

JANUS FACED WOMAN:  
A SEARCH FOR NEWFOUNDLAND IDENTITY

CENTRE FOR NEWFOUNDLAND STUDIES

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VICKI SARA HALLETT















# **Janus Faced Woman: A Search for Newfoundland Identity**

**By  
Vicki Sara Hallett ©**

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in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree  
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## **Abstract**

This thesis is an exploration of the identity “Newfoundland Woman”. It is a journey that encompasses a number of texts, which include both fiction and non-fiction, historical and modern narratives. These texts are Random Passage and Waiting for Time, by Bernice Morgan, and the narrative texts of my life and my mother’s life. It examines the social underpinnings of self-identity through the lenses of queer and postmodern theories. Most important among those are Judith Butler’s theory of gender performativity and Linda McDowell’s postmodern take on feminist geography. Through the interplay of these theoretical positions, and interconnections between theory and narrative, ideas of what Newfoundland Woman has meant, does mean, and might mean in the future are evinced and expanded.



## **Prologue**

### ***Erosion***

*It took the sea a thousand years,  
A thousand years to trace  
The granite features of this cliff,  
In crag and scarp and base.*

*It took the sea an hour one night,  
An hour of storm to place  
The sculpture of these granite seams  
Upon a woman's face.*

(By: E.J. Pratt)

Who is this woman? A woman carved, like the place she inhabits, by the unforgiving forces of the sea. A woman devastated. A woman of myth and memory. A woman of strength. A woman for all time? A Newfoundland Woman. Little is known about this woman, outside of her tragedy. In order to find out more, it will be necessary to plunge into the depths and explore the forces that have sculpted her and her place in the world.

As elusive movements of ocean continually etch new patterns in rock, so too are the powers that shape identity ever at work. Insidious erosion whittles away memories of granite, leaving behind raggedly shifting faces of the past. Barely perceptible changes are wrought over time, allowing us the illusion of permanence despite the reality of perpetual upheaval.

The woman in the poem Erosion could be Great Grandmother Daly, my mother's grandmother. The sea took her husband one February night in 1918 when the *Florizel* lost its way near Cappahayden. Her fifth child was still in her womb waiting to be named after his father. Somehow she raised her five children, maintained their small home on Circular Road in St. John's, and never remarried. She lived long enough to bury two of her children, Mary, who succumbed to influenza at thirteen years of age, and Burks, who at thirty-one fell asleep under the sun and never woke up. She was also fortunate to see the three others, my Grandfather Desmond, my Great Auntie Sheila, and my Great Uncle Joe grow to be fine, gentle souls. The story of her indomitable will lived on to carve the memories of her children, grandchildren and great grandchildren.

I have been left with a legacy of questions about my Great Grandmother. Was she resentful of my Great Grandfather for leaving her with such a burden to carry alone? Did she ever feel trapped by her life? Did she enjoy a measure of freedom as a widow? Did she have unfulfilled expectations? Was she proud of her own strength? Who was she? Am I like her? She exists in my memory very much like the escarpments of Signal Hill, carved by the sea, staunch, mysterious, and silent.

The power of her story has always been ambivalent, like that of the sea. At times it buoys me with the strength bequeathed by my female ancestors, at other times it swamps me with feelings of inadequacy. The force of it has left a deep impression on me, and as I learn and grow it continually deposits new queries into that cleft. It washes over me,



waves of emotion and wonder for a Newfoundland woman I never knew yet to whom I am connected by currents of salty blood and tricky tides of memory.

Stories like that of Great Grandmother Daly have flooded my mind as long as I can remember. Both sides of my family tell tales of ancestors that are tantalizingly ambiguous, or frustratingly incomplete. They are stories not only about people, but also about the places in which they lived and that lived in them, old St. John's on my mother's side, and the fishing community of Flat Island, Bonavista Bay on my father's side. It is these stories that I see and feel reflected in the books Random Passage and Waiting for Time.

