Such is the woman concealed behind her veil: it is the absence of the penis that turns her into the phallus, the object of desire. Draw attention to this absence and...the effect is guaranteed 100 per cent, for men who go straight to the point" (322). For these men who have gone straight up the river, it is evident that this woman is somehow instrumental in mending the rift they feel between themselves and the land. In making a connection with her, in getting to know her and in letting her know them, there is a possibility that this lack, this feeling of a missing something, will finally be satisfied.

According to Lacan, the mother figure, denied as she is the possession of a penis, becomes a symbol of lack for the subject. The mother is an "object that cannot be grasped" (316), representative of that which is lacking in the subject, an imperceptible something that always escapes the subject. Yet in this instance, these searching settlers have captured that lack. They have the mother (they even rename her *Mary*), and this unprecedented meeting will prove as tragic for Peyton and Mary as it did for Oedipus.

The Oedipal drama actually plays out on the ice that day. Just as Peyton saw fit to claim each river and hill he passed in earlier excursions, so now does he feel justified in taking this woman. When he finally catches up to Demasduit, Peyton holds her arm "gently above the elbow" (191) and passes her off to another member of his party much like a lead anthropologist would hand off an artefact to be catalogued by an assistant. The elder Peyton then binds the woman's arms with a handkerchief. It is now that Nonosabasut (who remains unnamed by Crummey), the husband of Demasduit, crosses the ice to rescue and reclaim his wife.

Although there is no reason to believe that the Beothuk were an abnormally large people, Nonosabasut has remained a massive and menacing presence in most recordings of Demasduit's capture. According to Major, Nonosabasut "was a giant of a man, well over six feet tall and easily the physical better of any one of the white men" (Major 213). Howley claims the Beothuk were a "race of gigantic stature" (Howley 257) and that Nonosabasut measured "six feet seven and a half inches" (257). Yet Bernard Assiniwi offers an alternative description of Mary's husband that reveals as much about Nonosabasut's killers as it does about the man himself: "One day I [i.e., Shanawdithit] heard someone say that the English thought that Nonosabasut was an enraged monster. Nonosabasut was well built, strong, and impressive of stature. But he was not a monster, and he was not enormous. He was an ordinary Beothuk, and because he was not motivated by fear, but by love, his enemies were afraid of him and saw him as bigger than he was" (284). Most descriptions of Nonosabasut call to mind a young child's description of his father: impossibly large, practically indestructible, and possessed of an authoritative air. It is obvious Nonosabasut is the Oedipal father in Crummey's narrative as he strides across the ice to retrieve his wife from these cowering white men.

The Beothuk man walks into the circle of armed and agitated Europeans with the authority of a father entering a room to discipline his children. Nonosabasut made his argument "in careful detail and with all the rhetorical flourish he could muster" before he made to remove his wife from the company of the uncomprehending white men (Crummey 286). In comparison to the single-minded purpose of the Beothuk man, Peyton's followers appear like a group of children without a leader. John Senior guards

Mary with a dangerous jealousy, screaming at his son, "You keep that savage off the girl, John Peyton" (287). When the large man turns from his wife and begins strangling John Senior, it becomes evident that Peyton and his men must kill Nonosabasut in order to keep Mary for themselves. Watching the Beothuk man throttle his father, Peyton gives the order to "Shoot him if you have to" – an order he quickly follows with the more emphatic "Shoot the bastard" (288). Nonosabasut dies "with his back on the ice where he stared into the pale blue of the sky and worked his mouth around a word that would never escape his lips" (288). The first part of the Oedipal drama has been completed – the father figure has been murdered.

Now possessed of a mother figure, a representative of the people who occupied this island before them, the settlers hope to create a relationship with the people they have wronged, close this troublesome gap between themselves and the land, and establish themselves as rightful heirs to the island. Unfortunately, the other can never provide the answers to all the questions of the egotistical subject, and any interaction with this other only leads to the further mystification of the sought-after individual and the deconstruction of the subject himself. This is true in the case of Oedipus, who possesses the other only to find out she is not what he thought she was. Through this possession, Oedipus discovers that he is not who he perceived himself to be either: he is not the son of a shepherd, the solver of the riddle, and the king of Thebes. Rather, he is the pawn of destiny, possessed of things that were never meant to be his forever. Peyton's interaction with Mary March also awakens him to his role as a Newfoundlander, and though he is not fated to become a blind exile of the island, he does realize that this land will never

truly be his home.

Major notes that "Demasduit was not the person the white settlers were expecting. She became the one to change minds about her nation rather than have her own mind changed by her captors" (Major 214). Her life and death among the European settlers causes them to reconsider their lives and motivations. Listening to "the wet seethe of Mary's breathing" in an adjoining room aboard the *Grasshopper*, Buchan laments, "We have taken the tragedy of an entire race of people, Mr. Peyton, and cheapened it with our own sordid little melodrama," to which Peyton replies, "I think perhaps that is the English way" (Crummey 305). Obsessed with creating and recording a history of "their" island, these settlers neglected to notice that an entire living civilization was being destroyed. With the death of Mary March, Peyton realizes an originary connection to the island has been severed, and loss has become a pivotal part of the Newfoundland psyche. As he admits to Cassie at the end of the novel, "All my life I've loved what didn't belong to me" (327). Now, like Oedipus, Peyton realises he is not the master of this territory but an exile eking out an existence in a harsh land. Having listened to Peyton's confessional story of what happened the day of Mary's capture, Cassie curses him: "You bastard, John Peyton" (289), and surely Peyton is a bastard resident of a "bastard country" (321) – a people born to this island but not of it, an island occupied by Newfoundlanders but not owned by them.

In the end, it is inexplicable, this lack, "this nagging tug of the past, [this] pointless preoccupation with things as they were not and never could have been" (*Colony* 452). Crummey often plays with the inability of language to describe this land and the

people's relationship with it. At times picturesque descriptions of the land and its people are offset by unsettling words that indicate something is not right. The depiction of a beautiful starry night is marred by Peyton's drunkenness: "Stars winking through the moving branches of trees like flankers rising from a distant fire. He was drunker than he realized. He raised his head a notch higher and he fell over backwards into the snow, his cock still in his hand" (43). A young John Senior is shaken from his romantic reverence for the land by the crude and crass Harry Miller:

He was a boy of seventeen the first time he arrived on the northeast shore.... They disembarked on Fogo Island and took Miller's sloop into the Bay of Exploits, a spill of rough country almost uninhabited by Europeans at the time, the coastline shadowed by a ragtag fleet of smaller islands. Humpbacked granite, dark pelts of spruce. Barely submerged skerries breaking the water.... Just sailing through that raw country set John Senior's heart on edge. It made him feel he was capable of anything.... Miller grunted.... "She's a whore is what she is." (256-57)

The homey and healing atmosphere of Reilly and Annie Boss' tilt is tarnished by the use of a word that has an offensive connotation for most modern-day readers: "They walked in together with one of Annie's children. The tilt smelled of spruce gum and brine and potash. There was a mewling from the back of the room where a slut with a litter of new puppies lay beneath a wooden bunk" (267). As if to ensure that Buchan, Peyton and company do not get too comfortable in the shelter, the nursing dog "growled at his boots" the moment Buchan dared to get too close (267). Language has an unsettling ability in

River Thieves, yet it is the inability of language to make the Beothuk knowable that most fascinates Crummey.

Buchan, being the colonial that he is, is determined to know the land and its Native inhabitants. The navy man is often pictured poring over maps or writing in his diary: "Buchan had been sitting with a pipe, making notes in his journal by the light of the fire as he did at the end of each day's travel" (83). European reverence for the written word is evidenced by Cassie, who uses a few fugitive phrases in Buchan's journal to tell her lover what she could not speak: "There was a child. Before I ended it, David. I was pregnant" (292). The written word, the ability to record and name new things, is a shield held before these Europeans as they penetrate the unknown. While Crummey does well to demonstrate this tendency through Buchan and Peyton's littering of the landscape with names, he gives a greater literal example of the protection offered by English words when he describes Richmond's tilt:

...Buchan looked around the tiny room as his eyes adjusted to the poor light.... The walls themselves were papered with what on closer inspection turned out to be pages of a Methodist missionary magazine. Buchan leaned in to read a paragraph next to his head. "Regular subscriber?" he asked, nodding towards the walls.

"Can't read meself," Richmond said.... He reached out and slapped the wall with the palm of his hand. "Keeps the draught down a bit." (245-46)

Richmond is representative of the European colonial, settling the unknown through language, bulldozing the Beothuk with words.

Yet Reilly knows that the Beothuk are unknowable, unreadable: "There's no guessing at what that crowd are thinking" (124) is the Irishman's response to Peyton's inquiry as to why the Beothuk killed two marines. To write about the Beothuk is to write about loss – a theme Crummey establishes in the preamble to his narrative: "Before all this happened the country was known by different names.... A few have survived in the notebooks of the curious, of the scientifically minded who collated skinny vocabularies in the days before the language died altogether.... At the edge of a story that circles and circles their own death, they stand dumbly pointing" (vii). The only victory the Beothuk can enjoy is that they will remain forever unknowable to those who vanquished them. For a people so reliant on language, on recorded history for a sense of self, Newfoundlanders will always have at their core a sense of lack and loss, a barely begun chapter on the first Newfoundlanders.

The famous portrait of Demasduit stares back at Newfoundlanders like their very own Mona Lisa, forever unknowable, forever ambiguous. Crummey conveys some of this ambiguity in the title of his novel. Initially, *River Thieves* seems to refer to the Beothuk, who often relied on the pillaging of boats and stages for survival. John Senior claims the Beothuk "have got the face of a robber's horse.... They're brazen, sir. They'll make off with anything not stood over with a musket. They are a shameless lot of thieves all together" (21). Yet when the term "river thieves" is actually used within the narrative, it is not to describe the Beothuk:

Reilly was born in St. Giles.... His father worked as a lumper on the cargo ships in the Thames, but his vocation was stealing from the English. Each

night at low tide the river thieves made their way onto the East India ships at anchor. Reilly's father employed his three sons in bailing provisions into the black strip – bags painted black to make them less visible in the darkness – once the casks were pried open.... They could identify the stolen goods just from the smell of it rising through the cloth bags, sugar or indigo, coffee beans, ginger, tea. (52-53)

The title leaves the readers wondering if this book is a lament for a lost, misunderstood people or a condemnation of the less than noble Europeans who escaped to this island to continue their thieving, this time on a much grander scale.

Peyton's voyage into the Newfoundland unknown unearthed many truths about his fellow settlers yet left the Beothuk forever lost. More concerned with transforming Demasduit into a little colonial, a vessel to carry European goodwill to her people, Peyton, Buchan, Cassie and the others missed an opportunity to know the Beothuk. Perhaps they were afraid to get to know her, afraid that she would tell them things about themselves that they were unready and unwilling to hear. The Beothuk will remain the hag lingering just outside Newfoundlanders' perception, nagging their unconscious and disrupting their sleep. True to the quest narrative, Peyton does not succeed in what he set out to do, yet he learns a valuable lesson about himself and his existence in Newfoundland. Like Conrad's Marlow, Peyton can look at the land he calls home and say "this also...has been one of the dark places of the earth" (Conrad 18). The loss of what could have been will forever hang over the occupants of this island.

Chapter 3

Island Intimacy in Patrick Kavanagh's *Gaff Topsails*

In his introduction to the special issue of *Essays on Canadian Writing* dedicated to the literature of Newfoundland, editor Larry Mathews establishes a dichotomy of stoic and romantic traditions in contemporary Newfoundland literature. His point is most succinctly made when he discusses the novels of Patrick Kavanagh and Michael Crummey:

Perhaps *Gaff Topsails* and *River Thieves* can be understood as continuing the debate between [Harold Horwood's] *Tomorrow Will Be Sunday* and [Bernice Morgan's] *Random Passage* on the one hand and [Percy Janes'] *House of Hate* and [John Steffler's] *The Afterlife of George Cartwright* on the other: the (naïvely?) idealized possibility, presented as tantalizingly actual, as opposed to the unsentimentally and uncompromisingly explored darker side of their society's collective psyche. (17)

This chapter will attempt to place Patrick Kavanagh's *Gaff Topsails* within this stoic-romantic binary by identifying the particular romanticism employed by Kavanagh. The combination of sentiments in *Gaff Topsails* produces a novel that is both romantic and bleak, an in-between island that is both idealized and obscene.

The Newfoundland-born characters of *Gaff Topsails* possess a oneness with the land that is overtly sexual. The "something" that drives Johnston's Smallwood and distracts Crummey's Peyton is defined in Kavanagh's text by sexuality and sexual awakening. Characters are sometimes plagued and sometimes pleased by phallic and

yonic symbols: a large icicle, a cave within an iceberg, the towering lighthouse, and the folds of the pitcher plant possess frightening and liberating powers – depending on who is encountering them. This understanding of the land, this merging with the island, be it sexual or psychological, is neither new nor limited to Kavanagh's text. Prowse's *History of Newfoundland* often elevates Newfoundlanders' relationship to their land to the level of a psychological and physical union. Ray Guy, in several articles, Horwood in *Tomorrow Will Be Sunday*, and Annie Proulx in *The Shipping News* are among many writers who have defined Newfoundlanders not only by their relationship with the land but by a fusion with the environment so deep that they actually resemble in appearance and attitude the glacier-scarred rocks and stunted trees of the island.

Kavanagh's text presents a new form of this island intimacy and should not be qualified or dismissed as romantic fiction. The relationship of Kavanagh's outporters with their homeland lies somewhere between the sexual, sacramental, and sentimental oneness with the place and the ravaging of the land that drives a wedge between the island and Crummey's characters in *River Thieves*. The land and the ocean are not raped in *Gaff Topsails*, but neither are they worshipped, wooed and loved. The sexualized relationship between these characters and their surrounding is best defined by a word used again and again by the three boys who spend the majority of *Gaff Topsails* penetrating an iceberg: *fucking*.

In *Gaff Topsails*, Kavanagh creates a "sublime in-between territory" that is both romantic and repulsive, sacred and profane (370). A detail of the events that comprise one day – the Feast of St. John the Baptist – the novel is a Bakhtinian carnival complete

with a fool-king, sexual (and sexualized) rituals, mock baptisms, obscene prayers, communal carousing, mummers, and exaggerated phalluses. Straddling myth and reality, Kavanagh creates a community that endorses Newfoundland romanticism yet eviscerates it as well. Just as the boys' penetration of the iceberg precipitates its destruction, Kavanagh's entrance into this nostalgic Newfoundland of fairies, the hag, dumb cakes, and the "Boo Darby" is not performed to actualize an idealized Newfoundland but to demonstrate how the romanticized and sacred aspects of Newfoundland identity are inextricably linked to a darkness that grows from Newfoundlanders' sometimes profane and obscene relationship with this "penitential terrain" (Kavanagh 91).

Island Intimacy

On the back cover of the first edition of Wayne Johnston's *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams*, Rudy Wiebe expresses his appreciation of this "irresistible novel" by way of the sexually charged poetry of the rakish John Donne: "Licence my roving hands, and let them go...O my America, my new-found-land." Through reading Wiebe's endorsement, one gets the impression Johnston has moulded "character and sea, landscape and past" into one fetishized body the satisfied reader will have "explored, savoured, indulged 'before, behind, between, above, below.'" This sometimes sexual, sometimes psychological, always romantic mingling of rock and flesh was already a well-established trope in Newfoundland fiction long before. In truth, this increasingly prevalent, pseudo-sexual merger of man and island can be interpreted as a peculiar but popular form of "Newfoundland nationalism." While the notion of Newfoundlanders as a people (and race) apart has found its way into tourist guides, it is this psychic/sexual union of island

and islander that gives birth to the "authentic" Newfoundlander.

Notions of Newfoundlanders as a race in tune with their island have been prevalent since D.W. Prowse's *History of Newfoundland* (1895), but it is through the "Newfoundland Renaissance" of the 1970s and the resurgence of interest in Newfoundland literature that the idea of the islander as being mystically of the land has become a prominent fixture. Whether this union of a people and their place is spiritual or physical, it has played a major part in the creation of Newfoundlanders as a people somehow predisposed to survive on a land where others would perish. While this notion goes far in establishing an identity for Newfoundlanders, it also leads to depictions of Newfoundlanders as a semi-evolved, Caliban subspecies. It is also, conversely, a continuation of the notions of defeatism that plague a people who have surrendered their nationhood and stand to be consumed by a much larger country. The growing desire to maintain island identity by placing Newfoundland within Newfoundlanders is tantamount to an admission of defeat. Unable to establish themselves through mastery of the land, Newfoundlanders can settle for a fantastic fusion of themselves and their birthplace. Though Newfoundlanders may have to abandon this island to live, they can take comfort in knowing that the island lives in them. An investigation of Newfoundland literature and the culture surrounding it will reveal this island intimacy to be more a reflection of anxiety than a felt oneness with the land.

The fisherfolk of Prowse's *History of Newfoundland* seem like lichen or the gnarled, stunted trees clutching the rocky cliffs of his island. Prowse uses the verb *cling* several times to describe Newfoundlanders' attachment to the land. According to Prowse,

Newfoundland was settled by “poor West Countrymen” whose “heroic souls” could not be daunted by any manner of hardship, who “clung to their homes” and spawned children who “grew up to love the wild country of their birth” (Prowse xxvii). Later in his history, Prowse notes that these men “clung with sturdy tenacity to the land they had made their home” (114). In the century that followed Prowse’s publication of these sentiments, Newfoundlanders would not only be portrayed as a race that dug into the land but as a people who have merged with this island or have been born of this rocky soil.

First published in 1966, in the early stages of what would come to be known as the “Newfoundland Renaissance,” Harold Horwood’s often romantic, sometimes scandalous *Tomorrow Will Be Sunday* moves toward this merger of man and island. Protagonist Eli Pallisher penetrates the landscape in what amounts to sexual sacrament as he enjoys an early morning swim: “He slipped lithely out of his clothes, then stepped down between the rocks into the sea, that rose, chilling, past his groin, and received him, as he slid underneath its limpid surface, with a sort of final cold caress – a baptism of ice” (Horwood 373-4). This union with the land leaves Eli “whole and content,” and his body strikingly similar to the rock around him: “He...looked down at his cold body, like marble stained red by the raw day” (375). Horwood does not stray too far into this romanticism, however, reminding his readers that it is the pragmatism of Eli’s neighbours that permits him these magical moments. The place where Eli chooses to enter the landscape is a “gunshot from the sunkeners” (370), a measurement that makes obvious this land has been made so familiar by the hunters and fishermen of Eli’s community – labourers who have gained their island intimacy through work, not whimsy:

Far off, behind [Eli], there was a faint cough or two, strangled and tentative – then the subdued chug-chug-chugging of a one-cylinder engine, as the first trap boat circled among the mooring collars of the harbour and slipped between the sunkeners into the open bay. The boat put the first gulls, sleeping upon the water or upon the offshore rocks, to flight, and spoke apologetically to the otherwise silent world, never asserting its dominance, but seeking permission, hesitantly, to intrude upon the privacy of nature. Three generations of fishermen had made its voice as much a part of the sea as the mewing of the gulls above it. (373)

Horwood depicts Eli's community of Caplin Bight as a place where "every foot of cleared land was in use" and the protagonist's horizon of experience is determined by the extent of his fellow villagers' industrious endeavours "into the woods" (Horwood 5, 13). It would not be until a decade after *Tomorrow Will Be Sunday* appeared that a journalist writing about Newfoundland literature would sever this connection between intimacy and industry.

In 1976, Sandra Gwyn wrote an article for *Saturday Night* entitled "The Newfoundland Renaissance" in which she discusses the "Newcult Phenomenon" – a term she coins to describe "the miraculous and exciting revival of art and theatre on Canada's poor, bald rock" (Gwyn 38). In between her description of tossing a bottle of rum into her car before she visits Newfoundland artist and character, Gerry Squires; her citing of Newfoundlanders who say things like "'Twas beautiful"; and her assertion that "inside every Newfoundlander there's a performer struggling to get out"; Gwyn manages

to mystically mingle Newfoundlanders with the land they occupy (38, 41, 42). According to Gwyn, "all over this rock...painters and actors and poets are popping up in sweet and splendid profusion. Like the wild harebells you find every August, bursting out of sheer granite cliffs" (40) The "life force" of these artists flows from the land, Gwyn claims; they are "salty and earthy" (40). Those who write of Newfoundland somehow grow out of this island like trees or are embedded in it like rocks. As evidence of this, Gwyn cites Newfoundland humorist Ray Guy, then adds her own nature-driven romanticism:

"Endure, endure, endure," Guy once described the Newfoundland mystique. "Sometimes the mute endurance of rocks, sometimes the roaring endurance of a stout bull...sometimes the fluid endurance of the waters around us that only look soft." ... [T]he decline of the fishery, the decay of the old outport way of life, are the sources of [Newfoundland artists'] inspiration and their sense of urgency. The source that drives the green fuse through the flower.

Can the flower endure? (45)

In the face of Joe Smallwood's unstoppable push toward modernization, the emptying of the outports, the collapse of the fishery, and the out-migration of thousands of islanders, a primeval Newfoundlander was created, anchored, and rooted in the land so that the Newfoundland identity would not be lost during this time of change. This Newfoundlander still "exists" today, carrying with him the "Newfoundland mystique," "a collective tragic muse" and also a paralyzing primitivism (Gwyn 40).

In November 2004, CBC Newsworld's *Hot Type* aired an episode dedicated to

Newfoundland writing entitled "The Rocks Here Tell Stories." In this program, Newfoundland writers are described as being "rooted to the place" and "bred to this place." Newfoundland writer and performer Des Walsh goes so far as to say "every piece of granite, every spruce tree, I feel it, it's all part of me" when describing his relation to this island. Newfoundland is described as "uncharted territory" in a world where so many places have been "papered over" with literature, and the episode becomes a supposedly long-awaited love letter to the land. The established binary of "new writing, old landscape" creates a sense of longing among these writers to somehow become extensions of their island, to feel as Walsh does the rocks and trees around them. In *(In)scribing Body/landscape Relations*, Bronwyn Davies artfully terms this desire "(be)longing in the landscape" (Davies 39): "I bracket the term in this way to give special weight to *longing*. In the process of constructing ourselves *appropriately* in landscape, we long for a *secure relationship*" (37). The speakers in *Hot Type* long to establish themselves in this landscape with the insatiable sexual desire of a pining suitor.

Kavanagh creates some of the most overtly sexual depictions of Newfoundlanders coming in and out of the land in *Gaff Topsails*. The arrival by skiff of the village's founding father reads first like the phallic penetration of a feminine landscape, then later like the fusion bay and boy:

[Tomas Croft] feels underneath him a hesitation, a kind of gathering, a sucking back, and then an advance, a heavy uplifting of the surface...an explosion of spray... He awaits the crest of a swell and catches it and runs the skiff ashore... Tingling with exhaustion the boy lays his body down

upon the beach... In the last instant before he passes out, hypnotized by the monotony of the sea, it seems that this glowing breath is nothing less than his own being, his own life and soul and spirit. (Kavanagh 108)

Later, Tomas climbs to the highest point of the cove and consummates his marriage to the land:

The wind roars. He hears so many sounds that he can hear nothing at all. His blood flows madly. In a frenzy he tears open his breeches and he bursts out hard. With both hands he seizes himself and at once his whole body convulses and makes spasms. For the span of one breath, milky ribbons of his seed hang suspended before his eyes, and in the next instant are vaporized by the wind and scattered in a pearly steaming mist westward across the field of voluptuous blue. (111)

Though Tomas does eventually marry a fellow castaway, his children seem less a product of him and his wife and more a result of Tomas' earlier union with the land – a hybrid offspring that are as much island as they are human. They are born of a community that Kavanagh describes as a “womb-cove,” and they live their lives in “rhythms [that] echo...the touch of sea upon the land” (139). The modern-day descendants of Tomas remain erotically attached to the land; one girl actually reaches orgasm as she watches a passing iceberg, the very iceberg whose crevices her male schoolmates penetrate near the climax of the novel.

Though the land and Tomas are as “lovers, one together,” the boy's almost symbiotic relationship with the land resembles also the unborn child's bond with its

mother (118). Davies views the landscape as a second mother, moreover, a second womb where the inhabitants search for a “secure relationship” and “affinity” with the land around them (Davies 37). Her text abounds with narratives of people “being enfolded in and *becoming* the landscape” (37). Kavanagh’s creation of the womb-cove could reflect Davies’ assertion that

[t]he first landscape we encounter, as animals who are born as sentient beings, is the internal landscape of our mother’s body folded around us.... [Our] first landscape is a fold in [our] mother’s body.... That fold creates an interior, a holding place, a deep surface on which the baby lives and from which, or in which, it finds its sustenance.... [T]hat prior-to-birth landscape...can also be thought of as one in which language, or systems of communication, have already been experienced and made relevant as the vibrations of sound pass through the physical matter of the mother’s body. We hear/feel the patterns of sound that our mother makes... (23-24)

The sheltered cove in which Tomas builds his “cozy hut” (Kavanagh 117) undoubtedly mirrors the fold of the womb – the “interior” and “holding place” which protects the child. Like the womb, this cove is full of its own vibrations and sound patterns through which Tomas experiences life: “In fact, every rock and tree and wave has a personality of its own. He speaks to all of these, and they reply to him, so that in his mind the island is alive as he himself is alive. During the nights, the sea comforts him with its steady breath of ebb and flow” (118). Like the unborn infant, Tomas is surrounded by a living organism that protects, soothes, and sustains him.

In his essay on *Gaff Topsails*, Adrian Fowler echoes Davies’ assertions when he

claims that the occupants of this “womblike harbour” (Fowler 81) garner not only sustenance from the land that enfolds them but also take from the sea and soil the very beliefs and ideologies that form their reality. According to Fowler, “[t]he spirituality of the villagers is complex, a mixture of Catholicism indoctrinated by missionaries and paganism imbibed from the place” (81). The sources of this sometime sexual paganism “arise naturally out of the world inhabited by these characters” (78). Like the womb, this cove provides everything these people need to survive while structuring their reality.

Island Anxiety

No wonder Rudy Wiebe would be so moved by a novel in which the “unrequited dream” of the title is the unbreakable, indissoluble union of man and island. Wiebe’s *The Temptations of Big Bear* concludes with such a joining. Defeated in court and on the battlefield, Big Bear, chief of the Plains Cree, who throughout the novel refused to be confined to a reserve, to be limited in his interaction with the land, finally becomes the land he has lost:

He felt the granular sand joined by snow running together, against and over him in delicate streams. It sifted over the crevices of his lips and eyes, between the folds of his face and hair and hands, legs; gradually rounded him over until there was a tiny mound on the sand hill almost imperceptible on the level horizon. Slowly, slowly, all changed continually into indistinguishable, as it seemed, and everlasting, unchanging, rock. (Wiebe 415)

Wiebe’s whimsical resolution seems to say that though Big Bear has lost the colonial

battle and can no longer legally claim ownership of the land, his affinity with the rocks and fields and trees cannot be broken – he cannot lose the land for he is the land. This illusion of man mingling with homeland is a well-used trope in postcolonial literature and is often a response to the anxiety surrounding a loss of place.

In *Ecocriticism: Creating Self and Place in Environmental and American Indian Literatures*, Donelle N. Dreese claims that “Part of the postcolonial condition is a loss of self, a cultural alienation involving an eradication of cultural traditions, a history, and national character” (15). In postcolonial literature, this alienation is countered by what Dreese terms “mythical,” “psychic” or “environmental reterritorializations.” The most interesting of these three is the environmental reterritorialization, which “involves writers who position themselves in natural settings in order to reinhabit a landscape or place that is intrinsic to their philosophies of being in the world” (19). According to this view, “We are our environments. We take in physically and psychologically our surroundings and they become part of who we are.... Place and self are not separate entities” (115). “[D]irt, water, flesh” (71) are all the same – interconnected and inseparable.

Dreese claims that this reterritorialization is brought on by anxiety and alienation stemming from the postcolonial condition of losing one’s homeland: “A response to the alienation is the attempt by colonized countries to retrieve and reestablish a sense of cultural identity” (15). Dreese believes that the pull “toward what feels ‘right’ or like ‘home’” (1) cannot be overestimated and that many writers write home through recording “the relationship between the natural world and the self as reciprocal and historical” (20). Tomas Croft’s union with the land and his descendants’ erotic attachment to it are proof

of their belonging, of being home. Fowler notes that every character in *Gaff Topsails* is at home with the exception of the newly arrived priest, Father MacMurrough, whose unsettling difference to those of this community is an example of Freud's *das Unheimliche* (the uncanny):

In *Gaff Topsails*, it would be understandable, given the isolation and homogeneity of the village, if the experience of *Unheimliche* – *l'inqui tante tranget*, the uncanny – were associated primarily with the stranger.... The stranger exists powerfully in the imagination...as the Boo Darby, the Janney Boo, the Black Stranger, the Masterless Men, and a host of other bogeyman names. Father MacMurrough himself realizes he is regarded by his parishioners as the Black Stranger. (Fowler 85)

Fowler believes the priest is made part of the community through his "role of master of the ceremony of lighting the bonfire on midsummer's eve, a pagan ritual given over to the priest in the early days of the people's reconversion to Christianity" (84). The "womb-cove" is such that it "has the capacity to embrace the other" and bring him home (85).

Yet Fowler admits that while this "womb-cove" becomes home to those born of it or inseminated into it, "the most compelling manifestation of the other in *Gaff Topsails* is...Newfoundland itself, never fully tamed or civilized, never quite fitting into imperialist interpretations of history, never understood, perhaps never understandable" (86). It is the anxiety over this unknowability of their homeland that drives the narrators of *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams*. At times, Johnston's Smallwood is entirely

overwhelmed by the land he is trying to conquer. The island becomes at worst an enemy, at best an oppositional other to Smallwood and all Newfoundlanders "by imposing upon us an obligation for greatness without giving us the means to meet it, a greatness commensurate with our geography" (Johnston 339). By novel's end, Smallwood has not experienced a Croftian fusion with the land but remains other to the land, unhomely: "I did not solve the paradox of Newfoundland or fathom the effect on me of its particular beauty" (552). Fielding can never shake free of her desire to claim the landscape and is forced in the end to create Newfoundlanders through whose hearts pump "old sea-seeking rivers." Fearing the loss of her culture as her home is transformed into another country, Fielding places Newfoundland within Newfoundlanders. Johnston's Smallwood believes it is the anxiety over the loss of place that drives writers and artists like Fielding: "Perhaps only an artist can measure up to such a place or come to terms with the impossibility of doing so. Absence, deprivation, bleakness, even despair are more likely than their opposites to be the subject of great art, but they otherwise work against greatness" (552). It is the anxiety behind Fielding's drive to create a Newfoundland merged with Newfoundlanders that is perhaps missed by critics who praise Johnston/Fielding's unification of "[c]haracter and sea, landscape and past" or readers who sing the praises of "tragically beautiful and noble" Newfoundlanders who grow out of this land. Fielding's claim that Newfoundlanders "are a people in whose bodies old sea-seeking rivers roar with blood" is a last desperate attempt of a romantic to maintain a separate and static Newfoundlandness as her country becomes a province (562).

Sacred and Profane

In "Patrick Kavanagh's *Gaff Topsails* and the Myth of the Old Outport," Fowler notes the importance of the day on which the story takes place – 24 June 1948. This day is more than just another feast of St. John the Baptist (or Discovery Day – the celebration of John Cabot's "discovery" of Newfoundland):

In 1948, this day fell between two fateful referenda on Confederation with Canada, the first resulting in a close minority vote in favour of restoration of Responsible Government, the second in a close majority vote in favour of Confederation. The chosen time of the narrative therefore merges two mythologically significant occasions – the one recalling the origins of modern Newfoundland society in its settlement by white Europeans, the other marking a momentous change in that society's sense of self. (Fowler 72)

Kavanagh reflects this change – a change Fielding would call loss – through subtle instances of a pre-Confederation Newfoundland identity manifesting itself mystically yet naturally within the community. The pink, white, and green flag today associated with notions of a pre-Confederate, "independent" and "free" Newfoundland appears again and again – proof that though the classification of Newfoundland as a colony, country, or province is in flux, a Newfoundland identity remains evident and embedded within the very landscape. On this day when "[l]azy clouds like jellyfish" drift over men mending lobster pots and caulking dories, women laying fish on flakes, and the much fetishized saltbox houses of the outport community, they also "pass over...the clotheslines where

flannel sheets, pink and white and green, wave like flags" (Kavanagh 31-32). Inside the community church, altarboy Kevin Barron watches sunlight pass through stained glass and the flag appear on the tabernacle – an obvious allusion by Kavanagh to the sacredness of the passing Newfoundland identity: "Sunlight falls square upon the conopaeum. The light paints patches of green and pink against the whiteness of the veil" (70). Outside the church, teenaged Mary Dwyer observes as the white glow of a light within the building creates another instance of the tricolour: "The sanctuary lamp is visible through the stained glass. Mary moves her head this way and that, trying to make the pinpoint change colour among the tinted panes, change to pink or green or some other colour" (189).

The timing of the narrative, an in-between space for Newfoundland identity, seems to imbue the novel with the anxiety and the loss that fill the characters of *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams* and *River Thieves*. The history and mythology that form these characters gains a heightened importance on this anniversary of Newfoundland's discovery, for the next Discovery Day will be the first in the province of Newfoundland. To paraphrase Fielding, the past – and all senses of place and self that can be derived from it – will literally be another country. Situating his narrative in this transitional space, Kavanagh seems compelled to cram his story with as much Newfoundland mythology and mysticism as possible. As Fowler notes, Kavanagh's first settler, Tomas Croft, is an archetype and a mythological character through whom the readers can experience much of what is romantic, roguish, and romantically roguish in Newfoundland's character and heritage (80). Tomas settles the land, encounters the Beothuk, witnesses John Cabot's

arrival, marries Sheila nGira, engages in acts of piracy, and fosters the “bedrock paganism” Fowler believes outlasts the thin layers of political and religious ideology that cover it from time to time (79). Tomas’ descendants also seem to experience all that is romantic and mysterious about the Newfoundland character: all seem to have at some time suffered from the hag, all have been affected by fishing or sealing disasters, most believe in fairies, bogeymen, and the validity of incantations and ceremonies that cure ailments or foretell the future. Fowler is right to identify Tomas as an archetype – but most of these characters are either archetypes (the fisherman’s widow, the broken survivor of a sealing disaster, the mad woman of the cove) or engaged in archetypal activity (divining future husbands through various folkisms, mumming, partaking in boil-ups). A unique and romantic Newfoundlandness is present on nearly every page of *Gaff Topsails*.

Yet, in the context of Newfoundland, Kavanagh’s most romantic notion of the land as a bountiful womb seems illusory and foolish. In his article “Looking backwards: the milieu of the old Newfoundland outports,” Newfoundland scholar Patrick O’Flaherty claims “[t]he pitiless Newfoundland environment does not yield a living easily to the labour of men. The soil is thin, the terrain, though beautiful, is primordial and appalling, and the climate is bitter” (O’Flaherty 1975, 4). Kavanagh’s portrayal of not only Tomas Croft’s survival but the sexual sanctuary he finds in Newfoundland would probably be scoffed at by O’Flaherty as the most delusional romanticism. According to O’Flaherty, “[t]he land itself was not admired but ravaged” (5) by the earliest Newfoundland settlers and their modern-day descendants. O’Flaherty goes as far to say that such a land offers

no succour but “stifles the spirit and erodes finer sensibilities,” fostering within those who work it “a kind of stolid indifference [and] a contempt for prettiness” (5).

Despite hundreds of years of intimate interaction with the land, there is little on the island to stake the claim of Newfoundlanders. O’Flaherty notes, “[t]here are few monuments or memorials to [Newfoundland] activity in existence because it was focused primarily upon the sea, and the sea does not show the marks of human industry” (4). Davies stresses that this embodiment of the landscape is an “attempt to make the invisible visible” (13), a reflection of a desire to connect oneself to one’s homeland. In light of O’Flaherty’s assertion, this joining of body and landscape seems a direct reaction to the lack of Newfoundland markers on Newfoundland soil. Occurring less than a year before Newfoundland’s entrance into Confederation, Kavanagh’s narrative moves between idealized actualization of Newfoundland identity and the most base instances of “stolid indifference” and “contempt for prettiness.”

Kavanagh is certainly motivated to merge Newfoundland identity with place. There is more than a claim to the land in *Gaff Topsails* – the flag is not placed on this island. It rises out of it. Yet the Newfoundlanders who occupy Kavanagh’s island are not so romantic or naïve. Fowler claims Kavanagh’s characters are oblivious to the “historical import” of the time they are occupying or the events outside their cove (73). It could be argued that they are less oblivious than wilfully indifferent. There is an awareness of the romanticism attached to the land and the labour that defines them; yet many of these characters mingle that sentimentality with pragmatism and obscenity. The entire novel is a play between the sacred and the profane, with many of its transforming

characters finding their identity somewhere in between. Beginning with founding father Tomas Croft and extending to his modern-day descendants, the identity of these characters is extracted from the "Newfoundland mystique" and the harsh realities of the world around them. As they pass through this landscape, the characters experience the sacred and the profane, the exalted and the fallen, and come to realize that their identity – especially in relation to the place – will always be in flux between the extremes of this carnivalesque world.

In "The Bakhtinian Road to Ecological Insight," Malcolm J. McDowell discusses the connection in literature between Bakhtin's theory of the carnivalesque and an intimate interaction with the land. According to McDowell, those who write about the land as Kavanagh does "try to divest themselves as much as possible of human preconceptions and enter the natural world almost as though they were animal participants.... The hope, it appears, is to allow the landscape to enter them in order to be expressed through their writing" (381). Citing from Yi-Fu Tuan's *Topophilia*, McDowell notes how the labourers' understanding of the land is particularly carnivalesque – very much of the body and outside any imposed ideology or romanticism:

"The entry of nature is no mere metaphor. Muscles and scars bear witness to the physical intimacy of the contact." The small farmer or peasant's way of nature comes through the need to gain a living, leading French workers to say with aching bodies that "their trades have entered into them." Bakhtin in his discussions of the carnivalesque champions this nonintellectual, bodily way of knowing the world. It is a way to resist

abstract, intellectual, official reality that a social hierarchy always creates for its own ends. (381)

As powers outside their community sign papers and alter the official reality of their country, the outporters of Kavanagh's text continue with their bodily way of knowing the world. All the characters take part in a carnival that reinforces their reality and sense of community through both incidental and intentional parodies of the religious and political doctrines that otherwise rule their lives.

According to Bakhtin, this festival on the cusp of change is an essential element of carnival: "through all the stages of historic development feasts were linked to moments of crisis, of breaking points in the cycle of nature or in the life of society of man. Moments of death and revival, of change and renewal always lead to a festive perception of the world" (Bakhtin 9). These feasts were not revolutions but rather "sanctioned the existing pattern of things and reinforced it" (9). In times of uncertainty, "the official feast looked back at the past and used the past to consecrate the present" (9). Kavanagh's carnival is not a lament for a past unrealized or a dream unrequited but a mingling of myth, past, and romanticism with grim reality to present and reproduce a Newfoundland character to be carried by these islanders into their new lives as citizens of Canada.

In *Rabelais and His World*, Bakhtin notes that an essential element of carnival is the "reversal of the hierarchic levels: the jester was proclaimed king, a clownish abbot, bishop, or archbishop was elected at the 'feast of fools,' and in the churches...a mock pontiff was even chosen" (81). The election of mock kings and popes is guided by "topographical logic"; a "shifting from top to bottom" (81). In this respect, Tomas Croft

is a carnival king and his impossibly long rule a time of carnival in Newfoundland.

Tomas Croft's story begins in fifteenth-century Ireland during a time of famine. Tomas is the bastard son of a monk: "The mother is unknown to the child," and he has been raised "in the austerities of the Rule" (Kavanagh 94). Through his very existence, Tomas mingles the sacred with the profane – he knows "only the ways of holy men," yet his life is evidence of his father's break from his sacred vows in favour of worldly flesh. (94). Lustful monks are central figures in carnival since many festivals precede official church feasts such as Lent by mocking the pious seriousness that is to reign during that time. All that is to be denied and suppressed during the holy time is celebrated by priapic priests such as Friar John who rule during carnival through their ability to "reinterpret any sacred text in the sense of eating, drinking, and eroticism, and transpose it from the Lenten to the carnival 'obscene' level" (Bakhtin 13, 86). Thus are the most revered texts, symbols, and icons entered into the "material bodily lower stratum" of festival and eroticism. Bakhtin notes that the carnival of Mardi Gras which comes before the celebration of Christ being "raised up" often plays on the notion of being erected through the inclusion of characters "with disproportionate phalli (wound six times around their waists) and others with unusually large testes" (328). Tomas, who is "of an age between childhood and youth" when Kavanagh begins telling his story, has been confined all his life to "the cloisters and sanctuaries of the public church" (Kavanagh 94) and brings the profane into the sacred through his own confused sexuality: "While his spiritual learning is great, so narrow has been his range of worldly experience that, as manhood approaches, the fantasies that excite him, that stir his body beyond his control and take

fierce command of him, are provoked by such things as coloured glass, or the smell of incense in the church" (94-95). It is not only through his merger of the sexual and the sacred that Tomas earns his place as a carnival king. His unlikely rule of Newfoundland is exemplary of the carnivalesque shifting from top to bottom.

With the death of his father, Tomas is forced into an outside world marked by death and desperation. Starving, Tomas finds his way to the hold of the British ship *Trinitie*, where he gorges himself on raw capelin. Discovered by the crew when the vessel is at sea, Tomas is saved from being tossed overboard by a captain who believes "the stowaway is a lucky omen" (97). Tomas occupies the lowest sphere of the social stratum on this ship and in the world of these British sailors. He is condemned as a "bog-Irishman" who is "good for nothing else" but the demeaning job of "fish-banger" (97). His shipmates continually remind the boy of his low status: "His mates scoff at his blazing red hair. *Bonfire!* they cry, when from the rigging they piss on his crown." They mockingly baptize him each morning with buckets of cold water, and they make "oinking sounds" whenever he speaks, "for his Gaelic offends them. In their English eyes he is less than human" (97).

Tomas escapes when the ship comes in sight of Newfoundland "a decade before the voyage of the *Genoan*" (94). Hijacking a jolly-boat, Tomas quietly rows away from the *Trinitie* and towards his sexual union with the land that he will rule for centuries. The boy sees in the land evidence of his own body: "Tomas Croft sees that the crest is topped by some sort of outcropping. It resembles nothing so much as the pap of his own breast" (109). No doubt this is the same outcropping Mary views from her bedroom window

years later: "On the crest of the ridge the lookout stands hard and stark as a teat" (46), the land formation navigators refer to as "titrock" (32). For Tomas, the land is a woman, and the land and he are "lovers, one together." The relationship appears to be reciprocal, as evidenced during Tomas' first masturbatory merger with the land. The wind that drove Tomas to distraction abates as soon as the boy ejaculates: "Tomas Croft totters and buckles and falls back atop the stone. Languor eases his body in softly fading spirals. The beat of his heart slackens. The wind ebbs and perishes" (111). Apparently the orgasm was mutual and simultaneous – the boy's unguided and unbridled sexuality has found a soul mate.

Tomas' relationship with the land is overtly sexual. Each cove and chasm is blatantly vaginal: "slippery smooth" and filled with "curves and whorls and stripes and ripples" (113). Yet Croft sees evidence of the sacred in his new land as well: "The exalted trees, moss-bearded like bishops, stare down at Tomas Croft, and in the Irish tongue he speaks up and addresses them reverently" (112). The boy worships and loves this land like some primitive and lustful demigod, and in doing so, some of that godly power is passed into him: "Thus the boy lives to become a man. His ruddy hair falls beyond his shoulders and he grows a shaggy beard of the same hue. He clads his body in coarse hides and bark and, although he does not know it, he looks like an ancient Celtic river god" (118). So does Tomas become the "mythological character" Fowler describes.

Tomas is a North American Gilgamesh or Beowulf, performing feats as equally impossible as those of these mythic characters. Tomas "has forgotten how to make fire" (177), yet he survives through several Newfoundland winters. His eventual stealing of

fire mimics the titanic deeds of the mythical Prometheus, yet his most improbable and therefore mythological feat is the circumnavigation of the island. In circling the island, the castaway becomes true lord of the land:

Tomas Croft has circumnavigated a vast triangular island – a new-world island.

He leaps ashore and in jubilation shouts to the cliff-face: *Sláinte!*

Joyfully the rock answers him: *Sláinte!* (118)

His navigation of the island implies a level of knowing that only he can claim. Following his successful voyage, Tomas can converse with “every rock and tree and wave.... He speaks to all of these, and they reply to him” (118).

A similar voyage is described by Bernard Assiniwi in *The Beothuk Saga* with very different results. Assiniwi has his mythological Beothuk hero Anin paddle around the island in his *tapatook* 500 years before Croft. During his travels, Anin encounters a Scottish slave running from his Viking captors who resembles very much Kavanagh’s “Celtic river god”: “His hair was the colour of the wildflowers that filled the clearings at the height of the warm season. He was wearing skins wrapped around his legs to the tops of his thighs, held in place by cords,” his “chest was completely covered with red hair” (Assiniwi 66, 101). The Croftian Robb becomes a member of the clan Anin is assembling while on his travels, he lives peacefully and subserviently in Anin’s country, and both he and Anin pass quietly into history and myth centuries before Europeans establish themselves on this island. In *Gaff Topsails*, Tomas’ encounter with a Beothuk represents a permanent break from the sacred and a plunge into the untempered profane.

Tomas comes across a Beothuk man tending to a pine-pole fence used to trap caribou. The men approach each other in what promises to be a peaceful union until the stranger touches Tomas' flaming red hair: "Tomas Croft is alarmed, and without thinking he wheels his blackthorn swiftly and clubs the man until his brains spill out of his skull and onto the snow" (118-9). Just as Robinson Crusoe did upon finding a footprint upon his beach, Tomas spends that night hiding in a tall tree, fearful that "more men will come and avenge their brother" (119). Following that murder, the land separates itself from its one-time lover: "After that day, Tomas Croft begins to feel lonely. No longer is he one with his new world. Somehow he is broken and incomplete" (119). This separation initiates the heathen, outlaw existence of Tomas Croft, who becomes during this long, evil period the embodiment of the bogeymen that haunt the fringes of Newfoundland's history.

With the arrival of more Europeans (classified by Fowler as "legitimate settlers"), Tomas becomes the "Boo Darby" who ruthlessly rules the pagan interior of the island (Kavanagh 125). Tomas finds a human lover in the form of Sheila nGira, an Irish princess of Newfoundland folklore, and fathers a race of brigands. He marries his daughters to "feral men, scoundrels and knaves and reprobates all.... expert in the seven deadly sins" and goes on to reign "with absolute dominion over a society born of his own loins" (126, 127). Tomas spawns a race of "wrackers," murderous outlaws whose "filthy blood" Annie Proulx's Quoyale fears courses "in his veins" (Proulx 174). Kavanagh gives an excellent definition of a wracker through his description of the murderous deeds of the Croft clan:

After an ancient tradition, the Irish light false beacons to lure fully laden merchantmen to wreckage and plunder on the cliffs. Soon the family seizes a formidable cache of small arms.... Bristling so, they venture in mere shallops into the broad sea, where they prey upon the traffic. They stand and await the inevitable fog and then row down openly, in regatta, upon the becalmed and helpless prize. (128)

Croft becomes a dreaded pirate, a living demon who marches boldly onto any vessel, "wild-eyed, his hair knotted into red horns, his beard into red braids, candles blazing from his tricorn" (130). And it is through this creation that Kavanagh again risks falling into romanticism.

The roguishly romantic has long been a part of the Newfoundland character. In one of his footnotes, Fowler mentions that "the Newfoundlander as outlaw still holds sway among many Newfoundlanders in the twenty-first century" (91). Though she does see Newfoundland artists blooming like "hare-bells" on the cliffs of this island, Sandra Gwyn also inserts the brigand into this landscape. Though beautiful, a drive along the Southern Shore of Newfoundland can be rather uneventful. Gwyn enlivens this coast through the following description: "the fifty-mile stretch of coast, a doomladen, awesomely beautiful old haunt of wreckers and whisky priests, that lies between St. John's and Ferryland" (Gwyn 44). Newfoundland is overrun with legends of Sheila nGira, wrackers, pirates like Peter Easton, and other ne'er-do-wells, and Kavanagh attempts to include them all in his narrative. As with the folk remedies and superstitions, the multiple examples of the roguish and ribald origins of the Newfoundland character

can seem a little forced. Yet Kavanagh is determined to include as much of the Newfoundland mystique as possible in his novel in order to present a thorough if not finite version of Newfoundland identity. Tomas's unbridled reign eventually comes to an end with the arrival of a priest to whom the carnival king relinquishes his power. Tomas is forgotten after a generation, but his existence is a metaphor for the quotidian lives of his descendants who live between the sacred and the profane, the order of a life that is "timed to the rhythms of prayer" (135) yet is based on a "bodily way of knowing the world" – the ploughing of the land and the slaughter of its animals. Tomas Croft lit the first Midsummer's Night fire to frighten the "legitimate" settlers and to stake his claim to the island. Later, the priest to whom Croft becomes an acolyte baptizes the pirate and his followers on a Midsummer's Night and consecrates the land and the new chapel in the name of St. John the Baptist. On this Midsummer Night in 1948, the occupants of the cove are caught between the pagan and the Christian, the sacred and the profane, as many give over to the bodily way of knowing the world and each other. Yet, this move to the "material bodily lower stratum" is done only to establish a new order in the cove.

Johnny the Light is carnival king of Midsummer's Night, 1948. According to Bakhtin, many medieval carnivals included the election of a fool-king "to preside at a banquet 'for laughter's sake'" (5). Such a clown "is elected by all the people and is mocked by all the people" (197). This fool masquerading as a king is "abused and beaten when the time of his reign is over" (197). Bakhtin notes that the "carnival dummy" often used to take the place of a living fool-king is "mocked, beaten, torn to pieces, burned or drowned" at the close of carnival – such "abuse and thrashing are equivalent to a change

of costume, to a metamorphosis" (197). On this day in Kavanagh's cove, Johnny the Light, through his actions and his fate, becomes the clown king that is not only mocked during carnival but taken to herald a new era of order through his metamorphosis and departure.

Johnny represents several archetypes: he is the village idiot or drunk (a trope certainly not limited to the confines of Newfoundland folklore), but in the particular context of Newfoundland archetypes, he is the survivor of a sealing disaster. Wayne Johnston, Bernice Morgan, and several others have made certain that the perils of sealing make it into their comprehensive Newfoundland narratives. As Johnston did in *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams*, Kavanagh inserts into his novel the awful incident memorialized by Cassie Brown in *Death on the Ice* of the 87 sealers who died on the ice when their vessel, the *S.S. Newfoundland*, was unable to find them for two and a half days. Johnny survived that disaster and kept many of his fellow sealers alive by claiming to see their ship through the blowing snow. Johnny saved many of his comrades by keeping them mobile and "received a medal from the king" for his heroics, but the ordeal has left him scarred physically and mentally (Kavanagh 199). He is described by one member of the community as an "unnatural leper," for frostbite has ravaged his face and body and taken most of his fingers. Every day he relives his nightmare on the ice which has driven him to insanity and alcoholism.

Though acknowledged by many as "the greatest man ever to walk these roads," Johnny is more mocked than lauded and spends most of his days in pursuit of liquor or "hiding from the youngsters" who chase him through the community, mimicking the

guttural "Hushta! Divil haul ye!" he hurls at his tormentors (199, 34). With his arrival at the bonfire that marks the end of the novel, Johnny is "[b]eset by the youngsters" and hailed as the fool-king (388). The children cry "Hushta! Hushta!" and demand: "Are you after saying your Rosary, Johnny?" (388). Gus Gallant, one of the boys who ventured onto the iceberg earlier in the day – a weak reply to Johnny's heroics on the ice – calls the broken man into the circle only to torture him further with promises of "a glitch": "Gus holds the flask under Johnny's nose. Johnny's mouth falls open and his tongue lolls. With two hands, like a cat, he reaches for the flask. But his maimed hands fail to seize it, for Gus has pulled it away. Gus upturns the bottle above his own outstretched tongue and drains the last drops" (389).

Johnny fulfills many of the profane aspects of the carnival king. His lighthouse is the greatest phallic symbol in the community. The "pong" he leaves "hanging in the air" is a constant reminder of the grotesque body and the material bodily lower stratum (339). The most revered aspects of the Catholic mass are also mocked by Johnny. He clutches a wine bottle "[w]ith his two hands clapped together like he's saying his prayers" (339). On this day he enters the church and drinks the sacramental wine: "without ceremony [he] upends the cruet and gulps down the liquid" (248). Yet Johnny's most significant and sacrilegious instance of "sacred parody" (Bakhtin 54) is also the one that brings the most redemption and restores order to the cove. On this feast of St. John the Baptist, Johnny the Light becomes the sanctifier of this community and the forerunner of a promising future.

Altar boy Kevin Barron marvels at the stained glass image of John the Baptist as

the lighthouse keeper becomes a modern-day version of the saint: "Kevin Barron studies the brilliant detail of the picture.... Saint John the Baptist, clad in animal hides, gestures towards the Lamb that he shelters in his arms" (71). At that moment, Johnny the Light is walking Gallows Beach and startles a small herd of sheep: "Johnny gathers up a white lamb braded with a blue collar.... he embraces the animal as if it were an infant" (73). In his earlier act of herding his stranded shipmates and through his current post as lighthouse keeper, Johnny the Light is the protector of this community, and like John the Baptist, he prepares it for the coming of a day he himself will never see.

The melancholy Father MacMurrough, who all day has unknowingly shadowed Johnny's drunken ramblings throughout the community, is suicidal by novel's end, filling the pockets of his cassock with stones in preparation for his plunge into the Atlantic and his departure from a community that has never accepted him. Johnny encounters the priest on his way to destroy himself and in his delusion believes Father MacMurrough to be one of the sailors lost on the ice: "Johnny takes his hand and holds it in a fierce grip, as a parent might hold a child.... 'That's it, l-l-lads. Come along now. Our salvation, our vessel, she stands!'" (404). As they move together toward what Johnny believes to be the St. Elmo's fires of the *S.S. Newfoundland*, the drunk becomes more saintly: "The moon highlights the bald skull so that it floats before the priest's eyes like a beacon" (408). The rum Johnny is attempting to share with Father MacMurrough becomes baptismal: "Sweet fluid rolls down [Father MacMurrough's] forehead and into his eyes and trickles into the corner of his mouth.... Johnny the Light is trying to direct the bottle toward the priest's mouth, but instead, clumsily, he drenches the priest's forehead" (413). Following the

baptism, Father MacMurrough moves toward the circle of villagers to take his place in the community as sanctifier of the bonfire while Johnny mirrors the departure of the mythical Tomas Croft and rows out to sea and the ice that has haunted him.

When Johnny asks his name following the baptism, the priest whispers "Gerry Mack," the shortened version of Gersam MacMurrough that he went by as a child and later as a champion boxer and "conquering hero" (414, 331). Reunited with this identity, an identity formed by family, friends, and place, Father MacMurrough is now ready to assume his role in this other community. In the world of carnival, "without ... sanction there can be no festivity," and Father MacMurrough's very ceremonial lighting of the fire following his encounter with Johnny not only sanctifies the bonfire but enables him to enter into the community. Many carnivals are linked externally to the feasts of the Church, but they are also connected to "ancient pagan festivities, agrarian in nature" (Bakhtin 9). This night is a celebration of Saint John the Baptist, but it is also a celebration of the summer solstice and the capelin spawn – agrarian events that recall a time when people did not rely on calendars but on their bodily interaction with the world. At this moment, this celebration becomes the intermingling of the sacred and the profane, a carnival in which "everyone participates because its very idea embraces all the people" (7). Father MacMurrough ceremoniously "wields the torch blazing above his head and he circles the pyre" before he lights the bonfire, then he gets very drunk on "Monkey rum, The real shine" (Kavanagh 419, 420). The priest who was regarded by himself and everyone else in the community as the alien and alienated "black stranger" (76) finds his place and his name during this carnival.

Fowler contends that this salvation and acceptance of Father MacMurrough “demonstrates that the community has the capacity to embrace the other, at least under the right circumstances” (85). This is an excellent reading of Kavanagh’s text and places the people and community of *Gaff Topsails* within the “complex cultural web of obligation, understanding, and support” that marks the ethic of “[i]nterdependence, not independence...that emerged through the evolution of Newfoundland’s remote fishing villages over the centuries” (72). Yet, Kavanagh is not interested in simply presenting a complete, communal Newfoundland identity that can withstand change then absorb it. In focusing on characters who have reached transitional, transformative moments in their lives, Kavanagh is demonstrating that the Newfoundland character, though certainly affected by the past, is not determined by it. Kavanagh creates a community that is gathering to itself the often contradictory histories and identities that could be said to define it: lawlessness and stern religiosity, “harrowing challenges” (Fowler 72) and humour, depravity and a selfless sense of community in order to prepare itself for upcoming changes. In preparing to mingle all the elements of its past with the changes of the future, this community and its inhabitants represent the central image of carnival: “the ever unfinished, ever creating body,...two links shown at the point where they enter into each other” (Bakhtin 26). McDowell notes that this Bakhtinian notion of “unfinishedness” is typical of landscape writing in which the characters are intimately connected to the land they occupy. The “unfinalized nature” of this writing “indicates the writer’s willingness to leave the door open to continuing dialogue.... Closure or ‘finalization,’ while often aesthetically pleasing, implies that the author’s view is

complete and true, and nothing more remains to be said" (376). Such open-endedness recognizes that no individual and no era has a monopoly on truth. While these characters are certainly to some extent moulded by the history and landscape that surrounds them, it is their changing interaction with their home and heritage that is the focus of *Gaff Topsails*. As Kavanagh moves through the obscene, the sexual, and the sacred, he does not approach a comprehensive Newfoundland character but opens it to unlimited possibilities.

Michael Barron, Gus Gallant, and Wish Butt form the trinity of boys who penetrate the iceberg as it grinds past their community (Kavanagh 40). Their quest is a carnivalesque pilgrimage in the tradition of *The Canterbury Tales*: the journey toward an exalted and revered goal enlivened by the most obscene language and stories. The reflections of the mute Michael maintain a sense of the sacred while Gus and Wish trade increasingly vulgar insults. Michael's musings on the iceberg are reminiscent of E. J. Pratt's "Sea Cathedral." Upon first viewing the iceberg, Michael sees a "spark" that fills his head "with the smell of incense," turns the "rough pine of the rowboat" into the "smooth varnished mahogany of the church pew" so that the earthly iceberg vanishes and is replaced with "eyes blue behind a veil" (9). Standing atop the mountain of ice, Michael looks downward: "the boy's eye penetrates the water and deciphers...the bulk that surges below the surface...all in cathedral shades of blue. This is what God sees: this is the topography of love" (219). Upon penetrating the iceberg, the boys find themselves "inside a vaulted chamber, a place about the size and shape of a chapel" (336). The reverence in Kavanagh's writing is an echo of Pratt's poetry:

Vast and immaculate! No pilgrim bands,
 In ecstasy before the Parian shrines,
 Knew such a temple built by human hands,
 With this transcendent rhythm in its lines;
 Like an epic on the North Atlantic stream
 It moved, and fairer than a Phidian dream. (Pratt 34)

Michael kneels before a small pool near the top of the iceberg that is covered by an “eggshell-thin membrane of ice” (Kavanagh 215). The boy takes a piece of this crust “and places it on his tongue. It melts like the Eucharist” (215). Michael then drinks from the pool and is amazed to find the water is “sparkling fresh, purer than anything he has ever tasted.... He wishes that he could bring someone here, to this special place, to drink from this miracle well” (215). Michael is a rather reflective character – a dreamer into whose daydreams the reader enters upon beginning the text: “Michael Barron takes hold of the moon” (1), so it is easy for him to elevate the iceberg into a realm of unearthly sanctity. Yet, even Michael is rooted to this realm by the sexual. Michael is riveted atop the iceberg not by the “miracle pool” or the hues of “cathedral blue” below him but by the shape of Mary Dwyer as she moves through the community: “Michael Barron observes the white figure distant across the water as if through the focus of a telescope: all else is swept away” (227). Weeks before this pilgrimage, Mary Dwyer changed in Michael’s eyes and became the object of a new and “strange longing” (228). Since that day, the boy has watched her: “Whatever act he observes...he venerates” (228). In light of these new desires, the voyage to the iceberg is not simply an act of daring but a rite of

passage for this boy to become a man and begin courting Mary. As Fowler observes, Michael takes from the iceberg a symbol of his longing and veneration: "From the iceberg where the boys test their manhood, he takes an icicle as a token of his love for Mary, a shaft of glacial ice that is both pure and sexual at the same time" (Fowler 74).

Michael's fellow pilgrims keep him in the earthly, bodily, carnivalesque realm through their sexuality and their sacrilege. In launching the grapelin (a light anchor for small boats), Wish Butt conducts something of a mock exorcism, making "the sign of the cross" before bellowing: "DEPART FROM ME, YE CURSED, INTO THE EVERLASTING FIRE!" (Kavanagh 30). The very actions of the boys imitate some of the most sacred elements of the Catholic mass. This is sometimes unintentional, as when Gus is jigging: "He...stretches wide his arms in the manner of the crucified Christ to measure the fathom of the drawback" (31). When both Gus and Wish are preparing the seal they killed, "The boys move with liturgical solemnity, as might a priest and his acolyte celebrating the Mass" (219). Other times, this mimicry is very intentional, as when the two boys are making a fire:

Gus arranges the chips in the base of the hollow. Above these he sets the sticks in a tepee.

"There you are." Gus stands back and speaks formally.

"There it is," says Wish.

"There you have it," the two recite in harmony. They face one another and bow, with perfect timing, like solemn acolytes. (234)

These rituals are also accompanied by mock prayers, one of which Wish recites before

the boys begin devouring their seal:

All three make the sign of the cross matter-of-factly. Wish joins his hands
and prays:

For this meal of claw-and-glutch

We thank Thee Lord so very much. (236)

It is through this sacred parody that the people escape the pious seriousness that has governed their quotidian lives since Tomas Croft transferred his power to the priest: "Soon, everyday life in the cove is timed to the rhythm of prayer.... [W]ork and worship enlase so harmoniously that labour itself begins to be sanctified" (135, 136). As Wish and Gus demonstrate, the back-breaking routine of fishing that has become "an ardent prayer, a kind of litany" also draws the Mass into the bodily, profane realm of labour (136).

The boys curse creatively, sometimes mocking the Mass, at other times focusing on the central figure of Christianity, whose name is used as a noun and an adjective: "By the Jesus! We'll put this goddamn old tub down to the gunnels!" (37). Wish is the most prolific swearer of the boys, as he demonstrates when he hurls a swollen sculpin back into the ocean: "Now, my son. You got your Jesus-boots on, you can fucking well get out and *walk!*" (38). As much as the rhythms of this community emulate the rhythms of prayer, hundreds of years of harsh outport existence have almost entirely consumed the piety of the Church. The immediate descendants of Tomas Croft whisper prayers at the tolling of the Angelus and "always, on meeting the priest, each of the faithful bows the head in homage" (135). The modern villagers are not so respectful of the new priest, who, prior to his baptism by Johnny the Light, passes through their circle

without acknowledging them. Their insults quickly move from the mock-offended “and a good evening to *you*, Reverend” to claims Father MacMurrough is “short-taken. Hurrying home to his shit-house,” to the ultimate sexualized sacrilege: the priest is “heading home to the palace to pull himself together” or “pay a call” on the cloistered nuns (383).

It would be easy to dismiss this mockery and mimicry as the lowest of low-brow humour. Occupying the “material lower bodily stratum,” these jokes are largely sexual and scatological and do not initially seem overly clever or subversive. Yet, such parodies were a pivotal part of carnival and “demanded from their authors a certain degree of learning, sometimes at a high level” (Bakhtin 14). Fowler notes that the boy’s conquering of the iceberg is child play but is also practice for “the profession of making a living from the sea” (84). The mingling of the bodily and saintly aspects of their lives demonstrates their budding expertise in both. When this carnival break is over, these boys will be able to use the skills they use in fun, and the spirituality they momentarily mock to structure and maintain their lives.

The inside of the iceberg is like the earthly womb discussed by Davis, ready and waiting for the boys to occupy it: “The hull slides so softly, so neatly down the tunnel, you would swear the cavity had been carved just to receive it. The walls are sculpted like ribs” (Kavanagh 336). The iceberg begins to contract and collapse while the boys are inside it. The boys are figuratively birthed from the iceberg, the walls pressing close and forcing the boys out into the ocean: “the prow bursts through the arch and into the blinding sun” (359). The boys are immediately baptized by a late squall that has gripped the cove leaving every surface “rinsed and purified” (367). Michael’s last act upon

leaving the ice is to grasp the icicle that hangs above the vaginal arch through which the boys have passed. By its shape it is phallic and masculine, yet by its position on the iceberg it is feminine – the hymen that has been broken by penetration. It is therefore the perfect gift for Michael to present to Mary as they pass into adulthood and become lovers – it is pure but also indicative of a break with that purity.

Later that evening, as they await the lighting of the bonfire, the boys brag of their afternoon bravado. While the vaginal symbolism is not lost on Gus, the sanctity of the whole event does not exist for him. As Wish and a few others begin to question mockingly Gus' self-alleged sexual prowess, Gus tries to change the subject while simultaneously maintaining his increasingly uncertain space in the sexual realm. Gus is particularly vulgar while describing their penetration of the iceberg: "And then we ran the punt up the iceberg. Straight into her. Right up her smelly cunt" (388). The banter between Gus and Wish soon turns to violence and represents the pinnacle of the carnival profanity and lawlessness. The open-palmed blow Gus delivers is described as "a Confirmation smack hard against the cheek" (396). Gus is derisively told to "confess" his homosexuality, which forces from the boy the most sacrilegious string of profanity to be found in the novel: "So help me Christ who was fucking crucified, Butt, I'll beat your Jesus teeth down your throat and out your Jesus hole" (397). The end of carnival is approaching. The boys have been here too long and "have become savages, all wild and strange and heathen" (399). Upon receiving the blow from Gus, Wish's grinning face becomes "[l]ike a mummer's falseface getting knocked askew, the blow to his cheek swats away the vacant look that he was born with. He is turned into a different person – a

smiler" (397). As with their Croftian ancestors, Wish and Gus have reached the pinnacle of their perversity for this day and must be returned to the world of structure and custom. Their battle is instantly forgotten with the return of Father MacMurrough to his post as sanctifier of the celebration and with the arrival of the capelin: "All hands abandon the blaze and hurry down to the strand" (429). In this instance, Kavanagh both demonstrates and dismisses the fallen, roguish side of the Newfoundland character. Like Proulx's Quoye, the blood of these boys' heathen ancestors flows through them, but it has been tempered by the practicality and sanctity that is required to survive.

Fowler believes the occupants of Kavanagh's cove to be tethered to the brutality of their forebears yet tempered by "the civilizing effects of Christianity" and the interdependence of outport life: "The joyful bloodletting of the early days is now limited to the hunt for fish and animals, and violence is sublimated to the language and threats rarely enacted" (Fowler 87). The days of piracy and murder are gone, yet the sexual intimacy with the land that Tomas Croft lost when he murdered the Beothuk is now felt by two characters in particular: Mary Dwyer and Kevin Barron. For these two characters, "the other is human sexuality" (Fowler 85), though for the blossoming Mary this other is welcomed as a bringer of change and maturity while for the pre-pubescent Kevin this other is dangerous and frightening.

The transitional, transformative aspect of Kavanagh's characters is best demonstrated by Mary, for whom today is neither the feast of St. John the Baptist nor Discovery Day but "Sweetheart's Day" – the day a girl may divine her future husband. Mary believes that with this information she will be a grown-up at last, and she begins

the day by trying to find in the bedroom mirror evidence of the woman she is to become: "In her bedroom this morning Mary dropped her pyjamas and stood before the big glass on the wash stand. She studied herself from head to toe, and she was able to make out, at one and the same instant, the departing child and the advancing woman both" (Kavanagh 44-5). Today, Mary dons a "grown-up dress" instead of her "dreary grey frock of a uniform" and foregoes school in favour of exploring her community and the land around it in an attempt to discern her future, interdependent role within that space.

Mary's bodily interaction with her landscape begins immediately upon waking. Not heeding the cool air, Mary opens her bedroom window, then "unbuttons her top and spreads it open to the sun and allows the light to warm her new body" (16). Mary spends her day in this in-between space of fleeting childhood and oncoming adulthood. In her sundress, she passes the morning in childish idleness, dancing through the fields and "[s]pinning like a ballerina" on the beach (303). Yet this innocence is tinged with a burgeoning sexuality and the knowledge that it is only for this morning that "she is still a child" (44). Michael Barron, the boy Mary hopes several divinations will reveal to be her future husband, is aboard the iceberg as it scrapes past Mary reclining on the Gallows Beach, which Mary is visiting for the first time. As if sensing an increase in the sexual tension that is building between them, Mary sits facing the ice Michael is penetrating and, in emulation of Tomas Croft, permits the landscape to enrapture her:

The heat of the beach makes her think of something she read in the book –
the masculine sun penetrating the feminine earth. Her two hands reach
down together and slowly they draw higher the hem of her skirt. She

enjoys the pleasure of the masculine sun warming, gradually, inch by inch, her long slender legs.

With magical quickness she makes it happen.... Then it is over, and she is pleased, and her eyes fall shut, and she sleeps. (303)

The boys' penetration of the iceberg occurs just as Johnny the Light is penetrating the sacred, feminine space of the convent. As both of these phallic breaches are occurring, Mary is climbing the most phallic symbol in the community, the lighthouse, and experiencing yet another awakening: "From this station she can spy more of the earth than she has ever seen" (308-309). Mary "traces in reverse the route she took today" and, in doing so can mark the very point where her world expanded and she became an adult: "In the past the beach was in her future, but here in the present that bit of her future is in her past – all that addles her mind" (309). As the pilgrimage to the ice marked a rite of passage for the boys, so does Mary's new worldliness enable her to finally approach Michael, draw him from the circle of his childish mates and into their new, adult life together: "Her fingers tug at his and draw his hand, his arm, his whole body towards another place.... He has no fear anymore of these unknown places, because the simple touch of her hand is his true destination, and he has already arrived" (418). In being drawn away from the familiar, Michael "feels like Cabot, or the Vikings, or Saint Brendan, sailing over the horizon, into the unknown" (418). In mentioning these "discoverers" of Newfoundland, Kavanagh links these children and their futures to their mythic past while permitting them the freedom to enter "into mysterious water where anything might happen" (418). These characters are in some respects defined by their

history and heritage, yet together they are discovering an ever-expanding though distinctly Newfoundland identity.

For Kevin Barron, the altarboy whose unearthly piety is reminiscent of Tomas Croft before he ventured outside the monastery, the sexuality inherent in the world around him is frightening. Just as Tomas "cowers in the confessional" for three days following his father's death, Kevin only feels safe within the confines of the church, where he lingers rather than face the older children in the schoolyard: "The Lord is here, watching over little Kevin Barron, keeping the child safe from all harm" (95, 71). Whereas the pubescent Tomas' sexual innocence enabled him to emotionally and physically love the land, the younger Kevin is terrified by urges he does not comprehend. The piety through which he encounters the world is intermingling with the sexuality and ruggedness that have insured the survival of his people. Kevin is familiar with the body only as it is a subject to torture: "the Jesus in the Stations," the Jesus who is "Scourged" (155), so the boy's rising sexuality is mixed with pain: he is ashamedly excited during school when Kitt Hughes, an older girl who shares his classroom, is strapped by the nun for "doing the Protestant kneel" (sitting back on her heels rather than kneeling upright) during the morning rosary (153). The boy is thrilled at the thought of Kitt's flogging, so much so that a "shiver runs up Kevin Barron's spine" (153). Later, alone in the classroom, Kevin whips himself like a penitent flagellant, his first tentative swings leaving his hand "tingling, pleasurably" (183). His confidence and desire rising, Kevin is soon swinging the leather with "as much force as his little body can manage," causing a pain that "shoots the length of his arm and across his shoulder and explodes inside his

skull,” all the while assuring himself that “It is good” (183).

Kevin is haunted this day by vaginal images. The pleasure he takes in punishing his hands is no doubt attached to the fact they had offended him earlier. During the strapping of Kitt Hughes, Kevin looks away momentarily to his hands, wrapped with a rosary and “joined in the priestly style” (154). The “gently arched shape that they form vexes him with a strange fear” (154). While his brother is piercing the icy womb offshore, Kevin is examining the folds of a pitcher plant, which he has previously studied only in a text book:

But up close Kevin can see something that the book did not show: the swollen purplish lips that form the rim of the bowl. The lips curve gently round the chamber and meet delicately at the tip. The boy remembers how a similar curving shape, that of his own hands joined loosely in prayer, so disturbed him during the Rosary. (318)

Alone in the darkening wilderness that surrounds his community, Kevin wets himself, yet “[s]omething is new in the world today,” and Kevin imagines “the delicate curving folds of the pitcher plant, purple and swollen” as “the wetness spreads inside his trousers” (329). Sexual maturity has come to Kevin long before he is prepared for it: “His body where he is wet stirs and shifts clammily against the cold damp of his underwear. Something is strange, and powerful, and dangerous. And he is afraid” (329). The creature that Kevin believes has been chasing him all day is the beast with two backs – and Kevin finally confronts his fears by watching a couple separate themselves from the bonfire and search for a place to have sex: “A figure lurches up the slope from the beach. When the

shape gets closer the boy sees that the creature has two heads. It pitches across the road and makes for the churchyard – in fact, the creature is not one body but two. The pair clutch each other so desperately that they appear to be wrestling” (405) The couple slip into the church, and Kevin watches their copulation through the stained glass window of Saint John the Baptist, the very window he looks through at the beginning of the novel when he is inside the church, avoiding the big boys who rule the yard of his school. At this moment Kevin Barron confronts it: “the shadow, the silhouette, the shape, of the monster that has been stalking him, that he so fears” and enters the church to discover the female member of the pair is Kitt Hughes whose strapping so exhilarated him earlier.

Of all the modern lives detailed in this novel, Kevin most closely mirrors Tomas Croft in his move from innocence to experience. Like Tomas, Kevin – or at least the Kevin of this day – disappears with the ebbing of carnival and the return of order. A new Kevin, whose piety is now balanced with a worldly awareness, has arrived to assume his place in this new and promising community. Kevin has mastered his fears and can now say he is truly of this place and this community. He is fully aware of how to interact with the land and his fellow villagers to insure the continued existence of his community and culture.

The Rem(a)inder

Two characters who do not appear to evolve during this narrative are both representative of mythic outpost tropes: Hestia Dwyer, the widowed wife, and Martha, the madwoman of the cove. In their constancy, both Hestia and Martha are examples of Homi K. Bhabha’s cultural “reminder (and remainder)” (57). These characters are lost in the past,

in a specific way of being and are thus the rema(i)nder of a culture that is changing:

“Cultures come to be represented by the virtue of the processes of iteration and translation,” Bhabha claims, and “all cultural specificity is belated, *different unto itself*” (58). With the coming of confederation and modernity, the Newfoundland identity, as with all identities, is now in flux: influenced but not entirely defined by a particular time or place. These new citizens of Canada will find their identities by looking forward, not backward – yet looking backward is all Hestia and Martha can do.

Martha appears only briefly within the narrative and sometimes only through the reflections of other characters. Her madness is a rema(i)nder of the madness that once ruled this cove. The final image of *Gaff Topsails* is Martha staring towards the sea as though she expects to see something. For Fowler, Martha represents “a core element of recalcitrance, some unresolvable defining characteristic of the country and the culture that cannot be fully understood or reconciled even by Newfoundlanders themselves but that must be accepted nevertheless” (Fowler 88). One must wonder what this act of recalcitrance is meant to protect or what force she is fighting. Martha “stands in the wetted landwash and she looks out to sea. Soon – even in the face of the wind – the thing she waits for will drift ashore. And she will claim it at last” (Kavanagh 435). Similar sentiments of romanticism and loss conclude *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams*, as Joe Smallwood resigns his search for a greatness equal to the land, and Sheilagh Fielding inserts within the blood of her fellow Newfoundlanders the things that are “primarily Newfoundland” (Johnston 562). But Martha is pathetic, hobbling among crows feeding “viciously on the stiffened corpses of the capelin” and poking among the ashes of the

previous night's fire (Kavanagh 435). Arriving long after everyone has abandoned the communal blaze, Martha is clearly an occupant of this community but not a part of it – as Fowler puts it, she is “the stranger within” (88). Hoping for the arrival of “the thing she waits for,” Martha represents the non-existence of one who awaits for the return of the Newfoundland identity. The other characters have faced their others and have abandoned the carnivalesque homage to the past to rest and prepare for the present. “The feast is always essentially related to time,” writes Bakhtin, and is therefore transitory (Bakhtin 9). On this day, the people of this cove are reminded, inspired, and cautioned by their past and have taken what they can from it to solidify their existence in the present. Martha continues to look backward to the point of insanity and is lost to the modern world.

Hestia Dwyer, like Johnston's version of Judge Prowse, is a Benjaminian angel of history. Perched in her *Pegasus* chair that is nailed to the roof of her home, Hestia literally sits atop a pile of debris salvaged from various shipwrecks over the years and faces the past as time moves by her. Hestia takes her name from the Greek goddess of hearth and home, and she truly keeps the home fire burning throughout the narrative. Like Martha, Hestia watches the sea and waits for something to be returned to her – her husband Lukey Dwyer, who drowned the previous year. Her rootedness in the past has already begun to erase her from the present – her own daughter Mary refuses to acknowledge her as mother and refers to her only as “the woman” (Kavanagh 13). Her long and rambling narratives are undoubtedly a result of a woman growing accustomed to speaking to herself. When she manages to trap someone long enough to listen to her soliloquies (filled with awkward references to her dead husband arriving at any moment),

the reader can sense the beleaguered listener's desire to part from her. When the community comes together around the bonfire, Hestia remains at home, not because she needs to tend to her infant but because she imagines her husband has returned and needs to be fed.

Hestia is also rooted in superstition and the mystical ways a girl can identify her future husband. Chattering to her infant while she sits in her elevated chair, Hestia wonders if her daughter has discovered the identity of her husband. The fact that a rooster has crowed, "the moon is out with the sun," and Hestia has hidden a button in Mary's chest, all prove the angels are on her side and Mary will find her soul mate (204). Hestia's knowledge of history would rival Prowse's, as evidenced through the names she confers upon her infant son. At different times Hestia calls her son Cornelius Quirk (a famous merchant), Peter Easton (a pirate rumoured to have used Newfoundland as a base of operations), Sir Percival Willoughby (an early settler of St. John's), Alexander Pintikowski (who painted the ceilings of the Colonial Building in St. John's and was later arrested trying to cash forged cheques), and Sir Alexander Clutterbuck (the secretary of the Amulree Commission), among others. Yet Hestia's mastery of the past paralyzes her, and she hints at her own fate as she coos her son to sleep: "Yes, the only thing that matters is the company. Isn't that the truth my duck? You and me together, we'll sit and look out into the dark and we'll watch for the torch" (408). As the child grows, he too will become like his older sister and separate from his mother and the debris of history that grows before her. Hestia is correct in claiming "all that matters is the company," yet her grip on the past has isolated her from her community and the interdependence that

drives them. The preservation of the past is not enough. This community thrives not on its heritage but on its work ethic and ability to adapt. While rema(i)nders like Martha and Hestia will occupy some sort of space within a community, it is the hybridity of this community, its linking of past and present ways of being, that will keep it alive.

Though focusing primarily upon the events of one day, Patrick Kavanagh's *Gaff Topsails* is perhaps the closest an author has come to writing the definitive Newfoundland novel. Rather than occupy either space, the novel blurs the line between idealized romanticism and unsentimental realism. Kavanagh creates a Newfoundland community at a highly charged, carnivalesque moment so that he may detail every extreme that can be considered essentially Newfoundland. The result is a varied picture of multiple identities and realities. As with that other great attempt at the comprehensive Newfoundland novel, Wayne Johnston's *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams*, Kavanagh's text leaves its readers with less a grasp of what Newfoundland is than what it might have been and what it could be. Kavanagh enters a carnival world and, moreover, a carnival body to celebrate Newfoundland's mythical and actual history and the hardships and endurance of its people. Kavanagh touches the absurdly romantic notion of Newfoundlanders being of the land, and he also dwells on the darker notion of Newfoundlanders as descendants of a debauched, violent group of castaways. The mingling of this sacramental relationship to the land with the roguish life of chaos and degeneracy can only be made possible through Kavanagh's carnivalesque approach. In this way, Kavanagh presents the exaggeration that is a necessary part of carnival – the sexualization of everything, even the land possesses what Bakhtin calls "a positive,

assertive character. The leading themes of these images of bodily life are fertility, growth, and a brimming-over abundance" (19). The narrative culminates with the spawning of the capelin, the very image of an overabundance of life: "the calm boils with little fish. From the shoreline all the way to the edge of the dark, millions of silvery smelt churn the water. They heave and surge up onto the beach and ejaculate into the sand and the landwash is wet and sticky and luminescent with their seed" (Kavanagh 429). Kavanagh presents an outpost bursting with life and possibilities, surviving through interdependence and a bodily knowledge of the world. In the end, voices join together to sing the "Ode to Newfoundland" after the last lingering celebrants pile the remains of the debris onto the fire. The feast has ended, and the uncertainty of the world closes in around them; yet this celebration has strengthened these people. Kavanagh has gathered so much of what is considered essential to the Newfoundland identity not for the purposes of presenting an encapsulated, romanticized version of Newfoundlanders but to create a womb from which to rebirth them. Set on the verge of Confederation and a new life, *Gaff Topsails* presents all the histories and myths that have been nurtured over the years and pushes his characters out into the world. While this sense of self has supported Newfoundlanders for a long period, it is now time to use this strong foundation to create a future worthy of it.

Chapter 4

Island Myths in E. Annie Proulx's The Shipping News and Michael Winter's The Big Why

Let us hasten to establish him on this island while he is able to find complete happiness on it, for the day draws near when he will no longer want to live alone, and when Friday's company will not content him.

– Jean Jacques Rousseau

"Come to Newfoundland," beckons the government of Newfoundland and Labrador tourism website, "a place that stays the same but changes you forever." In this instance of self-promotion is captured the very essence and project of "the Orientalist" as defined by Edward Said: "The European...is a watcher, never involved, always detached" for whom the East is "a career, one in which one could remake and restore not only the Orient but also oneself" (*Orientalism* 103, 166). Said cites Alexander William Kinglake's *Eothen* (1844) as an example of the European belief that "travel in the Orient is important to 'moulding your character – that is your very identity'," yet contends that Kinglake, "Like many other travelers...is more interested in remaking himself...than he is in seeing what there is to be seen" (193). The Orient serves as "a thing dead and dry – a mental mummy," a static "tableau of queerness" where the European can find pleasure but most importantly revel in his existence as a dynamic and modern creature amongst exotic primitives (193, 103). In crossing the Suez desert, Kinglake believes, "I *myself, and no other, had charge of my life*," to which Said replies: "It is for the comparatively useless purpose of letting Kinglake take hold of himself that the Orient serves him" (193).

In Western literature, the "Orient," the place of the other, the uncharted island has for centuries been the site where the (Western) protagonist can "take hold of himself,"

reinvent and rejuvenate himself, or create his own kingdom. Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* are two oft-cited examples of this "island myth" in which a disillusioned or downtrodden European hero steps outside society to create his personal island paradise. Newfoundland has had its share of island myths: from the letters of the first settlers enjoining others to prosper in this land of possibility and plenty to the claim by the tourism website that "Exploring Newfoundland and Labrador brings you closer to your true self." Two contemporary novels examine this idea of Newfoundland as a place of restoration and introspection. The protagonists of E. Annie Proulx's *The Shipping News* and Michael Winter's *The Big Why* abandon life in the mecca of modernity that is New York and escape to the island of Newfoundland in an overtly Orientalist odyssey toward self-improvement, inspiration, and control.

Upon first arriving in Newfoundland, Rockwell Kent of *The Big Why* echoes Benjamin Disraeli's 1847 assertion that "The East is a career" (cited in *Orientalism* xiii). Absorbing his surroundings, Kent quickly converts this island into a canvas for his own personal enhancement: "This here land is my outpost, and from here I'll make my name" (Winter 17). Likewise, Proulx's protagonist, Quoye, though hardly as hopeful (or haughty) as Kent, sees Newfoundland as "his chance to start anew" (Proulx 29), a place where Quoye, "bereft, brimming with grief and thwarted love," can find "something to brace against" (1, 31). Like Shakespeare's Prospero, Kent and Quoye find their own Newfoundland Calibans and Ariels to show them "all the qualities o' th' isle" (*Tempest* I.ii.337), qualities both hope will motivate, strengthen, and even save them. Both novels move from the quaint portrait of the enchanted isle to what one character in *The Shipping*

News refers to as “the darker side of the Newfoundland character” (155), as both exiles realize the limit to this island’s charms and their own inability to make the island their own. One man quickly abandons the notion of the island myth and finds salvation; the other becomes twice-exiled as his stubborn pursuit to mould the island and its people to fit his needs isolates him from a people who refuse to be acquiescent Fridays or compliant Calibans.

Island Myths

In *Tempests After Shakespeare*, Chantal Zabus discusses the “Prospero complex”: “Curiously enough, the ‘Prospero complex’ is not characterized by a superiority perplex, as one might expect, but rather the opposite.... [M]an’s striving for perfection is a striving for superiority and thus an overcompensation for a feeling of inferiority” (22). Whether or not they consciously realize it (and this is an important and telling distinction), the four exiles – Prospero, Crusoe, Quoye and Kent – choose lives outside their respective societies because they either are failures or are perilously close to becoming failures. In this regard, Prospero and Quoye are kindred souls – self-acknowledged losers looking for a fresh playing field. Early in *The Tempest*, Prospero explains to his daughter, Miranda, how they came to be on the island. A mild and studious creature, Prospero, the Duke of Milan, dedicated himself to the pursuit of knowledge and magic at the expense of his royal duties: “The government I cast upon my brother/ And to my state grew stranger, being transported/ And rapt in secret studies” (I.ii.75-7). Underestimating the ambition of his brother, Prospero is barely able to escape with the infant Miranda on the night Antonio claims his dukedom:

This King of Naples, being an enemy
 To me inveterate, hearkens my brother's suit
 Which was that he, in lieu o' th' premises
 Of homage, and I know not how much tribute,
 Should presently extirpate me and mine
 Out of the dukedom and confer fair Milan,
 With all the honors, on my brother. Whereon,
 A treacherous army levied, one midnight
 Fated to th' purpose did Antonio open
 The gates of Milan, and I' the dead of darkness,
 The ministers for th' purpose hurried thence
 Me and thy crying self. (I.ii.121-32)

Set adrift on the ocean but equipped with several prized texts his councillor Gonzalo, "a noble Neapolitan" (I.ii.161), managed to smuggle to the usurped duke, Prospero comes ashore on an enchanted island where he proceeds "to combat the malignancies of Sycorax, to colonise the island, to free Ariel, to educate and entertain Miranda and [most importantly] to summon tempests and bring his enemies to heel" (Greenaway 17). Prospero creates on the island the dukedom he could not have in Milan, a dukedom born out of his desires and designed to meet his needs.

Quoye has been plagued by anguish and insecurity all his life: "Hive-spangled, gut roaring with gas and cramp, he survived childhood; at the state university, hand clapped over his chin, he camouflaged torment with smiles and silence. Stumbled through

his twenties and into his thirties learning to separate his feelings from his life, counting on nothing" (Proulx 1). In emulation of Prospero, Quoyale tried to lose himself in learning: "At the university he took courses he couldn't understand, humped back and forth without speaking to anyone [until] he dropped out of school" (3). Quoyale was also cursed with a dominant and domineering brother – "the father's favorite" – who, unlike Antonio, was not interested in taking his brother's title but in constantly conferring upon Quoyale new, less prestigious designations: "brother Dick...pretended to throw up when Quoyale came into a room, hissed 'Lardass, Snotface, Ugly Pig, Warthog, Stupid, Stinkbomb, Fart-tub, Greasebag,' pummeled and kicked until Quoyale curled, hands over head, sniveling, on the linoleum" (2). Reduced to a "damp loaf" (2) of a man by a bullying brother and a frigid father, Quoyale is easily devoured by the ravenous Petal Bear, who gives Quoyale "a month of fiery happiness. Then six kinked years of suffering" (13). Unfaithful and uncaring, his wife also gives Quoyale two daughters and a "heart scarred forever by tattoo needles pricking the name of Petal Bear" (13) before she dies in a car accident along with her latest paramour – her purse containing the money she earned selling the girls to a pornographer. When Quoyale returns to his rented house with his daughters (rescued before they were harmed), he is very receptive to his visiting aunt's suggestion that he and the children follow her to Newfoundland: "You can look at it this way.... You've got a chance to start out all over again. A new place, new people, new sights. A clean slate. See, you can be anything with a fresh start" (27). Quoyale has his own Gonzalo in the person of Partridge, who had managed to get Quoyale some on-again, off-again, work as a "third-rate newspaperman" and later, "[p]leased to fixing up

Quoyle's life again," secures his friend a means of income in Newfoundland as a reporter for a paper in Killick-Claw (1, 31). Coming ashore in much the same way as Prospero, with offspring and a means of survival, Quoyle has no desire for domination or retribution but hopes this attempt at "a new life in a fresh place" (29) will heal his wounds.

Robinson Crusoe and Rockwell Kent chafe within the restrictions of their urban societies. "Being the third Son of the Family, and not bred to any trade," Crusoe's head "began to be fill'd very early with rambling Thoughts" (Defoe 3). Despite a fairly fortunate birth, a "competent Share of Learning," and his father's demands that he not "play the Young Man," Crusoe remains "deaf to all Proposals of Business" and sets out to find adventure at sea (3, 5, 7). Winter's fictionalized version of Kent has grown tired of New York: "I was mad at what the buildings were made of and the heat in the buildings," "I had lived most of my life in New York, and suddenly, with thirty rearing itself, the man-made surfaces bored me" (3, 6). Most revealing, however, is Kent's admission to his friend Gerald Thayer that "I was angry about the New York painters and my reputation" (3). The most self-loving of the "castaways," Kent is also the most self-aware – the result is a narcissist who is continuously reassessing himself and continually surprised to discover he may not be the premier artist he believes himself to be. One of the earliest deflations of Kent's ego occurs when the artist is planning to leave his New York job as a draftsman for the life of an artist in Newfoundland:

In order to leave my job I had to raise some capital. I made a deal with my agent, Charles Daniel, for a monthly stipend in exchange for everything I

would write or paint for the rest of my life. Everything: drawings, sketches, paintings, books, travel pieces, ceramics, woodblock prints, colophon design, illustrations. I said two hundred and fifty a month, Charles. What do you say.... [Charles] studied the spines of his books, almost solemn, but he was looking for something. He said sixty-five, to the books.... I realized he was bargaining. Sixty-five dollars. He said it very quickly, as if he really had totted up my future work and thought it worth sixty-five a month.... I sank on my arches. The sixty-five made me realize he was being generous. It had not occurred to me that I wasn't worth at least two hundred and fifty a month.... Okay, I said. (11-12)

In the wake of this disappointment, Kent's ego sets to work rebuilding itself. Just as his father's tearful pleadings persuaded Robinson Crusoe to momentarily resolve "not to think of going abroad anymore, but to settle at home according to my Father's Desire" until "a few Days wore it all off" (Defoe 6) and he hastily set out to sea, so too does the meagre sum offered Kent derail him only a moment. Though the stipend will be barely enough to keep Kent and his family alive in Newfoundland and is a bleak assessment of his talent and future work, Kent nonetheless believes he will become the "people's painter" (Winter 17) in Newfoundland. In Newfoundland he will realize his ambition, "Rockwell Land" (60), and it does not take long for Kent to forget how his first proposal was received by Charles Daniel and contact him with the more preposterous notion of selling shares in future works.

In *Robinson Crusoe: Island Myths and the Novel*, Michael Seidel claims that "[i]n

the middle stages of his island life, Crusoe begins to reinterpret the notion of deliverance to mean delivered to his island for salvation rather than delivered to it as a simple castaway" (97). For Crusoe, the island is "a personal and interpretable text primed for his conversion" (97). Quoye and Kent perceive Newfoundland to be a place of redemption and regeneration before they even see the island. Their shared belief that an island could provide the inspiration and salvation they cannot find in their own world is not unique, according to Ian Watt. In "*Robinson Crusoe* as a Myth," Watt explains that Defoe's novel encompasses "some of the enduring traits of our [Western] social and economic history": "Back to Nature," "The Dignity of Labor," and "Economic Man" (289). According to Watt, "Back to Nature" "covers the many and varied forms of primitivism, of revulsion from the contemporary complexities of civilization into a simpler and more 'natural' order" (290). Kent, tired of New York, "a city of concrete monstrosities," is inspired by his wife's desire "to make my life less complicated" and moves to Newfoundland "to live on the ocean" (Winter 19, 3, 67). Quoye leaves the urban sprawl of Mockingburg, New York – "A place in its third death" (Proulx 10) – for "the rock that had generated his ancestors," a place "more natural" and void of the degeneracies bred in big cities (1, 29).

The "enduring traits" or tropes of "The Dignity of Labour" and the "Economic Man" also spring from a "revulsion" of "contemporary complexities of civilization," a desire to step outside society and become self-reliant and self-made. Kent and his friends speak of "movement for the sake of making something new" (Winter 4), and Kent moves to Newfoundland, away from his stalled existence as "a disenchanted painter" (5), toward what he hopes will be a life of productivity: "I will make love to my wife and paint hard

and build a garden.... We'll visit New York as a treat and blend into Newfoundland life. I'd be a people's painter. Yes, I wanted to raise a brood of Newfoundlanders and honour my wife" (17). In a room which contains an "open book of essays by Emerson" (34) (in obvious reference to "Self-Reliance"), Kent and Bob Bartlett's brother Rupert have a conversation that reveals much about the painter's purpose for coming to Newfoundland:

[I asked] him about the Emerson.

I like, Rupert said, to read work by men my own age.

And this was a young Emerson.

I prefer Thoreau.

Yes, the lover of life.

Rather than your professional dreamer.

And he quoted Thoreau: I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately.

That's me, I said.

Welcome to the woods. (34-35)

Kent's desire to "paint hard," build a garden," and "live deliberately," identifies him as one for whom the island myth has such "deep appeal" that it "sends [his] critical faculties asleep" (Watt 297). According to Watt, Kent is neither the first nor the last to wish his island dream of peace, productivity and virtue into reality: "Inspired by the theme, and blinded, perhaps, by our wishes and dreams, we avert our attention from the subtle ways by which a consolatory unreality has been made to appear real" (297). Neither Kent nor Quoye gives much thought to the reality of Newfoundland. Lumbering between states of shock and grief, Quoye decides to move to Newfoundland, which at the time exists for

him only as "the idea of the north" (Proulx 31) while Kent admits that his desire to move "was tied up not with a place but more with the idea of who I was" (Winter 60). What drives these men is not a move to a new place, but a move to a new self.

Seidel notes that island stories are less about the exotica of a new, unknown locale than about how the Western interloper finds within himself the ability to survive, then thrive: "any island story...builds on a narrative pattern of separation, displacement, and resubstantiation so important to Western literature. The appeal of island stories has always to do with the reserves of individual resourcefulness under the most difficult of circumstances" (37). Seidel believes the most famous of island fictions are about the "craft, ingenuity, and power" of the castaways and their ability to gain "control over island spaces" (37) and themselves. Rockwell Kent is this sort of protagonist. Like Crusoe, he is interested in going out into the world and finding himself; like Said's Orientalist, he is "more interested in remaking himself...than he is in seeing what there is to be seen." Kent is driven by his ego to change backgrounds (for that is all location amounts to for him). A true tourist, he desires Newfoundland because he believes he can master it, consume it, and know it. He believes Newfoundland to be a place that stays the same but will change him forever. This desire and belief is encapsulated in a conversation between Kent and George Thayer:

You want, George said, to slough off the baubles.

He said you can get that only if you move to a small place, to the periphery, to a community that is one organism and does not change. That loves itself.

So that is why we moved. (Winter 7)

Watt notes that the romanticized move to the island “necessarily features two forms of regress: technological and topographical; a simpler economic structure and its associated rural setting” (290). The world of New York is too much with Kent, and he wishes to forsake this city of getting and spending for the simpler shores of Newfoundland, and in particular, the tiny town of Brigus.

Already attracted to Brigus because it is the home of Bob Bartlett, Kent believes the town to be free of the “systems of economy” that have caused St. John’s “to grow like a plant in the dark” (Winter 17-8). “Strength here lay in the rural” (18), Kent says of Newfoundland, and he quixotically declares of his voyage by train to Brigus, “I rode through the snow out of the life I was living” (21). All that Kent believes about the life he is approaching has its origins in the island myth that man can be at his most virtuous and self-reliant only after he steps outside the economic and social confines of the soulless city and its “concrete monstrosities” (19). What prevents Kent’s happiness and eventually gets him truly exiled is the fundamental though oft-overlooked flaw of the island myth. Watt writes,

Defoe’s hero ... has been endowed with the basic needs for successful exercise of free enterprise. He is not actually a primitive or a proletarian or even a professional man, but a capitalist.... [T]he very event that brings him there, the shipwreck, which is supposed to be a retributive disaster, is in fact a miraculous gift of the means of production, and one rendered particularly felicitous by the death of all the other passengers. Crusoe complains that he is “reduced to the state of nature”; in fact he secures

from the wreck "the biggest magazine of all kinds...that ever was laid out...for one man." (297-98)

Watt contends that Crusoe's possession of this "original stock" is "the major practical unreality overlooked by many of his admirers" (298). *Robinson Crusoe* has become a mythical affirmation that man can attain "comfort and security entirely by his own efforts" (298), despite the fact that Crusoe's survival is directly hinged to his salvaging from the wreck weapons, tools, and other modern sophistications. Though Kent's cache of tools is lost in a shipwreck, he takes other forms of modernity ashore with him: notions of socialism, bohemian attitudes, and a belief that these ideas must be forced on a perceived primitive populace. These attitudes hinder rather than help Kent's creation of an island paradise, and the artist is soon discussing via mail with a supporter in New York the "bigotry and the stupidity of the people here" (Winter 284). Like Crusoe, Kent is unable to claim wholly a life "reduced to the state of nature." Like Crusoe's rifle, some of Kent's "modern" ideals are simply unnatural on this island and lead to the destruction of his dream.

If Kent is driven by ego to create a new life in a new place, then Quoye is driven by desperation. A man who has "separate[d] his feelings from his life," for whom "[w]hat he had was what he pretended" (Proulx 14), Quoye has hardly lived his life enough to possess an ego. For Quoye, the move to Newfoundland is more birth than rebirth. While Kent is interested in exploring "the periphery," "the hem of the coat of a continent" (Winter 67), Quoye already lives on the periphery of his own life: "His earliest sense of self was as a distant figure: there in the foreground was his family; here, at the limit of

the far view, was he" (Proulx 2). The loss of his job, the double suicide of his parents, the death of Petal, combined with the hell his daughters almost experienced ("The children were examined by a child abuse specialist. She says there was no evidence he did anything physical to them.... But he clearly had something in mind" [26]), leave Quoye with little more than his shock and his pain. The aunt's assertion that a move to Newfoundland is a chance for Quoye "to start out all over again" is truer than she can imagine. Quoye leaves everything behind, leaves the life that had "enclosed him like the six sides of a metal case" (17), and allows himself to be reshaped by Newfoundland. Shattered, Quoye is unable to attempt enforcing himself on the landscape. Instead he reacts, he is interested "in seeing what there is to be seen." Though Quoye certainly struggles against this place (its roads, its cliffs, its oceans), he never tries as Kent does to force "the world to alter itself" (Winter 308). Of these four island narratives, *The Shipping News* is the only one that ends with the "castaway" remaining on the island. Quoye is able to find true happiness on the island – a love "without pain or misery" (Proulx 337) – because he is the only exile who does not attempt to shape the island to fit his purposes.

"A place of natural pirates and wrackers"

In his review of *The Shipping News* for *Newfoundland Studies*, Stuart Pierson qualifies Quoye as "an anti-hero: neither forceful, nor in charge, nor 'larger than life.' In short a loser, acted upon rather than agent" (151). Ronald Rompkey seconds this assessment of Quoye in his review in *Canadian Forum*, but he also classifies the book as a "reworking of the pastoral" (36), identifying exactly what "acted upon" the passive

protagonist:

The pastoral is as old as Virgil's *Georgics*. It concentrates on the slow exploration and cataloging of rural pursuits from the point of view of a visitor or outsider who is somehow troubled, dissatisfied or weary of his own lot. Such a man is Quoye.... As his nautical and suggestively allegorical name implies, his role in life is to be walked on. Quoye is a misfit, a "damp loaf" of a body who...drifts into newspapering, writes petty local news, ignores the world at large and waits for life to begin. (36)

Quoye is "one of life's failures," but he is about to take "his first risk: he goes to Newfoundland to start again in a 'fresh' place he has glimpsed only in the family album" (36). It is this place, this pastoral paradise and purgatory, that is the agent in this novel: it moulds and hardens Quoye; it draws to itself Quoye's aunt and wayward daughter of the island, Agnis Hamm; it fosters an isolation that breeds in its people pride, tenacity, and kindness, but also perversion, ignorance and inadequacy. *The Shipping News* captures the moment only alluded to by Caliban in *The Tempest*, when Prospero is not master of the island but inexperienced student of his would-be slave: "When thou cam'st first...I loved thee/ And showed thee all the qualities o' th' isle, / The fresh springs, brine-pits, barren place and fertile" (I.ii.332-8). Though Quoye eventually comes to master himself, he never masters the island (such was never his intention) – this reworking of the island myth focuses not on the identity of the protagonist as he increases his mastery over the island but on the healing of a man as he finds his place not as master but as member of the Caliban community.