The power of these stories has always fascinated me. The power to evoke places and times, to make you feel intimately linked with, or coldly isolated from your sense of history and self, to bring you along for the ride, to exclude you from the voyage, to make you feel any combination of these things all at once. Mostly they make me wonder about the unspoken details behind them, what is in the background giving the stories their authenticity, shape, and depth. This is what gives them the power to make us see ourselves in a certain way, the power to shape our identities.

## **Introduction**

“It forced us to face our long buried demon of identity” (Johnston 477, ch.29).

What is “identity”? What is “place”? How are they mutually constituted and constitutive? How do the stories we tell about ourselves shape both “identity” and “place”? How have ideas of “identity” and “place” changed over time in the Newfoundland context?

My thesis explores these questions within the amorphous boundaries of what Judith Butler calls the “normative operation” of gender in a variety of Newfoundland texts. The texts analyzed are fictional and non-fictional, historical and of the present day. These are Random Passage and its sequel Waiting for Time by Bernice Morgan, as well as the television miniseries Random Passage<sup>i</sup> based upon these books. In addition I include a reading of an interview I conducted with my mother in 2001 about her life and the female influences in it, and a narrative journal of my own life experiences as a girl/woman growing up in Newfoundland. (These experiences are of course not to be taken as unproblematic evidence, but are “interpretations in need of interpretation” as will be explained later with reference to Joan Scott’s work.)

In reading these ‘texts’ against one another and through the lens of Butler’s theories of gender performativity, I engage the notions of “what qualifies as ‘gender’” in a Newfoundland imaginary<sup>ii</sup>. As Butler suggests in the 1999 preface to Gender Trouble,



this is “already a question that attests to a pervasively normative operation of power [...] thus the very description of the field of gender is in no sense prior to, or separable from, the question of its normative operation” (xxi). Hence, an inquiry into the “normative operation” of gender, or the shapes we are expected to take, the postures we are supposed to assume, as ‘men’ and ‘women’, must be an exploration of “a *descriptive* account of gender [which] includes considerations of what makes gender intelligible, an inquiry into its conditions of possibility, [and] a *normative* account [which] seeks to answer the question of which expressions of gender are acceptable and which are not”(xxi).

In looking at the descriptive and normative operations of gender in these historico-fictitious texts, I query not only the binaries of male/female under which we are categorized as human beings, but also those of non-fiction/fiction, history/memory, past/present. I explore the possible connections betwixt and between these dualities and an identity known as ‘Newfoundland Woman’.

I believe this exploration of the identity Newfoundland Woman is important because, to quote Butler:

...every insistence on identity must at some point lead to a taking stock of the constitutive exclusions that reconsolidate hegemonic power differentials, exclusions that each articulation was forced to make in order to proceed. This critical reflection will be important in order not to replicate at the level of identity politics the very exclusionary moves that initiated the turn to specific identities in the first place.”(Bodies 118)

Thus a critical engagement with reified identity, an engagement that interrupts the normative operation of power, that interrogates the constrictive binaries under which we live, could not only help us portray the complexity of women’s identities, but also identify the ways we are oppressed, and oppress others through these insidious, exclusionary mechanisms.



## Theory

According to Butler:

If one “is” a woman, that is surely not all one is; the term fails to be exhaustive, not because a pregendered “person” transcends the specific paraphernalia of its gender, but because gender is not always constituted coherently or consistently in different historical contexts, and because gender intersects with racial, class, ethnic, sexual, and regional modalities of discursively constituted identities. As a result, it becomes impossible to separate out “gender” from the political and cultural intersections in which it is invariably produced and maintained. (Gender 6)

Thus I am concerned with the specific historical and present day “modalities” of the Newfoundland context, with all of its inherent idiosyncrasies, and how gender is indeed constituted within and by them. I view these “modalities” as the ways a culture reproduces itself. I focus on the religious, sexual, geographical, economic, and linguistic aspects of Newfoundland culture that shape an identity known as Newfoundland Woman.