Proulx's Newfoundland is a Caliban community. In *The Shipping News*, Proulx has seemingly made good on the promise of Prospero's slave and "peopled...this isle with Calibans" (I.ii.348-9). In his review, Pierson cites Proulx's claim that the "Newfoundland in this book, though salted with grains of truth is an island of invention" and adds that the language, "family names and place names are just that little bit athwart of the real thing" (151, 153) The people themselves are a little athwart of the real thing. The descriptions Proulx gives of her characters, particularly those from Newfoundland, are just slightly off human. Proulx's Newfoundland is a Middle-Earth: her Newfoundlanders are hobbits with names like Tert Card, Benny Fudge, and Beety Buggit, living in towns like Flour Sack Cove and Nunny Bag Cove. Proulx's descriptions of her characters put one in mind of J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* and the magical Ents, or tree people:

A large knob-knuckled hand was laid on each of their shoulders, and they....found that they were looking at a most extraordinary face. It belonged to a large Man-like, almost Troll-like, figure at least fourteen foot high, very sturdy, with a tall head, and hardly any neck. Whether it was clad in stuff like green and grey bark, or whether that was its hide, was difficult to say. At any rate the arms, at a short distance from the trunk, were not wrinkled, but covered in brown smooth skin. (Tolkien 453)

The "large knob-knuckled" hands of the Ent reappear in *The Shipping News*, this time on Diddy Shovel, the harbourmaster, who "[f]lexed his fingers, making the joints pop like knotwood in a fire. Showed a little finger like a parsnip" (Proulx 81). Like the Ents,

Diddy is "Man-like." Unlike the Ents, it is the rock and not the trees of the island that he resembles, his "voice as deep as a shout in a cave": "Diddy Shovel's skin was like asphalt, fissured and cracked, thickened by a lifetime of weather, the scurf of age. Stubble worked through the craquelured surface. His eyelids collapsed in protective folds at the outer corners. Bristled eyebrows; enlarged pores gave the nose a sandy appearance. Jacket split at the shoulder seams" (79). Diddy seems to be carved by the same glacier that shaped the shores of his homeland. As Proulx continues her descriptive re-creation of Newfoundlanders, it becomes harder to relate them to the majestic Ents and easier to see them as "craquelured" Calibans.

Proulx commits considerable space to the impossible features of her Newfoundlanders. Tert Card, whose "middle initial was X," has a "[f]ace like cottage cheese clawed with a fork" (57). Benny Fudge's face "seemed made of leftover flesh squeezed roughly together" (61). Boat builder Alvin Yark "was a small man with a paper face, ears the size of half-dollars, eyes like willow leaves.... Lips no more than a crack between the nose and chin" (236). The otherworldly descriptions bring to mind Morton Luce's comment on Caliban and the impossibility of creating such a character for the stage: "if all the suggestions as to Caliban's form and feature and endowments that are thrown out in the play are collected, it will be found that the one half renders the other half impossible" (cited in Hulme 107).

Proulx does attempt to create common characteristics amongst her Newfoundlanders – most of the local men "ran to large jaws, no necks, sandy hair and barrel chests" (256) and are similar to the "Caliban type" classified by "race-thinker"

Edward A. Ross: "sub-common," "oxlike men," the type who "always stayed behind" (Ross 285). In truth, it is Quoye's resemblance to these men that makes him truly unique among castaways. Though he has never been to Newfoundland before, this voyage is for Quoye a return home. Quoye is an exclusive exile in that he is a Prospero born of Caliban. Though Quoye grew up in the United States, he is more at home among these "oxlike men," the men who "stayed behind."

At one point in Alistair MacLeod's *No Great Mischief*, the narrator tells the story of his sister, who married a petroleum engineer and moved to Aberdeen. Though born in Cape Breton, the sister one day meets an older Scottish woman who recognizes her as one of her own:

She met the woman face to face, and they looked into each other's eyes.

"You're from here," said the woman.

"No," said my sister, "I'm from Canada."

"That may be," said the woman. "But you are really from here. You have just been away for a while." (160)

Despite the fact the narrator and his sister are descendants of Scottish immigrants who came to Canada centuries before this encounter, the old woman reassures the sister when three dogs come running from her stone house: "They won't bother you.... They will recognize you by your smell" (160). Telling the story to her brother years later, the sister recalls how thousands of miles away from her home, she felt surrounded by family:

"Some of them ... had red hair and some had hair as black or blacker than my own. All of them had the same eyes. It was like being in Grandpa and Grandma's kitchen" (167).

Quoye has a similar encounter when he meets Diddy Shovel, though the harbourmaster does not recognize Quoye by his eyes or hair. Waiting for the newly appointed shipping news reporter, Diddy “watched Quoye’s yellow slicker emerge from the station wagon, watched him drop his notepad on the wet cobbles. Sized him up as strong and clumsy” (Proulx 79). Having spent a few minutes with Quoye, Diddy comes to the same conclusion as the Scottish woman: Quoye is really from Newfoundland. He has just been away for a while:

“You look like you come from here but you don’t sound it.”

“My people came from Quoye’s Point but I was brought up in the States.

So I’m an outsider. More or less.” Quoye’s hand crept up over his chin.

The harbourmaster looked at him. Squinted.

“Yes,” said Diddy Shovel. “I guess you got a story there m’boy. How did it all come about that you was raised so far away from home? That you come back?” (81)

Unlike the sister in *No Great Mischief*, who uses her hair and her eyes to find a home and a place amongst strangers, Quoye covers his chin and quickly changes the subject when Diddy identifies him as one who was not born here but who has “come back.” For Quoye is a Caliban child and carries within a shame of his lineage.

One of the first things the reader learns about Quoye is that he has spent most of his life with his hand over his chin in an attempt to hide his “chief failure, a failure of normal appearance”:

Head shaped like a crenshaw, no neck, reddish hair rucked back. Features

as bunched as kissed fingertips. Eyes the color of plastic. The monstrous chin, a freakish shelf jutting from the lower face.

Some anomalous gene had fired up at the moment of his begetting as a single spark sometimes leaps from banked coals, had given him a giant's chin. As a child he invented stratagems to deflect stares; a smile, downcast gaze, the right hand darting up to cover the chin. (2)

Though his chin and oafish appearance have always been a source of embarrassment and self-consciousness for Quoye, it is in his "return" to Newfoundland that his attributes become the markings of shame. Quoye's arrival in Newfoundland may be the first time this man has been in Killick-Claw, but his features are well-known in this community.

For Prospero, Caliban's features are indicative of the creature's shameful parentage. The "blue-eyed hag" who lived on the island before Prospero died twelve years before the wizard came on shore and left nothing behind but an imprisoned Ariel and her son "that she did litter here,/ A freckled whelp, hag-born," a "dull thing" that, now enslaved, curses Prospero and attempts to rape the usurped duke's daughter (I.ii.282-3,5). Quoye's inherited traits also put others in mind of the disreputable past of his family. Quoye finds his family home on Quoye's Point, which "thrust into the ocean like a bent thumb" (Proulx 36), on the west side of Omaloor Bay. Quoye does not question the meaning of the word "omaloor" until he hears Billy Pretty use it at *The Gammy Bird*:

"'Omaloore?' As in Omaloore Bay?"

"Oh yes. An omaloore -- big, stun, clumsy, witless, simpleminded type of

fellow. There used to be crowds of them on the other side of the bay," he gestured toward Quoye's Point, "so they named it after them." Winked at Quoye. Who wondered if he should smile. Did smile. (58)

Adrift in life, Quoye comes ashore in Newfoundland to find the role of Caliban waiting for him. Of course, even one as given over to failure as Quoye would not imagine he would inherit an ignorance so large that a land mass would be named after it. Yet his actions and his appearance continue to confirm for him his role on this island as what Shakespeare calls the "Hag-seed" of past perversions, a "misshapen knave" whose existence recalls the fallen nature of his forebears. (I.ii.364, V.i.268).

Quoye buys a boat in an attempt to become part of his community, as a symbol he is "ready to take on the sea, to seize his heritage" (Proulx 88). Unfortunately for Quoye, his heritage comes not from seafarers but from "omalours" – he buys what his editor Jack Buggit calls "a shitboat" – a term Billy Pretty elaborates on when he condemns the boat as "a wallowing cockeyed bastard no good for nothing but coasting ten feet from shore when it's civil" (88). Such a reception sends Quoye into the self-hating, staccato newspaper headline inner dialogue that appears throughout the text: "Stupid Man Does Wrong Thing Once More" (89). More so than his actions, Quoye's appearance establishes his Caliban status, especially when he sees some of his own features stamped on the face of the local madman.

Caliban is often heard calling down curses upon Prospero and his daughter:

As wicked dew as e'er my mother brushed
With raven's feather from unwholesome fen

Drop on you both! A southwest blow on ye

And blister you all o'er! (I.ii.321-24)

So too does Quoye's hermit cousin hurl arcane and petty curses at the newcomer and his family. When Quoye and his daughters first arrive at the house abandoned by his family in 1946, they find "three lucky stones strung on a wire to keep the house safe" (Proulx 45). The charm of such talismans wears away quickly as others begin appearing. "[T]hree wisps of knotted grass" (103), left on the porch one evening seem to indicate sinister intentions. Later, Quoye finds more elaborate charms obviously meant to bring misfortune on Quoye and his family: "Someone had laid lengths of knotted twine on the threshold of each room. The dirty clenches at the threshold of the room where his children had slept" (263). It is when Quoye finally decides to confront the mad cousin that he realizes how much they have in common.

Prospero is able to distance himself from Caliban by casting his slave into the realm of the "other." It is a role that Caliban has come to define, especially in postcolonial theory. As George Lamming puts it in *The Pleasures of Exile*, Caliban "is always the measure of the condition which his physical appearance has already defined. Caliban is the excluded, that which is eternally below possibility, and always beyond reach. He is seen as an occasion, a state of existence which can be appropriated and exploited for the purposes of another's own development" (107). The writers of *The Empire Writes Back*, claim that postcolonial readings of *The Tempest* have ensured "Caliban is no longer seen as the creature outside civilization ... but as a human being ... whose human status is denied by the European claims to an exclusive human condition"

(Ashcroft 189). The coloniser creates the other in an attempt to solidify his position. The other is a stereotype, a trope, a fallacy upon which the identity of the coloniser depends. The other is a non-specific stereotype, a creation of the coloniser who defines the other as little more than other than himself. It is the paradox at the core of Orientalism discussed by Homi K. Bhabha in *The Location of Culture*: "The stereotype, then, as the primary point of subjectification in colonial discourse, for both colonizer and colonized, is the scene of a similar fantasy and defence – the desire for an originality which is again threatened by the differences of race, colour, and culture" (75). Bhabha's challenging and unsettling notions of hybridity (discussed in Chapter 1) stem from the ambivalence he perceives at the core of the "other" identity. As Said puts it, "Every subjugated community in Europe, Australia, Africa, Asia, and the Americas has played the sorely tried and oppressed to some outside master like Prospero" (*Culture* 214), yet these very distinct cultures (containing within them very distinct individuals) all fall under the realm of "the other." It is in the impossibility of representing such a vast number of people that the logic of colonial discourse crumbles for Bhabha, and the ambivalence at its core "deconstructs the epistemological 'edge' of the West" (Bhabha 31).

Though the definition of "coloniser" would have to be stretched beyond the breaking point to include Quoye, *The Shipping News* does provide the unique instance of the settler/interloper not only discovering the vagaries of the "other" identity but also seeing in the basest notions of the other evidence of himself. The most unsettling aspect of the other is that he may not be that different. This notion is discussed by Lamming: "Caliban is a reminder of lost virtue or the evil vigour of the Beast that is always there: a

magnetic temptation, and an eternal warning against the contagion of his daemon ancestry" (107). When Quoyale finally meets his Caliban cousin, he sees traces of himself and feels the "contagion" of his own "daemon ancestry."

When Quoyale first knocks of the door at his cousin's ramshackle home ("more boat shed than house"), Quoyale calls his own name, an experience he has never had until that moment: "He called, Mr. Quoyale, Mr. Quoyale, felt he was calling himself" (264). The feeling of visiting himself grows as his cousin emerges from his Caliban-esque cover: "A pile of rags in the...corner stirred and the old man sat up": "Even in the dim light, even in the ruin of cadaverous age, Quoyale saw resemblances. The aunt's unruly hair; his father's lipless mouth; their common family eyes sunk under brows as coarse as horsehair; his brother's stance. And for Quoyale, a view of his own monstrous chin, here a somewhat smaller bony shelf choked with white bristle" (264). The cousin's home is a true Caliban's lair:

A jumble of firewood and rubbish, a stink.... Loops of fishing line
underfoot, the snarl trodden into compacted detritus, a churn of splinters,
sand, rain, sea wet, mud, weeds, bits of wool, gnawed sheep ribs, spruce
needles, fish scales and bones, burst air bladders, seal offal, squid
cartilage, broken glass, torn cloth, dog hair, nail parings, bark and blood.
(264-65)

Like Caliban, like the garbage that surrounds him, the cousin has been cast away. Though Prospero, Quoyale and the other exiles may claim the title, it is the used and forgotten characters like Caliban and Cousin Nolan Quoyale who are the true castaways. It is

Quoye's attachment to this castaway that shackles his identity to past shames he believes he has inherited: "In the man before him, in the hut, crammed with the poverty of another century, Quoye saw what he had sprung from" (264). In this man's madness, Quoye sees the "genetic chemical jumble" that produced his appearance and forms his identity.

In *Difference and Pathology*, Sander L. Gilman discusses the existence of two "others" in colonial discourse: the "bad" other and the "good" other. The first is the bogeyman of the colonial mind, the violent savage, base, primal, ignorant -- the "vile race" of Caliban (*Tempest* I.ii.357). The second is the child of nature, peaceful, at one with the earth, as is Ariel. Both are sources of fear for the colonizer, for neither can be banished entirely from the human condition the colonizer shares: "The former is that which we fear to become; the latter, that which we fear we cannot achieve" (Gilman 20). On a boat trip with Billy Pretty, Quoye learns the history of his family: "They were wrackers they say, come to Gaze Island centuries ago and made it their evil lair. Pirate men and women that lured ships onto rocks" (Proulx 171). Hearing the story, Quoye cannot help but "imagine himself as a godless pirate spying for prey or enemy" (172). The novelty quickly turns to fear as Quoye wonders if such vulgar traits could be inherited:

Uneasiness came over him, that crawling dread of things unseen. The ghastly unknown tintured by thoughts of pirate Quoyes. Ancestors whose filthy blood ran in his veins, who murdered the shipwrecked, drowned their unwanted brats, fought and howled, beards braided in spikes with burning candles jammed in their hair. Pointed sticks, hardened

in the fire. (174)

Passing by the very island where his ancestors supposedly pillaged and plundered, Quoye now must face the gnarled and grotesque genealogy he tried to ignore when his aunt matter-of-factly informed him that his grandfather and grandmother were brother and sister. Sian Quoye, a father at twelve, died while sealing when "he had one of his fits and went off the ice" (25). His sister/wife then "took up with Turvey, the other brother" (25). Quoye prefers to leave such embarrassing entanglements unexamined: "Quoye hated the thought of an incestuous, fit-prone, seal-killing child for a grandfather, but there was no choice. The mysteries of an unknown family" (25). Later, when Quoye has learned more about his cousin and the "vile story" of how he continued to sleep with his wife's corpse, Quoye can only manage an ironically detached "Ah, the Quoyes" (297). Unlike other castaways who begin their lives on the island with a *tabula rasa*, Quoye must rebuild, then rebuild again: shirking off the unlived life of his mainland past and dealing with the identity of insanity and ignorance that already awaits him in Newfoundland.

"a good scurifunging:" The Dignity of Labour

Upon entering the abandoned home of the Quoyes, Agnis Hamm is not discouraged by the cracked ceiling, the slanted floors, or the rusted, rotted, or ragged ruins of furniture: "Needs a good scurifunging. What my mother always said" (44). Though Proulx's use of such an awkward and arcane phrase gives proof to Pierson's assertion that there "is something a little stannous about Proulx's ear," *scurifunging* is an appropriate term to describe that which truly saves Quoye (153). Defined in *The Dictionary of*

Newfoundland English as a "thorough cleaning," scurrying refers to the hard work that must be done to transfer a tarnished or neglected object into something new. Here, Proulx points toward one of the island myths discussed by Ian Watt, the transformation of a man through the dignity of labour.

Though the island myth is certainly escapist, the myth is not always an escape from work. Crusoe has to build shelters, fence off territories, hunt, learn to farm. Prospero must procure the island's secrets from Caliban, make the wretch his slave, learn to master the elements, and protect his daughter. Watt contends that as much as *Robinson Crusoe* is about a return to nature, it is also "antiprimitivist": "One of the reasons for the canonization of *Robinson Crusoe* is certainly its consonance with the modern view that labor is both the most valuable form of human activity in itself, and at the same time the only reliable way of developing one's spiritual biceps" (296). Quoye's meandering from job to job as a "distributor of vending machine candy, all-night clerk in a convenience store, a third-rate newspaperman" has left his spiritual biceps somewhat atrophied (Proulx 1). It is in Newfoundland that Quoye finds purpose and identity through his work.

In "Tayloring the Self: Identity, Articulation, and Community in Proulx's *The Shipping News*," Robert Scott Stewart draws attention to the fact that Quoye "does not and cannot see moving to Newfoundland as any sort of salvation" (61). Instead, Quoye takes a form of satisfaction in knowing he has moved to a place of harsh weather and dangerous landscapes:

"We better make tracks," [Agnis] said. "This is not a good place to get

caught in a snowstorm. Well do I know."

"In May?" said Quoye. "Give me a break, Aunt."

"Any month of the year, my boy. Weather here beyond anything you know."

"Quoye looked out. The bay faded, as though he looked through a piece of cheesecloth. Needles of snow in his face.

"I don't believe it," he said. But it was what he wanted. Storm and peril.

Difficult tasks. Exhaustion. (Proulx 50)

Quoye's desire for struggle is a pivotal part of the island myth. Seidel believes the island in *Robinson Crusoe* to be an "isle of providence," and not just because Crusoe finds grace and God while in exile:

For Defoe providence is not merely theological. The word also has significance as the substantial basis for the action of the story. After all, what does Crusoe do? He provides for himself under duress and over time....

Crusoe has obviously thought about obtaining his rescue even before religion enters in through the back door.... Maybe that is the point. All delivery is a kind of self-delivery. (Seidel 95, 97)

Work is salvation for the island castaway. Watt believes that if there is a moral to be drawn from *Robinson Crusoe*, "it can only be said that for all the ailments of man and his society, Defoe confidently prescribes the therapy of work" (Watt 295). Survival and, more importantly, an intimate knowledge of all the aspects of survival, are directly

related to the health of the castaway's body and character.

Though unable to cook, Crusoe eventually makes bread, which nourishes his body and his self-confidence. "It might be truly said, that now I work'd for my Bread," Crusoe proudly proclaims, "'tis a little wonderful...the strange multitude of little Things necessary in the Providing, Producing, Curing, Dressing, Making and finishing this one Article of Bread" (Defoe 118). When he finally succeeds in making pots so that he can boil meat or cook bread, Crusoe says, "No Joy at a Thing of so mean a Nature was ever equal to mine, when I found I had made an Earthen Pot that would bear the Fire" (121). Quoye also experiences pride and self-worth as he works in his own way to put bread on the table. Like Crusoe, Quoye first despairs when faced with a task he feels he cannot do. Upon first reading *The Gammy Bird*, the newspaper that has just hired him as a reporter, Quoye gets "an uneasy feeling, the feeling of standing on a playground watching others play games whose rules he did not know. Nothing like the [Mockingburg] Record. He didn't know how to write this stuff" (Proulx 63). Scott notes that "Quoye's claim here is ironic, of course, since he couldn't write for the *Record* either" (Scott 63). Scott goes on to say Quoye "will, however, come to learn to write for the *Gammy Bird*" (63), and this work will become his salvation.

In "Inarticulacy, identity and silence: Annie Proulx's *The Shipping News*," Rachel Seiffert notes that Quoye's growth and success as a writer establishes his confidence and (re)creates his ego. Like Crusoe and his many attempts at firing functional pots, Quoye is "very much an outsider in Killick Claw, ignorant of the ways of the Newfoundland communities, and consequently makes many mistakes" (515). Coupled with his

inheritance of his family's identity and shame, Quoyale's very public failures are expected and enjoyed by his co-workers and neighbours. Yet his eventual success as a reporter solidifies his character and his place in this community: "Through his work on the local newspaper *The Gammy Bird*, however, Quoyale gradually finds a position to speak from and words to speak with (even thinking in newspaper headlines...). The success of his column both with Jack the proprietor and the community provides Quoyale with a means of self-expression and self-acceptance" (516). As a Prospero-Caliban hybrid, Quoyale is able to experience the mastery that comes with labour and fosters a connection to the island and its people. It is a connection not experienced by any other castaway.

In *The Tempest*, the dignity of labour does not come to Caliban. For the shipwrecked Ferdinand, the prince of Naples to whom Prospero intends to wed his daughter, the task of moving heavy logs has benefit:

There be some sports are painful, and their labor
 Delight in them sets off. Some kinds of baseness
 Are nobly undergone, and most poor matters
 Point to rich ends. This my mean task
 Would be as heavy to me as odious, but
 The mistress which I serve quickens what's dead
 And makes my labors pleasures. (III.i. 1-7)

Though weary with the labour, Ferdinand refuses Miranda's help as Prospero watches unseen. It is obvious that this toil is not forced upon Ferdinand to keep the young man busy while Prospero tends to other aspects of his plot. In performing this task, and in

refusing the help of Miranda, Ferdinand is proving his mettle to Prospero. Yet when Caliban performs similar, and more important tasks (Ferdinand is, after all, only moving the logs from one pile to another), no favour is shown him. Prospero admits to his daughter that Caliban “does make our fire/ Fetch in our wood, and serves in offices/ That profit us” but refers to Caliban only as slave (I.ii.311-13). Despite Caliban’s claim “There’s wood enough within,” Prospero sends Caliban to collect more:

Fetch us in fuel; and be quick, thou’rt best,
 To answer other business. Shrugg’st thou, malice?
 If thou neglect’st or dost unwillingly
 What I command, I’ll rack thee with old cramps,
 Fill all thy bones with aches, make thee roar,
 That beasts shall tremble at thy din. (I.ii.365-70)

Caliban has become synonymous with the native other as perceived by the colonizing culture: “both savage (cannibal) and yet the most obedient and dignified of servants” (Bhabha 82). His name an anagram for *cannibal*, Caliban is a symbol of how the native can be saved from his uncivilized proclivities and become a tool in colonization. As Watt points out, *Robinson Crusoe* is not just about the dignity of labour but also the “division of labour” as Crusoe doubly saves Friday from cannibalism – from being eaten himself and from his own desire to eat others – then puts him to work, once again doubly saving him by teaching him the goodness of the Christian God while instilling within him an appreciation for labour (Watt 293).

Though Crusoe claims “never Man had a more faithful, loving, sincere Servant,

than *Friday* was to me" (Defoe 209), it is Crusoe's threat of lethal violence that "saves" Friday from his cannibalistic nature. Early in their time together, Crusoe and Friday discover evidence of a ghastly feast and gather the human remains together to burn. Watching Friday as the human flesh roasts, Crusoe notes, "I found *Friday* has still a hankering Stomach after some of the Flesh, and was still a Cannibal in his nature" (208). Believing that Friday is about to propose dining on this flesh, Crusoe "let him know that I would kill him if he offer'd it" (208). For Prospero, Caliban is both a constant help and a constant threat. When Miranda curses Caliban as "a villain," Prospero reminds his daughter, "We cannot miss [i.e. do without] him. He does make our fire,/ Fetch in our wood, and serves in offices/ That profit us" (*Tempest* I.ii.311-13). Yet Prospero knows it is only the threat of the whip that keeps Caliban from his lascivious nature:

Thou most lying slave,
 Whom stripes may move, not kindness. I have used thee
 (Filth as thou art) with humane care, and lodged thee
 In mine own cell till thou didst seek to violate
 The honour of my child. (I.ii.344-8)

Prospero's dependence upon and fear of Caliban is echoed in Frantz Fanon's description of the European attitude toward their African subjects: "There is a quest for the Negro, the Negro is a demand, one can not get along without him, he is needed, but only if he is made palatable in a certain way. Unfortunately, the Negro knocks down the system and breaks the treaties" (Fanon 114). The Newfoundlander occupies the rare position in colonialism of one who is descended from the same civilization as the colonising culture,

yet has descended to the degeneracy of the Caliban culture.

As Patrick O'Flaherty notes in *Old Newfoundland: A History to 1843*, the British also saw Newfoundlanders as a people who needed discipline to save them from degradation. Citing the seventeenth-century British *Calendar of State Papers, Colonial Series*, as his source, O'Flaherty writes that the British believed Newfoundland to be "a cesspool of vice, laziness, and drunkenness" (43) once the colonial officials abandoned the island at the end of summer. Left unsupervised, Newfoundlanders were reduced to a state of "idleness and debauchery," sometimes "pull[ing] down stages...to make fires 'to brew drink'" (43, 45). Though not possessed of the authority of a colonial official, Quoye is given a reporter's position upon his arrival in Newfoundland and repeated access to evidence of Newfoundland debauchery. Upon first arriving at *The Gammy Bird*, Quoye reads several back issues to familiarize himself with the paper: "Sexual abuse stories – three or four in every issue" (Proulx 61). B. Beaufield Nutbeem, who reports the sexual abuse stories "can't hardly keep up," produces the stories "by the yard," among them an article on a teacher who "won a hundred thousand in the Atlantic Lottery...and celebrated by molesting fourteen students in one week" (68, 248, 217). A Briton temporarily deterred from his navigation of the world in his self-made boat, Nutbeem has grown tired observing such perversions and proclaims, "I've heard it said – cynically – that sexual abuse of children is an old Newf tradition" (218).

Though this "old Newf tradition" repulses him, Quoye is forced to acknowledge that such a tradition is his birthright. His grandfather and grandmother were also brother and sister, his father repeatedly raped his sister, Quoye's aunt, Agnis, a fact Quoye

learns from his institutionalized cousin, who was present the night a young Agnis had an abortion: "It was 'er brother done it, y'see, that clumsy big Guy Quoye. Was at 'er when she was a little maid" (297). Quoye is of these people, his work, the dignity of his labour, saves not only himself but redeems the island and its inhabitants.

In "Tayloring the Self," Stewart notes that Proulx's Newfoundland, scarred as it is with incest and insanity, is not an island paradise offering rejuvenation: "Although *The Shipping News* speaks of the necessity of finding one's roots, of embedding oneself within a set of community values, it eschews both any connection to a "golden age" mentality and to the loathsome sort of "family values" sentimentality which infects many current discussions of that issue" (62). When Quoye first reads *The Gammy Bird*, he notes it "played streams of invective" and was "pitted with epithets" (Proulx 63). This paper was "a hard bite" that "[l]ooked life right in its shifty, bloodshot eye. A tough little paper" (63). For Stewart, Quoye's assessment of *The Gammy Bird* as a "tough little paper" is pivotal – the paper "mirror[s] the tough little community it represents" (Stewart 62). Stewart believes "the community and its local paper are idiosyncratic" (62) – unique little anomalies whose very existence is a testament to their quirkiness and tenacity. So does Proulx create a "tough little" race of Newfoundlanders.

Stewart buys wholeheartedly into Proulx's presentation of Newfoundlanders as a people keeping one step ahead of defeat and destruction:

Confederation, for Newfoundland...has almost destroyed the communities
[it] was supposed to help. Yet, despite this, Newfoundlanders have
struggled on, and in so doing, in spite of the new economy (or perhaps

because of it) have attempted to retain traditional ways of life.... [T]hough jobs are scarce to non-existent, Newfoundlanders continue to have a firm and secure sense of self, of who they are, and where they come from. (54)

Here, Watt's mystique of the dignity of labor meets the Newfoundland mystique of Sandra Gwyn. Stewart is no doubt familiar with Gwyn's "The Newfoundland Renaissance," whose sentiments he echoes. Gwyn also believes Confederation and the reforms it put in place deeply and permanently scarred the Newfoundland psyche. The attempt to modernize the province through resettlement and the construction of highways is lamented by Gwyn as the separation of Newfoundlanders from their fundamental selves – an identity located in outport settlements: "clusters of flat-roofed, white clapboard houses and churches on the brink of the Atlantic with names like St. Jones Without, and Ireland's Eye, and Merasheen" (40). Proulx posits her protagonist in a tough little town with the quirky name of Killick-Claw and puts him to work at a tough little paper with the quirky name of *The Gammy Bird*. With this appropriate mix of work and whimsy, Quoye should capture enough of what Gwyn refers to as the "Newfoundland ethic of endurance" (40) to save himself and his adopted culture.

As young Joe Smallwood's headmaster, an itinerant Englishman, readily points out to him at Bishop Feild College in Wayne Johnston's *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams*, "The worst of our lot comes over here, inbreeds for several hundred years and the end-product is a hundred thousand Newfoundlanders" (Johnston 36). That Newfoundland was settled by some rather disreputable characters is a "fact" accepted and romanticised by Proulx and Gwyn. As she travels the island looking for evidence of the

endangered yet enduring Newfoundland mystique, Gwyn marvels over the Southern Shore: "the fifty-mile stretch of coast, a doomladen, awesomely beautiful old haunt of wreckers and whiskey priests, that lies between St. John's and Ferryland" (Gwyn 44). As Billy Pretty admits to him, the fact that Quoye is descended from "wrackers" is not unique:

Truth be told...there was many, many people here depended on shipwrecks to improve their lots. Save what lives they could and then strip the vessel bare. Seize the luxuries, butter, cheese, china plates, silver coffee pots and fine chests of drawers. There's many houses here still has treasures that come off wracked ships. And the pirates always come up from the Caribbean water to Newfoundland for their crews. A place of natural pirates and wrackers. (Proulx 172)

The Newfoundlanders in *The Shipping News* remind the reader of pirates. The proprietor of Ig's Store just outside Killick-Claw answers Quoye's questions with an affirmative "Oh yar" (51). Jack Buggit has a look and a voice that would be more in place on the deck of the *Jolly Roger* than in a newspaper room:

Jack Buggit was an unlikely looking newspaper editor. A small man with a red forehead, somewhere, Quoye thought, between forty-five and ninety-five. A stubble chin, slack neck. Jagged hair frowsting down. Fingers ochre from chain-smoking. He wore scale-splattered coveralls and his feet on the desk were in rubber boots with red soles.

"Oh yar!" he said [into the telephone] in a startlingly loud voice. "Oh yar,"

and hung up. Lit a cigarette.

“Quoyle!” The hand shot out and Quoyle shook it. It was like clasping a leather pot holder.

“Thick weather and small rain. Here we are, Quoyle, sitting in the headquarters of *Gammy Bird*....” Shot jets of smoke from the corners of his mouth, looked up at the ceiling as if at mariners’ stars. (63-64)

Before Jack, Quoyle meets Billy Pretty, whose first word in the text is “Ar” (58). At Nutbeem’s farewell party, an “emaciated black-haired man,” whom Proulx undoubtedly models after Ben Gunn of *Treasure Island*, screams “Ar!” before he boards Nutbeem’s vessel “with his axe and in a few minutes chopped through the bottom” (256). Even the place names put one in mind of a pirate adventure: “Bloody Banks” (51), “Hell’s Rock” (163), and “Port Anguish” (219).

To compound the negative aspects of Quoyle’s pirate heritage, Billy Pretty is an endless source of information on the legendary depravity of the Quoyles: “Loonies. They was wild and inbred, half-wits and murderers. Half of them was low-minded”(162). Yet there is a strong dose of derring-do that has ensured the survival of these swashbucklers. Quoyle’s aunt proudly claims, “Rare the storm a Newfoundlander couldn’t cross the bay in” (49). Jack Buggit is possessed of an otherworldly knowledge of the sea – without any technological assistance, he finds his capsized son a week after Dennis went into the ocean. He later finds Quoyle in similar peril and exclaims, “I *knowed* somebody was out here. Felt it” (212). Despite being infused with Proulx’s romantic notions of Newfoundlanders, it is what can only be described as a survivor’s ingenuity that enables

Jack to thrive.

Jack creates *The Gammy Bird* when he realizes that so many factories have closed down and so many proposed factories have failed to open that no one – not government official nor those seeking employment – rightfully knows where to look for work. As he tells Quoye, “Now, how do you know things? You read ’em in the paper!” (67). Though his reading skills are limited (“I only got to ‘Tom’s Dog’ in school” [67]), Jack starts a paper, employs several fellow Newfoundlanders, and keeps the people of Newfoundland’s Northern Peninsula informed. What saves these people, these descendants of wrackers and wild men, is work – the dignity of labour.

Work is an obsession in Proulx’s Newfoundland (and in this instance she does not stray from reality). People leave the island to find employment, a fact lamented by those left behind. The man who sells Quoye his first boat does so to rid himself of memories of a son who “[t]ook off for the mainland. Where they lives ’mong the snakes.... Seek his bloody fuckin’ fortune” (85). Agnis Hamm remembers her family’s departure as “a drop in the tides of Newfoundlanders [moving] away from the outports” to find jobs (33). Proulx’s novel is a quest for work. As Louise Flavin notes in “Quoye’s Quest: Knots and Fragments as Tools of Narration in *The Shipping News*,” “Quoye reconstructs himself in Newfoundland, as he newly finds himself, becoming stronger, more assertive, more honest, and more capable” (240). Strong, assertive, honest, and capable – such words one would expect to read in a resume or letter of reference. Quoye’s on-the-job training gives him strength and self-assurance. Flavin notes that Quoye is aided on his quest “by a series of mentor-guides” (242), among them his co-workers at *The Gammy Bird*, Jack and

Billy. Jack is a testament to the deliverance that comes through work. His "Great-great-grandfather had to go to cannibalism to stay alive," but the Buggits "fished these waters, sealed, shipped out, done everything to keep going," worked their "cockadoodle guts out," so that Jack could be a successful and proud Newfoundlander, the proprietor of a paper who "hates a Newfie joke" (Proulx 64, 69).

During their visit to Gaze Island, Billy explains to Quoye the virtue of labour, and the strong community it creates:

...if it was hard times, they shared, they helped their neighbor. No, they didn't have any money, the sea was dangerous and men were lost, but it was a satisfying life in a way people today do not understand. There was a joinery of lives all worked together, smooth in places, or lumpy, but joined. The work and the living you did was the same things, not separated out like today. (169)

This "joinery" is the central focus of Flavin's analysis of the novel, "a life integrating work, love, family, and community into one harmonious whole" (Flavin 246). It is Quoye's "purposeful profession" as a newspaper reporter (and eventually editor) that solidifies this community and his place within it.

Jack demonstrates a peculiar insight through his designation of duties at *The Gammy Bird*. A survivor of sexual abuse, Nutbeem chronicles the endless stories of rape and molestation along the Northern Peninsula. Billy Pretty is still a virgin at 73 ("What he knew was that women were shaped like leaves and men fell" [Proulx 171]), yet he writes the "Home News" page and the scandalous "Scrunchions" section which is full of

“rude winks about rough lads” (62). To Quoye, who fears water and cannot swim and whose wife had just died in an automobile accident, are assigned the shipping news and the chronicling of the countless car wrecks around the community. Yet Quoye thrives under Jack’s tutelage. His personal touch on the shipping news (though Jack assures him “you don’t know nothin’ about boats” [143]), earns him his own column in the paper.

Quoye writes sentimental pieces, an ode to an exploded boat titled “Good-Bye, Buddy,” and his nostalgic opus “Nobody Hangs a Picture of an Oil Tanker,” in which he laments the replacement of schooners, “their sails spread like white wings,” by oil tankers, “low black” monstrosities that trail “black oil scum along miles of landwash” as the dominant vessels on Newfoundland’s Atlantic horizon (201). Tert Card’s condemnation of Quoye’s article as “American pinko Greenpeace liberalism” coupled with his editorial ravaging of the piece so that it ran as “Picture of an Oil Tanker” and encouraged everyone to “all hang a picture of an oil tanker on our wall” establish the managing editor as Quoye’s chief antagonist (202, 203). The fallout from the editorial fiasco also results in the further solidification of Quoye’s position at the paper and at *The Gammy Bird* – his articles will run as he writes them, free of editing.

Quoye’s dedication to the paper and to telling the story of the island results in his promotion to managing editor and the first indication he has an identity beyond his surname: “When the paper came out that week he tore out the editorial page where the masthead ran and mailed it to Partridge. *Managing Editor: R. G. Quoye*” (288). The “R. G.” is most likely a tribute to actual Newfoundland newspaper columnist Ray Guy (that Quoye’s father was named Guy makes this possibility more likely), whom Gwyn

describes as a “shy” “cult figure” (45). Gwyn cites O’Flaherty’s famous assessment of Guy as an “insistent reminder of a previous dignity now violated.... the only author in this province to possess an intuitive grasp of what ordinary people feel” (45). Proulx has elevated Quoye to Guy-like status, the nostalgic countermeasure to both Tert Card’s pro-industrialism and the inevitable loss of a way of life. Quoye sees the oncoming oil tankers, the chain stores, and the other trappings of modernity, senses the passing of culture and a people, understands that the Newfoundland he claims as home and the Newfoundland that will be are radically different, yet he looks “life right in its shift, bloodshot eye” and stakes the claim of Caliban: “This island’s mine by Sycorax my mother,/ Which thou tak’st from me” (*Tempest*, I.ii.331-2).

As Rompkey notes near the end of his review of *The Shipping News*, “Quoye, having escaped the encroachments of modernity in the United States, finds himself staring them in the face again” (Rompkey 37). Whereas Caliban is overrun by Prospero’s magic, whereas the cannibals of *Robinson Crusoe* are bowed by the protagonist’s gunpowder and ingenuity, Quoye is able to persist on this island through an illogical but not unfamiliar leap. In emulation of his name, Quoye binds himself to this land through work, but also through other methods. As both castaway and native – one who is “really from here” but has “been away for a while” – Quoye finds life on the island is not dictated by a master, nor is it defined by a search for mastery over everyone and everything. Quoye’s eventual place amongst these people is neither slave nor master but equal – friend, lover, co-worker. Like Tomas Croft in Patrick Kavanagh’s *Gaff Topsails*, Quoye merges with the land in what he hopes will be a mutually beneficial relationship:

Quoyly lay in the heather.... He pressed his groin against the barrens as if he were in union with the earth. His aroused senses imbued the far scene with enormous importance. The small figures against the vast rock with the sea beyond. All the complex wires of life were stripped out and he could see the structure of life. Nothing but rock and sea, the tiny figures of humans and animals against them for a brief time. (Proulx 196)

Like Croft, who makes love to the land, like Sheilagh Fielding of *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams*, who believes Newfoundlanders to be “a people in whose bodies old sea-seeking rivers roar with blood” (Johnston 562), Quoyly sees and feels his inherent *oneness* with the island, and in this connection finds his home. A snowstorm blows through Killick-Claw and Quoyly runs “a special issue, OUR BATTERED COAST” (319). When he learns that the same storm had obliterated his ancestral home, Quoyly cannot identify the loss he feels, for it is as if “he’d lost silence” (321). By now, this loss is insignificant, for the cables that lashed the home to the ground have been “stripped out” like the “complex wires of life,” and he now sees “the structure of life.”

Proulx’s novel is Quoyly’s quest to find himself, but it also appears to be a quest to become a true Newfoundlander, such as Proulx perceives it. He is naturally drawn to the cuisine of the area. Quoyly regularly eats squidburgers (Proulx’s take on a local delicacy) and he admits to Jack he “could eat the boatload” of herring they are shovelling (310). One of the first things the reader learns about Quoyly is that he enjoys “battered spuds” – the staple of many Newfoundland meals (1). When he and Wavey finally spend a night together, it is after a meal of seal flippers, which Quoyly devours: “Quoyly

finished the whole thing and licked the pan with a tongue like a dishclout" (306).

According to Proulx, Quoye's eating habits bring him closer to true Newfoundland status: "Real Newfoundland kisses that night, flavored with seal flipper pie" (307). In the end, it is Quoye's mystical and *a priori* connection to the place, to the quirks and peculiar magic that permeates the island, that enables him to find his home here. Quoye is possessed of the magic of Prospero and the rootedness of Caliban. He never tries to master the place, only to understand it, to find happiness in it through a subtle collaboration, a reaction to the world around him: "Quoye experienced moments in all colors, uttered brilliancies, paid attention to the rich sound of waves counting stones, he laughed and wept, noticed sunsets, heard music in the rain, said I do" (337). It is noteworthy that this list moves from reaction to action: first he experiences, then he utters, then he pays attention – he hears before he speaks. Unlike Crusoe or Prospero, Quoye listens to the island and does not try to impose his will on it, and the happiness he finds there is magical:

For if Jack Buggit could escape from the pickle jar, if a bird with a broken neck could fly away, what else might be possible? Water may be older than light, diamonds crack in hot goat's blood, mountaintops give off cold fire, forests appear in mid-ocean, it may happen that a crab is caught with the shadow of a hand on its back, that the wind be imprisoned in a bit of knotted string. And it may be that love sometimes occurs without pain or misery. (336-37)

Proulx creates a fabled almost pagan Newfoundland for her castaway to discover. He

finds happiness there because he embraces the island, wants to escape to it from the land he is coming from, and never tries to impose there the ideas he learned in his more modern existence. Such cannot be said of most literary castaways. Rockwell Kent of *The Big Why* longs to embrace this island, to free himself from his modern cage, but, like Robinson Crusoe, Kent carries with him too much baggage from his old world to find happiness there.

“An empty craft always looms high”: Kent’s *Prospero Complex*

On her way back to Newfoundland, Agnis Hamm recalls stories she has heard from “old mouths” of the “malefic spirits” bred by this island. She recalls several horrific tales of sealers drowning, families starving, and “convulsing hangashore[s]” who die because the proper medicine and medical attention was always too far away. In particular, she remembers the story of “the father who shot his oldest children and himself that the rest might live on flour scrapings” (33). In *The Big Why*, Michael Winter gives this last story to Tom Dobie, a young man told by Bartlett “to keep an eye on” Rockwell Kent (Winter 22). Dobie twice mentions that his father “destroyed himself” before he finally tells the visiting artist of his father’s suicide (85).

While living in Labrador, Tom and his father, Robert, leave his mother and twin sisters behind and set out in hopes of trading some of their tools for food. Unsuccessful in his quest and facing a winter of starvation that would surely kill his family, Tom’s father sends the boy and his mother to a neighbour to beg for food, leaving him alone with the twins who were crying and starving:

He must have taken up the axe and, with the back of it, tapped the twins

on their heads soon after. That stopped them. He would have said, Forgive me. And the quiet crowded the room. Tom's father had sat at the table and fed some wood to the fire. Then he fished the wood out again, to save it. The father took up the rifle and sat himself in the corner. He was going to destroy himself. He would have done it in the woods, but they needed the rifle and he did not want to risk their not finding it. He would have used a rope, but he did not want them to see him hanging. His grandfather had hanged himself in a stone barn in Brigus and Robert Dobie was the one who had discovered him. (89)

Winter infuses his depictions of Newfoundland existence with an immediacy not present in *The Shipping News*. A murder suicide becomes more than a story among stories; it shapes the reality of a main character. Winter seems to adhere to Patrick O'Flaherty's assertion that "Outport life had a raw edge, a harsh and violent tenor, which was linked with the oppressiveness of the milieu. It cannot be stated too often that while a life of fruitful work nourishes, that of grinding drudgery and dependence impoverishes the spirit" (O'Flaherty, "Looking Backwards" 5). Proulx lingers long on "Newf traditions" of incest, rape, lunacy, poverty and death; yet her characters seem to overcome all vices and hardships with an island-born pragmatism defined by Agnis: "We face up to awful things because we can't go around them, or forget them. The sooner you get it over with, the sooner you say, 'Yes, it happened, and there's nothing I can do about it,' the sooner you can get on with your own life" (Proulx 72). For Proulx, this pragmatism becomes magical, not only enabling Newfoundlanders to survive their environment and their own

backwardness but also to thrive as the “bards, storytellers, dancers, jokers, mummers, punsters, and proverb-makers” O’Flaherty claims crowd contemporary images of outport existence (“Looking Backwards” 9). It is Kent’s similar image of these “rural people,” his “desire to live with a rural people, to love them and be loved,” that motivates him to move to Newfoundland (Winter 46).

Winter’s depiction of Newfoundlanders certainly resists the image of plucky and whimsical islanders, but it also contrasts O’Flaherty’s deconstruction of that image. In “Looking backwards: the milieu of the old Newfoundland outports,” O’Flaherty contends that “the old outport had no culture at all, because in it deflection away from ‘everyday urgencies’ was almost impossible” (3). O’Flaherty paints a picture of a Newfoundland where a connection to the land such as Quoye experiences when he presses his groin to the barrens is not possible – O’Flaherty’s Newfoundland is not a lover, and life on this island leaves no time to romanticize her: “It was rare to see in the inhabitants of the old outports the higher qualities which a life lived ‘in communion with nature’ is sometimes said to nurture – a concern for animals, for example, or a love of scenery. Such feelings were submerged beneath the brutal difficulty of making a living” (5). At one moment, Winter appears to agree with O’Flaherty’s assessment, literally chaining Tom Dobie to his labour:

Tom suggested that we split some wood....

It was hot work, and Tom stopped to take off his jersey. He pulled the jersey and shirt and undershirt all over his head and down to his wrists.

And he stood there, a boy of sixteen, letting the sweat on his kidneys

evaporate in the cold February air, his wrists chained by the bulk of the shirt and jersey. (Winter 47)

A teenager and already long indentured to a life of labour, Tom seems to match O'Flaherty's definition of the outport Newfoundlander, especially in his lack of appreciation for scenery. While helping Kent install windows, Tom scoffs at the artist's appreciation of the view:

He assisted me with the front mullions. He kept remarking on the southern view, compared to the northerly he and most of Brigus had.

Brigus, I said, does not take advantage of the seascape. Youve got small windows in your houses.

We have to keep the saltbox warm. Lovely big windows make the draftiest of rooms.

But the view, Tom.

Why would we want to look at the salt water? When we're out on it all day long and that's enough of it.

This shut me up for a while. (92)

Yet, despite this dismissal of the view, Tom is not entirely empty of "the finer sensibilities" O'Flaherty claims have been eroded from the outport character ("Lookinh Backward" 5).

When Kent realizes the distance Tom walks every morning to work for him, he is amazed this boy would bracket a day of hard labour with such a long journey back and forth. Tom's response initially seems apathetic, an example of the "stolid indifference"

(5) O'Flaherty discusses: "Dont worry, a man's got to think" (Winter 82). Yet it soon becomes obvious that Tom is a thinker, that his labours do not foster in him "a contempt for prettiness" or a "note of impassiveness" ("Looking Backward" 5). Joining Tom in his dory to jig for cod, Kent comments on the ruthlessness of the jigger: "It seems rude...not to catch them in the mouth," to which Tom gives a response O'Flaherty might expect: "You, he said. Everything's got to be done in a beautiful way" (Winter 178). Tom is largely preoccupied with more practical concerns: "He spoke of who had a berth aboard what vessel.... He talked about the [cod] trap. He worried over it" (180-1). But contrary to O'Flaherty's assertions, Tom does take time out during labour to appreciate the world he occupies. In the dory, jigging for cod, Tom feels a connection to the men who have occupied this space before him, and the space itself:

He felt he was saying things his father would have said. He had to say them now....

I love this, Tom said. Again, he was being his father.

So this is what you find beautiful.

This is correct.

Sitting here after a feed of fish and potatoes on the water. This feeling, I said, is what I paint.

Youre good company on the water.

Me: I feel like I'm home.

I love it here too.

I looked back on the land. Do you love the woods?

I love being on the water more. Can't swim a stroke, but I love it. (180)

In Tom Dobie, Kent's native informant and hired Newfoundlander, reside many seemingly conflicting identities, among them the perpetually busy labourer and the lover of nature. O'Flaherty contends, "The land itself was not admired but ravaged" by outport occupants, yet Tom Dobie seems to admire paradoxically the land while he is ravaging it (5). Though killing its animals and felling its trees, Tom still feels an admiration for the land from which he wrests his existence.

Winter creates a population of complex, multi-faceted Newfoundlanders without resorting to the extreme degradations and mystifications used by Proulx. One sees hints of the oxlike "Caliban type" in Bartlett's appearance: "not tall but a well-packed two hundred pounds," but what is truly Caliban-esque about these characters is their ability to be so many things simultaneously (8). In *The Big Why*, Luce's comment on Caliban that "one half renders the other half impossible" applies not to the appearance of these characters but to their personalities. Winter does not create the Newfoundland hobbits or half-man, half-island figures of *The Shipping News*. The Buggits, Yarks and Shovels are replaced with Chafes, Pomeroyes, and Loveys – names commonly encountered on the island. Winter's characters seem solidly grounded in reality when compared to Proulx's island creatures. It is this reality, the realities that form the world of these Newfoundlanders, that prevents Kent from achieving a Prospero-like mastery of the island. In fact, it is Kent's attempt to alter this reality that results in his banishment from the place.

Winter's Rockwell Kent has much in common with Robinson Crusoe, including a

fortunate birth. Crusoe is the son of man who “got a good Estate by Merchandise” and is well educated to the point of being “design’d...for the Law” (Defoe 3). Kent reflects momentarily on his privileged childhood, “My father, a lawyer, was well paid. My mother was used to civic responsibilities” (Winter 152). Kent is also well educated. As a boy, he had a German nanny who taught him not only to speak her language but to sing such classics as Schumann’s “Two Grenadiers.” Though the death of Kent’s father meant a loss of income and change of lifestyle, the artist has never lost the feeling of entitlement he learned in childhood:

But when my father died the money went with him and we had to go live with my mother’s sister....

From then on we lived as though we had money because that was the only way we knew how to behave. I’m still this way. I don’t own a wallet. My money is crumpled in my pockets. I dig into a pocket for money and the money is there. I’ve always felt money is my right, even though I had no cause to expect it. But I’ve learned that much comes to those who expect it should. (152-53)

“[M]uch comes to those who expect it should” could easily be the moral of *Robinson Crusoe* – especially in the light of Said’s critique of it in *Culture and Imperialism*:

The novel is fundamentally tied to bourgeois society; in Charles Moraze’s phrase, it accompanies and indeed is part of the conquest of Western society by what he calls *les bourgeois conquérants*. No less significantly,

the novel is inaugurated in England by *Robinson Crusoe*, a work whose protagonist is the founder of the new world, which he rules and reclaims for Christianity and England..... Crusoe is explicitly enabled by an ideology of overseas expansion – directly connected in style and form to the narratives of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century exploration voyages that laid the foundations of the great colonial empires. (70)

As a protagonist, Crusoe is formed by the “ideology of overseas expansion.” His reality, his truth, is that the world can only be made better through the promotion and protection of English civilization and Christianity. His claiming of the island and his conversion of Friday are based on his belief that such acts are his duty and his entitlement. Along with his cache of weapons and other modern contraptions, Crusoe also brings aboard the island his ideas of what defines civilization, justice, and good. Just as Watt reveals Crusoe’s “original stock” to undermine the castaway’s claim that he has been “reduced to a state of nature,” Crusoe’s unwavering attachment to the colonial enterprise also prohibits him from truly realizing a “fresh start” on his island.

Kent tries to reduce himself to a state of nature in *The Big Why*. In emulation of Tomas Croft and Quoye, Kent desires that merger with the land: “I had held an abstract of the land in my mind and was stepping, it seemed, for the first time into its geography” (Winter 32). Kent goes so far as to “step into” this geography completely naked: “I woke up naked and stood at my door naked.... I walked, barefoot and naked, to the brook for a pitcher of water” (114). Kent is Adam, and Brigus is an Eden freeing itself from winter: “The brooks were full, their shells of ice melting hollow. Blades of grass shot up through

the snow.... A bumblebee flower pushed itself out of the snow (114). Yet this Adam finds nothing in this garden more wonderful than himself: "I like walking around naked. I like seeing, in the hall mirror, my cock and balls hanging like fruit. I posed in a tennis volley stance" (114). Kent's attempt at island life is too self-conscious; this artist is too self-aware, too absorbed in his own motives and potential to actually experience life in Newfoundland. As he collects his suitcase at the Brigus train station, Kent is ironically self-absorbed in not appearing self-absorbed: "I was concentrating on becoming the man I wished to present. I wanted to look focused and not self-conscious" (32). It is surely not a coincidence that upon seeing Bob Bartlett at a ticker tape parade in New York, upon making his decision to move to Newfoundland, Kent catches some of the "flurry of narcissus petals" his friend's wife let loose from her balcony (8).

Bored with "man-made surfaces," Kent says, "The idea of being foreign appealed to me" as if he can simply become foreign by leaving home (6). Unlike Prospero, Crusoe, or Quoye, Kent becomes a castaway after a long period of consideration: "But all sudden things come from a deep study of conversion – they are sudden only on the surface" (6). Not forced into exile by a usurping brother nor stranded by a shipwreck nor chased from a barely-lived life by a series of catastrophes, Kent makes a conscious and long premeditated move to the island. For all his intentions to "slough off the baubles," Kent's move to Newfoundland is a step outside his homeland but not his ideology. More simply put, the artist can take himself out of New York, but he cannot take New York out of himself. A true orientalist, Kent believes himself to be a dynamic force moving through a static Newfoundland culture:

You can know a man in Newfoundland and never have met him. Men replacing men, men who have lived alone in tilts in desolate harbours. Alone in a cove for three generations. And if you slip by as a passenger in a one-handed dory the fisherman who is rowing will say, Never dodge in there, son. For that loner will take a shot at you before he looks at you. There are men alive today pinned to the stories of their grandfathers. They *are* their grandfathers, and in a sense the story of Rockwell Kent, the who of it, ~~was~~ being filled in by curious people. Who was this man who lived alone in that old Pomeroy house out along the far end of the harbour.

(144)

Newfoundland for Kent is that “tableau of queerness” Said contends the “Orient” was for the orientalist. Strange men are grown in these isolated communities, men who “will take a shot at you.” Newfoundland is also “a thing dead and dry – a mental mummy,” for here men never change, “[t]hey are their grandfathers” – performing the same tasks, living the same lives for generations. In the midst of these people comes Rockwell Kent, instantly becoming Brigus’ most interesting occupant. As Said contends, the orientalist is “more interested in remaking himself” than in knowing the new world through which he moves. Kent proves even more shallow: he is not interested in remaking himself, but prefers to relive himself in a new place. Nothing Kent does throughout *The Big Why* indicates his desire to change. His move to Newfoundland is not an attempt at change but a quest to become novel. Kent’s sense of rejuvenation comes not through an attempt to become different – to become a faithful husband, a better father – but through being perceived as

different, by becoming an object of wonder in a new place, by having people wonder “who was this man who lived alone in that old Pomeroy house.”

Kent’s move to Newfoundland is driven by laziness. Unwilling to change, Kent hopes Newfoundland is a place more static than himself – the place he and George Thayer have talked about: “A community that is one organism and does not change.” Unfortunately for Kent, he has selected a time and place where idleness equals death. As O’Flaherty puts it,

... fishing itself was unbelievably time-consuming and exhausting.... The

fishing day began around 2 a.m. and often did not end until the late

evening, when the men would return, bone weary to their homes....

Newfoundland fisherman of pre-confederation days....inhabited a separate

universe of back-breaking labour which cannot be understood by anybody

who did not live in it. (“Looking Backward” 4)

Kent enters into another universe drastically different from his relatively pampered existence as an artist. His newness in this place permits him to coast for a short period of time, but in a place where “existence was carried on next door to danger and death” (“Looking Backward” 5), Kent’s eccentricities are soon viewed as liabilities.

Early in the novel, Kent claims, “I accept inertia and I can live within it for a long time” (Winter 30). Such idleness seems at odds with the community Kent now occupies, the community that resists an inert state even when most of its men are away on sealing vessels: “With so many of the men gone, Brigus was imbued with an absent potential. That it could continue without the men, yes, but only on the promise of their return. A

sudden immense profit would then occur. The cove ticked over without them. The word *potential* seemed to fit the agitated state of the community. It was like a kettle boiled dry" (115). Kent's various eccentricities are often met with jests. When he tells Tom and his companions that he is a vegetarian, he is first marveled at – "You dont eat meat. Boys he dont eat meat" – then lightly mocked – "Boy youre gonna starve on that" (29). But his idle nature is an immediate source of scorn, first veiled and later blatant.

Kent's tendency to spend his day in the pursuit of inspiration is first playfully questioned by Tom Dobie:

Tom: So what'd you do today.

I walked around the town. I spent all day at it.

Tom: You must have walked around it twice. (104)

Kent gets the first hint that his idleness has become a public concern when he tells Marten Edwards of the strong drafts from his stove which have forced him out of the Pomeroy house:

[Edwards:] I understand. You got to get some coal. Get some heat into her.

We were standing next to the heap of coal. It was under three feet of snow.

That, I said, is my coal.

Yes, we noticed you didnt settle that away properly. (119)

Kent is initially something of a marvel, a man who does not work. When hauling lobster pots with Tom, Kent admits, "I get up early, Tom. Because I want to lie in bed. And I work because I'm lazy" (154). Tom's response to Kent's confession reveals the world between these two men, for the option to stay in bed rather than work has never been

presented to Tom: "That's a queer thing, he said. When there's a choice in the matter" (154). Tom finally reacts to Kent's idleness with something other than humour or bemusement when Kent lifts "little Rocky" onto his shoulders and wades out amongst the men of Brigus hauling caplin from the ocean. Kent has embraced his observer status, and for him, watching and sketching the activities of others is work. But now, as he stands by watching men struggle to bring their catch ashore, Kent is a man standing in the way of other men performing one of many tasks on which their survival depends. Pulling a net that has become "a heaving, independent bulk," Tom scolds Kent into action: "Put your son down and offer a hand there if'n you dont mind" (199). Kent is aware that he is living in a place where everyone must work together to survive, where a Newfoundlander "gives a hand and he gets a hand, and hardly a nod of the head to either" (17). Yet despite the help he receives from these people, the labour of Tom Dobie, the bed and boots from Marten Edwards, Kent offers nothing back but sketches and a tennis field he builds while others are working.

Kent quickly becomes something of a joke in Brigus. When he invites the fishermen and their families to join him in a game of tennis, they "laughed and said, politely, that they'd have a go in October – when they had time to play" (200). While the town worked, Kent "walked the field and made sketches and studied landscape and seacoast" (201). The only man in Brigus capable of labour and not performing it, Kent soon becomes the focus of jokes questioning his masculinity. Kent is sketching the women laying cod out on the flakes when one of them, concerned with how long it will take to perform the task, asks for a count of the women present. The immediate response

is “With or without Mr. Kent,” at which the “women giggled and posed coyly” (208). This femininization of Kent, this questioning of his masculine power and usefulness is one of the elements at the core of the “Prospero Complex.”

According to Zabus, the “Prospero Complex” is simply an excessive correction for a feeling of inferiority associated with femininity. Zabus cites the findings of psychiatrist Alfred Adler, who claims most feelings of inferiority will be met with a “masculine protest” (22). Zabus mobilizes Adler’s theories to discuss the “inferiority complex of the colonizer” whose thwarted desire to dominate, combined with an urge to impose an “excessive idealism,” leads to a “‘flight’ from home” (22), a move towards the masculine penetration of another, weaker culture.

Kent may be said suffer from this complex. He worries about his position and reputation in New York and he is attracted to people and places he can dominate. He ends a relationship with Jenny Starling because there “was something unruly about her, something in her that I couldn’t contain, and it worried me” (Winter 48). It is upon leaving Jenny that Kent meets the more malleable, meeker woman who would become his wife:

Then I met Kathleen Whiting.

It was her youth and utter devotion. It was the way she closed her eyes before she nodded her head. The way she played with children. There was no risk, really, and at the time life was a struggle to achieve grace. I knew there would be no war out of Kathleen Whiting. I could dominate her.

(163)

Kent loves Kathleen because he can know her: “Kathleen’s character was thoroughly

consistent from the public through to the private. It was her consistency that drew me to her" (14). Kent wishes to be dynamic, so he wants Kathleen to be a constant in his life: "She made me better, I was a person whose fingernails were flecked with the glitter of her even temper" (15). It is not surprising that Kent moves to Newfoundland, a place he believes to be unchanging, a place he believes he can dominate through his own dynamic personality.

As Prospero uses the subservient Caliban to secure his position, so too does Kent use Kathleen to better himself. When first discussing Kathleen, Kent claims, "if I kept close to this woman a good life would accrue. But there is something about goodness – I associate it with acquiescence and I'm repulsed by compromise" (3). Kent sees weakness in Kathleen's goodness, an Ariel he can make sing whatever song he wants to hear. He actually does this when Kathleen finally joins him in Newfoundland: "Kathleen had brought her guitar and sheet music, and she sang "Let Me Call You Sweetheart." I sang her a local song I'd learned from Rose Foley.... I told her she'd have to learn it – I'm so bossy" (148-49). Prospero uses Caliban and Ariel to establish his superiority on the island. Kent uses Kathleen as a sounding board to confirm his own feelings of superiority:

Me: Do you think we're good.

Kathleen: Yes, we're good.

Me: We're good and smart, aren't we.

We're not bad.

We're smarter than most. We're pretty important aren't we. I mean, our

friends think – theyre impressed by us.

I dont think we should be saying this.

We're just saying it to ourselves.

I'm not comfortable.

We're not boasting.

But it could lead to something. It could affect us.

I just want it said. I want it acknowledged privately. (169)

Kent's belief in his superiority and Kathleen's confirmation of it result in Kent being driven by his "correction of things" (342). Kent considers his first tennis match in Brigus "a fine colonial afternoon" (201), yet it is in his introduction and imposition of other elements that he becomes a true colonial, motivated by his need to "correct" these people.

The most troublesome modernism Kent takes with him to Newfoundland is his concept of socialism. While his nude trips to the river and his idling about town raise communal eyebrows, his talk of unions and transforming the seal hunt establish him as an outsider and a troublemaker. Kent questions the truck system while staying with Rupert Bartlett. Kent claims it is a form of slavery, to which Bartlett simply replies, "The system, Kent. It works" (44). When Kent claims the fishermen are at the mercy of the merchant who "can set his own price for fish," Rupert retorts, "There's no other way to do it, Kent" (44). This adherence to a direct trade of fish for goods, to a system that rewarded labour meagrely but immediately, was typical of outport existence, according to O'Flaherty:

Living close to the unpredictable taught Newfoundlanders habits of

circumspection and frugality. In the old outpost there was no point in making long-range plans which involved spending time and money. You grasped what you could from whatever opportunities the day offered and held on to your winnings.... People whose livelihood is largely dependent upon forces and eventualities beyond their control tend to develop a fatalistic streak which may emerge in a passiveness of character. ("Milieu" 6)

Kent encounters such fatalism and passivity at a town-hall meeting called to discuss the fate of the *Southern Cross*, a sealing vessel lost in the spring of 1914. Eight men from Brigus were lost on that ship and despite "the storm, the high bulwarks, the heavy load, and the low-mounted engine," the people of Brigus call the disaster an "act of God" (Winter 136).

Kent believes this disaster was preventable and reacts to the blind acceptance of these people: "I stood up. I cannot let that remark go unchallenged. Acts of God, I said, are often an excuse to explain away human disregard" (136). Kent met William Coaker a few days before in St. John's and leaves the offices of the Fisheries Protective Union with some pamphlets to distribute to the men of Brigus and a new responsibility that "exhilarated" him (133). At the town hall, Kent attacks the nature of the seal hunt and claims, "This tragedy would not have occurred ... if the fishermen were unionized. If they had a say in how the hunt was run. I have pamphlets" (136). In shaking his pamphlets and personally attacking Captain George Clarke – "He disregarded the welfare of his men" – Kent establishes himself as an outsider espousing foreign ideas and

criticizing a man much respected locally (136). One-legged Patrick Fardy is so upset he actually stands and accosts Kent: "He put a finger to my neck. Just watch what you're saying. He looked ready to ask me outside" (137). Though Caliban bows before the magic of Prospero's texts, these islanders are unimpressed by Kent's flimsy pamphlets – "Butterfly wings, one man said" (136). In Kent's failure one sees how important a moment is Prospero's mastery of Caliban, or Crusoe's subordination of Friday. At this moment almost midway through *The Big Why*, Kent has made his play for Prospero's power – the ability to alter the island through words – be they magical or logical. He also attempts to establish himself as a Crusoe-like saviour, saving his Fridays not with Christianity but with socialism. Prospero cows Caliban with his magic, Crusoe threatens Friday with his rifle, and Kent reveals himself to be a danger through promoting ideologies that jeopardize the existence of these people. From this moment, Kent will no longer be regarded as "that American painter," an eccentric but harmless observer, but as a threat – an outsider who judges these people and attempts to press his useless ideas upon them.

One can see in the early receptions of Kent the potential for problems, as though these people are not just curious but suspicious of this artist who has come to live among them. Tom Dobie's mother tells Kent over supper that "Tom said you looked like you'd walked off a coin. Like you'd just come round the world and studies us all before you got here" (85). Later, after Kent has spoken at the town hall, his studying of these people begins to aggravate them – though their first protests are veiled in playfulness. Kent continues to linger about the women as they prepare the fish for the flakes,

disguising his ogling of Emily Edwards as an artistic exercise. Kent soon realizes that he is being observed as well, that the idle nature of his “work” has not gone unnoticed by a people whose life is defined by their labour:

A man catches a fish, Emily said, and the woman makes it.

Rachel: We mind the children, flakes, house and gardens. All the men mind is the fish.

Emily: Except for that one there.

Yes, but he’s an artist.

And they all have a laugh at that. A really good laugh. (194)

Mose Harris, who exchanged pleasantries with Kent at the merchant’s store in Brigus, now laces his humour with aggression when he meets the artist aboard the schooner *Industry* in Harbour Grace. Surprised to see Kent outside Brigus, Mose jokes, “We came aboard to get away from you, Kent” – a jest certainly, but one that indicates these people are growing weary of being observed by Kent (218).

When Kent begins to shape the land, to create his tennis court, something changes in the people of Brigus. The pharmacist Jim Hearn, who had let Kent use his land to build the court, suddenly and without explanation demands Kent stop playing on his property. Kent is baffled: “Something had turned in him. Something petty and he would not say” (206). Kent concocts a revenge plot and publicly humiliates Hearn by placing him in a headlock and calling him a swine in front of a crowd at the railway station. The town of Brigus, though not normally a supporter of Hearn, does not appreciate an outsider harassing one of their own. Under the scrutiny of disapproval,

Kent's eccentricities accumulate to transform him into an unwelcome other:

I noticed that people were slightly formal around me. They felt Hearn a fool, but still what right did I have to make a public fool of him. I was an outsider. I lived apart from the community, in that house along the headland. I had complained more about the loss of my toolbox than the loss of the *Southern Cross*. I heard this openly spoken – voices travel well over the water and in darkness at night. I had ordered all that coal. It was a show of wealth and that had bothered them. They thought the figurehead above the door outrageous. And wasn't I trying to rile up the fishermen to form a union? How quickly a mood can shift. Perhaps I was a little arrogant. Yes, I see now how they saw my spirit as arrogance. And maybe I was. (214)

Kent begins to feel resentment in the community for his "apparent lack of industry" and notices that he is the one being observed and pondered: "Who the hell was I?" "What did that Kent fellow do in his house all day?" (215, 216).

Unlike Father MacMurrough in Kavanagh's *Gaff Topsails*, Kent is not absorbed by this community. In his reading of the text, Adrian Fowler claims, "the saving of Father MacMurrough demonstrates that the community has the capacity to embrace the other, at least under the right circumstances" (85). Fowler contends that the people of *Gaff Topsails* initially place the outsider priest in the category of the "Black Stranger" yet overcome their fear of him and accept him during a communal bonfire over which Father MacMurrough presides. In *The Big Why*, Winter demonstrates how Kent as a "Black

Stranger” is at first tolerated, then shunned and feared: “If a farmer saw me up in his fields, painting his cows and his hills, he no longer waved to me. He seemed annoyed at my presence, as though by giving me leave to use his property to stand and paint on, he was guilty of fraternizing with a strange and corrupting influence” (Winter 216). Kent has become dangerous and a figure of suspicion. Men from the community have left to fight the Kaiser in Europe, there are rumours of a submarine idling in Conception Bay that has already sunk ships headed out of St. John’s, yet Kent insists on singing a Schubert tune at church. A sealed tube containing a painting is believed by members of the community to be a war map Kent is smuggling to the Germans. Kent reacts to these impositions in a fashion remarkably similar to Crusoe’s fortification of his island.

One of the great moments in *Robinson Crusoe* occurs when the castaway finds evidence (in the form of a human footprint in the sand) that he is not the only man on the island. Overcome with fear, he hurries to his fortification and, following a sleepless night, proceeds to perfect his defences and take stock of his ammunition. His sovereignty threatened, Crusoe stops working his fields, tending his cattle and creates a place of ambush so that he may properly defend his island:

In this Place then I resolv’d to fix my Design, and accordingly I prepar’d two Muskets, and my ordinary Fowling Piece. The two Muskets I loaded with Brace of Slugs each, and four or five smaller Bullets, about that Size of Pistol Bullets; and the Fowling Piece I loaded with near a Handful of Swan-shot, of the largest Size; I also loaded my Pistols with about four Bullets each, and in this Posture, well provided with Ammunition for a

second and third Charge, I prepar'd my self for my Expedition. (169-70)

Kent is "furious and immobilized" by the shift in his relationship with the people of Brigus: "I did not like going into town" (Winter 286). Not possessed of the weaponry that gives Crusoe comfort, he uses his pride and his paint to make his final stand on the island: "I felt it improtant not to back down. To back down was to admit that I was doing something wrong. Instead my pride rose up. I was reckless with pride.... I painted the chest and profile of an eagle on my studio door. It was a German eagle with a serious brow. Beneath this I wrote, in Gothic type, BOMB SHOP" (286-87). Whereas Crusoe's fortification is an obvious attempt at self-preservation, Kent's structure is the artist's attempt at self-destruction – the BOMB SHOP will ensure Kent goes out with a bang, as it were.

Kent refuses to help his own cause in Brigus – he continues to sing and speak German, even to the constable who visits his home to question Kent about the eagle on his studio. In the heightened hysteria surrounding the war, the Kent family are transformed into the "Six Kent suspects" and are banished from the island (336). Kent leaves Newfoundland realizing that the strength he claimed lay in the rural was not his to exploit or reshape. This strength resists, rejects and truly exiles him. He had left New York by choice, he leaves Newfoundland because he is forced out: "We arrived in New York like immigrants. No, we left New York like émigrés and returned as exiles" (337).

"good material for paintings"

Near the end of *The Big Why*, an older Rockwell Kent is invited to return to Newfoundland by another failed socialist, Joseph Smallwood. The premier of the new

Canadian province of Newfoundland takes Kent on a tour of government buildings, the university and a shopping mall. Proud of these gaudy modern buildings, Smallwood says, "It was not picturesque, but can you expect people to live in squalor just so you can have good material for paintings?" (362). The reason Kent's time in Newfoundland was a failure is because this is exactly what Kent wanted these people to do:

I was a modern man living an old-fashioned life. I was trying to blend the two and it seemed a bad idea. It was never a good idea – dont let anyone tell you otherwise. It was never a good place to be. I thought I could disappear in Brigus and lead a pure, natural life, free of suspicion. But I was misguided. My motives were not true. I didnt just want to live here, I wanted its customs to inform my work and make it unique. I wanted to make my name in Brigus. I was using the culture. I was exploiting it. And what I was creating is not what happened here. (271)

Kent wants the place promised by Newfoundland and Labrador Tourism – the place that stays the same, that can be used and informed by the dynamic visitor. This place is discussed by Tracy Whalen in "'Camping' with Annie Proulx: *The Shipping News* and Tourist Desire": "So much of the romantic tourist experience gaze depends on the subjective quality of solitary, undisturbed encounter and on the landscape's ability to signify the untouched and ideal" (62). Quoye's interaction with this (non-)place is interrupted by the presence of oil tankers, while Kent literally rides the machine into his garden.

In *The Machine in the Garden*, Leo Marx notes how the train lumbering through

Sleepy Hallow disrupts Nathaniel Hawthorne's romanticization of the place: "the startling shriek of the train whistle bearing in upon him, forc[es] him to acknowledge the existence of a reality alien to the pastoral dream" (15). Though Kent rides the train into his pastoral dream, he does not see the contradiction until much later. In his pursuit of authentic moments, Kent cannot escape Rompkey's "encroachments of modernity." Seeing that the oarlocks of Tom Dobie's dory are outrigged, Kent notes this is "unusual in a rural boat" (Winter 154). For Dobie, this hybridization of old and modern is a matter of sense and survival: You got to go with a bit of technology, he said. He learned that from Bartlett" (154).

Proulx's *The Shipping News* transforms Newfoundland into a mythical place where magic can still happen and the encroachments of modernity are lamented and resisted. As Whalen claims, such a novel "appeals to a tourist looking for the contemplative, for the essence of foreign experience" – for the person who wished to find in Newfoundland a mysterious "Orient" in the Western world (63). Winter's novel seems to be the latest work critiquing the tourist industry, this attempt to essentialize and exoticize the island. In writing *The Big Why*, in re-creating the failed attempt of an outsider to find and exploit a particular notion of Newfoundland, Winter joins a collection of writers – among them Edward Riche – who deconstruct notions of Newfoundlandness that attempt to peddle the island to outsiders as a place frozen in time, riddled with magic and ready for the taking.

Chapter 5

Living the Authentic Life in Edward Riche's *Rare Birds*

Before one reads a novel by Wayne Johnston, Bernice Morgan, or Michael Winter, one most likely has certain preconceptions of Newfoundland literature and the island and people it is meant to represent. Such literature will undoubtedly contain suffering tempered by irrepressible humour, loss balanced by a mystical oneness with the land, icy waves crashing on harsh shores, a salty yet melodious language, and the lingering mystique of a unique, unspoiled people. This is how Newfoundland art, literature, and identity are most often packaged by a pervasive and persistent culture industry. Since the Newfoundland Renaissance of the 1970s and throughout the current resurgence of Newfoundland literature, those who live on this island are portrayed as inextricably bonded with the land; possessed of a Newfoundland mystique threatened by "Progress" (Gwyn 40). This romanticism not only preserves an authentic Newfoundland identity, but actually saves the island through a tourism industry that invites non-Newfoundlanders to experience the place's "significant history, distinct culture, and genuine people" (*Tourism*). As this culture industry continues to consume Newfoundland literature, it is vital to consider a novel like Edward Riche's *Rare Birds* (2001) which resists this absorption by criticizing a culture that peddles an authenticity based on unfounded romanticism and perpetuated through historical re-enactments.

"Authentic Movie Fish"

Sandra Gwyn's 1976 article "The Newfoundland Renaissance" did much to establish the trope of the mythical and nature-loving Newfoundlander whose Eden-esque

existence was being threatened by modernization. Gwyn fawns over Newfoundland artist Gerry Squires: "He's the kind of character who, even if he didn't live on the top of a cliff in an abandoned lighthouse with casements that really *do* look out on perilous seas and faery lands forlorn, is proof that there are still artists around who look and act as artists should. Shaggy, intense, an authentic rowdyman" (38). According to Gwyn, artists like Squires are "bursting out of [the] sheer granite cliffs of Newfoundland," their work "the Newfoundland ethic of endurance made visible" (40). Yet their natural blossoming is imperilled by such modern innovations as the Resettlement Programme of the late 1960s, which arguably saved thousands of Newfoundlanders from an abject poverty fuelled by isolation. Gwyn converts this attempted move from poverty to prosperity into a highly romanticized loss to be lamented: "these settlements – clusters of flat-roofed, white clapboard houses and churches on the brink of the Atlantic...and the people who left them for mobile homes and prefab bungalows, contained the essence of the Newfoundland mystique" (40).

Gwyn's notion of the pastoral primitive is reinforced by Newfoundland writer Patrick Kavanagh in *Gaff Topsails*. Kavanagh's modern Newfoundland outporters still live lives that mimic "the touch of the sea upon the land" and frequently mistake the sounds of trains, airplanes, and steamers "passing through the fog ... as the lament of the Boo Darby, suffering in beastly solitude somewhere in the wilderness" (139). For Kavanagh and Gwyn, Newfoundland modernism and Newfoundland mystique cannot meet. The essence of Newfoundland authenticity is in its juxtaposition to the modern, mechanical world.

Gwyn and Kavanagh quite possibly take their cues from R.J. Needham's "The Happiest Canadians," which sociologist James Overton critiques in his seminal article, "A Newfoundland Culture?": "According to R.J. Needham in *Maclean's*, there is no factory time in Newfoundland, there are only nature's rhythms. The pace of life is slow, people work when they want to and "break into poesy when they feel like it." They have a colourful language and are kind and friendly.... [A] simple folk who are contented with what they have" (9-10). Such descriptions went far to create a quaint (and marketable) Newfoundlander who shuns technology in favour of a life in harmony with nature. Overton scolds Newfoundlanders for accepting this trope of a "single, distinct Newfoundland ethos, character or culture" and claims the failure to "acknowledge and explore the contradictions and variations in people's actual behaviour [has resulted in] a simple, idealized character" (11-12) that is often praised but is also used as an "explanation for underdevelopment" (14). This Newfoundlander, though charming, is primitive and unable to find a place in the modern world.

The notion of a sheltered, simple race of Newfoundlanders is promoted by a tourism industry that invites tourists to experience something "unique and different" in "a place that stays the same but changes you forever" (*Tourism*). Newfoundland is unabashedly peddled as The Far East of the Western World and the people are coupled with the land so that they become unchanging and exotic. Despite a history of struggling to wrestle a living out of the land and ocean, Newfoundlanders are promoted as authentic, natural fisher-poets through festivals and pageants in which Newfoundland culture is paraded before paying customers. According to Dean MacCannell, tourists currently

feeding Newfoundland's economy "make brave sorties out from their hotels, hoping, perhaps, for an authentic experience, ... [and are] greeted everywhere by their obliging hosts" (106). Tourists wishing to witness the authentic outport experience are pointed toward the reassembled movie set of the *Random Passage* mini-series or the "Trinity Pageant" where, despite Overton's assertions to the contrary, Newfoundlanders of old are depicted as a gregarious people in tune with nature who regularly break into song. This is the "staged authenticity" discussed by MacCannell in which the tourists' desire to experience "real life" forces the host "to act out reality and truth" (91, 92). As he discusses a promotional pamphlet written during the height of the Newfoundland Renaissance, Overton notes that the folksy heritage being performed has always been linked with a supposed love of the land. The pamphlet "devotes a large section to 'A Way of Life,' complete with a picture of an accordion player and excerpts from various folk songs," Overton writes, and this "hardy, fun-loving race" of Newfoundlanders share "a rare culture that is not contrived or artificial" (7). Most importantly, Newfoundland "is 'an oasis of humanity' in a 'world of serious ecological and philosophical problems'" (7).

Newfoundlanders are themselves encouraged to visit the *Random Passage* film set to "Rediscover Your Past" (*Film Set*), despite the fact that the set is an absolute reproduction (built on the ruins of an actual abandoned community) complete with tree stumps forced back into the ground and simulated salt cod the tour guide smilingly refers to as "authentic movie fish." On a guided tour of the *Random Passage* movie set, the guide will point out the split "cod" laid out to dry on flakes around the "community." Unable to use real cod, the film's producers created the fish from brin bags (canvas

potato sacks) and cardboard. In a remarkable oversight, however, all the “cod” are exactly the same size. On this set, as in Jean Baudrillard’s *Simulacra and Simulation*, “the double [is] being confused with the real” (1). According to Baudrillard, such sites as the *Random Passage* set constitute the “hyperreal”: “the generation by models of a real without origin or reality” (1). Newfoundland, with its pageants and reproductions, is eerily similar to the Disneyfied world described by Baudrillard:

Everywhere we live in a universe strangely similar to the original – things are doubled by their own scenario. But this doubling does not signify, as it did traditionally, the imminence of their death – they are already purged of their death, and better than when they were alive; more cheerful, more authentic, in the light of their model, like the faces in funeral homes. (11)

Just as “the Pirates, the Frontier, the Future World” are all embalmed through Disney rides, exhibits, and films, so too is the Newfoundlander – insofar as s/he is a whimsical, musical, irrepressible fisherperson – preserved and packaged for consumption at various cultural sites.

What motivates the preservation and valorization of this culture is perhaps the “panicked nostalgia” described by Baudrillard when discussing loss of power: “When [power] has totally disappeared, we will logically be under the total hallucination of power – a haunting memory that is already in evidence everywhere, expressing at once the compulsion to get rid of it (no one wants it anymore, everyone unloads it on everyone else) and the panicked nostalgia over its loss....in a society that cannot terminate its mourning” (23). Baudrillard’s sentiments are echoed by Overton, who critiques a

widespread sentiment that Newfoundland's power or mystique – “an authentic culture and a rural way of life....with real quality and humanity” – had been “sacrificed” by modernization:

This is a culturalist critique of modernization. It laments the loss of a traditional way of life...It takes culture and tradition as the point from which to criticize mass civilization and urban-industrial society. It is a pessimistic expression of disenchantment with many of the changes that occurred in Newfoundland during and after the Second World War by people who were in a very real sense the product of those changes. (9)

This pessimistic expression of disenchantment discussed by Overton is very much the panicked nostalgia of *Simulacra and Simulation*. The necessary move into modernism cannot be entirely welcomed by Newfoundland culturalists, for it means the loss of a rural, simple existence on which they have hinged so much of their identity. While it is doubtful anyone would wish to leave the age of refrigeration, running water, and paved roadways and return to preserving food by salt, using outhouses, and living in isolation, the connection to “authentic culture and a rural way of life” must be maintained to ensure the continuation of a particular Newfoundland identity. As Gwyn believes, the “life force” of Newfoundlanders is inextricably intertwined with the island – these people are “Celtic and passionate, funny and tragic, salty and earthy” (40). Cultural performances, as Overton puts it, are attempts to “defend this way of life and to build on it in an effort to maintain or recreate a distinct Newfoundland identity” (9).

These notions of authenticity were recently tied to Newfoundland literature in the

8 November 2004 edition of CBC Newsworld's literary program *Hot Type*. In this program, subtitled "The Rocks Here Tell Stories," Newfoundland is referred to romantically as "uncharted territory" and Newfoundlanders as "bred to this place." Though it threatens to fall into the same quixotic quagmire that consumes Gwyn and Kavanagh, *Hot Type* inserts a critical voice through another Newfoundland writer, Edward Riche. Riche says, "I've had it up to here with authenticity" and claims that Newfoundlanders' tendency to "indulge in our past" has resulted in a Newfoundland "trapped in amber" (*Hot Type*). Moving from dark sarcasm to slapstick satire, *Rare Birds* is the first serious look at the psychological ramifications of maintaining this island's authenticity.

Rich(e) Traditions

The artifice of the culture industry and the dubiousness of island intimacy are most artfully and comically displayed in Edward Riche's *Rare Birds*. Protagonist Dave Purcell has committed the fatal mistake of many who take a moment to ponder this island: he has asked the question, "do you know what this place needs?" For Dave, the answer is a fine restaurant, the "essence of elegance" which "could just as easily be in a tony bistro on the Left Bank of the Seine – but for the fifteen-foot-high snowdrift outside" (8). After a year of trying to peddle "calves' sweetbreads and wine at \$150 a bottle" (6) to "the fish and chip philistines of St. John's" (2), Dave has shut himself within his "domain of failure," consuming the contents of his wine cellar and cooking only to repay his neighbour, Alphonse (Phonse) Murphy, "the crazy bayman," who uses his homemade snow-blowing monstrosity to clear the lane leading to Dave's restaurant (8, 187). The defeated Dave –

waist expanding, marriage failing – is indicative of the Newfoundlander decidedly not of the land. Weather and geography conspire against Dave to make his restaurant a failure and send him into drink-driven despair. Divided from the land and disillusioned by the faux-culture he perceives around him, Dave joins Phonse in a scheme to save his restaurant. The result is an investigation of the pseudo-event and the chaos, dependence and self-loathing it fosters. A microcosm of Newfoundland's culture and tourism industry, the events of *Rare Birds* more than hint at the fakery behind the performable heritage and history that keep the island on life support.

Unlike the romanticized Newfoundland naturalist, Dave does not readily interact with his environment. In truth, on a day like the typically dismal 31 March that opens the book, Dave prefers to avoid the land outside his restaurant: "now in Newfoundland's dreariest month of March, the Auk was, for all intents and purposes, shut down. Shut down and Dave shut in. This last storm, a maelstrom of wild white curtains raging southeast from Labrador, had gone on for the better part of a week" (9). During the times that he does venture into the landscape, Dave is pathetically a townie, possessed of "a city boy's instinct" (167) that enables him to get lost on the short trail between his restaurant and Phonse's home. He wants to take part in outdoor ventures like moose hunting, "feeling somehow that he should, that it was his heritage, something every good Newfoundlander did" (45), but Dave's encounters with the outdoors are struggles that either leave him "bruised through" (189) or (at the best of times) exhausted:

It was difficult going. The snow was thigh-deep in places and softened to a slushy consistency by the rare sun. Dave bobbed and weaved through the crooked

congregation of spruce, grabbing at branches to steady himself. Twice one of his legs sank to his crotch and he had to struggle, to the point of working up a sweat, to free himself. Phonse navigated with considerably more ease. (37)

Lest his readers think Phonse's more nimble movement through the landscape is evidence of the Newfoundlander at one with his island, Riche gives multiple examples of Phonse's disregard for the rugged beauty that surrounds him. In *Rare Birds*, the machine is in the garden, and Alphonse Murphy is in the machine.

At several times throughout the novel, Phonse appears as the hunter, the Newfoundlander-as-killing-machine whose instinct is to kill then eat/wear/display the animals around him. When he first appears in the back porch of Dave's restaurant, Phonse is wearing a "bushy fur hat of his own manufacture and most certainly made of some creature he had killed" (12). He seriously considers raising ducks so that he may have a steady supply of the *confit de canard* Dave prepares for him. Upon hearing Dave describe the elusive prey of local birdwatchers, Phonse wonders, "Roe's crested waxwing?... Are they fit to eat?" (34). Phonse is not Kavanagh's mythical-man-merged-with-island, but neither is he the pastoral primitive. He is possessed of a common sense Dave first sees when Phonse walks past a "cluster of bodies on the community wharf" (22) to conduct the neat and necessary mercy killing of a humpback whale hopelessly caught beneath the ice. Phonse is the brilliant concocter of the scheme that will save Dave's restaurant and the ingenious creator of the Recreational Submarine Vehicle (R.S.V).

It is Phonse's propensity for all things mechanical that sets him up as a new

Newfoundland stereotype. As immortalized in the songs and stories of musical groups like Buddy Wasisname and the Other Fellers, this new Newfoundlander is not so much interested in nature as he is in the vehicle that propels him through it. In stories like "Da Yammie," "The Chopper," and several others, performer Kevin Blackmore (a.k.a. Buddy Wasisname) adopts a Phonse-like persona when he talks of mechanical miracles like placing the "454 four barrel, superglide transmission" engine of a Corvette Stingray into a Yamaha snowmobile – the result being a skidoo that outraced the speed of sound. Phonse is often found in his shed amongst wires and metal or "up to his elbows in engine" (205). Phonse's neighbours, the car wreckers that dot the Upper Road connecting Dave's community of Push Through with St. John's, "always congregated in one garage or another, usually around an automobile fast on its way to becoming a ruin" (23). That the modern Newfoundlander's attachment to the machine overwhelms his supposed attachment to nature is demonstrated during the trial run of the R.S.V. when Riche sets up a rather ironic instance of man using machine to "appreciate" nature. Peering through the periscope at his quiet community, Dave admires his environment at the very moment he is polluting it:

There, plain as day, was the community wharf at Push Through. He could see the long-liners, tied up since the fish had been exterminated, bobbing somnolently at their moorings....

"It's amazing, Phonse."

"It's Push Through, I hope."

"Large as life."

"Anything stirring? Don't want anyone to notice the smoke."

Of course, the exhaust would come to the surface. (187)

The Newfoundlander who is Alphonse Murphy is not marketable. For islanders like Phonse, heaven is not to be in nature but to be "inside his own machine, part of it" (183). This is the less romantic Newfoundlander who, once discovered, leads to the disillusionment of those who so wanted to believe in the existence of Newfoundlanders as a "heroic nature-people" (Jackson, *Surviving* 7).

This desire for an island of druid-like naturalists seems only momentarily to defer an easily awakened disgust and derision for the backward Newfs. The morning following the secret submarine tests, one of the academics duped by Dave's scheme notices a small oil slick "no doubt from the R.S.V. launch" (Riche 196). The man is at once vindictive and demeaning: "Will these Newfs never learn?... I know I shouldn't say it, but they truly are barbarians. They've killed off the fish but they won't stop there, will they?" (196). When Dave wearily asks, "What have we killed off now?" then dismisses the oil stains as "not the Exxon *Valdez*" (196), the young scholar turns patronizing, addressing Dave as "My good man" with a glare that indicates Dave's response "was just the thing he expected to hear from someone whose progenitors had murdered an entire race of people" (196). In this instance, Riche seems to point out that those who come to this island in hopes of finding the rustic remnants of an enchanted and authentic culture have a vague suspicion, just waiting for confirmation, that the simple life of these islanders is not the result of an inherent quaintness but a barely latent barbarism. These savages are not noble. As the derision in the voice of Dave's detractor seems to indicate,

Newfoundlanders' intimate claim to this island is directly connected to the European eradication of the Beothuk Indians, the first people to occupy it.

In *Surviving Confederation*, F. L. Jackson notes that when it became apparent that Newfoundlanders would "not be satisfied to contemplate a future role as enchanted cultural islands, preserved forever untouched by the storms of modernity, solely for the benefit of others" (6), their novelty began to wane. The "Newfcult" hysteria of the 1970s "ended rather abruptly when the world found out [Newfoundlanders] killed seals and whales and were serious about wanting to do something to improve [their] circumstances" (8). A Newfoundlander like Alphonse Murphy, who not only ravages the land but also experiments with near-futuristic technology that results in a personal submarine and a revolutionary lighting system that enables one to "light the biggest kind of room with a double-A battery" (Riche 51), does not fit into the desired trope of the "poor, cute and simple-minded fisherfolk" (Jackson 7).

Both Phonse and Dave have reason to hate the culture industry that fosters this notion. Phonse, whose proclivities fall well outside fishing and making one with nature, has had to carry the label of "lunatic bayman" as he continues to broaden his supposedly simple mind (Riche 170). Phonse is hampered by what Mike Robinson terms the "simplistic and traditionalistic imagery of 'otherness' used in product promotions and travel advertisements" (13). Robinson goes on to write that such an image "hinders the inhabitants of the countries concerned in asserting an identity as modern, industrially developed or developing peoples with complex lifestyles" (13). It is worth noting that in concocting a scheme to save the restaurant, Phonse obliges Dave to help him in his own

modern, industrial pursuits. Dave has tried to play a role in the culture industry, creating chic caribou cuisine the raving critics lauded as “rustic” before abandoning the restaurant forever. Dave’s aptly named Auk Dining Room and Inn is about to slide into extinction, just as Dave’s estranged wife prophesied: “Christ, Dave!...Why not call it the Beothuk Bar and Grill or the Dodo Arms?” (6). In the dying days of The Auk, Dave realizes that the land on which he built his restaurant prohibits prosperity:

what nature of demented traveler would visit Newfoundland during the six months it was under a cloak of bitter ice?

...Smart people were in the Caribbean somewhere. They would have to eat. They would go to a restaurant, order spicy prawns and juicy local fruit right off the tree. Why had Dave imagined the Auk had even a prayer of succeeding? “Come experience the Ice Age as Cro-Magnon Man experienced it, eat at the Auk! Nuclear Winter? No problem! The soup’s on at the Auk.” (6, 28)

Finding no succour in the land around him, having no spiritual affinity with the ocean or rocks, Dave is disenchanted and despondent. He sees through the charm “that had suckered so many souls,” including his own, and realizes that what is paraded before tourist and host as quirky and quaint is actually “old-world weariness.... A four-hundred-year legacy of misery and deprivation, a desperate colonial outpost of missed opportunities” (24). The ennui that all but paralyzes Dave is driven not by his floundering marriage but by his Baudrillardian discovery of the emptiness behind the artifice, a discovery he shares with the iconoclasts who realized there was no God behind the

symbols and statues but that “the visible machinery of icons substituted for the pure and intelligible Idea of God” (Baudrillard 4): “One can live with the idea of distorted truth. But their metaphysical despair came from the idea that the image didn’t conceal anything at all, and that these images were in essence not images, such as an original model would have made them, but perfect simulacra, forever radiant with their own fascination” (5). For Phonse and Dave, who winter in this province, the supposed inherent kinship with nature possessed by every Newfoundlander is a laughable hoax. The real Newfoundlanders are not mystical, musical islanders, but “enterprising brigands of the bay” who sustain their existence not through a love of the land, but by concocting schemes and ripping from the land what little refuge they can find (Riche 53). To keep The Auk alive, Dave and Phonse must use one tradition to exploit the other. Just as the postcards that promote this province add to the supposedly natural beauty of this place, so too must Dave and Phonse create the “natural occurrence” Newfoundland is supposed to provide. For these men, the “nature” many people come to Newfoundland to experience is already a pretense – it is but one small, almost logical step to create more of this nature to ensure The Auk’s survival. In doing so, Dave and Phonse commit the central deception of the tourist industry: “assembl[ing] their own images in advance of the arrival of the tourists,” thereby creating their own exploitable reality (MacCannell 142).

When Dave questions the viability of a recreational submarine, Phonse quickly replies, “Nature, old man, people are gone mental on the nature. Geezers hiding behind a blind all day to get a picture of a bird! This [submarine] is only a prototype. Once I build one with windows, so they can see the little fishies...!” (Riche 60). As his explanation of

the consumer craving for the R.S.V. turns into his scheme to save The Auk, Phonse displays an intimate knowledge of the tourist gaze. As John Urry notes, in the centuries following the Romantic movement, "nature of all sorts came to be widely regarded as scenery, views, and perceptual sensation... And the building of piers, promenades and domesticated beaches enabled the visual consumption of otherwise wild, untamed and 'natural' [world]" (*Gaze* 148). Tourists whose connection with nature is hampered by their otherwise urban existences need to see this nature, for, as Jackson writes, "People want to feel that somewhere out there beyond the confines of their overpopulated, thoroughly industrialized cities, an original life in nature still goes on undisturbed" (*Surviving* 4). The isolation of Newfoundland, and The Auk, is "part of the appeal." According to Phonse, "you've got geezers flying up here from all over the world to get a good gawk at a whale or take a snap of a gannet" (Riche 62). People come to Newfoundland hoping to see – to consume visually – something they would not see in less isolated parts of the world. It is the task of restaurateur Dave Purcell to give these insatiable masses something to "eat up."

It is fitting that the proprietor of a restaurant named after an extinct bird would fabricate the sighting of another felled fowl to keep his business afloat. With Phonse's help, Dave creates mass hysteria through several anonymous sightings of "Tasker's Sulphureous Duck," a possibly extinct bird last seen off the coast of Newfoundland in 1985. True to Phonse's predictions, Push Through is soon "maggoty with bird-watchers" who take respite from the drizzle and the damp at Dave's quickly revived and thriving restaurant (80). The wild duck chase concocted by Dave and Phonse conforms to many of

the characteristics of the "pseudo-event" as detailed by Daniel J. Boorstin in *The Image*. Moreover, whereas Boorstin differentiated between "natural" or "spontaneous reality" (254) and the entirely fabricated pseudo-event, Riche demonstrates how nature cannot only become artifice, but can also be modified, replicated, and repeated as desired.

The first characteristic of the pseudo-event is that "It is not spontaneous, but comes about because someone has planned, planted, or incited it. Typically, it is not a train wreck or an earthquake, but an interview" (11). The "appearance" of the Tasker's Sulphureous is blueprinted in Phonse's shed, playfully (or perhaps not so playfully) termed "central ops." The "event" itself does come in the form of an interview, as Dave and then Phonse phone a local call-in show for birders to report "seeing the strangest bird" (Riche 88). Secondly, the pseudo-event is planted "for the immediate purpose of being reported or reproduced... The question, 'Is it real?' is less important than, 'Is it newsworthy?'" (Boorstin 11). The bird exists solely in the report, and its actuality is less important than its possibility. Whereas actual evidence of the duck's existence would certainly be interesting, its unconfirmed possibility results in hundreds of "bird brains" and "dupes daring the cliffs around the restaurant" (Riche 95, 85).

This unfulfilled search that eventually becomes the search for unfulfillment is discussed by Graham Huggan in *The Post-Colonial Exotic*: "Tourism shares with exoticism the impossible search for 'uncontaminated' experience. The exoticist/tourist gaze looks beyond the world toward an ungraspable ideal entity" (180). Citing John Frow, Huggan notes that disappointment plays a structural role in the tourist experience for it is not so much what the tourists see as "how they *ought* to see" that defines the

tourist gaze (180). "[T]he appeal of the exotic 'elsewhere' is," Huggan believes, "precisely, that it will always be out of reach" (194). In this light, tourism is a brand of hope, a type of wishful thinking that must always remain as such. These birders do not need to see the duck so much as they need to be in the presence of its mystique, to believe that in this part of the world, outside the urban and suburban sprawl, there is a possibility that an authentic piece of nature, thought vanished, still exists. It is their willingness to be deceived, their need to be deceived, that makes these "gawkers," "bird brains," and "dupes" the perfect marks for Phonse's scheme.

It is also this predilection for self-deception that fuels the final two characteristics of the pseudo-event. According to Boorstin, the pseudo-event must be ambiguous. In order to draw curiosity, a pseudo-event must inspire people to discover "whether it really happened" (11). The pseudo-event is also "intended to be a self-fulfilling prophecy" (12). Phonse demonstrates an understanding of how ambiguity and desire can confer "reality" onto a pseudo-event while explaining to Dave how his plot will play out: "You know what will happen, too?... One will catch a gull or a kittiwake out the corner of his eye and say, 'Did you see that?' and another one will say, 'Yeah! I saw something!' and they'll go wild for it. Psychology of the mob, Dave, mass hysteria!" (Riche 80). It is Dave's disdain for these dupes that enables him to execute Phonse's scheme, but it is his dependence on them that leads to the anxiety, guilt, and self-loathing that plagues his mind and liquefies his bowels. Boorstin never examines the psychological ramifications of perpetrating a pseudo-event in *The Image*, but Riche's *Rare Birds* is arguably a case study of the repercussions to be expected by those who simulate the culture and nature of

their environment.

Dave's guilt upon carrying out Phonse's caper is almost immediate. It was never Dave's intention to cater to the tourist industry: "[The Auk] was to be an 'Inn,' a place of rest and wines for the weary traveler, and never a 'Bed and Breakfast,' a place of poached eggs and tepid tea for the tourist" (8). As the unprofitable months progress, Dave is forced to admit his dependence on these visitors, telling a friend that "I'm mostly going for large parties until the tourist trade picks up" (27). The disdain Dave feels for his earliest customers following the duck sighting (locals who were not tourists *per se*, but certainly cut of the same bourgeois cloth) is evident even as he lovingly prepares their meals:

Through one of the tiny diamond-shaped windows he studied the table nearest the bar. Two men and a woman. They were dressed in the mock fishing vests, cableknit sweaters and leather patches of the class that chose to go out of doors. You could tell they had never worked a day under the sky. They *took the air*. The woman....was smiling, at some bon mot, he guessed.

...No piece of salmon had ever been so delicately poached.... Dave wanted the table with the salmon to tell her deep-pocketed friends about her fah-bulous lunch at the Auk. (102)

Dave's shame over pandering to the very elite whose indifference almost bankrupted him combines with his guilt over lying to them and manifests itself physically. Even as he is reporting his supposed sighting, "Dave had the urgent need to shit. His guts were

boiling.... His hands were trembling and he was concerned he would shit in his pants.... His shirt was heavy with sweat and growing cold against his flesh" (89, 93). Dave later develops a burgeoning and body-wrecking addiction to cocaine (salvaged by Phonse from "an operation being undertaken at sea" [52]) in order to keep up with his other dependency – fulfilling and profiting from the ever-increasing, increasingly intricate orders of St. John's aesthetes and classy come-from-aways.

Dave's guilt over his deception also threatens to destroy his unconsummated relationship with Phonse's sister-in-law. Though Dave longs to get closer with the hypnotic Alice, he fears what may happen if she discovers his recent success is the result of a ruse: "She seemed to know nothing of the duck hoax, and he would never tell her. He reasoned that if Alice was to discover the horrible fraud he was perpetrating on these innocent, well-meaning bird lovers to simply fill his pockets and rescue his pride, she would think him cruel and selfish" (111). His guilt and shame only further escalate following a visit from the Minister of Tourism.

Riche's implied criticism of the tourist industry through the shysterism and self-loathing of Dave Purcell is replaced by outright condemnation of the culture industry prior to Dave's conversation with Minister Heber Turpin: "Tourism. It was the last hope for Newfoundland, to become some kind of vast park, its people zoo pieces, playing either famished yokels or bit parts in a costume drama, a nation of amateur actors dressed up like murderous Elizabethan explorers, thrilling to the touch of their tights and tunics as they danced for spare change. It would never work" (148). That the culture marketed to tourists is more act than actual is made obvious through the scheming familiarity the

Tourism Minister assumes with Dave when Turpin visits The Auk “to get a piece of the phantom action” (149):

“And these bird freaks. Amazing, hey?” There was something conspiratorial in Turpin’s tone. “Did you set up the restaurant out here because of that? I mean, Dave, who would think to open a restaurant in Push Cove? You are a shrewd one, hey? An operator.... [I]f the birds weren’t here I’d say you would be wise to say they were anyway. I could talk to some people in Wildlife.” Turpin winked. (154)

Turpin’s devious nature, his belief (correct but unfounded) that Dave is running a scam, and his willingness to aid Dave in the continuation of his confidence game are indicative of the pretence and deception at the core of the tourism industry.

Dave’s restaurant and the area surrounding it possess no inherent value in Turpin’s opinion until others begin to regard it as valuable. The minister admits that the first time he heard of Dave’s restaurant was “in one of those airplane magazines” (153), reflecting a mentality of those Newfoundlanders discussed by Jackson in *Surviving Confederation* who “started to warm to the idea” of a cultural uniqueness being conferred upon them by outside anthropologists (7). It is worth noting that Phonse counsels Dave before phoning “the bird show” to let “them decide what kind of bird it is. The less you know the better” (Riche 84). He then praises Dave’s addled performance on the radio because “they would never suspect any scheme from such an arsehole” (94). Those Jackson refers to as “culture-cultists” who seek “to satisfy their spiritual hunger” (1) through witnessing a simpler, more natural culture must be fed more of whatever it is

they find appetizing, and those “simpler folk” who take up their gaze, live and die on the cultural assessments of outside experts. Whatever it is that catches the collective fancy of the tourist class is captured by the host, revamped, re-enacted and imbued with cultural importance.

MacCannell believes that “[t]he underlying structure of touristic imagery is absolutely plastic, so its eventual form is a perfect representation of the collective conscience” (143). Turpin arrives hoping to mould the duck sensation into a particular Newfoundland experience. The tourism minister pays his first visit to “the little restaurant that could” (Riche 149) with the promise that photographers will follow, no doubt to take pictures that will appear in brochures and pamphlets alongside other Newfoundland to-dos and must-sees. Turpin is relieved to hear Dave is a Newfoundlander, for it “would never do to have another come-from-away-makes-good story” (151). A culture is quickly being erected around Dave’s restaurant and the phantom fowl – a culture that is almost destroyed when one of those outsiders for whose enjoyment this culture is (re)created questions its reality.

Dr. Hans Speidel, the renowned ornithologist who last spotted the Tasker’s Sulphureous, comes to Newfoundland and quickly dismisses the sightings. Though the duck has never been sighted, it has already been infused with a particular Newfoundlandness, and Speidel’s rejection of the duck’s existence is received as a condemnation of Newfoundland culture. Heber Turpin is enraged and calls Dave as the restaurateur begins once more to indulge in the wine cellar of his once again empty establishment. The psychological and economic depression caused by the

“disappearance” of a duck that was never there is discussed by John Urry in “Death of Venice”: “Where the place no longer affords those performances of play that visitors are seeking, then it may be in its death throes – a place of degraded consumption. More generally, the place of play where no-one much still plays seems more dead than ever” (209). The anxiety over the second, greater death of Newfoundland is reflected in Heber Turpin’s “panicked nostalgia”: “Turpin called Dave in a funk. ‘It’s an outrage, Mr. Purcell, an outrage! Goddamn foreign experts sticking their nose in it! They are a plague on Newfoundland, a plague! Christ sake, a fucking Kraut coming over and telling Newfoundlanders about our ducks. We’ll get our own fucking experts on the case. I have friends down at Wildlife, Dave, I can send them around’” (Riche 202). Dave, a former employee of the Department of Fisheries, remembers too well the result of experts claiming fish were in the ocean when they were not and declines the minister’s offer to verify the existence of the duck.

Phonse again saves Dave’s business by attaching a decoy of the disputed duck on the periscope of the R.S.V. and doing “a few sweeps of the bay” (205). Phonse correctly predicts upon hearing that his duck has been spotted that Dave will “have a full house tonight” (206). But now Dave begins to grow tired of the game, fearing that the future of his business may be in “hawking trinkets and novelties, duck key chains and T-shirts, candy duck eggs and whatnot” (204). As the climax of the novel approaches, Dave is outside his restaurant, armed with a rifle and ready to chase away the very birders who sustain his business: “The birders were beginning to piss him off...he was too reliant on them and tired of sucking up. It was time to reclaim some dignity” (229). Dave’s

customers, the tourists, become for Dave one all-consuming maw, devouring Dave's food and his culture without understanding or appreciating it:

This aspect of the restaurant's life distressed Dave. After a certain point, he thought, if the prices were high enough and tables scarce enough, he could serve up steaming plates of shit. The rich would go in for it, they loved to be humiliated. Passionate physical appetites, the devotion to food, the full appreciation of its smell, its texture, its fire and certainly its primary function as sustenance did not motivate the fashionable crowd now frequenting the Auk. Their relationship with food was pained; eating, filling the mouth, chewing was always somehow vulgar. Eating made one belch and fart. It gave you bad breath, became, in the end, only unsightly fat and foul excreta. (134)

Dave's restaurant has become what Urry claims every tourist location strives to be: "the place to be, a place to die for, a place that cannot be missed, a place of life" ("Death" 207). Yet the tourists' superficial connection to the culture they are appreciating can easily turn places "to die for" into "places of death" (206). Once the novelty of the place wears off, once everything it can offer has been consumed, the place becomes "more dead than ever," its culture consumed and re-consumed until it becomes "foul excreta." Riche's obvious parallel between The Auk and a tourist industry that smilingly serves up a reheated culture for consumption is reiterated near the novel's end as Dave sets out to destroy the wooden decoy and end his connection with this deception:

The curse of the duck, of the lie that had propped up the charade of the

Auk, needed to be purged.... The duck was trouble, an evil juju, looming forever over Dave. It was his contract with the devil. They had been playing games with God, resurrecting the dead, and if Dave did not soon repent God would continue this torment. Blasting the duck to smithereens would forever end the Faustian bargain. (226)

The continued perpetration of cultural events to be consumed by insatiable "culture vultures" (Jackson) becomes a hellish sentence for Dave. Both Dave and his customers are so busy consuming and being consumed by the artifice that no one notices when an authentic and "spontaneous event" (Boorstin 39) occurs.

Boorstin notes that the greatest threat of the pseudo-events that feed the tourist industry is that they "overshadow spontaneous events" (39). Among the attributes of these pseudo-events that enable them to eclipse more natural occurrences is the fact that "[p]seudo-events can be repeated at will, and thus their impression can be re-enforced" (39). When interest begins to decline or authenticity is called into doubt, it takes only the proper placement of a wooden decoy to revive the duck-driven delirium. "Pseudo-events are more sociable" (40) according to Boorstin. The search for the duck is never a failure, for it involves taking part in the most topical of events, and it incorporates dining at the most exclusive of restaurants. "Finally, pseudo-events spawn other pseudo-events... They dominate our consciousness simply because there are more of them, and ever more" (40). Even as the duck hoax begins to take wing, Phonse is preparing for the next great pseudo-event, even further removed from reality: the discovery of "dinosaur bones" in Push Through.

The conclusion of *Rare Birds* spirals further into this unreality with a stand-off with CSIS, the explosion of the R.S.V., and the apparent death of Phonse Murphy. All these events so absorb those on either side of the hoax that Boorstin's lament proves true in the novel's final paragraph as the actual, the authentic, the real swims by unnoticed: "Dave walked up the hill and back to his rented truck, failing to notice among the other ducks on the water that day a particular bird, a bird with its wing lifted, its head tucked underneath, preening itself purposefully, a little dandy, a peculiar bird, a wildly colored bird with a ridiculous white tuft on its head. A rare bird" (259). Concerned with creating and consuming empty signifiers whose *raison d'être* is that they can be easily and opportunely (re)produced, the tourists and hosts of Newfoundland culture are starving even as they gorge themselves. Riche's warning that the real is being lost while the re-enacted is being fetishized points toward a future Newfoundland void of meaning and starving for the outside attention that confers significance upon its culture. *Rare Birds* shows how Newfoundland is approaching this future. Dave Purcell is caught in Frederic Jameson's "feedback loop" (xv) in which culture and economy continually nourish and devour each other. Dave must continually provide evidence of the sought-after duck so that he can fill his restaurant. Newfoundlanders are also trapped in this terminal loop, offering bite-size morsels of their culture to tourists, "fattening up" these visitors so that they can parasitically live off money spent in the "visual consumption" (*Gaze* 148) of this "culture." A snake devouring its tail, Newfoundland then puts this money back into the culture and tourism industry, making more consumable culture, consuming more tourist dollars.

The culture and tourism industries "saved" Newfoundland by focusing on the demise of a people and a way of life. Yet, the rugged individualism which was once "supposedly characteristic of Newfoundlanders" can "be used by people to become entrepreneurial pioneers in oil-related businesses" and other modern industries (Overton 14). Through the romancing of the outport existence, the pragmatism that is a Newfoundland tradition was lost. "The pitiless Newfoundland environment does not yield a living easily to the labour of men" (O'Flaherty 4), yet people have been living here for hundreds of years. It is the enterprising nature and ingenuity of people like Alphonse Murphy that should be at the centre of Newfoundland identity, not the idealized image of Newfoundlanders harmonizing with their island paradise. As Riche demonstrates, it is this division from the practical promoted by the culture and tourism industries that consumes Newfoundland reality and turns Newfoundland culture into an artefact that is not so much lived as it is performed.

Chapter 6

**The *Flâneur* in Paul Bowdring's *The Night Season*
and Michael Winter's *This All Happened***

Though much of the works produced by Newfoundland novelists focus on either the frontier-like Newfoundland of the past or the simple outport existence (or both), most of the authors of these books are modern urbanites: both Wayne Johnston and Michael Winter divide their time between St. John's and Toronto, Michael Crummey and Joan Clark live in St. John's, and Patrick Kavanagh lives in Ottawa. Recent award-winning novels by Newfoundland authors like Lisa Moore's *Alligator* or Edward Riche's *The Nine Planets* have more in common with the (sub)urban fictions of Don DeLillo or Richard Ford than with any traditional literary depiction of Newfoundland.

Paul Bowdring's *The Night Season* (1997) and Michael Winter's *This All Happened* (2000) are two of the first truly contemporary St. John's novels. Though Winter waxes poetic in his introduction on the "port city" at the centre of his narrative, *This All Happened* does not represent the sepia-soaked St. John's of Johnston's *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams* (Winter vii). There the unfurled sails Sheilagh Fielding recalls drenching the harbour in amber light are replaced with a "thin ice sheet" on which seagulls stand as "raw sewage surfaces" (30). Bowdring's scholarly protagonist is filled with angst, loss, and nostalgia, but for his own mistakes and missed opportunities, neither of which he connects to a particular Newfoundland sense of longing. Unlike Johnston's Fielding, it is procrastination, not Confederation, that determines the fates and failings of these characters. The narratives of Bowdring's Will Wiseman and Winter's Gabriel English offer the reader a glimpse into a new and different breed of fictional

Newfoundlander – not the struggling settler or oppressed outporter but the urban idler. If *The Great Gatsby* is a portrait of the lives of New York's idle rich in the 1920s, then *This All Happened* and *The Night Season* each depicts the existences of a far more rare and interesting collection of individuals – the idle poor, or at the very least, the idle lower-middle-class.

Both novels revolve around liberally educated, artistic urbanites living in downtown St. John's. These characters are content to subsist on government grants, odd jobs, and the good will of their fellows. Their lives seem to revolve around hours of contemplation (as close to work as these characters come), short excursions outside the city, avoiding those they may have offended or slept with (or both), and meeting nightly at a pub or cultural event – be it a “folk night,” public lecture, poetry reading, or gallery opening. Though Winter claims his book to be “a literary tableau of Newfoundland life” (vii), both novels and their characters are rooted in St. John's – any forays into rural Newfoundland reveal these characters to be recreational campers at best, unprepared and unable to exist in the celebrated Newfoundland environment that still defines them. The Newfoundland narrators of these novels are of the city: they live in it, they observe it, they read and write it, and – most notably – they spend a large portion of their time strolling through it. It is in this respect that these new Newfoundlanders have much in common with one of the more interesting creations of modernity – the *flâneur*.

The *flâneur* has its origins in the works of Walter Benjamin, in particular *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism* and *The Arcades Project*.

According to Benjamin, the street becomes a dwelling for the *flâneur*: “he is as much at

home among the façades of houses as a citizen is in his four walls" (*Baudelaire* 37). The *flâneur* is a man of some means, most likely bourgeois, for he can afford to spend his days walking in the city, avoiding the life of labour. Though he walks the same streets as the homeless "rag-pickers" that inhabit Benjamin's city, he is not one of them, for he can easily enter any café, shop, or arcade district. Yet like the rag-picker, he is a scavenger, a parasite of the city. Though his walk through the city may lack the focus of the homeless man hunting and begging for food, he is dependent on what he finds during his stroll to survive. During his ambling, the *flâneur* will make the observations or formulate the ideas that will maintain his leisurely existence: "Basic to *flânerie*, among other things, is the idea that the fruits of idleness are more precious than the fruits of labour. The *flâneur*, as is well known, makes 'studies'" (*Arcades* 453). Just as the dropped coin or discarded piece of food will sustain the street urchin, a "word dropped by chance" in a crowded street brings illumination and profit, for such a word could "furnish the painter with the expression he was dreaming of; a noise, insignificant to every other ear, will strike that of the musician and give him the cue for a harmonic combination; even for the thinker, the philosopher lost in his reverie, this external agitation is profitable: it stirs up his ideas as the storm stirs the waves of the sea" (453). In the end, the *flâneur* is a writer, a narrator of the city: "The social base of *flânerie* is journalism. As *flâneur*, the literary man ventures into the market place to sell himself" (446).

The *flâneur* is most engaged in his work when he is idling, strolling the streets. Through his observations he records and re-creates the city and sells it back to its citizens in the form of a novel, poem, painting, or song. Benjamin believes the idleness of the

flâneur is a “demonstration against the division of labour” (427) – the *flâneur* blurs the line between work and play. Whereas the labourer’s life is easily divided into moments of work and rest, the *flâneur* is at work when he is not working. The writer not at his desk is still working for at any moment inspiration may strike. A writer not writing yet somehow still a writer, the *flâneur* evades classification – as Deborah H. Parsons puts it, “he literally walks away from Benjamin’s definitions into the labyrinth, myth, and fragments of the city” (Parsons 4). Both Will Wiseman and Gabriel English typify the elusiveness and contradiction at the shifting centre of the *flâneur*’s character. Will is an English professor who is not teaching, but neither is he resigned from the profession nor on sabbatical – rather, he has decided to “for a while at least, do absolutely nothing” (Bowdring 117). Gabe is a novelist who is constantly deferring the writing of his novel, yet he is still a writer in as much as his daily observation of his friends and surroundings constitutes writing. During these long moments of postponement, these St. John’s *flâneurs* take to the streets, the pubs, and art galleries to observe, experience, and record their versions of the city.

The *flâneur* preserves the city, literally pressing between the pages of a book particular moments within the changing life of a metropolis. In *The Arcades Project*, Benjamin writes of the “double ground” walked by the *flâneur*: “The street conducts the *flâneur* into a vanished time. For him, every street is precipitous. It leads downward ... into a past that can be all the more spellbinding because it is not his own, not private” (417). For the *flâneur*, who has lived his life in the city, each observation recalls “the time of a childhood ... In the asphalt over which he passes, his steps awaken a surprising

resonance" (417). In this fashion, the *flâneur* provides a much needed contrast to the getting and spending existence of his fellow urbanites, providing a pause for himself and others (through his writing) to experience and remember all the elements that contribute to the city's identity. In this sense, Johnston's Fielding is the archetypal *flâneur* with a purpose.

Where Angels Fear to Tread: Fielding as *Flâneur*

In Sheilagh Fielding, the caustic journalist who shares narrator duties with Joseph Smallwood in *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams*, Wayne Johnston has combined two Benjaminian concepts: the *flâneur* and the angel of history. Like the *flâneur*, Fielding walks over "double ground" as she strolls through St. John's, simultaneously bearing witness to what is there and remembering how it used to be. Like the angel, her back is turned to the future even as she is pushed toward it. In a fashion, Fielding walks backwards through St. John's, the rag-picker tendencies of the *flâneur* compelling her to collect the "pile of debris" that is the history of a St. John's now merely a trace on the current landscape (*Illuminations* 258). Both angel and *flâneur* are collectors of refuse, a trait that serves Fielding well in the compilation of her *History*, for as it is noted in the epigraph from Prowse in Johnston's novel: "The history of the Colony ... lies buried under great rubbish heaps" (Johnston vii). In her journal, that is both a love letter to Smallwood and a chastisement for his headlong rush into a future that altered so much of her home, Fielding describes her double-grounded walk through present and past: "I walk as far as I ever did, though it takes me longer. The past is a place I visit on Sunday afternoons. Things I cannot remember when I have been indoors a week come flooding

back" (1). Fielding collects memories like rags and sews them together to create a St. John's in memory that is as real as the one through which she is currently walking.

At first she qualifies her dream-walk as a diversion, something that amuses her. She says, "I like to remember what used to be where something else now stands, or what used to be where there is nothing now. The pastime of the old, and I am not yet fifty" (4). By the end of the passage that begins *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams*, Fielding realizes the importance of her meanderings, for they recall a St. John's rapidly fading. Upon describing the vanished fish flakes, potholes, and wooden schooners that once defined her city, Fielding writes: "It was like that, Smallwood. Not three hundred years ago but twenty. One generation" (7). One senses in Fielding's reverie an urgent desire to sustain a moment despite the passage of time, a task she admits is unattainable: "It is impossible to fix exactly in time when something happened, and sometimes impossible to remember how life was before it did. This was our city when we were still in school. This is what it looked and smelled and sounded like" (8). Fielding also realizes that the position from which she viewed the city as a child, a position that still informs her adult understanding of St. John's, was a position of privilege. As a young girl, Fielding feared the people who actually lived in the city: "I was afraid of the crossing sweepers, boys wielding birch brooms who hung around intersections waiting for people to cross the streets" (4). The well-born daughter of a successful doctor, Fielding could enjoy the city from a distance even as she moved through it, marvelling at the "tedium of wonder" that is her St. John's without realizing that hundreds of others were desperately dependent on

the continuing function of this port city: "The harbour. I loved the harbour as only a child to whom it was nothing more than a place to walk could love it" (7,6).

In accordance with Parson's belief in "infinite versions" of a city, Johnston immediately follows Fielding's *flânerie* with Smallwood's memories of his father, another wanderer whose drunken musings reveal a very different St. John's. As the young Fielding is walking past the harbour, Charlie Smallwood is walking through it: "He found a job that at least allowed him the illusion of self-sufficiency, that of lumber surveyor, his daily task being to walk about the decks of ships docked in the harbour and tote up the amount of wood on board" (9). Charlie does not abandon his "toting pole" when not working, "using it as an oversized walking stick [that] because of his mane of hair and bushy beard...gave him the look of some staff-wielding prophet" (9). Charlie and his family wander from house to house in the St. John's area, settling finally on the Brow: "the least desirable, most scorned of all the city's neighbourhoods" (14). Each day, Charlie must walk from his home amongst the "savages, the dregs, the scruff of society" and into the realm of successful merchants and his social betters. If the task of the *flâneur* is to collect inspiration for later publication, then Charlie collects enough information and cheap rum ("which he bought from the foreign sailors on the dock" [9]) on these walks to fuel many nights of "flamboyantly eloquent" condemnations of St. John's (9). From the deck that overlooks St. John's, Charlie has a panoramic view of every street and neighbourhood – many of which he has been forced to leave as a consequence of a poverty that increases with the birth of each child. From his perch Charlie condemns the fortunes of his father and brother, who work as merchants in the city, the upper class who

occupy the neighbourhoods inaccessible to him, and the itinerant English educators who judge both him and his son to be the riff-raff descendants of those “who couldn’t even make the grade in Ireland” (38). Clinging to a lower rung of the social ladder than Fielding, Charlie cannot afford these idle moments of reflection and angst, and they eventually lead to his ruin. They also result in the estrangement between him and his eldest son, Joe, who rejects his father’s *flânerie* for a more purposeful (though no less wandering) existence.

Maturity, her continued proximity to the proactive Smallwood, and her own bouts with alcoholism lead Fielding to become a greater *flâneur* – a *flâneur* with a purpose. The adult Fielding is a combination of her younger self, still a romantic capable of wonder, and the embittered Charlie Smallwood, at once a defender and an assailant of her homeland. Fielding becomes a *flâneur* who benefits from her fortunate birth but is not limited by its view. A true Benjaminian *flâneur*, Fielding takes as her profession the “social base of *flânerie*” and becomes a journalist. Literally venturing into the marketplace to sell herself, Fielding follows Smallwood through socialist circles in New York, into a St. John’s mob intent on removing Sir Richard Squires from office, and across Europe in order to record Smallwood’s activities and make them part of a greater, personalized history.

During the riot outside the Colonial Building, Smallwood first sees Fielding in all her *flâneur*-ish glory: “Fielding was leaning on the Bannerman Park side of the fence, watching the riot through the iron bars, notebook in hand, frantically scribbling. It was like some tableau of her life: Fielding the critic, aloofly watching a riot from the safe side

of the fence" (315). Of course, Fielding is not content to stay outside the action for long and is soon hoisting herself over the fence and moving through the masses, certain there is a reportable story in this mayhem. Yet, Fielding does not become one with this mass – "the man of the crowd is no *flâneur*" and can "relegate [the crowd] to oblivion with a single glance of contempt" (*Baudelaire* 128). As Fielding straddles the fence between observation and interaction, "she paused to look out over the crowd, shook her head" then "waded into the crowd," moving through the "more tractable part of the mob" by prodding at them with her cane (Johnston 316). According to Benjamin, the *flâneur* demands "elbow room" while among the masses, in fact is "someone abandoned in the crowd" (*Baudelaire* 54, 55). The *flâneur* is amongst the crowd, but not part of it, for his is a double existence while in the street and among the crowd. The *flâneur* is both participant and recorder, a roving reporter who maintains critical distance even as he threatens to melt into the masses. In *Myth and Metropolis: Walter Benjamin and the City*, Graeme Gilloch contends "the disappearance of the *flâneur* into the crowd, the instant in which they become 'one flesh', is the moment of extinction of the *flâneur*" (153). The *flâneur* avoids this merger by refusing to be caught in any moment, but rather to place each moment within a history. Fielding walks a Benjaminian "double ground" as she moves through St. John's, experiencing each moment as it happens, but also contextualizing these moments in a greater narrative. Her *Condensed History* and her "Field Day" column enable Fielding to do this, by appreciating the present moment as an instant in the future-past. In this fashion, Fielding performs what Ross Chambers considers the most important attribute of the *flâneur* – the act of being belated.

In *Loiterature*, Chambers qualifies the *flâneur* as a “belated figure”: that is, a character who lives within a “culture of impatience” yet carves a space for reflection (216). The *flâneur* becomes both subversive and subservient, taking a moment to critique the metropolitan life on which he is dependent for his own identity: “Betaking himself to the bourgeois marketplace with eyes firmly set on an aristocratic model of leisure, the *flâneur*, then, was a figure of divided attention and belatedness. As such, he was a likely site for a certain digressiveness to occur, by which he became dissociated from the culture of speed that his observations of modern life were nevertheless subserving” (216). Chambers believes that by filling this site of digressiveness, the *flâneur* becomes a suspect figure who is “loitering with intent, in this case critical intent,” and is marginalized along with other characters the bourgeois feared and despised like the beggar or the rag-picker.

St. John’s at the time of Johnston’s narrative is a city in flux, a “culture of impatience,” as Chambers puts it, and Fielding takes many moments within these years of rapid change “to digress a bit, that is, to become slightly dissociated from the onward rush of progress, in order to discover both the culture’s readability and one’s own readerly engagement with it as a text” (217). Fielding’s reading and writing of her city and island mark a “discrepancy between experience and memory” (218) in which she is the “belated observer” not just recording the world in which she lives but allegorizing it – placing the events and players within the context of the island’s history. This approach sometimes results in Fielding’s nostalgic, melancholic musings on the island that was and could have been. This allegorizing is also the source of Fielding’s most bitter sarcasm,

reducing Smallwood and his big ideas to just another in the long line of Newfoundland politicians making the same mistakes. Both Fielding's wistful and derogatory digressions are anathema to Smallwood and his spirit of progress. Her treatment of powerful politicians as mere bit players in a long history of failure and missed opportunities earns Fielding the life of the marginalized poor that Chambers believes is the eventual space (at least in the minds of the bourgeois) of the *flâneur*.

Though Sir Richard Squires reads Fielding's "Field Day" column every morning, "searching, never in vain, for some mention of himself" (Johnston 280), and though Smallwood inquires earnestly (despite his attempt at smugness) whether Fielding's *History* will include any mention of him, Fielding's life as a woman of letters is a largely impoverished one during which she is spurned by the more powerful inhabitants of her city. In her usual ironic manner, Fielding admits to Smallwood that her decision to be a writer was a great disappointment to her father and her family: "I made up for catching TB when I told my relatives I was going to be a writer. They were overjoyed, for as you know, no family that can't count among its progeny at least one unpublished writer is taken seriously in St. John's ... you can imagine how thrilled my father was" (231). Divorcing her life of privilege, Fielding lives in estrangement from her father and occupies various derelict buildings, among them the shack of a railway sectionman and what she calls "a three-cent house, a marvellous establishment on Cochrane Street, which I share with an as yet un-unionized nest of prostitutes" (253). Even before she begins her life as a poison-pen columnist, Fielding feels the isolation that the observation of her fellow Newfoundlanders will foster, ironically quipping to Smallwood that she is "on the

waiting-lists of various hermit professions: lighthouse-keeper, weather-observer, telegraph operator" (254). Like the *flâneur*, Fielding is among the crowd but not of it – her wry observation of citizens and politicians is the idleness Benjamin claims to be the *flâneur's* "demonstration against the division of labour" – and this can make her an object of scorn. More importantly, her treatment of self-important politicians as passing examples of a historical ineptness in Newfoundland politics forces her to a position outside the Newfoundland being created by Smallwood and others – an angel of history forced into a future that she does not want.

In his discussion of the character of the *flâneur*, Chambers uses a Freudian term used by theorist Homi K. Bhabha in his identification of the postcolonial subject. Rapid changes in the city's political or geographical landscape turn the *flâneur* into a very specialized reader, according to Chambers. Fielding's walk through St. John's remembering "what used to be where else now stands" is a revisiting and a revisionist experience: "one might say that the 'revisiting' experience makes a once familiar (*heimlich*) urban text into something that has become *unheimlich*, or uncanny" (Chambers 217). The city in memory haunts the current city, forever unattainable but never completely dismissible. Like Bhabha's unhomely subject who is continually rejecting, revisiting and revising his (post)colonial identity, the *flâneur* occupies a position "split between two cities, each making claims on the attention but to neither of which one can fully 'belong'" (217). The *flâneur's* double-grounded experience of the city means he will never be entirely at home. Chambers claims that *flâneurs* like Fielding are "marooned in a kind of limbo and inevitably belated, therefore, as fast-forwarding

history passes them by" (236). A bizarre breed of "inner exiles," Fielding and her type must live as "critical readers of the culture of impatience as it accelerates away from them, leaving them in its dust" (236). Even as they walk through the streets where they feel the most comfortable, the *flâneurs* are being *unhomed*, forced at every intersection to note the divergence between their ideal city of memory and the city as it is being formed by others.

Chambers believes the *flâneur* to be one of "history's leftovers," a misfit in modern society in that his desire is not focused on the future "like the majority of his contemporaries in the culture of impatience" but on the past (242). This continuous reflection and look backward is what is most meaningful and maddening about the *flâneur*. His movement does not follow the "forward-turned, goal-oriented, progressive history" of his fellow city-dwellers, be they bourgeois or proletarian. The *flâneur's* life consists of "dilatatory, sideward movements" that may produce important moments of reflection, but that could also be perceived as, at best, moments of deferral, at worst, wasted moments of doing nothing (242). As Gilloch notes, the *flâneur* could be "heroic in his arrogant retention of an aloof independence and a disdainful individuality," yet this indolence may be a "thin veneer, a flimsy façade" (Gilloch 155). In truth, the *flâneur's* deferral and dawdling may not be in the service of reflection and preservation but simply an attempt to transform "laziness into an occupation" (156). It is quite possible that the *flâneur* delays because he has nothing to offer.

In Johnston's hands, the *flâneur* is the perfect twentieth-century Newfoundland hero. Fielding is a culture saviour, taking moments within the culture of industry and

impatience to remember and preserve what is disappearing. She is Smallwood's foil and conscience, a counterweight to his industrialization. It is worth noting that Fielding's final words recall the July night in 1948 when Newfoundland finally voted to join Canada. Fielding sits atop her railway sectionman's shack in a rocking chair as a train hurtles past her, the grinning conductor's triumphant cheer of "We won" overwhelmed by the noise of the train. Though she has removed herself from the city, Fielding still demonstrates one of the failing characteristics of the *flâneur* discussed in *The Arcades Project*. As a streetwalker, the *flâneur* is continually "overtaken" by more advanced modes of transportation, be it a carriage or an automobile. The stationary Fielding contemplating what has been lost as the conductor of a modern machine rushes past her, celebrating what has been won, is a symbolic rendering of the fate of the *flâneur*, to be overtaken, left behind in her moment of nostalgic contemplation. The *flâneur's* only ammunition against the progress that overtakes and overwhelms him is his ability to mock it, to return to his "haughty bourgeois" nature and dismiss the industrious nature of his workaday fellows: "Although the city forms the sacred ground of the *flânerie* ... the urban complex gave birth to precisely those forces that were soon to destroy the *flâneur*: the crowd and forms of mass production, standardization and commodification. The *flâneur* sought not so much to resist these tendencies as to deceive them, and he failed splendidly. He is only a mock-hero" (Gilloch 157). Fielding fits this definition of a mock-hero in that she is failing splendidly, fighting a losing battle but delivering the sort of barbed insults that will forever scar those who defeated her. She is, quite simply, a hero who mocks, a hero whose sole weapon is well placed derisiveness.

She is somewhat elevated from the status of mock-hero by Johnston's romanticism. Fielding's *flânerie*, her "promenade without purpose," her seemingly aimless strolls through the city are redeemed by their connection and contrast to Smallwood's more industrious treks. Her angelic turn backward is heroic, for she sacrifices her life of privilege to save the history and identity of her people. Her life as mock-hero and mock-historian is not a lucrative one, and it transforms her into a figure of disdain and derision in powerful circles. Her life is all the more heroic for this tragedy: she is the disowned, downtrodden defender of the side that lost. The *flâneurs* of *The Night Season* and *This All Happened* cannot be so easily redeemed.

Idle Idol: The *Flâneur* as Mock-Hero

Bowdring's Will Wiseman is certainly a mock-heroic *flâneur*. His very surname is an allusion to a superhero, a hero whose special power is his wit and wisdom. His name also has the alliterative nature of other superhero alter-egos: Clark Kent, Peter Parker, Bruce Banner. As a mock-superhero, the wisdom implied in his name is double-edged. Will has garnered a considerable amount of wisdom, yet he usually earns it through unwise decisions. Being a *flâneur*, the will implied in the first name is also ironic. Though Wiseman has read his share of philosophy, his name is not indicative of a Nietzschean "will to power" or a will to anything in particular. Will is content to do absolutely nothing but wander about the city, roving from shop window to library, grocery store to shopping mall, all the while walking the double ground of the physical present and his personal past. Wiseman's superhero status is similar to that of floundering restaurateur Dave Purcell's self-appointed alter-ego in *Rare Birds*: "Fuck-Up Man" (Riche 3). Both

men seem to have the unenviable power to make wrong decision after wrong decision and to have arrived at the time of the narrative at the very pinnacle of their "fuck up" powers, in Wiseman's case being divorced, alone, unemployed, listless and spending his mid-life searching for purpose in the reflection of a downtown shop window.

Wiseman is a kindred spirit of Moses Berger in Mordecai Richler's *Solomon Gursky Was Here*. Both men are well-educated examples of limitless potential wasted. Both men have spent their lives collecting knowledge, but it is knowledge without practice, for neither man has used his natural and cultivated intelligence to garner the positions expected of him. Richler's Berger delays the writing of his articles and his revealing biography of the Gursky family until he finds himself either dismissed or forgotten by his family and professional peers. Berger drifts from his fishing cottage to his favourite bars, to the dinner tables of his few remaining friends, dismissing his own failings and the accomplishments of others with a lethal wit, yet still obsessed with a life's work he will never complete. Similarly, Wiseman is suffering a peculiar mid-life crisis. He no longer enjoys his work, he would rather avoid his friends than seek consolation in them, and he prefers to spend his time remembering the defining moments of the first half of his life. Though he does not want to be an active member of St. John's society, Wiseman cannot leave the city. In truth he is driven to walk through it night after night, strolling a double ground where many town houses and pubs remind him of past mistakes. He seems content to idle, but idle around those gnawing unfinished aspects of his life that he stubbornly refuses to complete.

According to Gilloch, the *flâneur*'s refusal to apply himself and become not only a functioning but leading member of society is the source of his heroic status: "The *flâneur* ambles, saunters and strolls, but must not hurry. He is fundamentally out of step with the rhythms of modern life. Herein lies his heroism ... Sloth is heroic" (155). Such an idling existence can be maddening for those outside it, as is the case for Wiseman's mother-in-law, who hears of his intent to do nothing during a Christmas gathering: "Dorcas drew herself up like a pouter pigeon, expelled several indignant puffing sounds, and then a really righteous bone-in-her-throat cough.... 'Nothing' was a concept she had trouble swallowing, being of a singularly unphilosophical temperament.... 'How can *one* do *nothing*?' Dorcas demanded, spitting words like irritating bits of grit from her mouth" (Bowdring 117,118,119). It seems the destiny of the *flâneur* to be misunderstood, even despised or suspected in his own time.

Likewise, Fielding's ironic distance is both compelling and repulsive for Smallwood. As a rising politician, Smallwood is always wary of what Fielding will write next and even worries about the private jokes she may make at his expense. As a journalist, Fielding uses the knowledge gained through her elitist education to subvert the attacks of her detractors and vilify key members of the Liberal Party. A "Field Day" article purporting to be an excerpt from *Hooligans Seized Her* by "Sheilagh Shakespeare" casts a young Smallwood in the role of the traitorous "lean and hungry" Cassius who led seven other boys not to stab Fielding in the back, but cane her backside. Presenting an alternative, malicious side to individuals trying to cast themselves as the heroes and saviours of Newfoundland, Fielding demonstrates one of the saving graces of the *flâneur*

– her ability to pause and reflect multiple sides of any truth. While Chambers notes that duality may result in a Shakespearean pox-on-both-your-houses attitude, it also makes room for a “historically and socially peripheral position” that offers “a critical function that society’s more respected members ... are much too *busy* – or insufficiently loiterly – to notice, let alone to fulfil” (222). Fielding’s supposedly idle strolls, her arbitrary collection of literature, her refusal to move forward with others of her class combine to make her a well-armed critic of those who rush ahead without considering what is being left behind.

Wiseman has the education and the wit to become a fitting heir to Fielding, yet his inactivity and failure exceeds hers and is harder to redeem. At times, the narrative of *The Night Season* appears as a veiled excuse to connect epigraphs, each chapter beginning with at least one, sometimes three quotes from an array of artists, novelists, philosophers, and playwrights. The summary of the novel on its inside flap contends that the epigraphy is “a force in itself, suggestive of Will’s obsessive reading, one of the burdens of his life.” While this is largely true, Will seems to be amusing himself with these quotations, not trying to “reconcile literature and life.” In a chapter entitled “True Grits,” Will temporarily reoccupies the house he once shared with his ex-wife while she is out of town for Christmas. Will is forced to buy bacon, bread “*real* tea and *real* coffee” to take the place of the “oat bran, cracked wheat, hominy grits, buckwheat mix” and health foods that occupy Kate’s “tiresomely wholesome storehouse” of a pantry (Bowdring 85). “True grit” is an ongoing pun in this three-page chapter, seemingly written for the express purpose of punning. Wiseman spends his morning observing a homeless cat he has called

Sculpin, who is “as lean and tough as an old leather bag” and “probably downright unkillable” (88). “That kind of grits,” Will muses, “you can’t buy at the health food store” (88). Wiseman crowns this chapter not with a quote from “The Duke” but with two lines from a poem by John Wain.

Wiseman is the audience for his wit and wordplay. At first he begs the reader’s indulgence as he recalls the time during his high-school years when he first experimented with calling his father by his first name, Des: “after a few attempts, the bald and unfamiliar diminutive had (if you’ll forgive me) desiccated on my tongue” (1). He foregoes his audience’s forgiveness a few pages later when he stretches his linguistic talents even further to make a less obvious pun. Sitting on his mother’s couch on Christmas Day as Bing Crosby emanates from the record player, Will inquires if the singer is dead: “Bing himself replied unequivocally, or unequi-vocally, with a sprightly rendition of ‘It’s Beginning to Look a Lot Like Christmas’” (10). These turns of phrase are strung throughout the novel: Will refers to his job at the local college as a “manure-track position” and terms a fellow bibliophile “a stowaway ... on the Queen E II, the mother ship of the university line,” not the cruise ship but the library at Memorial University (117,225). Wiseman’s compulsion to crack wise and turn phrases is related to the insecurities of the *flâneur*.

For Wiseman, the flaunting of his clever tongue and extensive literary knowledge is justification for his idle existence. Though an academic no longer teaching, Wiseman still identifies himself through the literature he has read. Any reflection on his life with ex-wife Kate leads to a literary allusion. His hope that the “too too sullied flesh” of him

and his wife could “resolve itself anew” (itself a misquoting of Hamlet) is followed by Mercutio’s “O flesh, flesh, how thou art fishified” (Bowdring 28). Remembering his wife’s increasing coldness with each argument, Wiseman quotes Auden: “About suffering they were never wrong, the Old Masters” (136). It seems any encounter with a woman, be it actual or recalled, sends Wiseman to the inexhaustible annals in his head, emerging with the proper quote. Admiring the black hair of an estranged female friend, Wiseman turns to Rossetti: “Oh where are you going with your love-locks flowing” (192). Flirting with a woman in a George Street bar who is reading *The Garden of Eden*, Wiseman cannot resist an allusion to Hemingway when they realize they have seen each other before at the university: “That’s the place ... A clean well-lighted place” (224).

Though Wiseman has foregone his life of labour, it is obvious he still derives his identity from it. Moreover, his eagerness to display his acquired skill may allude to the shame he feels about “doing nothing,” a shame that forces him to validate himself through an endless stream of literary references. When Kerry, the young woman from the bar, follows him home, he spends the night listening to her read poetry from his massive personal library. Though this *flâneur* avoids work, he cannot seem to outpace the identity he has derived from it.

For Will Wiseman, the act of walking is a deferral of labour. Wiseman’s decision to do nothing “for a while at least” indicates that this is a (non-)space he intends to occupy temporarily. Dissatisfied by his job, divorced, detached from his daughter, Wiseman decides to put life on hold, to reflect on it before moving forward. Ironically, this pause can come only through movement, his aimless walking over the double ground

of his city. He decides not to teach, not to be a teacher, yet he does not actively seek another activity or title by which others can identify him. He is not so much being a *flâneur* as deferring or delaying being anything else. His walk, and indeed the very narrative of *The Night Season*, is a delay, a deferral in Wiseman's life. As the *flâneur* is outside the crowd at the very moment he is among it, Wiseman is not in the St. John's of those around him who are attached to the city through their jobs and families. He walks through his own St. John's, a dreamscape city of memory. Despite the grim observations and wry sarcasm, Wiseman's is an earnest mid-life pilgrimage toward discovering a new self. This *flâneur* may seem to walk aimlessly, but his many meanderings, diversions and deferrals do eventually lead to some conclusion.

Wiseman certainly fulfills the identifying characteristic of the *flâneur*: he is a walker. He wears sneakers year round, much to the chagrin of his mother when he visits her on Christmas Day. "Why are you still wearing this get-up in the middle of winter," she asks (5). He remains downtown, for he is familiar with the area and can stroll through it, taking time to observe and preserve his surroundings. Though St. John's is a port city, he is referring to the crowd of downtown shoppers and not the ocean when he frets about being sucked into "the all-consuming sea" (19). While he claims to desire a "burrow to crawl into" to avoid these shoppers until he can "emerge with the groundhogs on Candlemas" (19), he is among these people during this frenzied time. Though he grumbles about "Muzak machines in the overcrowded stores" and reminds the reader of "the rising Christmas suicide rate," he cannot help but take to the streets, joining the ranks of "gawking shoppers" staring at "[l]ive turkeys named after city councillors ... on

display in the downtown raffle-shop window" (19). Wiseman has much in common with Benjamin's favourite *flâneur*, Baudelaire, who "loved solitude, but he wanted it in a crowd" (Baudelaire 50). Alone in his townhouse, feeling through the walls the vibrations of the rock band rehearsing downstairs, Wiseman feels increasingly haunted by the "signature songs of my lost youth" which keep him awake (Bowdring 22). With nothing but his "hopeless nostalgia" to keep him company, he admits he cannot bear "the thought of spending Christmas in this house" and takes to the streets (22, 23). The next chapter begins with Will on Water Street, "clearing my head in front of the display window of Noseworthy's, a confectionary cum deli cum secondhand furniture store" (25).

It becomes apparent that Will's *flânerie* is an attempt to maintain and relive a connection with his ex-wife: "Walking was the only exercise she engaged in. Slow-walking, in a daydream. You could cover more ground out strolling with your three-year-old. Kate liked to look at things, indoors or out – the inflorescence of plants, frost on a windowpane. The texture of a stone could hold her attention for hours" (Bowdring 46-47). Post-marriage, Will can now be found "botanizing on the asphalt," examining a window display, conjecturing as to its meaning, creating the life of the man who designed it. His reverie comes to an end with a confession: "But the bare truth was, I had never spoken to, or even seen, Mr. Noseworthy. I had never been inside his shop, and neither had anyone I knew. He was even more retiring than his merchandise. Perhaps there was no Noseworthy at all" (28). The city truly functions as a double ground for Wiseman. He dreams rather than experiences many places. Standing outside Noseworthy's window, he wonders what would happen if "Kate and I could only come here for a Pepsi and a hot

dog,” perhaps “our own burdensome history might be lifted from our shoulders” (28). A true *flâneur*, Wiseman impregnates his city with narratives, cramming meaning and experience into places he has never entered. For Will, the city is a place of reflection rather than interaction.

Wiseman’s movement through the city is a movement through his own memory, subconscious, and identity. Turning from the shop window, he is momentarily startled by a bus pulling up to the stop where he is inadvertently standing. Though he had not intended on taking a bus ride, he steps on anyway, content to be led through his city of memories. The bus takes him past his former home and into another memory: “I felt a hollow nostalgic ache as we passed the old house, gentrified now almost beyond recognition, where Kate and I had once lived, where we had first made love, in a bedsitting room with a view of the Waterford River” (29). The memory so overwhelms him that he moves to the rear exit while calling his ex-wife’s name. The harshness of the “real” city strikes him as he exits: “I looked up and down the street, but there was no sign of anyone ... I began to walk back down the hill, but I didn’t meet a soul until I reached Water Street” (30). Wiseman often permits himself to be led through the city, each moment of drift bringing him closer to an understanding of his relationship with Kate. Encountering Kate’s brother Bill as he is exiting Lar’s Fruit Market, he submits to his former brother-in-law’s greater purpose: “he put his arm in mine and led me back into the shop” (53). Learning from Bill that Kate has left the city for Christmas, he is able to give momentary purpose to his strolling and eventually make his way to the house they used to share.

Chambers believes that memory gives rise to a feeling of "historical alienation" in the *flâneur* (219). Here is the source of the double-ground imagined and navigated by the *flâneur*. Here also is Wiseman's greatest affiliation with Fielding as a *flâneur*, an "historical alienation" that necessitates the allegorizing of the city. The city changes and many aspects of it are lost, taking with them the physical markers of the *flâneur's* memories and his very identity. To protect his identity, the *flâneur* remembers, either remembering "what used to be where else now stands" (like Fielding), or allegorizing what remains by imbuing it with memory. A house becomes a place where a couple once made love; a deli becomes a place where a couple could have saved their relationship. Will hates change, for it threatens to erase the city of his youth and the city in which he spent his happiest moments with Kate.

Standing in front of Noseworthy's window, Will admits, "I would not have been surprised ... to come down here some day and find the place closed, the windows caged" (Bowdring 27). In the window, he sees "the ghostly reflections of centuries of shoppers" while imagining "the bells of forgotten street cars echoing in his ears" (27). He both laments and admires the recent display which marks the survival of old St. John's yet stands as a meagre, less heartfelt version of past displays: "I warmed to the thought that Mr. Noseworthy was single-handedly and single-mindedly shepherding us all in the right direction ... Clear out, pare down, jettison, minimize. The past was a sad and wearisome weight" (27). Will admits there is "just too much history here to think about," but he despises any attempt to move away from it (27). He detests the suburbanization of St. John's and the surrounding areas, referring to north-east St. John's as a suburban

wasteland with strip-malls and “fortress-like fences” (3). He derides the lack of distinguishing features and landmarks to “etch themselves on my memory” in the “suburban sprawl” of “look-alike bungalows with lawns of frozen mud” and pathetic “maple-saplings guy-wired to the ground” (200).

But the newness he hates most is that which penetrates and alters his downtown. The streets and houses of his youth have been declared a “Heritage Conservation Area” and have become “a yuppie garrison” (57). The waterfront has been obscured by a wall of brick and glass, the centrepiece being “a brick shithouse and parking garage known as Atlantic Place,...one of the ugliest things, both inside and out, ever conceived by the human mind” (57). The gentrification of George Street has chased people from their homes and converted it into a strip of bars “with names such as Swallies, Dickie’s, Christian’s, Gropers, and Bounders” (57,58). Even Will’s double-grounded dreamwalks cannot overlook the ghastliness of some of these edifices.

Not just the spaces but the traditions of Will’s past are under attack as well. Joining Bill for breakfast on Boxing Day, he also joins him in his condemnation of beautification by-laws. “There’s an unwritten law out here against hangin’ out your clothes. Spoils the look of the neighbourhood, gives away your lower-class roots,” he says (205). On New Year’s Eve, Wiseman laments the loss of another tradition, one particularly dear to the heart of a *flâneur*:

The New Year’s Eve waterfront soiree had once been a much smaller, more casual, affair: just a few people strolling the docks with mickeys of rum in their overcoats. On a few occasions Kate and I had been among

them, singing "Auld Lang Syne" and kissing and embracing strangers at midnight. But, in less than a decade, it had festooned into a "tradition," a raucous media-whipped affair with radio station ghetto blasters on wheels and a City Council fireworks display. (218)

On this New Year's Eve, he is away from the crowd. In fact, he is above them in a sort of foggy panopticon: "I made my way up Military Road and sat for a spell on the Basilica steps high above the harbour. Through the luminous fog I could hear the radio music and the cheers of the waterfront crowd; the smell of the salt air was sobering and sad. There were probably ten thousand or more down there this year" (219). In an attempt to avoid the crowd, he walks the back streets of St. John's, and returns home, only to grow frustrated in his solitude, and sets out again amongst the revellers. Even as it changes, the city compels him to take part in it. In truth, it is the changes that repeatedly draw him outside his door. For it is the task of the *flâneur* to survive in a city that is becoming increasingly foreign to him: "The more uncanny a big city becomes, the more knowledge of human nature – so it was thought – it takes to operate in it" (Baudelaire 40). Refusing to relinquish his grip on the changing landscape of his city, he must take to the streets like a true *flâneur* and study the city and its occupants. Though his mastery of St. John's may be waning, his knowledge of it will secure his position as urbanite.

Through change, the city becomes an increasingly dangerous place for the *flâneur*. Benjamin notes that the aging *flâneur* was always actively avoiding creditors and moving from place to place. In his later years, Baudelaire "roved about in the city which had long since ceased to be home for the *flâneur*" (47). As the city becomes consumed by

the machine of progress, the *flâneur* finds fewer places to practice his art. Moreover, walking the city so many times, he increases his chances of offending someone or outstaying his welcome – as Benjamin puts it, “Every bed in which he lay down became a *lit hasardeux* for him” (47-48). Though Wiseman more or less drifts through St. John’s, there are sections he tries to avoid. As the crowd presses in on him, so too the area he can safely promenade becomes smaller.

One of Will’s favourite diners is Bird’s Family Restaurant and Bakery. He admits, “in the beginning I came here for one reason only: It was the sort of place Kate and her friends would never think of coming to” (Bowdring 64). He enjoys the “frozen in time” aspect of the place, “like someone’s nostalgic hazy recollection rather than a real eating place” (65). In this restaurant Will debates returning to his former house while Kate is out of town. One gets the sense that he has come to Bird’s often to think about Kate – a fitting irony since Kate is never there, enabling Will to freeze her in time as well. Here Will can revisit his Kate without ever having to confront his real ex-wife. His seemingly aimless existence is actually one of avoidance. He prefers “to meet the few friends I still wanted to see in some neutral territory like a bar or cafe” (92). He seeks the crowd but not company. He admits to Kerry, the girl he meets in a bar downtown, that he too avoids the Ship Inn because it is still the meeting place of many former friends. His description of that bar near the end of the novel captures the *flâneur’s* fear of being consumed by the crowd:

if half the town drank on the George Street Strip, the other half drank at the Ship Inn, and this half included everyone you knew, among whom, of

course, was everyone you didn't want to see. Pity poor John Keats, out for a quiet pint of an evening, a man who professed to have no self, no nature, no identity – at least as a poet – and when in a roomful of people felt the identity of every one of them press upon him to the point of annihilation. He would not have stood the chance of the proverbial snowball in Hell in the agonistic crucible that was the Ship Inn. (239)

What is the fate of the *flâneur* when there is nothing new to see in the city and all that is old is too painful to be enjoyed?

As Gilloch notes, it is the nature of the *flâneur* to be overtaken by progress: "The hustle and bustle of the crowd were both necessary to the *flâneur* and the source of his eventual demise" (156). The *flâneur* is an "idle dreamer destined for a rude awakening" (157). This awakening comes in several forms, the first being the realization that the city has changed beyond even his ability to enjoy it. Pretty soon the "persistent aloofness" and "disdainful individuality" become less about a nostalgic connection to the past and more concerned with a cynicism for the present. Near the end of the novel, Will returns from his walk "tired but still restless, a bit edgy and raw-eyed" (Bowdring 220). His forays onto the streets only further frustrate him, the double ground of memory now barely perceptible beneath the drastically different city of the present.

As he sits before Kate's television watching *The Notorious Landlady*, Will has a revelation while watching his teenage heartthrob, Kim Novak: "in that old black-and-white, soft-focus celluloid print, she glowed with a translucent sensuality that brought back all my adolescent love and longing, made even worse now by the knowledge that I

would never have her, and that her painful beauty had now faded" (220). As Will's frustration grows, it becomes obvious that what he realizes he will never have is not Kim Novak but Kate and, perhaps more importantly, the St. John's in which he grew up and fell in love. Will claims finally to understand "what the film was really all about" (221) – the director, Richard Quine, Novak's former lover, has created a film detailing everything he has lost: "our *auteur's* painful longing filled every frame. Having lost *her*, how could he have been expected to keep his mind on something as trivial as plot" (222). Likewise, Will's life has been without plot or meaningful progression since he lost Kate. His anger escalates as he realizes this is to be another uneventful evening: "In the end it always came down to this: the empty bottle, the empty bed, evenings like oceans, onlies and onliness; even after the walk abroad among your fellow men, the long walk back home to your bowl of gruel and your ghosts" (222). Before he takes to the streets with renewed purpose, Will projects his anger at his own passivity onto Fred Astaire's performance in *The Notorious Landlady* as an observer of the romance in the film: "DANCE YOU SILLY FUCKER, DANCE. IT'S NEW YEAR'S EVE, I shouted at him. I switched off the TV, grabbed my jacket and walked out the door" (222). Will finally asks Dorcas' question: "How can one do nothing?" Realising his aloofness has resulted in emotional atrophy, he sets out to join the crowd on the previously vile and vilified George Street Strip.

Will's death as a *flâneur* is necessary – in order to remain a part of St. John's he must become one of its citizens. The *flâneur* never walks against the crowd but alongside it, like the rag-picker who hopes to collect any item dropped by the crowd. Will sees in

his future the destiny of the *flâneur* discussed by Gilloch: "The eventual fate of the *flâneur*, the truth of this character, is to be found in the pathetic figure who wanders around the city, seemingly without destination, but with a placard attached to him advertising commodities for sale" (156). Will encounters his possible future self near the end of the novel, when the ironically named Tasker Murphy visits him on New Year's Eve. An alcoholic whose name serves only to highlight his do-nothing existence, Tasker sits at Will's kitchen table, bemoaning his life, his separation from his wife and family, all the while drinking Will's scotch and pulling "sad songs out of the air like trap lines out of deep blue water – hand over hand, line after line, song after song after song after song" (Bowdring 211). Tasker is the *flâneur* lost in the past, ignorant of the present moment: "In the five or six years that we'd been neighbours, he'd been in our house no more than a half dozen times, usually around Christmas, and each time it seemed that he hardly knew us. He would re-introduce himself, thinking that we didn't know him" (214). Rather than become permanently lost, the exhausted Will takes his place in the crowd, fighting for elbowroom in a St. John's pub, using his identity as professor of literature to begin his conversation with Kerry. A fellow *flâneur*, she followed Will home because "[i]t seemed she had nowhere else to go" (223). Though both are certainly denizens of the city, they spend their first day together outside the city, on the very edge of the island.

Following a night of poetry reading, Kerry suggests a trip to Cape Spear, "North America's most easterly point" (238-39). Walking along the cliff, Kerry mocks the "Ship Inn-centred world" of St. John's, then boldly passes the "Parks Canada DO NOT GO BEYOND THIS POINT sign on the edge of the cliff" (239). Though they were notably

uninspired in the city, both Kerry and Will are overwhelmed by passion in an alcove of rock as the ocean laps the shore. He watches as Kerry disappears into a "deep cleft" of rock "heaved up at a 45-degree angle, and its long wide mouth gaped at us and frothed and roared" (241). Kerry's lips, stained from the berries she had picked, appeared to Will as "red with the earth's blood," and he feels "the waters move in [him]" as he kisses her. The final words of this consummatory chapter could be found in Patirck Kavanagh's *Gaff Topsails*: "We kissed again, more passionately this time, then eased ourselves down upon the smooth warm stone. When all my senses returned again, the sea rushed back into my head with a roar" (241).

For all its cynicism and persistent aloofness, *The Night Season* is, in the end, as much a love letter to Newfoundland as is *Gaff Topsails* or *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams*. Will has come to *flânerie* later in life, having been damaged by love and disillusioned by his profession. To step outside the crowd, to appreciate what is being lost as others move blindly beyond it, is a moment of power for the *flâneur*, but also a moment of self-deception, a belief that one can somehow exist as an inner exile, an angelic caretaker of all that is left in the dust of the forward-looking "culture of impatience." Will's encounter with Kerry and, subsequently, Newfoundland, leaves him reborn. He now experiences St. John's through reborn eyes, finding newness everywhere. Waking in his apartment at the conclusion of the novel, he sees a flock of birds in his garden and notes he had "never seen anything like them before" (247). He learns to appreciate the transitory nature of this moment: "They seemed on display, freeze-framed beneath the streetlight, but then they rose suddenly, like a single silhouetted shape, and

disappeared over the rooftops into the fading light" (247). Will realizes that he can enjoy his memories, but he cannot live in them. He cannot freeze-frame family and friends in a favourite time and place. As he reads from a storybook he used to read to his daughter, he finds comfort in the otherwise ominous approaching storm: "soon it would descend upon us with all its fury. The snow had held off long enough. It would block our doors and shroud our windows, fill the streets and gardens to the roofs of the houses. As we slept it would sweep down upon us like the waters of the lake" (248). Having touched a more elemental version of Newfoundland through his experience with Kerry, he no longer fears or loathes the alterations of his city. He accepts these changes, for Newfoundland will always belong to him and he will always belong to it. It is this need for both elemental and personal connections that both consciously and subconsciously drive the *flâneurs* of *This All Happened*.

The Portrait of the *Flâneur* as a Young Man: Gabriel English

David Frisby refers to Benjamin's *Arcades Project* as "scraps of information ... placed together in a constellation of meaning" (42). This is also a fitting description of Michael Winter's novel, which Winter himself refers to as a "fictional memoir" in that *This All Happened* is really a collection of daily observations and musings presented in the guise of a novel. The narrative of Winter's novel is connected only by a calendar year driven by 365 individual entries through which Gabriel English forms a pastiche of himself and his urban surroundings.

Winter's novel is certainly the portrait of the *flâneur* as a young man, for Gabriel is very much Will Wiseman in an earlier stage of his life. Like Will, Gabe is a man of

letters. In a true reflection of Will, Gabe appears to be at the beginning of a career as an educator, driving to Conception Bay to teach creative writing to high school students. Will spends a large part of his narrative remembering his failed relationship with Kate, while Gabe occupies most of his time trying to interpret and preserve his failing relationship with Lydia. Younger than Will, he seems more advanced in his *flânerie*, more practised. More proficient in the tactics of the *flâneur*, Gabe will also tire of them sooner, outgrowing the city (or believing he has) in his early thirties. This journal disguised as a novel documents the daily meanderings (both physical and mental) of a *flâneur* of St. John's, recording his fascination and eventual disenchantment with his urban landscape. Like Will, Gabe eventually desires a more elemental and elementary version of Newfoundland. Unlike Will, Gabe is unable to use his experiences in a more natural Newfoundland to further fuel his life as Newfoundland urbanite.

The city has yet to become a Benjaminian *lit hasardeux* for Gabe, but he is certainly on his way to making St. John's a dangerous place for himself. Having limited himself to a group of friends, friends who live in the "Ship Inn centred world" derided by Kerry in *The Night Season*, Gabe roves a sexually charged social circle crammed with ex-girlfriends, Lydia's ex-boyfriends, and those who are both desirable and dangerous because they have been neither. His collection of friends has an incestuous nature in which no social gathering is possible without encountering at least one former lover or a person who threatens to encroach on Gabe and Lydia's tenuous relationship. Several times throughout the narrative, Gabe ponders the possibility of "leaving this claustrophobic city" (91). The angst shared by these St. John's hipsters is best described

by Wilf Jardine, a fifty-two year old "promising actor" who describes the fear inherent in a seemingly simple solitary walk to a bar:

When you open the Ship Inn door all by yourself. Youve walked
downtown alone. You dont want to be alone. You feel like a dog and you
want a bit of company. Well, you open that door and you steel yourself.
It's got to be all one motion, no hesitation. Open the door and stride in, but
a slow stride, maximum exposure. And you make your way to the bar.
And all the way there you keep your eyes on the bottles and the mirrors
and youre hoping, youre hoping there's someone in there who knows you.
You hope you dont make it to the bar before someone waves you over,
grasps your arm, says, Hey Wilf, how's it going? Yes, sir, that walk to the
bar is the loneliest walk in the world. (142-43)

This is the circumstance of these St. John's streetwalkers, to dread the moment of being out alone, yet to be forever on guard when in a crowd. Voices have a short distance to carry in St. John's, and the socialite must always be wary, even in the street: "Lydia's ex, Earl ... lives two streets away. Once, when we were walking home from the Ship, Lydia told me to shush. We were talking about Earl, under his window" (6). These people not only frequent the same bars, but they live on the same streets: the townhouse-lined streets of the recently gentrified downtown. It is no wonder Gabe feels claustrophobic in this city, for even as he walks, the row houses encroach on his conversations. He says, "We manage the stairs to Duckworth Street and speak quietly under the ear that hears all of downtown St. John's. Quiet with the stories you tell, or the wrong person will hear you"

(95). Though it is one of the primary perils, being overheard is not the only hazard in the streets of St. John's.

Even one as familiar with the streets as Gabe can find himself in dangerous situations. One night Gabe is attacked by snowball-hurling teenagers, one of whom he manages to grab at the collar. As he decides what to do with the youth he has pinned to the sidewalk, older boys wielding hockey sticks surround him. Gabe runs several blocks uphill before he realizes the hockey players are actually Good Samaritans concerned about his welfare. Yet Gabe's fear upon first seeing the older boys reveals how quickly the familiar can become unfamiliar in St. John's. Following a night of drinking with Max Wareham, Gabe, who knows every alley and corner of his city, still manages to walk into a tree and seriously hurt himself. But the real danger in walking the streets of St. John's is encountering those dangerous and desirable characters outside the parameters of a bar or house party where watchful eyes ensure the interaction remains at the level of slightly risqué flirting. Gabe has gravitated toward Alex Fleming at several parties and has even met her for lunch a few times, but in the street one April night, both are able momentarily to slip away from the confining crowd: "everyone who is anyone is out crawling the mild, wet streets, a bit like Dublin folded into Paris. Europe of the twenties, when everyone is walking home with a person they shouldn't be walking with, people going home with the wrong people for one night only. Alex leans into me and we kiss against the coarse clapboard of a house (I scrape my knuckles)" (88).

This moment with Alex is not an indication of dissatisfaction with Lydia but more an act of rebellion against the inward-looking collection of actors and artists who

constitute and confine Gabe's urban existence. This need for the new both drives and disturbs Gabe, for he knows Lydia wants it as well, in the form of the novel and charming Craig Regular: "Fact: I know everyone in this town even if I havent met them and they know everything about me, which is frustrating. So when someone new comes to town, or someone returns, like Craig Regular, everyone lurches towards him, especially the women, because it's such a relief to meet someone you dont already know" (152). Gabriel grows increasingly jealous and paranoid throughout the narrative, convincing himself Lydia has slept with Craig and Wilf. This combination of fear and envy fuels Gabe's desire to vanish: "I am taken by the idea of leaving St. John's by sea. I am taken by the idea of vanishing. A small vengeful part of me, or an intolerant part of me, wants to leave Lydia, and this means leaving St. John's" (94). It also fosters Gabe's already burgeoning contempt for St. John's:

At Coleman's grocery store. The distorted women, freak-show faces, warped eyebrows, blotchy complexions.... Thin legs on the women, big torsos, and their pushed-in, beaten faces, receding chins, thin hair crimped artificially. Then calling taxis, paying with Government of Newfoundland blue cheques that require MCP and SIN and theyre worth \$301.50 and theyre buying cases of Pepsi, Spaghettios, tins of vienna sausages, cold pre-fried barbecue wings, I can barely write this it is all so cliché. (117)

This near inability to write marks Gabe's exhaustion with St. John's yet identifies him as a citizen. His *flâneur*-ish contempt for the masses is coupled with the comfort and identity that his observations afford him. Though he grows tired of the city and its people,

he is linked to them as is the *flâneur*, walking amongst them like the ragpicker, collecting stories and conducting inspections through which he legitimizes his idle existence.

Gabe's home is a panopticon from which he can view much of downtown St. John's. When not walking the streets, Gabe likes to observe them through his binoculars. In truth, he more than likes to do this, as he admits in one of his entries: "I love my binoculars" (Winter 92). Most of *This All Happened* is observation, many sections beginning with a simple sentence describing Gabe's location: "Snowbound in St. John's," "Ten p.m. at Max's playing poker," "At Coleman's grocery store," or "On our way to Gallow's Cove" (8,102,116, 175). From his window, Gabe studies the city, sometimes "watching weather work in the distance," at other times watching "a rollerblader tack down Signal Hill Road," willing him to fall when he discovers it is Craig Regular (79, 92). This observation from a distance offers Gabe the security he lacks when walking the streets. He shares his townhouse with the couple Iris and Helmut, their names a reflection of the omniscience and protection his room and the binoculars provide him.

Gabe makes these observations from the desk at which he is supposed to be composing his novel. The writing of this novel is something by which he identifies himself rather than something he actually does. In truth, Gabe is rapidly approaching Will's situation of doing absolutely nothing. Even when he sits to write his novel, he cannot stop observing the city outside his window: "Back working on the novel. Outside my window I can see Boyd Coady on an aluminum [sic] ladder. He's scrutinizing the work of the roofer" (162). Actually watching someone watch someone else, Gabe grows

further removed from doing anything himself. Near the end of the novel, he admits to Alex that "I've given up on the novel" in favour of watching the city fulltime (280).

Yet Gabe is well studied in the tactics of the *flâneur* and he knows that the *flâneur* distinguishes himself "through his activity, or rather, through his lack of activity, for the business of the *flâneur* was 'doing nothing'" (Gilloch 154). One of Gabe's New Year's resolutions is to finish a novel, and this is the activity by which he identifies himself throughout the narrative. The fact that he never gets closer to completing the book does not seem to bother him, perhaps because he knows that the length of time it takes to produce something also adds to its worth. Gabe can mock the hefty patrons of Coleman's grocery store and their clichéd purchasing of junk food with government cheques though he is technically unemployed and beleaguered with student debt. He can look on them with disdain, for they are on welfare and doing nothing while he is a "writer." The longer it takes for him to produce this novel only distances him further from these people, for he is not a hack writer mindlessly producing disposable literature. He is a true novelist whose masterpieces require prolonged periods of time.

Gabe remains much like Will or Benjamin's *flâneur* who "catches things in flight." Those who work can justify their existence through what they have garnered. The *flâneur*, whose work is not work, justifies himself through the tools of his trade: keen observation and clever wordplay. In this respect, Gabriel is certainly a younger version of Will Wiseman. *This All Happened* abounds in idle wordplay, as if Gabe and his artistic (though largely inactive) friends must continually reify themselves through displays of writerly observation. Gabe begins the entry for 4 March with "It's after badminton, on the

only day of the year that is a command, march forth" (Winter 59). He responds to a child's comment that "A question mark is like half a heart" with "Sometimes questions are asked half-heartedly" (50). In a more bizarre moment, Gabe proclaims that "Corn ... is the lobster of the vegetable family," then, pressed to defend this statement by Lydia, he actually takes time to list the similarities: "Theyre both large, I say. A solid colour. You boil them alive and theyre seasonal. You eat only a select part of the whole body. And pepper's important" (100). These moments of artful insight are a way for Gabe and others to avoid dealing with their own idleness, to confer purpose and meaning upon moments and themselves.

In finding his place in his city, Gabriel the writer converts St. John's and its occupants into texts he can read. His voyeurism reaches such a point that he refers to autumn in St. John's as "the striptease of the city" (Winter 249). Gabe begins to spend more time observing the city than living in it – Lydia complains near the end of the text (and the relationship) that Gabe does not "instigate evenings out" (223). His constant observing grows increasingly unsettling to those he is watching. Early in the novel, he watches his friend Maisie through his binoculars as she walks home with her groceries, then decides to make a prank phone call:

I wait until Maisie is in her porch. I can see her run for the phone.

You should close your front door, missus.

Who is this.

I've frightened her. It's Gabe, I say.

Jeez, boy. (35)

His constant surveillance upsets Lydia, who begins to distance herself from him because of the way she is treated in his journal:

I felt like I couldnt say anything to you because you'd take it the wrong way and write it down in that journal.

You read it.

Yes.

Lydia.

Everything you write about me is rotten. (190)

Even as his relationship crumbles, Gabe cannot remove himself from the position of the observer. He commands himself, "I have to stop watching Lydia" (248), yet he continues to do so to the point that he begins stalking her. One night, Gabe follows Lydia and Craig Regular from a restaurant to a laundromat to Craig's home in the Battery, at one point actually tracking them in his car. Earlier in the text, Gabe proclaimed his love of walking: "Walking is the correct speed for rumination" (132). But now a walk in the city has become painful as the city and its people have changed and slipped from underneath the narrative he has constructed for them.

Throughout the text, Gabe expresses a fascination and fear of change. He makes an effort to be present when houses are being torn down and makes note of the places where buildings once stood before they were lost in a fire. The arrival of Craig Regular and his beguiling newness upsets him, for it marks a change in his relationship with Lydia and the dynamics of his social circle: "Why the interest in Craig Regular? Lydia: He's new. In this town, everybody knows everyone else even if you havent met them.

That explains Craig Regular” (151). Gabe admits, “Often I am afraid of new life. Of pushing into the new” and that “I always sense a panic at the thought of change” (146, 207). Yet this fear of change runs parallel with a desire to escape the city.

In *The Arcades Project*, Benjamin identifies the two sides of the “dialectic of flânerie.” One side is “the man who is utterly undiscoverable, the hidden man” (420). This is Gabe gazing out his panoptic bedroom window or writing in his diary, the man enjoying the “omnipresence of God” that flânerie affords him as he narrates the city (805). The other half of this dialectic, however, is “the man who feels himself viewed by all and sundry as a true suspect” (420). Gabriel and the city seem to have grown mutually tired of each other. The city and its citizens refuse to correspond with Gabe’s imagining of them: new buildings replace beloved landmarks, new people infiltrate and alter the closest social circles, and a presumed friend like Boyd Coady is revealed to be a master of breaking and entering, using the houses of friends and neighbours to conduct his everyday business:

I hear from Daphne that the police have found lots of evidence. Boyd Coady used seven houses in the neighbourhood. He’d break in, find a spare key, make a copy, and then study the patterns of the people who lived there. When he knew they were gone, he’d go in.

He left the television at Lydia’s because she didn’t have one, and he liked to watch TV while his laundry was on. (Winter 241)

The change he does notice is compounded by the unseen changes he later discovers, and Gabe is soon disenchanted with the city, exhausted by it. He becomes overwhelmed by

the city, yet remains insatiable, as if the city, though inexhaustible, offers only subtle variations on the same fare. The novel concludes with Gabe's statement of purpose: "I gotta leave this place. I gotta start over. I've used up everything here. I have got to let the city go fallow" (Winter 285). There is also his New Year's resolution: "I've decided to leave St. John's. I will head west and look for a desolate, foreign place. All that can happen to me here has happened" (286). This desire to head west, coupled with the fact that when he next appears in Winter's *The Architects Are Here*, he is living in Toronto, seems to indicate that Gabe has decided to defer for the moment the examination of himself and his homeland. In particular, he has decided to no longer simply "get out of town and explore Newfoundland" as he does with several of his city-dwelling friends throughout the narrative, but to leave the island all together (127).

The text abounds with a desire to leave the city. Gabe takes several trips to the house his friends Maisie and Oliver keep in the aptly named community of Heart's Desire. While in the outport community, he tries to play the part of the rural Newfoundlander, setting snares for grouse, though the sight of his tiny captured prey, "his chest flattened a little to the moss," makes him feel shame, and the act of cleaning and preparing the bird draws from him the promise: "Tomorrow I'm taking those snares up" (19). Gabe is much like Dave Purcell of *Rare Birds*, lost outside in his rural surroundings: he lights a kerosene lamp and brings it outside only to see it doused by the wind; rather than wait for the freezer to thaw, he uses a hammer and destroys the Freon tubing; he idles when he should be chopping wood to fuel the fire during his stay. Each of

these acts elicits the same derisive head shaking from local boys Josh and Toby, who become friendly with Gabe and endlessly amused by his ineptitude.

Upon hearing the boys list the names and affairs of every family in every house in Heart's Desire, he longs for the communal closeness so often attributed to the Newfoundland character: "They are far more knowledgeable of the people they love than I am of my own" (17). He is enraptured by the notion of a more primordial relationship with the island, as evidenced in the observation he makes on a "boil-up" on the rocky beach in Goat Cove just outside St. John's: "We listen to the pull and suck of the water's ebb, remembering our mother's bellies ... We all remember gentler times as the tide claws at stones. We all want, for a moment, to return to some simpler existence" (89-90). There is a desire (sometimes suppressed, sometimes unidentified) amongst Gabe and his friends to be the Newfoundlanders they so obviously are not and cannot be.

Gabe and his friends make forays outside St. John's to experience Newfoundland and often find themselves paying to enjoy events created to capitalize on the tourist industry: "We are on a boat trip out of Bay Bulls, to see whales and puffins" (129). Gabriel is at times as unconnected to the outports of Newfoundland as are the tourists who visit the island. As he wearies of the city, Gabe also grows anxious, for he knows if he detaches himself from St. John's, he risks losing himself:

I say to [Alex], I'm blowing this popsicle stand. This entire city. I'm leaving it. I'm going to drive my trusty Jethro to Heart's Desire and never come back.

Alex asks if I need company.

I wouldn't be good company.

You'd be a useless article.

Precisely. (280-81)

Gabe's concession that outside St. John's he would be a "useless article" hints at the anxiety and unhomeliness at the core of his character and the indecision that makes him a *flâneur*. Even as he lives in it, the city and its occupants are changing, and as Chambers notes, "rapid change can make a reader of anyone" (217). Gabe soon finds himself "walking around two cities at once," strolling through a city that has become *unheimlich* yet "sutured to an *énonciation* that 'haunts' it, without being fully or securely retrievable (the city of one's memory)" (Chambers 217). He knows his city and it knows him, but as Gabe's relationship with Lydia deteriorates, making interaction with mutual friends especially painful, he also knows that he has to find a place for himself outside this city. This realization is frightening for Gabriel, who experiences a new level of unhomeliness, this time not as a city dweller but as a Newfoundlander. He has seen the rolling of the eyes he receives from people outside his circle when he discusses the act of writing. His idleness and ineptitude have been marked by Toby and Josh in Heart's Desire. Having "used up" the city, Gabriel now vaults into the unknown, a fearsome leap that threatens to destroy his identity.

Gabe plays the role of the settled urbanite, the master of the metropolis. He frequents the clubs and taverns deemed the domain of the city's artists and thinkers; he remains trendy and *nouveau*, like Benjamin's *flâneur* who took a tortoise out walking in the streets of Paris. He skis downtown over snow-covered streets, attends erotic poetry

readings, and even permits his artist friend to make a mould of his buttocks. Yet the text also abounds with a desire to leave the city. Like Fielding and Wiseman, Gabe is a *flâneur* who has grown uncomfortable in the city on which he has founded his identity. These incidents of unhomeliness force these characters to look outside the city for a sense of place and in doing so question their own conflation of St. John's and Newfoundland identities. As historians, journalists, academics and artists focused on a particular Newfoundland "frozen in time," these characters move outside the city and realize what they have been deferring through their leisurely meditations is the knowledge that the Newfoundland they have called home may never have existed anywhere but in their own imaginations.

Chapter 7

Surviving St. John's in Lisa Moore's *Alligator* and Kenneth J. Harvey's *Inside*

In both *The Night Season* and *This All Happened*, the urban-centric view of the novels' protagonists turns in the end toward a mythologized rural and natural Newfoundland. Both Will Wiseman and Gabriel English find (or believe they find) the source of their redemption from the metropolitan malaise and ennui that plagues them. In this respect, these city novels are similar to the historical and romantic *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams* and *Gaff Topsails*, all of them preoccupied with the protagonists' realization of their relationship with Newfoundland and their particular place upon the island. This literary depiction of a physical and spiritual move from the city to the country is not new, nor is it peculiar to Newfoundland, as the authors of *Writing the City: Eden, Babylon, and the New Jerusalem* make clear:

In a wide variety of texts from the classical period to the present day the urban and rural have been placed in diametric opposition, to the advantage of the latter. In this view the city is seen as the site of guile, corruption, intrigue and false values, as against the positive, natural, straightforward values of the countryside. To escape from the city and live far from courts and princes is to make a choice in favor of a kind of authenticity that can only be found in the pastoral life. (Preston 2)

Annie Proulx's Quoye forsakes his half-lived, aimless urban existence amongst New York's heartless users and predators to find his identity as village journalist and protector of the Newfoundland pastoral in *The Shipping News*. Similarly, having "used up" St.

John's by the end of *This All Happened*, Gabriel English envisions a productive future in the outport community of Heart's Desire. Even the city-born, pothole-loving Sheilagh Fielding has to retreat to the Newfoundland interior to complete her "Condensed *History of Newfoundland*" and concludes *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams* with wistful depictions of the island wilderness. In each instance, Newfoundland is portrayed as an island between two worlds: encroached upon by modernity, yet still possessing pockets of the redemptive pastoral. The urban-rural dichotomy remains a defining disparity within these novels as protagonists extricate themselves from the metropolitan masses to discover their true selves among the bogs and barrens. Two recent St. John's novels, Lisa Moore's *Alligator* (2005) and Kenneth J. Harvey's *Inside* (2006), either openly criticize or completely ignore this pervasive infatuation with an idyllic Newfoundland to present two narratives that do not re-establish the division between nature and the city but rather perform an ecocritical examination of the city itself.

Inside, the narrative of a man released from prison into the surprisingly gritty world of downtown St. John's, has more in common with an Elmore Leonard depiction of Detroit than it does with any other Newfoundland fiction. *Alligator*, though possessing a character obsessed with portraying "the desolate, violent landscape and human triumph over nature" she sees at the core of Newfoundland identity, is more concerned with the predatory nature of St. John's and its inhabitants (Moore 38). Both novels present the city as an urban jungle, far removed from the "Dublin folded into Paris" depiction of St. John's in *This All Happened* (Winter 88). Moore and Harvey enter the world of "Government of Newfoundland blue cheques" and low-income housing so disdained and

dismissed by Winter's haughty *flâneur*, Gabriel (117). What Gabriel sees as "so cliché," the characters of *Alligator* and *Inside* live as reality (117). Moreover, unlike Gabriel, who decides to leave St. John's, to "get out of town and explore Newfoundland," many of these characters are trapped within the financial and physical confines of their St. John's universe (127).

One of the obstacles between Johnston's Joe Smallwood and the modernization of Newfoundland in *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams* is the isolation of the outport communities. "Nothing so enisles you as the sea," Joe claims as he discusses the purpose of "The Barrelman," a radio program to "make Newfoundland better known to Newfoundlanders" (Johnston 389, 385). In adopting the jingoistic persona of the Barrelman, Joe "wanted to make it possible for [his] audience to suspend its disbelief in the existence of the outside world... the supply boats that came from some nebulous elsewhere and put into each bay once a month could not do that. Nor did the large ships that appeared, mirage-like, on the horizon, or the seagull-sized planes the people saw but could not hear" (389). Joe reflects often on the enisled nature of Newfoundland and "how cut off from the world in both space and time these people were" (355), especially when considering the lives of his outport audience. He says, "the whole island seemed to me a glorified outport, so hemmed in that to own a car was pointless, absurd, a mere reminder of your confinement" (390).

On one of his several island-wide treks, Joe awakes to look out the train window at the barren Newfoundland wilderness, sparsely dotted with "small, unaccountably located towns a hundred miles apart, nothing more than clumps of houses really, all with

their porch lights on but otherwise unlit, occupied by people who, though it passed by every night, rarely saw or even heard the train" (143). Considering this reflection occurs as Joe is moving through the Gaff Topsails, it is not hard to see this passage as an homage to Patrick Kavanagh's novel, in which the outport dwellers, entombed in their "womb-cove" communities, would often misinterpret "the drone of an airplane behind the clouds, or the horn of a steamer passing through the fog, or, in the calm of night, the moan of a locomotive sounding down the corridors of the land...to be the lament of the Boo Darby, suffering in beastly solitude somewhere in the wilderness" (Kavanagh 139). Outport isolation breeds superstition and backwardness in both novels, as Joe notes when discussing his travels to unionize fishermen: "The farther from the ice-free part of the coast I travelled, the more eccentric became the people I encountered" (Johnston 353). Barriers of belief, language, and history turn each community into an island unto itself, as each outport, each Newfoundlander, becomes further enisled by his own place-bound peculiarity.

Yet Joe sees evidence of this enislement within the city, particularly between himself and his family and Fielding and the rest of the community. When not travelling the island, Smallwood is a restless soul, often leaving his home in the middle of the night and driving through the streets of St. John's: "Sometimes, late at night, I drove down Cochrane Street, past her boarding house, where Fielding's was often the only light still on. I pictured her up there, pursuing her solitary occupation while the city slept" (390-91). This notion of enislement is best defined by J. Hillis Miller in his artful discussion of Derrida: "One further consequence of Derrida's assumption that each of us is enisled is

the following: not only am I isolated from others, with no isthmus across to them, but also they are isolated from me, radically impenetrable and secret" (Miller 267).

Smallwood's solitary drives through the city, Fielding's self-imposed enislement, and Miller's discussion of the "radical inaccessibility" (267) of the other person bring to mind Raymond Williams' classic examination of urban isolation: "the new qualities of the modern city had been associated, from the beginning, with a man walking, as if alone, in its streets" (Williams 233):

This is usually true also of those frequent episodes, from Dickens to Wells, in which a character enters a sleeping city and is overwhelmed by the thought of all the hidden lives so close to him. Yet this experience, clearly, could go either way: into an affirmation of common humanity, past the barriers of crowded strangeness; or into an emphasis of isolation, of mystery—an ordinary feeling that can become a terror. (234)

In *The Country and the City*, Williams demonstrates how "[s]truggle, indifference, loss of purpose, loss of meaning...have found, in the City, a habitation and a name" (239).

Examining the urban meditations of Hardy, Wordsworth and others, Williams discovers a common and lamentable paradox: "that in the great city itself, the very place and agency—or so it would seem—of collective consciousness, it is an absence of common feeling, an excessive subjectivity, that seems to be characteristic" (215). Harvey's *Inside* and Moore's *Alligator* further demonstrate that the condition of enislement is not the sole property of Newfoundland outporters and that St. John's, though hardly a metropolis, is a city large enough to foster the indifference, alienation, and violence that plague so many

city dwellers.

In *Inside*, Harvey creates an asphalt jungle within St. John's that encapsulates all the classical elements of the urban wilderness as discussed by Andrew Light in "Boyz in the Woods: Urban Wilderness in American Cinema": separation, savagery, and superiority. This "wilderness" is marked, it is dangerous, and it is separate from the world of more "civilized" urbanites. The inhabitants of this wasteland are savages, unrepentant villains who seem to abhor anything related to innocence or happiness. While the notion of superiority may recall Gabriel English's snobbish contempt for the welfare recipients he recoils from in the grocery store, it is the awareness of a "better life" outside the borders of this danger zone that motivates the protagonist of Harvey's novel. While he knows this "superior" existence is beyond his grasp, Myrden believes he can help his daughter and granddaughter escape to this more promising world.

Moore's *Alligator* focuses on the interrelated stories of several characters living in St. John's. Echoing Williams' analysis of urban-focused literature, what is so remarkable about this novel is the lack of connection between these characters, despite countless opportunities for meaningful relationships. The title reflects the predatory nature, fierce territoriality, and cold reptilian indifference of characters who take advantage of each other through violence and theft or heartlessly dismiss one another. The characters can be placed in either of two categories: predator or prey – or, as Lorne Foster puts it in his analysis of Elmore Leonard's novels, "the mark and the operator" (Foster 139): "The mark observes the strict rules of conduct and social convention" and is therefore easy prey for the operator, who is a "*camofleur* – continually refining the art of the false front

in order to score or ‘cut a deal in the city’” (139, 140). The more natural Newfoundland becomes an unwelcome, unnatural presence in Moore’s St. John’s, embodied by a floundering film project trying to capture the epic relationship between man and island or by the unsettling, disorienting presence of the elm spanworms who make the city hazardous and unhomey to even its lifelong occupants.

“City Primeval”: *Inside the mind of the Alpha Male*

Inside is the story of Myrden, released from prison after serving fourteen years for the murder of Doreen Stagg. New DNA evidence has exonerated Myrden – new evidence that further vilifies Myrden’s ogreish former drinking companions who testified against him in the trial. The semi-human Grom, Squid and Willis serve as foils throughout the novel, as the returned king of this urban jungle tries to reclaim his throne and ensure the safety of his daughter Jackie (trapped in an abusive relationship with Willis) and his granddaughter, the angelic Caroline, who need only say “Poppy” to cloud her otherwise stoic grandfather’s eyes with tears.

Much like Quoye in *The Shipping News*, Myrden is never identified beyond his surname, though he is occasionally referred to as “Mr. Myrden” by the journalists who hound him and the lawyer who helps negotiate Myrden’s lucrative compensation from the province. Unlike Quoye, whose “return” to Newfoundland was regenerative and redemptive, Myrden knows that no salvation awaits him upon his release from prison. Where Quoye’s ignorance of the island only further facilitates his opportunity to reshape and improve himself, Myrden possesses what Mary Ann Caws terms “city-knowing,” an intimate knowledge of “city misery, physical and mental,...loneliness and loss and

powerlessness" that prohibits the possibility of awe and wonder that serves as Quoye's salvation (Caws 1, 6). Whereas the absence of Quoye's first name makes possible the fashioning of a new self and the rise above the legacy of "omalooors" attached to the Quoye name, Myrden's missing moniker only underscores the burden of his surname and the impossibility of redemption. The reporters who await Myrden's release and perch parasitically outside his home continually call his name and remind him of the legacy attached to it: "Are you concerned that your sons and daughter will continue with your lifestyle? Your granddaughter, too... One of your sons is in prison. One dead. Driving while impaired. His girlfriend, too. Killed in the same crash. Your other two sons have long histories of offences... Your mother was killed when she was forty-six. Killed by your father" (Harvey 16, 18).

These scrounging, scavenging reporters are the first real indication of the animalistic nature of Harvey's novel, of the urban wilderness that is Harvey's (and Myrden's) St. John's. As Myrden retreats from the reporters in his return home, he moves through several barriers separating the world of civilized society from his more primal environment. "Separation" is the first of three theses Light discusses when detailing the "classical view of wilderness." "Because the wilderness is bad, evil, cruel, et cetera, it must be separated from humans—it must be marked off as distinct and kept out of civilized spaces" (Light 139). Sitting in the back of his son's car, Myrden watches the neighbourhoods grow progressively poorer as he nears home:

The houses began to change. The bungalows and older houses with nice yards turned to smaller houses with smaller yards, and then row houses.

Doorsteps right on the asphalt curb. No yards. No sidewalks. Children in the street. Playing like they owned the place. Not minding the cars. The cars were meant to watch out. For them. See what happens if you hit me. Go ahead. See where that'll get you. Adults standing in their doorways, watching the cars move by. One or two of them shouting at a child, or raising their hands. (Harvey 7)

Discussing Myrden's future financial plans, the lawyer handling his case reveals that he "grew up" with Myrden's daughter, yet his description of where he lived in relation to Jackie demonstrates the definite border between the wilderness and civilization: "I was right on the cusp, the edge. You know what those streets are like. The dividing line. Good neighbourhood. Bad neighbourhood. One street to the next" (39). As Peter Preston and Paul Simpson-Housley note in their introduction to *Writing the City*, "Cities are not homogenous places, one and indivisible, they have their zones, with boundaries, both visible and invisible" (Preston 11). The commercial and entertainment districts and the suburban, more affluent housing are often divided by "a 'twilight zone' of poor housing" (11).

The people who constitute Myrden's world in *Inside* are the "riff-raff" against whom the mind of Headmaster Reeves "balks" in *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams*: "The riff-raff are out there, we know by extrapolation from Smallwood that they exist, but luckily for us, we cannot picture them" (Johnston 38). Like young Smallwood and his family, this riff-raff is divided from civilized society. It is during one of the many Smallwood family relocations that Joe realizes they are moving to the deepest urban

wilderness:

We were headed as far from the favoured part of town as it was possible to go, to the south side, the “Brow” of which my mother often spoke as though it lay in outer darkness. It was the least desirable, most scorned of all the city’s neighbourhoods; the home, even those brought up like me had been led to believe, of people one step up from savages, the dregs, the scruff of society, a kind of company town whose single industry was crime. A Pariahville of ironically elevated bottom-dwellers. (14)

Recuperating from a heart attack, Myrden stares out his window at this same neighbourhood, still dangerous, though almost a century after Johnston’s Joe moved there: “Small square houses. Perched on the hill. A tough neighbourhood. The Brow. They called it. He knew people from up there” (Harvey 171). Earlier in the novel, Myrden is still accepting visitors and well-wishers “from the street and one or two streets over,” one from the dangerous street alluded to by Boyd Coady in *This All Happened*. Replying to the enquiry of Myrden’s friend as to who he is, an old man sharing a beer with Myrden identifies himself as Paddy French “[f]rom Casey Street” (41, 45). Harvey thus establishes Myrden as a prominent resident in the legendary wilderness of St. John’s, a man befriended by the “ironically elevated bottom-dwellers” of the city and intimately familiar with a street so violent it has become part of a well-known threat. Myrden is an urban lion, an alpha male temporarily captured, but now released to reclaim his wild kingdom.

Myrden knows how to navigate (and sometimes gravitate towards) the dangers in

his neighbourhood: "He'd spent his life knowing everyone. Every square foot. A child facing an adult. Who to fear. Who was kind. Who would beat you. Take you inside. Scare you" (29). He is accustomed and attuned to the sounds of this jungle: "The booming echo of a body hitting wood. The houses on the streets all connected. You could feel that sort of thing if you were five houses down. The rumble. Day or night" (46). Enjoying a brief respite at his friend Randy's apartment in another section of town, Myrden notices the absence of noise: "He liked Randy's apartment. It was quiet. No one beating on anyone else in the house. Or next door either. No violence in the walls" (129). The repetitious sounds of violence mark another of Light's aspects of the urban jungle: "the inner city is just as dangerous, violent, and chaotic as the most uninformed outsider would imagine" (Light 143). While no credible depiction of St. John's could incorporate the level of violence found in Leonard's Detroit, Harvey's city is shocking for its frequent violence and the acceptance of homicide as a possibility. Randy waits in a running car while Myrden enters the house his daughter and granddaughter share with Willis. Finding both Jackie and Caroline at the mercy of Willis, Myrden almost kills the man: "One rush forward. Got Willis by the throat. One hand. Dead tight grip on the throat. Not a speck of air getting in" (Harvey 46). Having not left the car, Randy is unclear as they drive away whether his friend has murdered Willis or simply injured him. His casual questioning of Myrden and lack of concern reveal an understanding within this neighbourhood that a violent death is a very real and sometimes desired possibility:

"Should I be driving faster?" Randy asked.

"No." The heart in his chest began to quiet.

"He's still breathing then."

He nodded.

They drove around for a while. Both of them watching straight ahead.

Randy lit a cigarette and plucked a draw from it. He plucked more draws from it. Thinking hard. Then he put it out. Crushed it out.

"That's too bad," Randy said. (49)

Harvey further separates Myrden's world from another St. John's through the depiction of the bars frequented by Myrden and his friends and the George Street bars peddled by tourism and culture industries. Countless websites, television programs, and tourist pamphlets describe George Street as having the most pubs per square foot of any street in North America. Frequently listed as a "must see" location in Newfoundland, George Street is a place Myrden avoids. The people who frequent Myrden's favoured bars are "[n]ot like the people up on George Street" whom Myrden despises: "Everyone done up to get fucked. He never went there. Stuck to his own bars. The darker ones where the people couldn't talk" (71). Myrden's bars are occupied by another type of people, another species, marked and different from the laughing masses on George Street: "There was something about the people that he loved. They were heart-mangled. Not just for the moment or for the week or month. It was their family legacy. To exist in these places... All of them crippled over and crawling" (72). Johnston uses the word "chthonic" to describe the isolated and eccentric outporters he meets while trying to spread the word of Confederation: "Their homes were worlds unto themselves. The fishermen were...residents of chthonic origin, sprung from the earth or whatever little island or cove

they had grown up in" (Johnston 454). Faced with fellow Newfoundlanders who are also so irreconcilably "other," Joe imagines them to have some alternate origin, to be birthed of some underworld separate from his familiar island. So too are Harvey's characters "other" to the revellers walking the well-financed, well-lit commercial areas of St. John's.

Denizens of a St. John's underworld, these characters frequent bars far from the bright lights of George Street: "The smell of beer drank for years. Cigarettes fizzled out in beer bottles. Drinkers who drank from morning until dark. Daybreak to blackness coming early. Shutting down the day" (67). The "[g]reasy black hair" of people one would be wise to "[h]ave nothing to do with" further distinguish this separate St. John's, a disconcerting "twilight zone" within the city. Through his examination of Myrden's world, Harvey creates the disconcerting diversity Richard Lehan claims unsettles the city in *The City and Literature*:

Diversity is the key to urban beginnings and continuities, and diversity is also the snake in the urban garden, challenging systems of order and encouraging disorder and chaos... Such diversity led inevitably to the "Other"—an urban element, usually a minority, deemed "outside" the community. But in mythic-symbolic terms, an embodiment of the Other is the mysterious stranger—the Dionysus figure in the early city, the mysterious man from nowhere, who disrupts the city from within. (Lehan 8)

In discussing particular depictions of the urban wilderness, Light notes, "the separation of

one part of the city from another is justified and rational" (Light 143). Read in the light of Lehan and Light's comments, *Inside* demonstrates the fear created by a character like Myrden, released and soon to be financially powerful. His impending settlement for fourteen years of wrongful imprisonment provides Myrden with a crossover power he never possessed nor could hope to attain prior to his incarceration. Myrden is Lehan's mysterious stranger, preparing to disrupt the city from within. His greatest transgression across that border between urban jungle and civilization is the purchasing of a house for his daughter and granddaughter in the suburbs, amongst the working, respectable class: "A quiet cul de sac. No fast cars going through there. The neighbours were busy. Work and then leisure. Kept to themselves" (Harvey 212-13). Myrden acknowledges the enormity of this crossing, noting that others from his neighbourhood are not capable of such a passage, are in fact living proof that this separation is "justified and rational":

There were plenty of people who could do with a house. Plenty of people who needed more space. He could name a hundred of them. Bigger rooms. Brighter kitchens. But those people would turn against it. That house. Live in it and not care. Make it into a slum. Just to prove a point. Nothing worth anything. Nothing ever lasts. He knew it. All that they knew. Ever. Care for nothing. Owed a living. (213)

It is this savagery within himself and his neighbours that Myrden perceives as the most telling difference between those who live in the "tough neighbourhood" and those who frolic on a "quiet cul de sac." As Light notes, this savagery is corrupting and frightening and "beyond salvation" (Light 144).

The second thesis of the classical view of the wilderness is savagery: "The inhabitants of the wilderness are nonhuman beasts and are to be accordingly demonized and vilified" (139). Light notes, "the suggestion of corruption from exposure to this environment is the most evocative of the effects of wilderness on the civilized" (146). Shortly after his release, Myrden is back outside the gates of the penitentiary to collect his youngest son Bobby. He already sees in his son the sign of one who is damned: "You're going back in," he said to his son. In the past, he wouldn't have said a word. Thinking it wasn't his place. Let them live. Let them learn" (Harvey 91). Myrden notes that Bobby is "snarky-looking now. Disrespectful" (91). The father cringes at the lack of respect his son shows the woman who drives him home from the prison, but is most likely upset by the similarity he sees between himself and Bobby:

He turned to look at his son. Face like his father's.

Bobby was watching Mrs. Brophy's face.

"Who're you?" He asked.

"I'm from the Society for the Wrongfully Convicted."

"Yeah." Bobby stared at her. His eyes flooding with darkness. "That's your fucking name?"

His wife snickered.

"Watch your language," he said. (88)

Myrden undoubtedly feels guilty for being incarcerated for fourteen of the eighteen years his son has been alive and attempts giving Bobby some long overdue fatherly advice, but the son balks at the suggestion of finding a job: "A job!... What's that?... Sure, you're

rich. What'd I need a job for?" (91). For Bobby, the only reality, the only means to survival is crime: "Schemes already set up. Crime was nothing but a laugh... It was all anger with him. He was going to show them. Take what he could get" (90). It does not take long for Myrden to dismiss his son as a lost cause: "Fool, he thought. He didn't like it. The sound of Bobby's voice. Stupid boy" (91).

Bobby's time in this text amounts to little more than ten pages. His fate is worse than his father prophesized, and Bobby is murdered, following the destiny of his older brother Chris, who was beaten to death in an alleyway. It is now that Myrden begins to feel the tremendous burden of his family name and truly begins to fear for the futures of Jackie and Caroline. At Bobby's funeral, Jackie touches her father for the first time since his release from prison, and Myrden instantly realizes the inescapable trap he has created for his family: "Her warm fingers through his thin white glove. Holding on like when she was small. She gave his hand a little squeeze. That's all it took. Tears pouring down his cheeks. Jackie. I'm so sorry" (95-96). Later that day as Jackie sings in his kitchen, "[t]he tone in her voice all full of Bobby," Myrden sees his daughter and granddaughter as out of place in these surroundings (97). Jackie with a voice "[s]weet like an angel's," Caroline on his lap with her "sweet face... Sweet lips. Sweet cheeks. Eyes full of wonder" (97) must be rescued from this world, their sweetness preserved before it succumbs to the sour Myrden legacy. These angels have no place in the animalistic world of Myrden and his sons.

Light discusses the savagery of the "nonhuman beasts" who dwell in the urban jungle, and Harvey follows suit with his depiction of Myrden and the others who reside in

his wild kingdom. Yet Myrden does not limit his animalization to the residents of this asphalt jungle. The most derogatory depictions are of the reporters who live a sycophantic existence outside Myrden's home. Harvey seems to reflect Light's third thesis of the urban wilderness, superiority, in the obsession these reporters have with Myrden and his family. They appear to be parasites devouring Myrden's misfortune, as if the deeper his villainy the more lofty their position. In *This All Happened*, Winter has his narrator become one of the gawking masses at the murder site of Derek Druken, who was allegedly killed by his brother in 1996. Unable to resist the pull of the place, Gabe and Max "walk down and see the corner of the hill cordoned off with yellow police tape. The stain where the dead man lay. A mother is crying into a television camera" (Winter 236). Harvey portrays life on the other side of the yellow tape, as Myrden awakes in the morning after his son's murder to the parasitic feeding frenzy outside his home: "The microphones and cameras were there the next morning. He heard them outside the door. More than usual. The sound telling him something wasn't right. More chaos. The more chaos the more of them. Maggots and stink" (Harvey 93). In Harvey's urban jungle, the bottom feeders are those leeches who sneak in at opportune moments, the bloodsucking reporters who gorge themselves on woe, who "made a living digging things up. Drooling over it," then feeding it to others living outside the jungle parameters (86).

The reporters are not the only parasites in Harvey's wild St. John's. Upon his release, Myrden is surrounded by a host of scavengers and scroungers – urban jackals who can smell Myrden's impending financial settlement and quickly circle to feed: "People came to see him. Sat in the kitchen... Then they'd ask him what he was going to

do with all his money... Always that smile. What a stroke of luck. You'll be on Easy Street... Randy called them the People Making the Pilgrimage to the Holy Shrine of Future Wealth" (42). The great parasite of this piece is Myrden's wife, a marvellous depiction of desperation and deviousness, who promptly uses the media exposure to align herself with her newly absolved husband and claw ever closer to Myrden's settlement:

His wife hanging onto him. Hugging too hard. Her bony grip strong for such a small woman. She'd come to see him inside. Once a month maybe. Tell him what he had done wrong. Why he was in there. Tell him about her problems.... Now, she was hugging him. Squeezing his arm. Laughing back at the crowd. "Innocent as the lamb," she said to everyone. "Knew it all along." (8)

Myrden's wife is also unnamed, as if her animalistic nature prevents such domesticity. She constantly hounds Myrden to "get at it" and sue the government for his wrongful conviction (23). Her actions recall the tearing and ripping of a vulture as she grabs a package containing a gift for Caroline. She tears the bag open, callously tosses it aside when she realizes there is nothing in there of benefit to her, then demands of her husband, "You got any money on you" (24). The wife snatches the money in much the same way she later "snatched up a pen" to sign for the compensation cheque. At the signing, Myrden's wife transforms herself into a scavenger, fearful that someone would take something rightfully hers, constantly licking her lips as she signs document after document, each one getting her closer to the cheque. Upon seeing the amount of the settlement that is lost to the lawyer's fees her "eyes went shifty" and she complains,

“‘That’s almost half,’ she said. Licked at her lips” (184).

Myrden’s wife is possessed of the single-mindedness of a parasite or insatiable predator. She scoffs at the lawyer’s suggestion at investment: “Won’t last long. Money’s for spending,” and appears near the end of the novel wasting the money on frivolous expenses: “I’m in my new car. A Cadillac. Got a driver. On Slattery Street. By the supermarket. Going to bingo” (191, 275). Like a parasite, her only concern is her next meal. When Myrden disappears for several days, his wife admits that she “had to keep checking the money” in fear that he may have taken it all (275). Her desire to consume until there is nothing left is a common mindset in this world, as the lawyer notes as Myrden’s wife greedily snatches the cheque: “The lawyer said nothing. He’d seen it before. People with free money. Friends and family members with ideas. With plans. Nothing left in a year. Pissed away” (191).

This book is at its most animalistic in the clash between males. Though Bobby, in refusing to get a job because his father is now “rich,” appears to have inherited the parasitic traits of his mother, most males in *Inside* are predators fighting for the position of alpha male. Myrden reverts to his animal instincts almost immediately upon release from captivity: “Fresh air. Fresh noise and movement that hurt his ears and eyes... His body filled with warning. Muscles stiffening” (4). Myrden is the alpha male returned to his former territory, but in his absence the lesser males have moved up. Alex Gilbert now lives with Myrden’s wife and is seen only once, near the beginning of the novel, “Sipping his beer. Waiting. Watching. Saying nothing. Alex full of fear because he was out now. Not in for life after all” (14). Willis, one of the men who testified against Myrden, now

lives with Jackie and terrorizes both her and her daughter. This claiming of females normally under the protection of the alpha Myrden recalls the Darwinian treatment of literature in David and Nanette Barash's *Madame Bovary's Ovaries*.

According to the Barashes, mythic heroes like Achilles are not very different from silverback gorillas posturing for "direct access to fertile females and achieving social status" (Barash 28). At the party celebrating his release, Myrden is overwhelmed with questions, most of them relating to his loss of territory and women: "What was he going to do to Grom?" (12). "Didn't Grom make it all up? Didn't he? Grom. The bastard. He'll get his now. You'll show him. Lying fucker. He'll be put away instead. He'll get his" (13). Alex is brought to Myrden's attention, as are Jackie and Caroline and their living arrangement with Willis. Though he has no interest in rekindling what little relationship there was between him and his wife, Myrden is still driven, perhaps by a biological imperative, to recoup the status he possessed before his imprisonment. This is not unlike the analysis of Achilles' anger in *Madame Bovary's Ovaries*:

The famous wrath of Achilles—an undoubtedly dominant male—is kindled by the fact that Agamemnon...had taken the gorgeous Briseis from Achilles. Not insignificantly, Briseis had been "given" to Achilles as a reward for some earlier heroic exploits, all of which involved killing other men. It is made clear, however, that Achilles isn't so much enamored of Briseis as he is of his own reputation. His anger derives from the threat to his social status and prestige. (Barash 29)

Fourteen years' wrongful imprisonment is an injustice of mythic proportions, and

Myrden is driven by the same animalistic impulses as Achilles to reclaim what he fought so hard to earn.

Myrden is not so much driven by revenge as he is by a biological desire to protect his offspring. The tragedy that promises to be fulfilled in this novel is the eventual realization that Myrden himself cannot escape this world and can only guarantee the safety of Jackie and Caroline through the basic, primal, and deadly confrontation between him and the other upstart males. Myrden's first step on this journey is a visit to Grom, whose guttural grunt of a name early establishes his animalistic status. His first name, Manny, reminds the reader that Grom is more manlike than man. His appearance only further solidifies him as one of Light's "nonhuman beasts": "Grom was on the couch. Fat as ever" (31). A pretender to the throne who cannot even raise himself without the help of his son, Grom appears to be enjoying what meagre opulence his pathetic kingdom provides. Wheezing throughout their hostile though eerily calm conversation, Grom actually finds it hard to talk "because he was so fat" (32). Noting Grom's puffy eyes, three chins and sallow skin, Myrden wonders, "How did he stay alive" (32). Smelling of grease and fish, Grom is like some beached ocean mammal. His description calls to mind Robin Fox's discussion of the Greeks on the beach in *The Iliad*: "The Greek warriors, beached on the sands of Troy, very much resemble giant elephant seals angling for upward mobility in the social and reproductive hierarchy. Those who top the hierarchy are men like Achilles, Ajax, Odysseus, Agamemnon, and Diomedes—they are huge, sleek, bellicose animals" (cited in Barash 29). Though huge and bellicose, Grom is far from sleek, and this perhaps explains his less than complete success as alpha in Myrden's

absence. His physical inability to angle for "upward mobility" is proven when he extends an arm to be tugged from the couch.

Grom's house is marked by savagery and uncivilized behaviour. An emaciated mongrel patrols the yard, barking and straining against its chain. Grom's mother presents a line of first defence against Myrden's entry, wheezing, screeching, cursing and finally threatening Myrden with a crowbar. Grom's misidentification of his son as his grandson is reminiscent of the type of wildness that greeted the members of the Amulree Commission in *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams*, the man from Spaniard's Bay admitting to the commission that "half the children don't know who their fathers is" (Johnston 338). The foul string of invectives let loose by the boy only further establishes these folk as urban savages: "'Fuck off.' It was the boy. 'I know who you are. You fuck off, now.' He was ten. Maybe eleven" (Harvey 33).

Once Grom is pulled from the couch, he reunites with Willis and Squid to form a threatening pack of dogs who finally face Myrden. In the darkness of an after hours pub, Grom and the others encircle Myrden as he sits at the bar: "They were on all sides of him in a second. Grom on his right. Squid and Willis on his left. Elbows on the bar" (103). Light analyzes a similar scene in the film *Falling Down* in which that protagonist finds himself in "a cramped, trapped space...caught within a closing circle...in the position of prey trapped by circling wolves" (Light 144). Myrden is no prey, and his own anger frightens him the most, even as his potential predators move in: "He kept staring into his drink. The coils tightening in his shoulders and arms, in his stomach and jaw. If they wound too tight it would be over for all of them. A roar would leap out as he spun

around. A flash and no one left standing. Every worthless person snapped in so many places" (Harvey 101). These men are more threatened by Myrden than he is by them, for everything they have gained was earned in his absence, and therefore their right to it is now questioned by Myrden's freedom. Whether he wants it or not, Myrden is like "Gregory Peck in *The Gunfighter*...facing down blustering young toughs with a frontier-man's courage and true grit" (Foster 129). Harvey's St. John's has more in common with the wild west than the Canadian east, complete with barroom brawls, frontier justice, and dangerous wilderness. Myrden's showdown with these men is pre-empted by the rise of another animalistic character, the beta male.

Grom's goading of Myrden is more than a mindless butting of heads. He knows that Myrden is under intense media scrutiny and that a beating at the hands of this man could actually be good for Grom. No matter the result of the altercation, every option seems to favour Grom: a severe or even deadly beating of Myrden removes the greatest threat to Grom's tenuous hold on power. A victory for Myrden could only result in Myrden being incarcerated again. Unfortunately for Grom and his cronies, Randy is aware of this as well and saves Myrden from dirtying his hands. Grom's insincere condolences to Myrden over Bobby's death reveal a truth to Myrden that stirs him to action: "It hit him. It shook him. Not just the death, but the way Grom said it. The apology. The way the words were shaped. The way it told him that Grom was part of it. He turned his head and looked at Grom's face. The rum in his eyes spoke. Explained everything" (104). Myrden moves to hit Grom, but the big man disappears into the darkness. Randy has come to the defence of his leader, unleashing a violent beating on

the men that leaves two of them in comas. Randy grabs anything he can find to administer the beating: bottles, an old man's cane, and a chair he swings until only a splintered leg remains in his hand. During the fight that leaves the entire room flecked with blood, Randy appears like a rabid animal – notably not a lion who can afford stances of bravado, but a rat who must fight until no one else is moving: “Randy there. Belting Grom three times in the face. Hard. Fast. Randy's face screwed up the way it was when he was the angriest he could be. Nose squat higher. Teeth showing like a rat's” (105). Though brutal, Randy is also brilliant, saving Myrden from further jail time and temporarily eliminating three of the greatest obstacles between Myrden and the safety of his family.

Randy has all the characteristics of what several Newfoundlanders would term a “cracky”: “A small, noisy mongrel dog” (*DNE*). Like a small dog, Randy's defence is his bark, and he never stops speaking. Bringing his car to an abrupt stop to avoid killing a crossing pedestrian, Randy cannot help but bark back at the angry face: “I stopped didn't I?... I didn't kill ya... Get over it... Yeah, you better run. I got a murderer in here” (Harvey 20). Myrden, the “murderer” in the passenger seat, can only remark: “You're mouth is something” (20). The first description of Randy reminds one of a dog, like the maltreated one tethered in Grom's backyard: “Randy laughed the way he always did. Like a bunch of barks strung together. Nothing ever bothered him... Silver cross on a silver chain... His thin face with the scrap of beard. Bright eyes always searching” (9). Randy is Myrden's most loyal companion, the beta male to Myrden's alpha. Randy remains on guard at Myrden's home, mocking and challenging the “pilgrims” who have

in fair weather come to reminisce with a man they had all but forgotten.

Though not exactly an “operator,” Randy is certainly a *camofleur* as defined by Foster: “continually refining the art of the false front.” Like the small dog who barks and bites to stay alive, Randy often strikes first, knowing the larger men like Grom and Willis could overpower him if given the chance. Yet Randy’s greatest line of defence is his chameleon-like ability to appear like the hard men around him. Myrden has known Randy long enough to penetrate his friend’s disguise and sees the intelligent man behind the animalistic cover. When Randy greets his friend on the first morning of his freedom, he is gnawing on a chicken bone and demanding, “Who you gonna kill today? You got a few lovelies to pick from” (19). Randy’s posturing makes Myrden reflect on the true nature of the man before him: “He wondered about Randy. The smart kid in school. Always the smart kid. Smart kid in with the tough kids. Trying to hide it” (19). The perpetrator of the novel’s most violent moment, Randy is also the source of all the novel’s witticisms. Even while being questioned by the police following the beating he administered to Grom, Squid, and Willis, Randy literally keeps his wit about him. Cornered on the St. John’s waterfront, Randy initially pretends to be a sailor off one of the docked vessels, fully aware that he is already well known by the police:

“What’s your name?”

“Pablo.” He gestured back to one of the ships.

The man smiled a little. A smile that was in control. He didn’t seem bothered by it. The woman looked up at the man to check what was supposed to happen.

"Pablo," said the man. "Pablo what?"

"Pablo Picasso."

"Right," said the man.

"I've come a long way to paint cubes." That said with an accent. "Look at your head." A few imaginary brush strokes in the air. "You see. My work here is done."

The man and the woman watched him.

"Is your name Randy Murphy?"

"No, but that fucker owes me money." (112)

Randy's wit and knowledge of (among other things) cubism may not impress more worldly characters like Will Wiseman or Gabriel English, but it certainly distinguishes Randy from the uneducated and uncultured people in his social circle. When informed by the lawyer that investing the compensation money would mean never having to touch the principal, Myrden's wife asks, without a hint of sarcasm "Whose principal?... We got no one in school anymore" (186). Randy, conversely, has moments of insight and wonder, not unlike the *flâneurs* of Winter and Bowdring's novels: "He knew where the boats were from by the names. He knew some of the sailors on each boat. Drank with them. Listened to their stories. Taught them English. Learned bits of French or Portuguese... A miracle, Randy sometimes said. The way language works" (108-9).

While Randy is in prison for assaulting Grom and his crew, Myrden lives in his friend's apartment. He there discovers Randy's other secret – not only is Randy intelligent, but he is also an artist. In *The City and Literature*, Lehan claims "[m]uch of

the meaning...in many urban novels [comes] through reference to art" (Lehan 177), but in Harvey's *St. John's* a proclivity for anything other than violence will be interpreted as weakness. The artwork that adorns the walls of Randy's apartment does capture some of the "meaning" of *St. John's*, but it is hidden like a secret shame. Randy's paintings capture a *St. John's* that Myrden does not usually see: "There were paintings of colourful row houses. Of the ocean and shorelines. The colours were unbelievable. They made his eyes feel better" (Harvey 122). Yet when Myrden brings some of Randy's paint to him during a visit at the penitentiary, Randy scolds his friend: "'Are you nuts?' Randy leaned forward. Across the table. Whispering: 'You wanna get me killed?'" (155). In Myrden and Randy's world, the artful reflection that both drives and delays *flâneurs* like English and Wiseman could be seen as a fall from the animalistic maleness that determines their position within the neighbourhood hierarchy. In this *St. John's* the only means to respect and survival is unbridled toughness.

Of course, the alpha dog in this novel is Myrden. A sort of lion in winter, Myrden is the top male returned to his former kingdom. Still dangerous, Myrden has been weakened by two heart attacks suffered while in prison. As a matter of survival, Myrden has kept these heart attacks secret, though he suffers another one while visiting Randy in prison. Myrden is always aware of his waning powers, and his fluttering heart serves as a reminder that he can never climb to the top of the male hierarchy but he may have just enough time to save his family from the pack of lesser males fighting for his position. Foster discusses the "primeval psychic structure" of the urban novel, and Harvey captures this most effectively through narration (Foster 125). The urgency is compounded by

Harvey's abrupt prose. The terseness can be alienating for the reader (as is probably Harvey's intention), but it also helps reiterate the madness of Myrden's world – the hundred things happening at once to a man overcome with revenge, responsibility, and the need to reshape his life. Here is Myrden before the countless microphones of reporters he knows still think he is guilty, a polished bad apple:

The microphones in his face. Closer. Their feet on the pavement. Waiting for a reaction from him. The cameras going faster. His face changing. He could feel it. He tried to find the words. Not the ones he wanted. His lips just twisted. His shoulders bunched together. He looked at the other faces watching him. Men and women. Silent and watching him or checking their recorders. Not a single one of them decent. Anything to further the pain. Anything. He shook his head and sniffed. Turned and walked away. The voices and shouts came again with their questions. Trailing after him.

(Harvey 18)

There is something of a primal instinct here, but also a very human wisdom, a knowledge of who these people are and what they think of him. At times Myrden is very animalesque, roaring and pouncing, but his bestial nature is always measured by human emotions and desires – the love of his family and the desire for a better life.

Myrden is possessed of the alpha male's ability to determine instantly the weaknesses and strengths of potential challengers. Waiting outside his eldest son's eyeglass factory in Toronto, Myrden quickly assesses the ability of the security guard approaching him: "The security guard didn't like the looks of him. He could tell. The

security guard didn't buy the suit he was wearing. He knew the face. He knew what was in that face. Bang bang. Gunfighter. The bad guy must die... He was bigger than the guard. He was bigger than most people" (228-29). Myrden is unable to deactivate this instinct, noting earlier how he could easily disarm the female police officer arresting Randy: "the woman put up her hand... Her other hand went to her stick. Not her gun. She'd only hit him. Not shoot him. That wouldn't be too bad. He could live with that. Break her wrist taking it away from her" (113). Even while on vacation, Myrden is still assessing the dangerous aspects of others, noting the physical attributes that make them dangerous: "The taxi driver was small and demented... A wiry man. Lots of energy. Bad news" (242).

Myrden's body is that of a predator, refined over the years to be a perpetually prepared fighting machine. He is very aware of his body, of how it is coiled and always looking for release. Returning from his first encounter with Willis, Myrden is unable to contain the violence within him as his wife berates him for interfering in their daughter's life: "He turned before he knew it. And the glass exploded over the table. His wife ducked away. Her mouth shut now. One look at her" (50). At Grom's, Myrden feels his "arm like a spring," knowing that he could uncoil it, snatch the crowbar from Grom's mother, and destroy the house and everyone in it (34). After Randy's brutalization of the three men in the bar, Myrden actually feels relief, as if violence, or at least proximity to it, somehow soothes him: "All of this made him feel better. Relaxed his muscles. Like he'd had a good night's sleep, or a massage" (107). Even a beautiful day triggers within Myrden a barely repressed desire for violence: "He felt like killing. Not just hurting, but

killing. Hurting would not be enough. The mood he was in. It crept through his veins like poison" (137). Though DNA has given Myrden his new freedom, he knows that the DNA within him predetermines his fate. This bright world is not for him. He is built for darker, more sinister places.

Myrden seems to despise equally his wilderness and the more affluent and civilized world of characters like Ruth, the well-born woman with whom he is trying to rekindle a relationship he abandoned many years ago. Myrden despises those wealthier than he: the George Street revellers, the reporters who marvel at his lifestyle, the people enjoying a walk along a sunny St. John's street: "He hated them all. Pretending a good life. Because they thought they were it. They thought they mattered. Only their lives. The centre of everything. Every single one of them. Buying into it. An important life. The centre of everything" (137). He despises those who look down on his neighbourhood, those like Gabriel English who wander close to view crime scenes: "the crowd of onlookers on the street. How many times had they watched this?... It didn't matter how many times. They still wanted to know. To spread the word. It was something to compare themselves to" (139). Yet their world is the world Myrden wants for his daughter and granddaughter, the world he is proud his eldest son has aspired to, and the world that is the home of his one true love – a love he abandoned because he knew his life would damage her. In this begrudging desire, Myrden demonstrates the notion of superiority Light connects to the urban wilderness: "In contrast [to this wilderness], civilization (and its inhabitants) may be celebrated for its superiority over wilderness as a haven of virtue" (Light 139). Born in this wilderness, even becoming master of it, Myrden is always

looking out into civilization. He is the alpha male who controls his surroundings and longs to rise above them. This is best demonstrated when Myrden leaves the party celebrating his financial settlement. Myrden dominates the room, quieting his two quarrelling sons with a powerful roar: "They backed away from him when he made the roar. Everything went quiet. All eyes on him... He could kill anyone in the room" (200). This urban king literally rises above his animalistic subjects as he throws money in the face of his sons. As the occupants of the kitchen scurry for the hundred dollar bills, Myrden ascends the stairs, dons his best shirt and pants and leaves this wilderness below him: "Drunken laughter beneath his feet. Coming up to meet him. It didn't matter. That was them. He felt fresh... Then he went down the stairs. Not a word to anyone before he walked out the front door" (201).

Myrden's attraction and gravitation toward Ruth is also connected with the classical preference for the "country way of life" over urban existence (Williams 1). "Ruth came from money" is one of the first things the readers learn about Myrden's lost love: "Ruth was from money. Like a place. A town. A big city" (Harvey 55). Yet this fact does not corrupt Ruth as it does those fighting for hundred dollar bills in Myrden's kitchen. For Ruth, money has enabled her to elevate above the city, to remain outside its corruption. Through Ruth, Myrden sees how money can be used to save Caroline and Jackie. His first visit to Ruth's home is a revelatory journey to the pastoral: "Plenty of space to play outside. Little Caroline. Grass that would be soft. Barefoot in the summer. No worry of broken glass. Trees. Just outside the city. Horses up the road. They passed a stable on the way in the car" (56-57). On a later journey to the house, Myrden sees Ruth's

home as lifted above his urban world, occupying a more natural realm: "Look at that house. He stood in the lane. The house was raised from the ground. Built on higher ground. The ocean was not far away. He could smell it in the air. Saltwater. A house in the country... The woods right behind him" (75-76). Despite his disdain for many of those who can afford this way of life (earlier, Myrden calls Ruth's father just to say "Fuck you," his anger so great he pulls the receiver from the phone booth [74]), Myrden wants this world for himself and his children, and he uses the money he despises to buy Jackie and Caroline's passage out of the wilderness.

Despite Jackie's earlier refusal of her father's offer to buy her a house, Myrden buys his daughter a home in the suburbs where children play in the streets not fearing fast cars or dangerous adults. The suburb is a logical choice for Myrden. As Williams notes, the suburb is one of "a wide range of settlements between the traditional poles of country and city" (Williams 1). Jackie and Caroline will be free from the corruption of the city yet still accessible to Myrden, who perhaps foresees himself as a city-dweller for life, enjoying excursions to the redemptive suburb and countryside but unable to extricate himself from the urban jungle. Myrden's greatest error occurs when he attempts a prolonged journey outside his asphalt wilderness, leaving Jackie and Caroline vulnerable to the wounded but still lethal Willis.

With Randy still in prison (and therefore unable to tend to the alpha male's concerns while he is absent), Myrden finally uses some of his money for his own enjoyment and takes Ruth on a vacation to Spain. Myrden enjoys this class transgression, paying for hotel rooms and large meals with cash, revelling in the surprised looks on the

faces of those serving him. The vacation regenerates him, enables him finally to consummate his relationship with Ruth, and inspires him to restart his relationship with his children. He sees a life of travel with Ruth, and even another child, born outside the urban wilderness that has claimed two of his sons. These plans are quickly forgotten upon Myrden's return to St. John's. Unable to contact Jackie, Myrden phones his wife and is callously told what has occurred in his absence:

"I was calling Jackie's house."

"Wha? You're breaking up. Hell—"

"I was calling Jackie's house."

"The...new one?"

"Yeah."

"I can hear ya now. Willis wrecked that one."

"Wrecked what?"

"The new house."

"Where are they?"

"Back in the old house. Nothing the matter with—"

He hung up. (Harvey 275-76)

Myrden now realises that he cannot leave this wilderness, that he is possessed of what Light terms the "cognitive wilderness within" (Light 138). The short sentences conveying little more than instincts, Myrden's ability to assess immediately the danger in any person or environment, his proclivity to violence, his hatred of those outside his wilderness, have all been intimations of Myrden's impending fate. Light notes that "it is not the mere

physical surroundings but the supposed claim of those surroundings on the mental states of its inhabitants" that is the true mark of the urban jungle (Light 138). Though Myrden has enjoyed his brief moments outside his realm, he knows that it will always define him and find ways to draw him back. Moreover, Myrden realises that the corruptive nature of the jungle will outlive him, and he must ensure all evil elements are destroyed before Jackie and Caroline are safe.

Returning to Willis's house, Myrden finds his daughter and granddaughter beaten, Jackie's eyes bruised "Black and sacred purple," her arm in a sling (Harvey 278). Caroline, cowering on the couch, has a bruised cheek and one eye swollen shut. Having spent the entire narrative trying to shut out his baser, animalistic instincts, Myrden now lets them flow through him. He literally lifts both Caroline and Jackie out of this world, placing them in Ruth's car with the simple directive to her: "Take them" (281). The three women drive out of this jungle under his protection, then Myrden turns to perform his duty as alpha male, and enters Willis' home for a final conflict that will ensure forever his daughter's safety and permanently damn Myrden to life in this wilderness.

Whereas Harvey focuses on the impossibility of class transgression in *Inside*, Moore demonstrates in *Alligator* how every occupant in St. John's is possessed of such "anxieties and cool indifference" that any connection between people within the city seems impossible (Iverson 201). While her title is an allusion to the merciless predator, it is more importantly an indication of the cold-bloodedness that can be found in so many of her urbanites.

“Paved Solitude”: Indifference and Endangerment in Moore’s St. John’s

In *Alligator*, the wilderness is in constant interaction, in fact, in conflict with the city. The novel’s young female protagonist, having hitched a ride back to St. John’s following an act of eco-terrorism, is almost killed when the car hits a moose with such intensity that it crashes through the windshield forming a “fist of glass lined with silver wrinkles and cracks [that] punched Colleen in the face” (Moore 146). Colleen’s act of eco-terrorism is an attempt to prevent the urban sprawl of St. John’s. When Colleen has her run-in with the moose, she is returning from pouring sugar into the gas tanks of the bulldozers that are destroying the forests outside the city. She explains to her baffled mother that the existence of the Newfoundland pine marten is being threatened by this mass unearthing of wilderness. Colleen’s mother Beverly spends most of the narrative in the somewhat clichéd angst of a mother raising a teenaged daughter, battling while at the same time trying to understand the madness Colleen continues to bring into their home. During breakfast on the morning Colleen is to be sent to Youth Diversion for her vandalism of the bulldozers, Beverly watches through her kitchen window as a cat stalks a robin: “The cat pounced and held the bird under its paws for a long, considered instant, then tore off its head” (58). Just as the predatory urge simmers in the brainpan of the seemingly docile housecat, something primordial, something foreign to the urban domesticity of her surroundings, is rising within Colleen. The equally clichéd notion of a teenager trying to “find her place” is extended by Moore to become a would-be predator discovering her position as just another prey in the urban jungle.

In his prologue to *Pastoral Cities: Urban Ideas and the Symbolic Landscape of*

America, James A. Machor notes that the exodus to the suburbs following World War II “renewed interest among city dwellers in tending gardens and cultivating tropical plants” and gave rise to “frequent meetings of sensitivity groups where alienated urbanites seek to ‘get in touch with’ their ‘natural feelings’” (Machor 5). Colleen, born long after the mass migration to the suburbs, finds no solace in her mother’s suburban home, her aunt’s apartment behind the Village Mall (which serves as the dividing line between the city of St. John’s and the suburbia of Mount Pearl), or regular forays to house parties in the satellite communities around St. John’s. The synthetic world of cultivated lawns and shopping centres becomes for Colleen a cage that can no longer contain her, and she seeks the freedom of St. John’s nightlife or the untainted wilderness. Throughout *Alligator*, Colleen is both beguiled and repulsed by the seedy side of the city, and her journey takes her from participant in a George Street bar wet t-shirt contest to sailing through the alligator-infested everglades of Louisiana. While she is the undeniable queen of her domain in the dance bars of downtown, she laments the urban sprawl, the spread of houses occupied by teenagers who throw parties in their parents’ absence and show “bum fights” on their plasma televisions. Perhaps it is the spread of this particular urban poison, an indifference bordering on malice, that motivates Colleen to move beyond Machor’s “large lawns and well-spaced houses” to find her “natural” feelings. (5).

In *Writing the City*, Peter Preston and Paul Simpson-Housley claim that for many urban writers and their characters, “the city is an active organism, which may prove to be a site of culture and inspiration” (Preston 10). They go on to cite one of Hugh MacLennan’s characters who, in a moment of epiphany, contemplates “the immense

empty street, and has the impression that it is his own interior life he is contemplating” (10). Colleen moves between the shark-like eyes-shut predatory existence of an all-consuming downtown denizen and the contemplative, perhaps even *flâneur*-esque position of introspective and respectful observer. Colleen plays the roles of thief, user, temptress and even terrorist throughout the narrative but forsakes each of these identities in a moment of revelation near the end of the novel when she finally understands her symbiotic position within a living and evolving city. Her understanding – and perhaps even salvation – comes in a rather unconventional manner for an urban novel. Machor notes that the most notable urban fictions, such as those written by Dickens and Melville, recreate the city as an intensification of “the evil that accompanied the Fall from Eden” and that the movement of most protagonists is “from innocence to experience, from pastoral well-being to urban death” (Machor 176, 177). Colleen is almost killed in a pastoral setting, her fall from innocence a cold confirmation that she is not the predator she thought she was. Colleen returns to the city experienced but not a harbinger of “urban death.” Instead, her return to the city is an affirmation of urban life and the celebration of the city as an active and evolving organism.

Colleen, like Will Wiseman and Gabriel English, spends most of her time navigating the city and testing its parameters. She moves from her suburban home to her aunt’s apartment on the border of city and suburbia; from house parties in Mount Pearl to contests in downtown bars; from city shopping malls to the few miles of highway outside St. John’s that effectively separate “town” life from rural Newfoundland. Along the way, Colleen demonstrates moments of *flâneur*-ish insight. Rewinding and re-watching a film

in which a man is attacked by an alligator, Colleen seems to echo Gabe when she says, "If you watch for long enough you will see everything" (Moore 8). In viewing the quotidian, Colleen sees the deeper drives and emotions of those around her. Watching her mother apply mascara following the death of Colleen's stepfather, the girl can see how this simple task is enabling her mother to maintain control and composure: "These were the ordinary gestures of getting ready. There would be no hysterics; for whatever reason, Beverly had decided she would appear completely intact" (54). Regarding hair her mother had pulled from a hairbrush earlier in the day, Colleen intuitively interprets the "remote solitude" her mother now occupies following David's death. She sees her mother as a woman "robbed of sex and the intricate privacy and rituals of a couple who have been in love for a long time" (56). Whereas this gift of insight inspired Gabe and Will to do little more than observe the world around him, Colleen, still uncertain of the desires that motivate her, uses her intuition to become an urban predator.

Colleen sees in the tangle of hairs a grief that terrifies her, and she vows to get "as far away from the voyeuristic intimacy of that floating nest of tangles as she could get" (57). Frightened by the enormity of the pain her mother feels following David's death, Colleen avoids intimacy and fosters an indifference ironically fuelled by a desire for attention and human contact. To commit seemingly random acts of vandalism and thievery would make Colleen indecipherable, incomprehensible, yet the focus of attention. Her sabotage of the bulldozers can be interpreted as a desperate attempt to force a reaction from her mother, who has grown frigid since David's death:

Colleen thought, Goddamn her. Nothing hurt more than her mother's cold

shoulder, mostly because it was involuntary. It was a dry-ice, burning kind of cold that required massive amounts of energy to ignore. Colleen was terrified and compelled by her mother's anger. She was drawn, against her will, to be in the same room with her.... It was best to stay out of the room but Colleen could not stay out of the room. She wanted the full blast of rage, but Beverly either guarded it vigilantly or was oblivious to it. (30)

Witnessing in her mother the agony human intimacy can cause and feeling herself the cold burn of her obliviousness, Colleen decides to sever herself emotionally from the world, to become a callous observer of her society and its conventions.

Four days before she is to be sent to youth diversion, Colleen steals a bottle of vodka from a liquor store in one of the malls she often frequents. She does this on a whim: "I had come to the mall to buy striped socks but as I was strolling past the liquor store, I got the idea of stealing a bottle of something. I had to know how such a thing would turn out" (118). The desire to observe drives Colleen to put herself in danger. Despite the repercussions of being caught committing yet another crime, despite the "thunk-thunk of blood" racing through her as she executes her act of thievery, Colleen cannot resist risking herself for a social experiment: "the thing is, once I've imagined the absolutely worst thing I could do in any given moment I have to do it. I have to see how it will end" (118).

Colleen slowly dissociates herself from her surroundings by becoming an observer like the creatively-blocked Gabe English or the academically-spent Will Wiseman. Yet, where Gabe watches the world through binoculars and Will wanders

aimlessly through St. John's, Colleen actively and aggressively inserts herself into situations that will make for interesting investigation. To celebrate her liberation from youth diversion and because she is "pissed off" that she now has to spend a month painting murals as penance for her vandalism, Colleen enters a wet t-shirt contest "because she was loaded and because she had big beautiful breasts and she might win \$1,000" (198). During the contest, Colleen loses the control she possessed while stealing the liquor. Colleen and her fellow contestants are sprayed with water with such force that one of the girls actually falls off her milk carton perch. Blinded by water, Colleen is momentarily oblivious to the "slightly nasty edge" of the crowd and the "definite whiff of menace" moving through the bar (201). Only when a man steps out of the crowd to protect her from the encroaching, lustful mass does Colleen realize "the menace in the crowd, the weird collective nastiness coming to a boil" (202). Though her recent urban experiment has left her overwhelmed, her rescuer provides Colleen with another opportunity to commit the "absolutely worst thing" she can imagine doing to another person.

The man who saves her from the sexually-charged crowd is Frank, the George Street hotdog vendor who has admired Colleen since first spotting her dancing at the Ship Inn. Colleen is at her seductive best when Frank first sees her, and the young man is utterly infatuated: "She has a rhinestone in her belly button. She's slender, her arms are golden, her neck is golden, and there's an elastic riding over her hip, a part of her red thong and it makes him crazy to think about sliding a finger under that elastic. He'd like to take that elastic in his teeth" (132). This teeth-and-claws reaction to Colleen is one of

Frank's few predatory moments. Back at Frank's apartment, it quickly becomes obvious who is predator and who is prey: "Frank had fallen in love with [Colleen] while they were having sex; she watched it happen... Frank had no idea how vulnerable he was. Frank's innocence was jolting and sensual and she felt the need to destroy it as quickly as possible" (208, 209). Quietly searching for her clothes while Frank sleeps, Colleen finds an envelope crammed with twenty-five hundred-dollar bills and takes it with her as she leaves the apartment.

This interaction reifies within Moore's St. John's the urban hierarchy discussed by Foster in "City Primeval." Much like those of Elmore Leonard's Detroit, the citizens of *Alligator* can be divided into two categories: the mark and the operator. The difference is, according to Foster, "The mark is a role-player and the operator plays a role" (Foster 139). The night in his bedroom demonstrates how Frank and Colleen occupy different categories. Frank is the do-gooder mark, the citizen who "observes the strict rules of conduct and social convention, and lives within the bounds of society's institutional role structure" (139). The courage to interact finally with Colleen comes only when the "rules of conduct and social convention" are about to be violated by the aroused mass of males demanding more from the wet t-shirt participants. Colleen is a fledgling operator, an amateur alligator whose "real life-interest is feeding on the marks" (140). She is a *camafleur*, beguiling and flirting her way toward whatever goal she sets for herself. Despite being under age, Colleen manages to enter the wet t-shirt contest by seductively applying lip gloss while the bar's doorman looks on appreciatively: "She made the [lip] smack deliberate and she was leaning near the bouncer, her breasts over the table, she

couldn't believe how much fun it was coming on to an ugly bouncer in order to gain admittance to a wet T-shirt contest" (Moore 198). Though achieving her first orgasm with Frank momentarily derails her, to the point of cathartic sobbing in Frank's arms, Colleen wakes in the morning and instinctively claims the money-crammed envelope upon discovering it. Colleen steals from Frank because she needs to see "what she could get away with, how far she could go" (211). Though this theft will leave Frank at the mercy of another urban predator, Colleen is quick to overcome any remorse and, having devoured Frank, heads for the Bagel Café to consume an actual breakfast.

Colleen uses Frank's money to finance a trip to Louisiana and meet Loyola, the man mauled by an alligator in her aunt's video. Though professing the need to get "Way the hell out of here," Colleen quickly returns home only days after departing (218). Colleen's retreat to St. John's has been motivated by her encounter with an actual predator, far more cold, indifferent, and lethal than she could imagine. Visiting the alligator farm in Louisiana, Colleen peers into the eyes of a predator: "I knelt down near the fence and looked into the eye of a giant alligator that was very near the fence. The alligator did not move and did not move. I saw myself kneeling in its eye and I was tiny and fragile-looking in a long velvet tunnel and I wasn't ever coming back from there. Then the animal turned and waddled over the hard-packed, cracked mud and algae. Its tail swung with lazy muscular swishes. Then it sank into the water and glided out of sight" (253). Helene Staveley makes much of the alligator's indifference to Colleen in "City and Citizen in Lisa Moore's *Alligator*": "It is not interested in some abstract idea of contest, domination and triumph, of winning some life and death game against a human

competitor. It does not care whether Colleen is its friend" (Staveley 6). This almost aggressive apathy alters Colleen. She sees in this reptilian coldness the hurt she has inflicted on Frank and her mother. Colleen quickly returns to St. John's, having called her mother to tell her she loves her and heading immediately for Frank's apartment with the remainder of his money.

The most obvious "mark" or prey in *Alligator* is Frank, the aptly named hotdog vendor who is devoured by several characters in the novel. Working within "strict rules of conduct and social-convention" of the civilized man, Frank tries to rise above his impoverished position by becoming an entrepreneur. The young man wishes for financial success, and he plans to do it legitimately: "He had bought the first hot-dog cart with his paper route money. He put every cent of it away for four years, and during the winter he went door to door asking if people wanted shoveling and he asked if there were beer bottles they wanted to get rid of. There was a restaurant downtown that let him wash dishes in the summer when it was busy" (Moore 59). Though a determined worker, Frank would rather avoid confrontation: he even lets his mother negotiate the deal for his first hotdog cart.

Frank's flight or fight response is hardwired to flight. This is made obvious when he is almost killed trying to avoid an elm spanworm. Stepping into a lane of traffic, Frank causes a head-on collision between two cars, then ducks into a Shoppers Drug Mart and disappears out the back rather than deal with the two irate drivers. Frank is also an object of fun for most people around him. Working on the famous George Street strip, Frank is usually subject to rather lewd comments about his "wiener" from drunken customers and

idle taxi drivers. Despite the obviously phallic implications of his name, Frank is a rather impotent character, admiring women from afar but never confident enough to approach them, leaving him in a fantasy world of endless sexual possibilities: "The young nurse who lives across the street...was backing out of her driveway over a ploughed hill and she made the engine rev until it was squealing... Frank gave her directions on which way to turn her wheels and he saw her eyes in the rear-view and they were brown and he would give anything to kiss her and make love to her because he had been watching her since she moved in, and she'd call out hi and wave and sometimes that was all anybody said to him in the run of a day" (Moore 16). His sense of fair play and his rather priapic nature prove near fatal weaknesses for Frank, who is easily preyed upon by two of the novel's more conniving predators, Colleen and Valentin.

Valentin is a Russian sailor who has been living in St. John's for the sixteen months since the vessel he was on was seized by the Canadian government in Harbour Grace. A natural survivor, Valentin has made a living in St. John's through gambling, peddling drugs, and even scavenging the city dump for copper pipes and brass fittings he sells to a salvage yard. Once he has garnered enough finances to establish himself in a small apartment above the room Frank is renting, Valentin commences his predatory ravaging of St. John's. Valentin is a foreign predator released into an urban wilderness unprepared for him. Fiercely territorial, Valentin views any real estate as an exploitable opportunity: he will burn the home of the woman he is dating, collect the \$82,000 insurance and leave St. John's. While he is waiting for the opportune moment to destroy the house, Valentin will demand protection money from Frank, slashing Frank's prized

waterbed and demanding he surrender his hotdog cart until Frank is able to pay the ruthless Russian what little money he can afford.

Frank is unable to pay Valentin all the money he demands because the large envelope filled with cash he had been saving from his evenings on George Street was stolen by Colleen. Colleen's theft leaves Frank ever more vulnerable to the blackmailing, bullying Valentin. Having gouged Frank for all he can, Valentin eventually drugs Frank and leaves him in the house he has doused with gasoline and intends to ignite. Waking while the house is being consumed by fire, Frank, scorched and blistered, manages to hurl himself through the front window, momentarily impressing Valentin before the Russian renders him unconscious with a shovel and drags the boy to his berth aboard his anchored ship in Harbour Grace. Moore's apparently anti-pastoral narrative ends rather abruptly, following this moment, with Valentin's arrest, Frank's convalescence, and Colleen's return to St John's. It is through the penetration of actual nature into this urban jungle that Moore is able to redeem her characters and perhaps her city.

The elm spanworms are fittingly introduced to the reader during a section describing Valentin. Like Valentin, these worms are voracious interlopers, entering an environment that cannot contain them and feasting on the unprepared natives. Valentin sees in them his own insatiable desires and ridicules the citizens of St. John's for not dealing with them more aggressively: "From the window he could see the spanworms hanging. It was the third consecutive summer of infestation and the trees would not last, they said. If it were his house he would have sprayed. He would have blasted the worms straight back to hell, where he imagined they had come from" (72-73). Valentin regards

his girlfriend's failure to combat the worms as evidence of her laziness and justification for Isobel's eventual victimization at his hands: "She should have sprayed the worms, Valentin thought... There was a suffocating laziness about her; she was too easily overwhelmed. If she had taken care of the worms he might have married her... He might have married her, but at her core she was no more substantial than a soap bubble" (188). Much like Frank in the face of the oppressive Valentin, the citizens of St. John's are at a loss as to what to do about this new and mysterious predator: "On the radio they said spray. Don't spray. The trees are finished, a scientist said. The worms have won... Where had they come from? They had come in the wind or in someone's suitcase. They had come with a shipment of lumber, in a case of apples. Someone had dreamt them" (158-59). The worms' waste covers everything left outside, emitting a "pissy odour that got stronger when the sun warmed it," accumulating in the crotches of underwear left out on a clothesline to dry (159). Despite their decidedly unnatural presence within the urban wilderness, these trespassers symbolize the greatest moments of redemption for Moore's animalized protagonists.

At the moment when Frank emerges from the blazing house, Valentin turns to see the neighbouring trees catch fire and the worms Isobel had permitted to live consumed in the flames: "The flames moved from tree to tree and the trees shrivelled up and crackled and spat sparks. All the worms hanging in the trees were lit up from the second it took them to turn to carbon" (272). The sudden disintegration of the spanworms contrasts the transformation of Frank from a meek boy to a young man struggling to survive, standing again and again as "the fire covered him in a flimsy straightjacket [he] couldn't get out

of" (273). These creatures that have had St. John's in their sticky clutches for several summers are easily destroyed; yet this seemingly insubstantial boy fights through a drug-induced haze, a flaming house, and several beatings to cling to life. Watching both transformations, Valentin is himself transformed: "it occurred to Valentin that it was over. He would not implicate Isobel. He decided that in an instant... He would go to jail forever but he would leave her alone... It might be the honourable thing" (273).

The metamorphosis of the millions of other spanworms not destroyed in this fire reflects Colleen's transformation at novel's end. In a perhaps clichéd caterpillar-to-butterfly motif, Colleen's moment of redemption occurs as she sees the now white moths covering her city, making it both beautiful and unfamiliar. Witnessing this transformation, Colleen admits to Frank's neighbour Carol that she had stolen money from Frank and was here to "pay it back": "The trees across the street were white, as if there'd been a snowfall. The window screen was covered in moths. Carol saw, on the roofs of the cars below, and on the hoods, a blanket of white moths, the wings opening and closing. A transport truck roared up the hill and moths lifted all at once and it looked like a Christmas card. The worms, [Colleen] said. They've transformed" (285).

In Moore's St. John's, the wilderness is never very far away. The city becomes its own ecosystem, and its occupants become more animal than human, primeval in their indifference to their fellow humans and predatory in their exploitation of them. Surprisingly, it is the appearance of an insect that transforms the city, marking what Douglas Ivison and Justin Edwards would call "the uncanny return of the wilderness" that reminds these characters of their human traits (Ivison 208). Reassessing their urban

ecosystem, and therefore their place within it, characters like Colleen, Valentin, and Frank interact rather than ignore or abuse their fellow city-dwellers, and the result is a redemptive move toward human nature.

Moore's Modern Fielding: Madeleine

Staveley notes, "Here in Newfoundland, the urban has had a largely vexed existence; so much of the island's identity seems constituted by the rural and marine that the city sometimes reads as a more than usually threatening force in Newfoundland literature" (Staveley 3-4). Moore mirrors this turn from the urban with Madeleine, the urban-dwelling filmmaker who searches the stark and treacherous Newfoundland coast for what Burton Pike in *The Image of the City in Modern Literature* calls the "lost frontier," a mythologized way of life imperilled by continued urbanization (Pike 193).

"Newfoundland has never looked so beautiful and dangerous," Madeleine says of the island in her film, "it was a Gothic, vicious landscape, a curse, a new kind of beauty" (Moore 120). Her preoccupation with the portrayal of this natural Newfoundland leads her to ignore the natural ebb and flow of her own body, and Madeleine dies of heart failure before the film is completed. Through Madeleine's death, Moore appears to condemn this sort of Newfoundland wilderness to the mythic past, and the driving force of her novel becomes the new urban reality of St. John's as a wilderness city.

Staveley writes that the Newfoundland of *Alligator* is "aggressively enigmatic," resisting interpretation or understanding. When Madeleine begins filming her Newfoundland Gothic feature, Staveley notes, "the island does not smooth her way with sunbeams and flower petals. Instead, it flings up threatening cliffs and wild blizzards that

stand in the filmmaker's way" (Staveley 4). But Madeleine does not want Newfoundland to smooth itself. In fact, she wants her island to achieve a ruggedness and unwieldiness of epic proportions: "The film was all about the desolate, violent landscape and human triumph over nature, but it was also, in a much quieter, private way, about evil. A community in the grip of some religious fervour that had sprung out of the tyranny of mild constant hunger and a giving over" (Moore 38). In creating Madeleine and her quest to make the epic Newfoundland masterpiece, Moore is perhaps acknowledging novels like Johnston's *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams*, Kavanagh's *Gaff Topsails*, and most recently Bernice Morgan's *Cloud of Bone*, novels that tackle Newfoundland on the grandest scale, novels that attempt to include everything Newfoundland: harsh landscape, fierce isolation, human struggle. Madeleine's film mingles the private with the heroic to create an extensive and elaborate depiction of Newfoundland:

They did this on the Southern Shore back in the 1830s: two young men stole a priest's collar and went up the Southern Shore hearing confessions. It didn't matter if they really did it; they couldn't have really done it, but what a film. A claustrophobic community bandaged in snow squalls. And a girl is possessed by the devil.

There is always a young virgin, and this one has streaming red hair and a white, white nightdress. A girl on a cliff in her nightdress, sleepwalking or fairy-led, the church bells rippling through the icy darkness. (36)

Like Kavanagh and his depiction of a day in the life of an outport community, Madeleine is trying to capture everything and employing any trope to do it: Newfoundlander as

prankster, as survivor, as isolated primitive. It is the image that concerns Madeleine, the windswept girl on a cliff. As she admits, it does not matter whether it really happened. Both she and her cinematographer “dismiss whole libraries of historical scholarship” in the telling of their story: “You don’t tell the truth.... But what you tell *becomes* the truth” (119). Madeleine becomes something of a reverse romantic: where Sheilagh Fielding remembers sunlight through unfurled sails in pre-Confederation St. John’s harbour, Madeleine craves darker images: “I want bleak.... Turnip soup and fish flakes and scurvy. I want pouting orphans with sunken eyes and scabby knees” (174). Madeleine longs for the dire and the desolate, the ragged romanticism that inspired Sandra Gwyn in “Newfoundland Renaissance.”

As Johnston did with Joe Smallwood in *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams* and Michael Crummey did with John Peyton in *River Thieves*, so too does Madeline (or attempts to do) with Bishop Fleming in her film. Plucking a pivotal player out of Newfoundland history and revisiting and re-examining the truth of that history has become a vogue in recent artistic depictions of Newfoundland. Morgan, Bernard Assiniwi, and countless others have attempted to (re)tell the “history” of Shanawdithit, and even the limited scope of this thesis reveals varying depictions of Joe Smallwood and Judge Prowse. Madeleine wants to resurrect and reinvent Fleming, the fourth bishop of St. John’s, who comes to the small community of her film to exorcise the town’s church bell and save the girl threatened by both otherworldly and domestic devils. Her depiction of this man becomes too grandiose and threatens to destroy the picture.

Madeleine is haunted by Fleming following her discovery of his letters in the

Roman Catholic archives. He becomes for Madeleine a sort of hag-like spectre that tortures her during the incubation and production of this project: "Her heart would constrict in the middle of the night and she'd wake slathered in sweat, thinking, This is it, this is it. And she'd find Archbishop Fleming in the corner of her bedroom baring his yellow teeth like a dog" (37). Like Johnston's Smallwood, Fleming will become a catch-all protagonist in Madeleine's film. It does not matter where and how the actual Fleming lived; Madeleine will use him to put a human face on her creation of Newfoundland: "She could not put into words about how she'd captured the history of Newfoundland in this film, new because she was inventing it, or how this film had spiritual implications, how it would transfigure human experience, how bloody gorgeous was the landscape, the actress with red hair, and Archbishop Fleming and the church bells" (196). Her need to capture so much in this refashioning of Fleming's life drives her to ignore the film's budget as well as her own well-being, and Madeleine will die before this bloated project is complete.

Madeleine is aware of her health problems, as are several people in her close-knit circle: "there was all the talk of her heart being weak, angina, clogged arteries – they'd wanted to take a blood vessel out of her leg but she wouldn't have it" (35). A physician Madeleine visits for the physical her film company demands before financing her picture washes his hands of the determined director, warning her she is pressing her luck before conceding to her insistence that he sign the forms. The urgency surrounding the completion of the film grows as Madeleine realizes she may not live to finish her work. In truth, the film becomes all Madeleine lives for, all that she is: "She was just her film

and how much energy it would take to make it happen" (37). The stalls in production not only threaten the film but Madeleine's identity, for this project will stand as a monument to her and her Newfoundland. As she thinks of the churches Fleming raised that now stand as evidence of his life on the island, Madeleine reassesses the most romantic moments of her film and how they will remain as testaments to person and place. Feeling the first stirrings of the heart attack that will kill her, Madeleine begins to doubt the possibility of this monument: "The great monuments.... You go out of your way to see them but they never stick in your memory" (303). As she dies, taking with her the monument that is her film, the Newfoundland she is trying to capture undergoes yet another transformation.

At the moment of Madeleine's death, the moths that as elm spanworms held St. John's in their sticky grasp descend upon the city. The concluding paragraph of *Alligator* is reminiscent of the final passages of *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams* as nature and creative desire merge. Madeleine is talking to her apparition of Archbishop Fleming as she approaches death; the moths outside her window bring an unexpected winter to the summer streets of St. John's: "The archbishop raised his arms. The horses come by helicopter, pawing the clouds with their great hooves, a snowfall of moths. The city is covered in fluttering white snow. Moths on their hands, on their arms, on their upturned faces" (303). Madeleine had wished to capture somehow the essence of Newfoundland by importing white Lipizzaners to run through the island surf. The expense of transporting these white horses almost crippled production of her film and added to the stress that is squeezing her heart. The image of them being airlifted from a vessel trapped

in the ice returns now to Madeleine as she witnesses the transformation outside her window.

The death of Madeleine and her desire to shape Newfoundland occurs as the island is reshaping itself. Smallwood is driven throughout Johnston's narrative to discover the something that defines Newfoundland, just as Madeleine is propelled through Moore's text to capture a particular Newfoundland essence. In both narratives, the island remains forever unknowable despite the protagonists' efforts. As Staveley notes, "The moths that usher Madeleine out of her world...bring no clear message of enlightenment or redemption.... In spanworm form, the moths have beleaguered the city for an entire month or more by this point, and now it is far from clear whether they are blessing the people or consuming them" (Staveley 5). It is interesting that Madeleine first misinterprets the moths as snow, then sees in them her horses, her own attempt to define Newfoundland. The protagonists of Johnston's and Crummey's historical Newfoundland novels confront at the end of the narratives the difference between their interpretation of Newfoundland and the forever changing reality of the island. Crummey's Peyton realizes that his Newfoundland exists only upon the erasure of an existence that understood the island in an entirely different fashion. Johnston's Smallwood understands that rather than forging the island in his own image, the island has formed him in ways he has yet to understand. Fielding, who in watching her island change begins to realize how little she actually knew of the island she loved, reaches for the romantic, mingling island with islander without ever defining either.

It is worth noting that the Newfoundland Madeleine creates is almost entirely one

of her imagination. The film director is revealed at times to be a jaded urbanite, far removed from the rural "reality" of her film: "Madeleine told the waitress she only had a forty-five minute lunch. She said about the burger: she wanted medium-rare, she didn't want well-done. Did the girl know what she meant by medium-rare, Madeleine wanted to know. Do they do that here? She'd asked" (289). Meeting with her lead actress in a diner in an industrial park "because that's where they ended up," Madeleine speaks rather condescendingly to her waitress, wondering if in this border area of St. John's they offer the same city services to which she has become accustomed. Madeleine claims to want bleak landscape, skinned rabbits, and skinned knees, yet she seeks the urban and its conveniences. It is remarkable that her absent-minded drive with Isobel has not led her out of the city but rather towards the suburban and industrial areas. It is as if Madeleine is wired instinctively to avoid the rural, though her livelihood currently depends on observing and reshaping it.

Moore's decision to include an artist's obsession with the mythic and rural past in her urban novel is an interesting one. It is oddly reminiscent of the final moment in Edward Riche's *Rare Birds* when the actual Tasker's Sulphurous Duck glides past the people who have been obsessively searching for it, yet remains unseen because these people have now become preoccupied with another spectacle. Madeleine's fixation on Fleming and the mythic past has blinded her to her own life and well-being. She dies as the city outside is morphing, becoming both engaging and unhomely at the same moment. The attempt to tell everything, to capture each essential Newfoundland moment, ends with Madeleine's death and an entirely new phenomenon, the arrival of alien moths

obscuring the familiar objects and faces of St. John's. A backward look into history to find a defining or connecting moment between island and islander ignores the reality that Newfoundland and Newfoundlanders are not connected. It is in the island's power to transform itself and surprise those who claim it. The Newfoundland and St. John's of Lisa Moore is not an inanimate object that is acted upon but a living organism that forces others to react and constantly reassess their place within it.

The choice of both Harvey and Moore to present St. John's as a dark and dangerous urban jungle marks both *Inside* and *Alligator* as revolutionary Newfoundland novels. Both texts present an image of the island that has not only been ignored but denied existence within other Newfoundland fiction. There is no redemptive turn toward the rural in Harvey's text. The reality presented here is a metropolitan wilderness that proves inescapable for many of its citizens. Moore's St. John's is ultimately an altering and unknowable port city in which new arrivals recreate the landscape while urban natives redefine themselves. Both texts are devoid of romanticism which serves to further mark them as distinctive Newfoundland novels. In a market defined by images, both *Inside* and *Alligator* resist conventional Newfoundland tropes. In doing so, these novels present a new and troubling form of Newfoundland literature.

Conclusion

"Nothing but story": Writing "Home" Through Unhomely Narratives

All the novels examined here in some way involve protagonists struggling to impose their identities on the Newfoundland landscape. Consciously or subconsciously, characters in these novels strive to find or inject evidence of themselves in the landscape around them. Wayne Johnston's incarnation of Joseph Smallwood turns to industrialization and the erection of factories and power plants to fuse forever his identity with the island. The other narrator of *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams*, Sheilagh Fielding, turns to language and romanticism, writing undercutting and revisionist histories and pastoral reflections that figuratively forge an identity that is inseparable from the island. Even the novels that seem initially to forego such whimsical notions as a symbiotic relationship between island and islander and focus instead on a modern, less natural, urban Newfoundland existence contain in their narratives a turn toward nature. Will Wiseman of Paul Bowdring's *The Night Season*, a cynical city dweller, revitalizes the romantic within him following a revelatory sexual experience on the beach at Cape Spear. Lisa Moore's rebellious teenager, Colleen, has an attitude-altering epiphany as thousands of white moths alter her cityscape near the end of *Alligator*. Moore elevates this image above the cliché, for Colleen does not see her own transformation reflected in the former spanworms but sees in the city's alteration nature's indifference to her perception of place. What is truly unrequited in Johnston's novel and in the other texts studied here is the perceived relationship, at times romance, between island and islander.

The missing "something" that drives Joseph Smallwood through *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams*, the persistent nagging that follows Michael Crummey's John Peyton

into the Newfoundland interior of *River Thieves*, even the spectre of failure that seems to hang over Edward Riche's deflated Dave Purcell in *Rare Birds*, could very well be the island's indifference to the efforts of Newfoundlanders to foster a reciprocal relationship with it. "The pitiless Newfoundland environment does not yield a living easily to the labour of men," writes Patrick O'Flaherty, "and the sea does not show signs of human industry" (4). Pathetic fallacy aside, there is no mutual relationship between Newfoundland and Newfoundlander and seemingly no lasting testament to mark the Newfoundlander's presence and persistence on the island or the ocean. It is this unreciprocated, unrequited love that in some way motivates the plots of these novels.

Lawrence Mathews identifies Patrick Kavanagh's *Gaff Topsails* as a companion piece to *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams*. Mathews is certainly right insofar as both novels are exceedingly romantic in their fusing of identity and place. Fielding conflates the existences and destinies of island and islander in her concluding remarks, the minds of Newfoundlanders imprinted with images of the land, their veins containing roaring rivers. For Kavanagh, the land reflects the growing sexuality and self-awareness of his characters. The island is as much a part of these people as their own bodies, and they grow to know it as they continue to better understand themselves. Moreover, the island seems to project images of Newfoundland identity: the pink, white, and green of the Newfoundland flag appearing, apparently of its own volition, on the loaded clotheslines and in the refracted light of windows in the community. The narrative comes to a close with the "womb-cove" dwellers taking life from the sea in the form of spawning capelin and punctuating their work as a particular "Newfoundland" activity by singing the "Ode

to Newfoundland”: a ceremony of sanctification and entitlement in a text full of sacred and profane moments connecting people to place, body to island. The final image is of Martha, the mad woman whom Adrian Fowler believes to represent “some unresolvable defining characteristic of the country and the culture” (88), looking to the ocean in anticipation of claiming “the thing she waits for” (Kavanagh 435). What connects island to islander may be a mystery, but it is all the more mystical, and therefore real, for it. Though its parameters cannot be defined, Newfoundlanders do have a claim on their island. At least that is how it appears in many Newfoundland narratives.

Two recent novels contain images that appear to be direct reactions to the egoistic claiming of place by Johnston and Kavanagh. Riche’s *The Nine Planets* and Bernice Morgan’s *Cloud of Bone*, though very different novels, seem to indicate that the relationship between people and place in Newfoundland may be a desperately one-sided romance. Without the buffer of a character like Alphonse Murphy or a likewise likeable figure, *The Nine Planets* is a narrative of untempered cynicism and sarcasm. It is apparent very early that the focus of the novel’s derisive humour is the assumed affinity between Newfoundlanders and their homeland. In a less-than-deferential homage to Kavanagh’s naturally occurring flag, Riche begins his narrative with a similar image that does not evoke connection to the land but failure to press permanently this identity onto the island. Alighting from his car to the front lawn of a St. John’s community college, protagonist Marty Devereux must step carefully to avoid the oozing dyes of melted snow sculptures:

A milky fluid was seeping from the expansive lawn of the vocational college, on which a number of snow sculptures – relics of a winter

carnival – were surrendering to March drizzle. A Viking, Leif Ericson no doubt, was guarding the place with a sword blunt and soft as a stick of butter. His helmet was shy a horn. The same raggedy gales that had carried him to Newfoundland a thousand years earlier were now his undoing. To Leif's right a wedge once representing the old tricolour of the island, the standard of wishful thinking, resembled a melting block of Neapolitan ice cream. The opaque effluent pooling on the parking lot was pigmented, too. It had been necessary to dye the snow white. (1)

It is worth noting that Marty "danced a jig" to dodge the oncoming slime, an obvious response to R. J. Needham's claim that Newfoundlanders are a musical people who "break into poesy when they feel like it" (cited in Overton, 9) or Sandra Gwyn's examinations into "Newfcult" which reveal an entertainer struggling to emerge from every Newfoundlander or countless other literary renderings of Newfoundlanders as quaint and quirky people. The pervasiveness of such folksy tropes is revealed in a 19 April 2008 article in *The Globe and Mail* which speaks of "authentic" kitchens in Cape Race "where residents might pop over for a quick jig or to shoot the breeze" (Glave 1). Riche's Marty, the vice-principal of the private school he helped create, once worked "writing and proofing copy for the Newfoundland Department of Tourism" (Riche 19) and is thus the perfect protagonist to lampoon such romantic and touristic notions of Newfoundland.

The above passage does so much to deflate the notions espoused by Kavanagh in *Gaff Topsails*. The powerful phallic images of icebergs, lighthouses and long-standing

trees that invigorate Kavanagh's villagers are replaced by Riche with the flaccid sword and gelded horns of a melting monument to the island's founding father. Tomas Croft's purposeful ride ashore and passionate penetration of the island are replaced with the passive nature of Leif's arrival: the raggedy gales carried Leif to the island, he did not propel himself. The idea of the sculptures "surrendering to March drizzle" counteracts Kavanagh's Croft finding succour in Newfoundland's unsettled landscape and reminds the readers of another national surrender that seems to negate even the most romantic notion of owning the island. The fact that the snow had to be dyed white recalls for the readers, as did enterprising engineer Phonse in *Rare Birds*, that the machine is already in the garden. The exhaust from thousands of cars blackens the snow used for these ice sculptures and seems to indicate the time for any natural merger between man and island has long passed. Most important, the flag, which seemed to appear of its own accord in Kavanagh's narrative, is in *The Nine Planets* a pathetic attempt at branding identity on a landscape that easily removes it.

The Colony of Unrequited Dreams, despite containing moments of peril when Smallwood nearly dies of exposure in the Newfoundland wilderness or almost plunges into the frigid Atlantic beneath the icepans he is attempting to negotiate, concludes with Fielding's praise of "the barrens, the bogs, the rocks and ponds and hills of Newfoundland" (562). In Riche's work, the land is adversarial rather than admirable. In *Rare Birds*, Dave's attempt to move through the Newfoundland outdoors is hilariously pathetic, a comedic version of the same resistance faced by Peyton and Buchan as they attempt to penetrate the Newfoundland interior in *River Thieves*. Riche forsakes this

humour in *The Nine Planets* as he reveals just how dangerous this rugged country can be:

Marty suddenly wanted to ... ask Rex whether he missed their parents.

They had died in a highway accident fourteen years earlier. Based on the skid marks – two abrupt black crescents – the police concluded that their father may have swerved to avoid something, an approaching vehicle drifting into their lane or an animal, or perhaps nodded off and lost control of the vehicle. On that moonless night the car left the road at 130 km/h and smashed into a boulder the size of a house, an “erratic,” a random geological hazard, dumped there by a receding glacier. (94)

Marty finds it difficult to be charmed by the harsh, harrowing yet beautiful landscape carved by rock, ice, and sea, because he has felt firsthand what this decidedly unromantic landscape can do to the people who move through it.

Though he is rendered forever cynical by his past failures and tragedies, Marty's contemptuous insights are still thought-provoking (if not a little ignominious), as when he deconstructs one of the most overused oxymoronic descriptions of Newfoundland landscape, coming this time from the mouth of a visiting actress shooting a film in an undeveloped area of Newfoundland:

“Set's a reproduction eighteenth-century fishing village. So primitive! I don't know how your ancestors survived. It's really just fantastic. And the landscape! That harsh, rugged beauty.”

“Rugged beauty”? No wonder they needed writers. If I were a rugged beauty would you blow me? thought Marty. (180)

Marty would balk at what he would term Fielding's "retarding nostalgia," and upon hearing more and more of it considers leaving the island for western cities without history, where the occupants look forward, not backward. As Marty puts it, threatening to shatter one of the bedrocks of popular Newfoundland identity, "To live in the oldest part of the New World was to miss the point" (252).

Marty's disdain for valorization of Newfoundland's rough and rural history is not groundless. Professionally and personally invested in his private school, Marty has been victim of the "quiet bigotry" of mainland Canadians whom he claims "enjoyed the yokels' singing and dancing, their antic faux-Irish chimping, could stomach them as toothless ghosts, the stoic rickety sea-serfs of yesteryear, but no self-respecting Canuck would think of sending their child to a 'Newfie' school" (147). The backward glances at half-created Newfoundlanders who laughed in the face of tragedy and made homes in an inhospitable country fuels the idea of Newfoundlanders as people who are at heart "still savages, born devils on whose nature nurture never stuck" (147). The continued revitalizing of such tropes can prove an infuriating impediment for professionals like Marty striving to be taken seriously: "They loved a funny Newfie on the mainland" (93).

Fielding is perched atop her isolated section shack on the night Newfoundland votes to join Canada. A train blasts past her tiny shelter, the conductor constantly blowing his whistle and calling "We won" to Fielding as he passes her. As the train disappears and the land returns to darkness and silence, Fielding notes, "Something abiding, something prevailing, was restored" (Johnston 562). For Fielding, it is the barrens and rocks and bogs, not the miracle of a train traversing them, which somehow captures the

Newfoundland essence that is lost on this night. The entrepreneurs, industrialists, and investors of *The Nine Planets* would argue that Fielding, like the Newfoundlanders who boast of living in the oldest part of the New World, has missed the point. In a speech that could have come from one of the unrepentant capitalists in Ayn Rand's *Atlas Shrugged*, a leading member of a controversial undertaking to develop the untouched area of Perroquet Downs outside Riche's St. John's justifies his stance. He preaches that it is the active utilization of the land, not a passive appreciation of it or glorification of those islanders who have struggled with it in the past, that is the only Newfoundland tradition:

"You know, Marty," said Hayden, "you know what I hate the most? It's when they refer to the Downs as 'unspoiled,' as though building there, like making use of it, letting people live in it, would spoil it. That's such bullshit, Marty, 'cause this place is about commerce. They didn't cross the pond in leaky boats for a theatre festival or to watch whales, they came to this place to make money, to kill whales and sell their fat. North America is about capitalism, and it got its start here, right here. Money means vitality, money means movement. That's our lost tradition, Marty, not running the fucking goat. There should be a fucking museum. Men have been doing business in Newfoundland for five hundred years. We've traded with Lisbon and London and Havana and Genoa from the get-go, and there are those who would have us all gamekeepers and actors. Build, baby, or wait tables." (141)

Despite the obvious fundamental differences between Hayden's and Fielding's

understanding of Newfoundland and Newfoundlanders, both are concerned that their notion of Newfoundland will be consumed by a more popular perception. Most of the protagonists in the novels studied here are not concerned with a notion so arbitrary as loss but with the possible loss of their idea of Newfoundland within a larger, less personal history.

There is an anxiety shared by Fielding and Smallwood in *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams*, John Peyton, Jr., in *River Thieves*, and several other protagonists that popular sentiment and the passage of time will conspire against them and their efforts to reshape and maintain a strong Newfoundland identity not tied to defeatism or backwardness. Smallwood believes that he must act quickly before the self-deprecation he sees in his father and in other Newfoundlanders he visits during his tour of the island with the Amulree Commission becomes too rooted. He believes that he must work immediately to attract the money and industry of other developed nations so that his "great small nation" may grow along with the others. Fielding sees in Smallwood's industrialization the paving-over of her St. John's of cobblestone roads and her Newfoundland of unspoiled wilderness. She commits her life to ceaseless writing, deriding those who would demean Newfoundland as they alter it and preserving on paper a Newfoundland that has disappeared in her lifetime. Peyton, the son of a man who played a prominent role in the extermination of the Beothuk, feels the pressure to somehow repair before it is permanent the damage done by his father and others. His overzealousness to make contact with the Beothuk and begin a healing process for both settlers and natives turns Peyton into a kidnapper and his father's collaborator in two

more murders. Every action of the outporters in *Gaff Topsails* occurs on a day nestled between the two referenda that eventually led to Newfoundland's confederation with Canada. The entire narrative is therefore charged with a particular relevance as it represents certain traditions and beliefs imperilled by this change of national identity. At the end of the narrative, which encapsulates the events of one day, the members of the community stay as long as possible beside the weakening bonfire, clinging to the remnants of the day and collectively admitting yet refusing to acknowledge the uncertainty in the growing darkness. It is this fear that drives many of these narratives: the fear of today washing away and leaving no trace while being replaced by an uncertain and unhomely tomorrow.

This fear is reified in Morgan's historical fiction, *Cloud of Bone*. The novel connects the narratives of three people involved in events that have shaped Newfoundland's collective identity: a Newfoundland soldier from the Second World War, a modern-day anthropologist whose studies have led her to the island, and Shanawdithit, the last Beothuk and therefore the last native Newfoundlander. Morgan's novel covers many recycled Newfoundland narratives, the wartime sacrifices made by Newfoundlanders for a distant and detached colonial ally, the loss of both a race of people and a wholly different understanding of the island with the eradication of the Beothuk, and the more recent though oft-repeated tale of a social scientist from outside Newfoundland discovering treasures overlooked by locals who, to paraphrase F. L. Jackson, did not know they were standing on a cultural goldmine until the anthropologists told them so. The soldier's narrative, which is itself a reaction to a history that will record

him as a deserter, contains Shanawdithit's story, apparently told to the young soldier by the ghost of the girl still angry at the "dogmen" who callously colonized her country. The anthropologist's accidental discovery of a skull sends her on a hunt that connects the narratives and mollifies Shanawdithit's tortured soul.

The title of this novel seems to indicate the collective murkiness of these histories and the impossibility of ever seeing them clearly. Moreover, the final paragraph in which the soldier is reunited with the skull and through it the stories of Shanawdithit is a disappearance of these narratives rather than a clarification of them. As Kyle Holloway, now an aged veteran, seeks to reunite the skull of the Beothuk girl with the rest of her remains somewhere in St. John's South Side Hills, he reflects on the impossibility of permanence in Newfoundland: "Soon there'll be nothing. Grass will grow over the railway station, over Water Street. Kyle wonders if they will just let the harbour silt up once the town is gone. The government will want to maintain what they call a presence... One Coast Guard station should do the trick, five people in all of Newfoundland – not Newfoundlanders, of course" (441). The culmination of the narrative sees both Holloway and Shanawdithit, as well as the solutions to their personal mysteries, consumed by an indifferent, relatively unaffected island:

They move forward, snow still falling, her voice and the snow all around, enclosing them in a white cave that is filled with nothing but story.

Then they are pitching and falling, tumbling together, spinning downward into the ravine. The snow has stopped. Here is the green valley, the little stream, the moss that long ago covered the army truck and its driver,

covered the broken beer bottles and knives, the rifles and rusting torpedoes, covered the spears and arrows, the shards of bone, the broken skulls of men and women and small children. Moss, given time, will cover everything. (442)

On first reading, this paragraph may seem to be another romantic ending to another historical Newfoundland fiction: not a companion piece necessarily, but a companion conclusion to Johnston's *Colony of Unrequited Dreams*. At the end of Morgan's novel, person and place are merged, made forever indistinguishable, forever a part of the other. Though in its own way as romantic as Johnston's conclusion, Morgan's final words do not offer the hope of a sustained Newfoundland identity.

Johnston's conclusion, which includes the assertion that Newfoundlanders "are a people" on whose communal minds the images of the land have been indelibly imprinted, offers permanence to both island and islanders. Newfoundlanders, being so in tune with the land around them, will continue to exist as long as the land remains. The land will exist forever as "Newfoundland" as long as there are Newfoundlanders to believe it. Morgan's conclusion is not so hopeful. "Newfoundland" as it is imagined is "nothing but story." The land is not so much a constant as it is a constantly self-regenerating entity. The island has endured human endeavours and follies by many races and generations of natives and settlers and has remained largely untamed, consuming the remnants of human industry rather than being marked by them. Holloway's thoughts on the eventual disappearance of Water Street, a main St. John's thoroughfare, are echoed in the work of Johnston and others, whose description of massive potholes and the penetration of

wilderness into the city reveal that fragility of even the most certain footholds of civilization on the island. The moss does not become one with the evidence of human effort and interference. It covers it.

Through Fielding's conflation of person and place, the land is imbued with the life of its inhabitants while the people (inasmuch as Johnston's Newfoundlanders are "a people") are offered a part of the land's intransience. Whether Johnston shares the sentiments of his narrator is unclear, but perhaps Fielding's poetic copulation of island and islander is the eponymous unrequited dream. There is no doubt as to the impossibility of a reciprocal romance between Newfoundland and Newfoundlander at the end of *Cloud of Bone*. All life, or all least all evidence of a life lived, will be consumed by the land. O'Flaherty is only half right it seems – given time, the land, like the sea, will erase all signs of human industry.

The different versions of Newfoundland depicted in these novels seem to be an extension of the debates occurring about Newfoundland both off and on the island and within and without academic and literary circles. A survey of any ten Newfoundlanders will surely find several who despise the word "Newfie" as the worst sort of ethnic slur, some who readily use the term and take pride in it, and others who are completely indifferent. The same holds for screech-ins. Some consider this initiation of non-Newfoundlanders into honorary Newfoundlander status an embarrassing minstrel show; others regard it as an inseparable and precious piece of Newfoundland tradition, while others see it as silly but ultimately harmless fun. As the idea of Newfoundland becomes more recognizable through literature and tourism advertisements, the debate over what is

and is not Newfoundland tradition, the debate over the relevance of this tradition, becomes more important, more passionate, and more likely to drive well-considered and creative contemplations on the island.

With so many narratives and so many presentations of Newfoundland, the Newfoundland experience, the culture, and the people, Newfoundland has become a more contested space than ever before. Yet each novel produced by Lisa Moore, Kenneth J. Harvey or Joel Thomas Hynes is invariably labelled as "Newfoundland literature," the term indicating that these books contain, above all else, enough images of the landscape, instances of the dialect, and reflections on the history to provide a sufficient portal into that particular world. That Johnston's novel drew the ire of several critics who attacked the author for his geographical and historical inaccuracies reveals Newfoundland to be a much contested space, even in the realm of fiction. Novelists who take as their subject the people, places, and history of Newfoundland still must work to demonstrate which Newfoundland they are reflecting.

This obligation, indebtedness, or responsibility to setting is obviously felt by the authors who take Newfoundland as their subject. This is revealed in the 2007 documentary "Speaking Volumes: A Literary Roar from the Rock." Discussing *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams*, Johnston admits he uses setting "as an extension of how characters live and see their destinies." This seems to explain the mindsets and motivations of both Fielding and Smallwood in Johnston's novel. The landscape is bleak, desolate, forsaken by many, difficult to work, but permanent. Born into this landscape, these characters must remain undaunted by its formidability, accept it as a birthright no

one else wanted, and strive to make it great – work tirelessly so that both Newfoundland and Newfoundlanders achieve a potential beyond that expected of them. Only through this can these characters fulfill a destiny in which their achievements are coupled with the endurance of the land itself.

Fielding and Smallwood seem to fall on either side of the Ozymandias equation in regards to their relationship with the land. Smallwood is the tyrannical king who builds factories and foundries that scream to present and future leaders, “Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!” Fielding is the “Traveller from an antique land” who knows, as Smallwood discovered too late, that “only an artist can measure up to such a place” (Johnston 552). Fielding turns to art, to writing, as her way of perpetuating the lives and destinies of Newfoundlanders. Like Shelley’s sculptor, Fielding, through connecting Newfoundlanders to their island, saves these passions, “Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things.” In his final remarks, Smallwood begins to see the double-edged nature of his toil on the island. Difficulties, it seems, make for a good story, if not always a successful life: “Absence, deprivation, bleakness, even despair are more likely than their opposites to be the subject of great art, but they otherwise work against greatness” (552).

During his interview in *Speaking Volumes*, Crummey turns from his work to the writing of Lisa Moore as evidence of place figuring prominently in Newfoundland literature: “because of what she is writing what comes through on the page is Newfoundland.” Though Moore’s “Newfoundland” rarely moves outside the parameters of St. John’s, it seems that any preconceived notions of Newfoundland space will be as

prominent in her novels as her characters. The pervasiveness of this landscape, or perhaps the overwhelming desire to capture it, is evident throughout the documentary. Though the authors are recorded *en masse* at public readings and in the living room of at least one gentrified St. John's townhouse, most of the individual interviews seem to take place outside, set against barren landscapes and grey oceans. Moore and Johnston discuss their works at seaside. Crummey sits within a seemingly untamed field. Michael Winter shares his thoughts on Newfoundland writing while restoring an apparently isolated cabin like the one occupied by his Rockwell Kent in *The Big Why*. Only Riche seems to resist the not-so-great Newfoundland outdoors and gives his interview in his kitchen – a modern kitchen rather than one of the “authentic” types praised by Glave. Yet in choosing to eschew the Newfoundland exterior, Riche seems to be making a statement as loudly as those standing before stark cliffs and yellowed fields. The Newfoundland landscape cannot be ignored, it seems. Even those who discuss Newfoundland literature from the comfort of their kitchens convey a desperation to convey another sort of Newfoundland away from rock and sea. Riche's decision to ignore it only makes more poignant the other authors' choices to position themselves within it.

The notion of the land enters each of these novels, whether as a constant already present foil to Johnston's characters or with the sudden impact of a moose through a windshield in *Alligator*. Each novelist appears to pay homage to it in some fashion. Even Harvey's urban tale is in many ways a turf war in which Myrden is in constant conflict with others to find a safe space for himself and his family. The untouched forests and ocean that surround Ruth's home on the outskirts of St. John's become for Myrden his

own unrequited dream. That landscape will save both Myrden's daughter and granddaughter as he sends them away to live with Ruth at the end of the novel. Conversely, Myrden effectively removes himself from the redemptive pastoral as he shuts the door of the townhouse behind him in preparation for the potentially fatal altercation with Willis, both men irreparably spoiled by their lives in the urban wasteland.

Myrden's recognition of Ruth's country home as some sort of Newfoundland ideal is repeated throughout these novels in Fielding's retreat to a railroad shack in the wilderness, in the joy taken by Peyton in his solitary work along his traplines, in the determination of Quoye and Kent to find a landscape that will help define them, in the desire of Will Wiseman and Gabriel English to leave the confines of St. John's for rural Newfoundland, and in Colleen's sabotage of bulldozers to preserve the Newfoundland pine martin. Crummey probably best defines this pervasive desire among writers to convey vividly the geography of Newfoundland in an interview with *The Antigonish Review*. Crummey once again praises Moore's work through noting what he perceives to be her deference to place: "Lisa Moore's latest book, *Open* ... is a fabulous book, an incredibly moving book, partly because what each of her stories does is honor the experience of this place" (Furey). To take Newfoundland as a subject, according to Crummey, is to take Newfoundland as a cause, and one must be careful to honour properly Newfoundland existence and experience.

As this new wave of literature continues to roll and readers are discovering Newfoundland as a "new" landscape not already papered over with stories, there seems to be a responsibility conferred upon those who write about Newfoundland. As Richard

Gwyn puts it in *Speaking Volumes*, there is a new and wider audience for Newfoundland literature, which means that Newfoundland authors are, for the first time, “doing it for strangers.” Leo Furey adds that this rise of a literary culture in Newfoundland is not long preceded by a “reading culture” and that most Newfoundland authors have “*carte blanche* to takes bits and pieces ... from the four-hundred-plus years of unwritten history.” With so many stories reaching a largely non-Newfoundland audience for the first time, it is not surprising that the Newfoundland literary scene and the idea of Newfoundland in general have both become contested spaces. Riche’s frustration is evident in the *Hot Type* documentary *The Rocks Here Tell Stories* when he proclaims, “I’ve had it up to here with authenticity.” The frustration no doubt stems from a desire by publishers and the reading public for historical Newfoundland fiction, or at least fiction that is somehow imbued with the culture of the place. This contesting for space extends beyond historical and modern-day fictions to a perceptible anxiety in authors and their books to convey their particular Newfoundland existence.

This anxiety is reflected in the characters of these novels. Morgan’s conclusion to *Cloud of Bone* presents the fate of obscurity feared by many of these protagonists. Morgan makes her testament to transience all the more poignant by including within it the disappearance of all earthly evidence of Shanawdithit, one of the most iconographic figures in Newfoundland history. Surely these characters cannot hope to leave a significant mark on this island if even its most prominent, truly native daughter has disappeared without a trace. It is this fear of leaving no trace, despite even furious industry, that motivates so many of these protagonists. Smallwood, in *The Colony of*

Unrequited Dreams, attempts large projects and builds large factories – objects and ideas he believes too large to be lost. Yet in his lifetime the projects fail and the factories become rusted “Come by Chance-like monoliths” (555). He sees in Fielding, her artistic talent and irrepressible love of the island and its people, the possibility of equalling the grandeur of the land. Perhaps only an artist, Smallwood admits, or an impossibly “self-sacrificing, love driven person,” can capture the essence of Newfoundland existence. In Fielding Smallwood sees both the artist and selfless lover of the land: “Fielding to whom no monuments will be raised, after whom no streets or buildings will be named. Unlike me, in whose name books have been written, plaques placed, statues erected” (552). Whereas some of Smallwood’s markers will lie, like Ozymandias’ shattered visage, a testament to fleeting power and what could have been, Fielding’s absence from history, Smallwood believes, is inextricably connected to the “paradox of Newfoundland” he has spent his life trying to solve.

For her part, Fielding seems to see both herself and her Newfoundland disappearing at the end of the novel. In her “Field Day” article that concludes the text, Fielding writes of another woman largely lost to history, Shawnawdithit, and tries to establish some affinity with her. Fielding must admit that such an attempt to understand this woman is presumptuous and, in the end, “an address to absence, silence” (559). Fielding does share a common pain with Shawnawdithit, however, in her loss of children. Shawnawdithit’s children were lost to her on the day she was abducted; Fielding’s children were taken from her and raised by her mother in New York. Near the end of *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams*, having lost her son in the Second World War, Fielding

contacts her daughter, tells her she is her mother, only to receive a note from an obviously unsettled woman who assures Fielding she is mistaken and offers to meet with her only in the comfort of a friend's home. The loss of her two children, coupled with the transformation of her island from a country to a province within a country of strangers, forces Fielding to recognize her failure to leave any permanent mark on Newfoundland. Her scathing satires, her poignant commentaries, even her pastoral romances have failed to stall Newfoundland's march into confederation. Her children will know nothing of the country she has tried so hard to preserve. Realizing that her legacy may become the absence and silence of Shawnawdithit, Fielding must find evidence of herself and her fellow Newfoundlanders in the unchanging rocks and barrens of her island. Ownership of the island may shift, even its official name may change, but the ponds and hills, "These things, finally, primarily are Newfoundland" and they remain so in the minds of Newfoundlanders (562). There may be more anxiety than romance in Fielding's final comments, because at the end of her narrative she struggles to find affinity, not with present or past Newfoundlanders whose losses and failings she has detailed, but with inanimate and indifferent objects that have been unchanged by human interference and will remain so.

In *River Thieves*, John Peyton fears that his legacy will be connected with his father's history of violence and savagery. Both time and the land seem to conspire against Peyton's ambition to reconnect with the Beothuk and heal some of the wounds his father and others have created. Unable to mount an expedition in the harsh winter months, Peyton feels the proposed departure date of the first search party slowly "grinding

towards him" (166). In its turn, the land grinds Peyton and the other men on his expedition, bruising, cutting, breaking, and otherwise impeding these men as they try to find evidence of the Beothuk in the Newfoundland interior. Even the most rushed mission inland is reduced to a "hard chafe" by inhospitable and unrelenting terrain (317). When contact is finally achieved, Peyton and his men, exhausted and frightened, only further distance themselves from an understanding of the land through a sloppily executed kidnapping and murder.

The very act of industry drives a wedge between the settlers and the island. Though Peyton feels most at ease in the bush and feels closest in the interior to "loving something that might, in some unconscious way, love him in return," he knows that the Beothuk – through their existence and eventual non-existence – stand between him and true kinship with the land (166). The thievery referenced by the title could relate to the pilfering of place by settlers like John Peyton, Sr., and the continued use of stolen goods by John Peyton, Jr., and all members of subsequent generations. The younger Peyton cannot work this land enough to make it his, and the anxiety he feels is directly related to the dwindling of the Beothuk population who have a rightful claim to the island. Peyton must act quickly, like Smallwood and Fielding, to make his connection before the opportunity has passed. Peyton hopes that contact and meaningful communication with the Beothuk will be tantamount to communing with the land. His hope is to be absolved of the sins of his father and work the land as a partner benefiting from his rightful inheritance, not the son of a murderer and thief continuing an act of colonial appropriation.

This communing is impossible, of course, and Peyton is effectively unhomed in this narrative. As Homi Bhabha notes in *The Location of Culture*, the claiming of home by the colonizer relies first on a disavowal, a convenient forgetting of those whom he has supplanted. Peyton's unsuccessful effort to contact, understand, and save the Beothuk is his "unhomely moment," a moment which, as Bhabha puts it, "creates an uncertainty at the heart of the generalizing subject ... compromising the individual" (10). Having witnessed the murders of two Beothuk, having kidnapped Demasduit only to watch her die as well, having heard all the grisly truth of his father's claiming of this place, Peyton cannot claim to be a Newfoundlander, to have earned a right to call the island his home.

Even the romantic Kavanagh cannot gloss over this original sin at the core of Newfoundland identity. Though the characters in the narrative present of *Gaff Topsails* do have moments of intimate connection with the land, these brief instances of a primal and primary relationship are minor compared to the years of intimacy shared between Tomas Croft and the island. Croft miraculously survives Newfoundland winters without shelter or fire because he is sustained by a sexual and psychic connection to the land. But like Peyton, Croft is also severed from his island by the killing of the Beothuk. Though a unique colonizer, Croft is victim to the same fear that fuelled so many colonial genocides and murders the first Beothuk he encounters. Like the elder Peyton, Croft crushes a Beothuk man's skull and is thenceforth a tortured interloper on the island: "No longer is he one with his new world. Somehow he is broken and incomplete" (119). For the years following the murder, "Nothing happens to Tomas Croft but the routine of keeping himself alive" (119). Croft lives a meagre parasitic existence far beneath the spiritually

symbiotic life he once shared with the island. Though Kavanagh does deploy a heavy load of romanticism in his depictions of Croft's womb-cove-dwelling descendants, the members of the community on this day in 1948 could also be said to be simply performing the routines that keep them alive. Though there is an aspect of reverence and ritual attached to their actions, these people have lost that connection to the land once felt by Croft.

As Fielding talks to absence and silence, Croft and Peyton mark their relationship to Newfoundland not by a connection, but by a fissure, the very absence of a connection. Unable to re-establish this connection, these characters accept the impossibility of leaving a meaningful reminder of themselves as inhabitants of the island. Croft becomes an unrepentant thief and leader to a band of like-minded brigands. When repentance does come in the form of baptism by a missionary, Croft does not try to mend the rift between him and the island but ends his impossibly long life in Newfoundland. Upon bringing Mary March to her final resting place, Peyton looks to the same land formations that gave succour to Fielding and realizes no affinity, feels no entitlement: "He gestured toward the far hills, to the forest so green under the sun that it was nearly black. He shaded his eyes against the light, the white of snow on the lake. He said, 'All my life I've loved what didn't belong to me'" (Crummey 327). Whereas Fielding uses words to make possible her connection to the land, Peyton realizes to speak is only to give voice to shames best left unspoken. When questioned by Lieutenant Buchan, Peyton is forced to confront the truth about the capture of a Beothuk girl he saw on display when he was a boy in Poole:

"Do you remember how she wound up there?"

"Richmond was the one got hold of her, I believe. Says he found her wandering alone out on one of the bird islands."

Buchan shook his head. "He found her. A child. Thirteen leagues out on the Atlantic."

"So he says."

"He must have killed the rest of her family to get her, I expect."

Peyton raised his shoulders. No one had ever said as much before, though everyone believed it to be true. "I expect he must have," he said. (306)

Language offers no comfort to Peyton, nor does it offer some poetic oneness with the land. To tell stories, to unearth histories, is to widen the gap between Newfoundlanders and the island they call home.

Apparently only a visitor with little or no concept of the land or its history would try to somehow foster this relationship between person and place. Arriving with no preconceived notions of Newfoundland and close to no sense of self, Quoye comes closer than any other protagonist to Croft's bodily connection to the land. At one point in *The Shipping News*, Quoye is so aroused by the landscape he presses his groin "against the barrens as if he were in union with the earth" (Proulx 196). A shapeless, aimless individual, Quoye wants to be hewn into some purposeful instrument by this land. It is interesting that the other visitor studied here, a more occidental than accidental tourist, relishes his directionless nature. Rockwell Kent of Winter's *The Big Why* wishes to shape Newfoundland as he sees fit: "I'd realized that my own ambition, let's call it Rockwell Land, was tied up not with a place but more with the idea of who I was" (Winter 60).

Vain and fickle, Kent wants to use Newfoundland to further his own reputation but is unwilling to take part in the routine that has ensured the survival of generations of Newfoundlanders. Unwilling to play host to his parasitic nature and tired of his condescending eccentricities, the people of Brigus banish him from the island. Quoye's open nature leads him to be accepted by the locals. Though Kent has aspirations for "Rockwell Land," Quoye's name is already attached to the land through Quoye's Point and, less flatteringly, Omaloor Bay, a reference to the "big, stun, clumsy, witless, simpleminded" Quoyes who once lived there (58). It is interesting that Quoye's desire to detach himself from that legacy, and any claim to the land (albeit a dubious one), leads to his eventual happiness. Of all the characters studied here, Quoye is certainly the happiest by the end of his narrative. The reason appears to be that he is the only character who has not tried to alter or otherwise lay claim to the island.

Dave Purcell of *Rare Birds* is the exemplary protagonist whose notions of self-worth are directly connected to his inability to forge a life in this inhospitable country. Dave is not a settler but a modern day restaurateur. It is not the inhospitality of the land, such as was shown to Peyton and Buchan in *River Thieves*, that thwarts Dave. Rather, it is the island's apparent inability to foster a hospitality industry that threatens to destroy him. Having given his restaurant the rather inauspicious name The Auk, Dave, like the doomed bird, seems on the verge of disappearance. A long winter of snowstorms and snowdrifts make the drive from St. John's to The Auk too perilous to attempt most of the year, and Dave's effort to alter the Newfoundland landscape by creating a bistro that caters to less provincial tastes seems about to fail. Defeated and bitter, Dave counts his

faltering enterprise among the centuries of failed human efforts on the island: "A four hundred year legacy of misery and deprivation" (24). Dave's momentary success comes not from working with the land but through creating an alternative, imaginary version of it. The bust that follows the boom finds Dave seriously considering a road trip off the island, a trip made all the more likely by his would-be lover Alice taking a permanent position in Montreal. Unlike Fielding, Dave finds only temporary solace in his re-creation of the island. When the events around the bird hoax literally explode around him, Dave has a greater appreciation of the island but is no closer to claiming mastery over it. The final images reveal Dave to be content to enjoy the island but give no indication of his desire to carve his life from it. In fact, Dave seems to take his cue to depart from the natural instincts of the migrating ducks he is admiring: "Ducks were on the pond of Push Cove too, taking their last sustenance before joining the geese and leaving the punishing Newfoundland winter behind" (259).

The *flâneurs* of *The Night Season* and *This All Happened*, by their very natures, have a deep connection with the urban landscape. Yet, whether they realize it or not, like the other characters discussed, this relationship is a strictly one-way romance. Gabriel English's connection to the St. John's of pubs and art galleries is so tangential that the arrival of one man, the intriguing Craig Regular, threatens to dislodge Gabe from his place in the city. Will Wiseman of *The Night Season* has covered the city with stories of his own past to the point of paralysis. Will avoids large areas of St. John's rather than relive painful moments or be reminded of past joys. Like his reflection in a shop window, Will's presence in the city is fleeting, and though his experiences there have marked him,

they leave no mark on a city that is growing increasingly unfamiliar to him. Both men seem content to live entirely within their own narratives, pretending that their experiences in St. John's contain a wider meaning, both imagining themselves to be the city's only son.

Like Smallwood, Fielding, Peyton, and the others, Gabe is obsessed with time: so obsessed that *This All Happened* is little more than Gabe's recording of days he should be spending doing something else. By the end of the novel, Gabe feels he has "used up" St. John's and is now counting the days until he leaves the place. Wiseman mourns the differences he sees in the current city and the city of his younger days. Bemoaning everything from the closure of family-run businesses to the erection of the garish Atlantic Place to the demise of the tradition of a quiet walk along the harbour on New Year's Eve, Will feels as if the city has abandoned him, has coldly forsaken a relationship in which he has invested so much of himself. Wiseman eventually lifts himself out of his malaise and re-enters the city, looking not for a self-affirming, long-lasting relationship, but a "fling" with an enigmatic city that in many ways will not be there tomorrow. The older of the two *flâneurs*, Wiseman is able to forsake the egotistical desire to impose himself on the place and resume his life as a traveller in the city. Gabe is still looking to make his mark at the end of *This All Happened*. Not finding it in his changing friends who have switched jobs, partners, and professions in the span of this narrative, nor in the city which still holds many hazardous unknowns, Gabe decides to leave St. John's. Like Kent, Gabe fails to see beyond what he can make of Newfoundland, and when he cannot shape it to mirror his own desires he abandons it.

In Moore's *Alligator*, neither person nor place stays constant long enough to formulate complementary identities or bonding relationships. The impossibility of this merger laces Moore's narrative with irony: Colleen, defender of Newfoundland's wildlife, is nearly killed by a moose crashing through her side of a car windshield; Madeleine, the filmmaker obsessed with capturing the reality of Newfoundland history, is delayed in shooting her movie because she needs to airlift white stallions into the province; Valentin, a Russian sailor who hates the island, is the only character who possesses the confidence of one truly at home; and Frank, whose phallic name recalls the sexually charged islanders of *Gaff Topsails*, is unable to claim even a street corner as his own. The invasion of the spanworms creates in Moore's St. John's an "unhomely presence" that momentarily displaces and undermines her characters (Bhabha 13). In regards to landscape and interaction with it, Moore's images of the spanworms blanketing the city after they have morphed into white moths are some of the most powerful scenes in Newfoundland literature. Seeing in the swirling insects the snowstorm and charging horses from the climax of her film, Madeleine misses her last opportunity to see the actual. Already humbled by her encounter with an alligator in the Louisiana everglades, Colleen sees in the moths the foolishness and vanity of her earlier attempts to control this city and its occupants. Valentin sees the moths for the first time as he stands outside a house he set ablaze. Marvelling at Frank's refusal to die in the burning building, Valentin abandons his attempts to exploit this place, perhaps realizing there is more to this island than he so quickly condemned.

Valentin's rise to power in *Alligator* would be considered by Bhabha an example

of "historical displacement" (13). Through claiming the title of Newfoundlanders, these characters should be best suited to succeed there. Yet Valentin enters like an alligator in a favourable but unprepared environment and proceeds to feast on the native inhabitants. Recalling Jackson's anthropologists who find treasures missed by the locals, Valentin turns garbage into sizeable profits through his harvesting of copper in the city dump. He then quickly moves in on territory claimed by Newfoundlanders, persuading Isobel to let him burn her house for the insurance money and strong-arming Frank into surrendering his hotdog cart. It is colonial conquest all over again as the more cunning and worldly Valentin overpowers the unsuspecting natives. His success at the expense of locals who have lived their lives in St. John's reveals the fragility of this connection to place that defines so many Newfoundlanders.

In Harvey's *Inside*, Myrden, though a vastly different character from many of the protagonists studied (with the exception of Valentin), shares many of their concerns. Like Fielding, Myrden fears that he will have no lasting legacy, or at least no good one, because of his separation from his children. Like Peyton, Myrden rushes to mend these rifts but succeeds only in forever removing himself from his home through further acts of violence. Myrden is not so much concerned with leaving a trace of himself on the island as he is worried about erasing past transgressions that may harm his daughter and granddaughter. Having momentarily ruled his small but violent urban jungle, Myrden ultimately decides that his life in this place can go no further, and he selflessly removes himself from it for the benefit of his family. For Myrden, St. John's is a contested space where even the most successful combatants hold sway for only brief moments. He

regards the reporters who dog his door, the fun-loving patrons of the George Street bars he avoids, and pretty much everyone outside his immediate social circle (save Ruth) as people who simply do not understand the city as he does. Like Peyton, Myrden has seen the worst sides of Newfoundland and Newfoundlanders and cannot romanticize a connection between the two.

Inside is unique among Newfoundland novels because it never turns to romanticism. Even Riche's satiric novels, which are a continual commentary on this pervasive romanticism, still contain such instances as the dour Dave Purcell enjoying a few contemplative moments with the Newfoundland landscape at the end of *Rare Birds*. Myrden is very aware of his body, his failing heart, his still dangerous hands, the thrill that surges through him at the threat of violence, but he never connects his body to his surroundings. His failing heart is never whimsically compared to the failing economy or other historical failures of Newfoundland. His rough-and-ready-body is a testament to his own life and hardships, not the Darwinian result of four hundred years of adaptation to the Newfoundland environment. The final line, "Then he went back inside," is at once a turn from environment and a realization of the power of the self to determine one's destiny, or even the destiny of others (282). In light of the other texts studied here, as well as numerous other Newfoundland novels containing lengthy considerations of the "traditional" landscape of barrens, rocks, and oceans, *Inside* in its ignorance of it does not diminish its pervasiveness. The absence of a landscape made familiar to readers by Johnston, Morgan, and Proulx seems to scream that *Inside* is a presentation of another Newfoundland existence, a gritty urban life that troubles any preconceived notions of the

place. It is vital that this way of being be considered and not, to borrow Johnston's metaphor, buried in an avalanche of literary imaginings of Newfoundland as rural environment inextricably linked to its history of loss and determination.

The passions displayed by Newfoundland writers when discussing their work and their province gives evidence to their eagerness and anxiety to convey their versions of this place. In the documentaries *The Rocks Here Tell Stories* and *Speaking Volumes: A Literary Roar from the Rock*, some writers claim to "feel" the island, its trees, rocks, and rivers, while others dismiss this sentiment as utter nonsense. Some feel they owe their Newfoundland identity to those who came before, while others believe they are forging their Newfoundland identity in the modern world. Regardless of their perception of Newfoundland, all these authors seem to share equally a need to add their notions of Newfoundland to the growing voice. The categorization of a "Newfoundland literature" or the amalgamation of recent novels into one rising wave of Newfoundland fiction belies the fact that these novels are often in contention with each other for readers and for the recognition of a particular version of Newfoundland. Each novel not only diversifies the ideas of Newfoundland and Newfoundlanders but destabilizes, in fact unhomes, these perceptions in another novel.

Karen E. MacFarlane believes that articulating the notion of "home" in contemporary Canadian writing involves "a negotiation between multiple versions of histories, identities, and places" (223). She believes that contemporary Euro-Canadians are only beginning to recognize "the instability of the master narrative of colonial history" and starting to write narratives that destabilize colonial and postcolonial notions

of Canada (223). As Ronald Rompkey notes, Newfoundlanders are the only Canadians with both a pre- and post-Confederation consciousness, so the notion of Euro-Canadian seems particularly fitting. MacFarlane's definition (via Vijay Mishra) of "home" as "the new epistemological logic of (post)modernity as the condition of 'living here and belonging somewhere else'" appears to be a precise definition of Sheilagh Fielding's position in Newfoundland: a woman both at home and lost in a country she loves but no longer recognizes as hers (MacFarlane 223). The feeling of living in one place but belonging to another is what plagues Peyton throughout *River Thieves* and drives him into the interior to seek peaceful communication with the Beothuk and perhaps earn their approval as the next Newfoundlander. In the deepest moments of his despair, Dave Purcell wonders why Europeans ever bothered to settle Newfoundland and sees in the debilitating snowstorms and hazardous roads evidence that Newfoundlanders, despite the name, do not belong there. Dependent as they are on the streets of St. John's for their identity, both Will Wiseman and Gabriel English feel out of place in their hometown. Will's is the uncanny experience of moving through a space so much like home yet so obviously not. Every step he takes through St. John's is a reminder that his St. John's is receding further and further into the past. Gabriel has become remarkably uncomfortable in his own home. He is so uncomfortable, in fact, that he feels he must leave it. Colleen wanders the narrative of *Alligator* feeling somehow above the shopping malls and George Street bars she frequents. She is comfortable among these people, but she feels no connection to them. *Inside* is the narrative of a man who returns home only to feel more alienated than he has ever felt before. Myrden briefly flirts with a life back home before

returning to where he really belongs. Both within their own narratives and among themselves, these novels create a notion of home not as a constant but as a space that must be continually reified and contested.

MacFarlane uses the Foucauldian term “heterotopia” to further examine how one could be both at home and unhomed within one’s own country. A heterotopia is unlike a utopia in that it is an actual place. It is like a utopia in that it is also created. A heterotopia is an actual place, yet it represents all the places, histories, and events of a particular culture. Newfoundland is an actual island in the Atlantic Ocean, but it is also a representation of colonization, defeat, struggle, survival, humour, future greatness, rural tradition, and urban modernity: “The heterotopia thus mediates between the real, identifiable place (‘there’ or ‘here’) and its imaginative or discursive function” (MacFarlane 226). For MacFarlane and for many contemporary Newfoundland authors, “home” is a strategically deployed entity: “it is an imaginary, provisional ‘place to stand on’ ... which is articulated through an elaborate process of mythmaking and storytelling” (229). Consciously or subconsciously, many of the characters studied create a heterotopia of Newfoundland. For Smallwood, Newfoundland is the next “great small country,” and he refuses to see it any other way despite his father’s self-defeatism, his school master’s disparagement, or Fielding’s sarcasm. For Fielding, Newfoundland, whether a province, colony, or country, will forever be home to Newfoundlanders who are linked to it by entities that will never change, regardless of the island’s name and status.

These characters espouse their definitions of their Newfoundland “home” in the face of other, destabilizing definitions. Smallwood creates his Newfoundland of untapped

potential to counteract those who would dismiss him and his home as lost causes. In the face of confederation with an unknown country and the imposition of provincial status, Fielding creates (ironically with words) a Newfoundland outside of language and title that exists forever in the minds and blood of Newfoundlanders. *River Thieves* is John Peyton's search for a heterotopia, a land that speaks only to him, but in the end it is the discovery of another land marked everywhere with the scars of colonialism, a land whose defining story is not one of entitlement but of thievery. *Gaff Topsails*, moreso than *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams*, is an attempt to create a Newfoundland heterotopia through the inclusion of as many myths and stories as possible. Moreover, through the pseudo-sexual union of person and place throughout the narrative, Kavanagh forges a place on this day when Newfoundland is neither a colony nor a province, an island that is undeniably and undyingly connected to Newfoundlanders. Quoye finds in Newfoundland a constant, something to brace against but also something abrasive that will hone him into a purposeful being. The Newfoundland heterotopia in *The Shipping News* is a home that must be continually worked, or "scurrifunged" as Aunt Agnis would put it, but a home that rewards those who work to make it so.

Yet these Newfoundland realities are contested and contradicted by the urban existences of Newfoundlanders in the novels of Moore, Bowdring, Winter, and Harvey. Dave Purcell, through poignant, painfully truthful passages, reveals Newfoundland to be beyond romanticism and quite possible beyond settlement. These varying ideas of home are like MacFarlane's postcolonial theories of space and identity which "function beyond stable forms of definition" and "foreground the inherently provisional, unstable nature of

all such characterizations" (237). "Home" is a place to be occupied "for now," and its meaning changes constantly. As MacFarlane notes, "home" is a concept to be worked rather than a constant to be accepted. Fielding demonstrates this best through her shifting though undeniably Newfoundland personality. Reflecting on her Newfoundland of barrens and bogs at the end of *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams*, Fielding demonstrates what Mathews has termed "flashes of what might be called naïve Romanticism" (8). Yet in dealing with the history of her island, romanticism fails her, and she relies on biting sarcasm. Her "Condensed *History of Newfoundland*" contains an alternative, certainly unromantic version of the "Ode to Newfoundland" and passages from *Quodlibets*, a "corrective" history Fielding claims to have discovered. Portrayed in both instances is a harsh, inhospitable Newfoundland that refutes romanticism. Fielding's concept of Newfoundland alters depending on whose ideas she is arguing, whose ego she is deflating, or which ignorance she is combating.

Yet Fielding's love of Newfoundland remains constant, whether it is expressed through her warts-and-all depictions of its history, her cynicism towards others she feels do not appreciate it as she does, or through her final moments of idyll and idealism. As Mathews puts it, "Fielding never gives up or sells out, and she remains for Smallwood a constant beacon of personal integrity" (9). Smallwood realizes late that his love and respect for Fielding has been as much a motivating force in his life as his determination to turn Newfoundland into a success. He loves her love of Newfoundland, as evidenced in their train ride across the island, during which Fielding finally sees the western half of the province: "It was not the country we were passing through that kept distracting me,

but Fielding seeing Newfoundland for the first time at the age of sixty" (Johnston 550).

Smallwood, who as a boy moved from house to house, who as a young man left, then rediscovered, traversed, and circumnavigated the island, who as a man, no matter how powerful, felt ill-at-ease among other politicians and officials, finally finds a home in Fielding's love of Newfoundland. As with all the novels studied here, the constant is not the place itself but a desire to continually rediscover it. Contemporary Newfoundland literature provides readers not with a rock to observe but with a fertile soil to be endlessly excavated.

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