In keeping with Butler’s theory of performativity, I am not only interested in the ways gender identity is constituted, but the ways in which it is *imperfectly* constituted. In this theory, gender is a performative set of identifications based upon the reiteration, or “citing”, of societal norms. These norms govern every aspect of our identities as men

and women from how we love to how we dress. As Butler states in the article “Imitation and Gender Insubordination”:

...gender is not a performance that a prior subject elects to do, but gender is *performative* in the sense that it constitutes as an effect the very subject it appears to express. It is a compulsory performance in the sense that acting out of line with heterosexual norms brings with it ostracism, punishment, and violence, not to mention the transgressive pleasures produced by those very prohibitions. (24)

Despite being “compulsory”, the citing of gender norms is rarely perfect. Does anyone consistently adhere to the strict protocols of these binary categories? How can any human behaviour be faithfully repeated without deviation? Therefore, I did not expect to find any ‘perfect examples’ of gender performativity. I did expect to find tangled, contradictory, painful, and pleasurable aspects of the identity Newfoundland Woman, and I expected to be surprised by many of them.

I have chosen Butler’s theory as my point(s) of departure because Judith Butler is unafraid of the ambivalent nature of human social existence. She is unwilling to place any aspects of human “identity” into discrete, stagnant categories. Instead, she unsettles the sediments of cemented identity categories and finds pleasure and hope in the turbidity. She is eager to embrace the pure paradox of what it means to call ourselves anything, and in doing so she creates a theoretical space that is ever-changing, shifting,



and exciting. It is a queer space where the possibilities are endless and the air so rarefied as to make you feel, well, in a word, queer!

This theoretical space is a contested and ambivalent one, as I learned from Julia Creet's 'definition' of queer theory in Code's Encyclopaedia of Feminist Theories. Since Teresa de Lauretis coined the term in 1991 it has been the subject of hot debate in academia.

[While] Lauretis initially took up the term queer with an eye to projects uncovering 'the respective and/or common grounding of current discourses and practices of homosexualities in relation to gender and to race, class, ethnic culture, generational, geographical, and socio-political location', [she soon] distanced herself from the term, disappointed by the vacuousness that its popularity implied. (Creet 414)

In my subsequent readings of theorists whose work often gets defined as 'queer' (Butler, Probyn, Fuss, Neuman, Britzman), I have found that the 'common grounding' of these writers is the uncommon ways they think about identity, sexual and otherwise. These writers have made me re-evaluate notions of identity as fixed, unified, based on biology, or as an unproblematic basis for political action. I think it is the ever-deferred notion of identity that loosely defines this space. Thus, it is in this space that I wish to explore the identity of Newfoundland Woman.

Into this space I also wish to interject Joan Scott's postmodern take on the notion of "experience", as I am using my experiences and those of my mother as additional texts in this endeavor. According to Scott:

When experience is taken as the origin of knowledge, the vision of the individual subject (the person who had the experience or the historian who recounts it) becomes the bedrock of evidence upon which explanation is built. Questions about the constructed nature of experience, about how subjects are constituted as different in the first place, about how one's vision is structured—about language (or discourse) and history—are left aside. (25)

I do not wish to leave questions of the constitution of subjectivity unexplored. On the contrary, I wish to place such questions at the forefront of my analysis of gender(ed) experience. I will heed Scott's warnings, and try to avoid the pitfalls of an unquestioned and unquestioning notion of experience.

As well, Scott's notion of identity as "a contested terrain, the site of multiple and conflicting claims"(31) is one that I agree with. I do not think that 'identity' is available to us in any simple form. I think it is a complex and conflicted idea that has multiple meanings for any one person, or group of people, and is constituted by myriad modalities in any particular cultural context, such as that of Newfoundland. As Diana Fuss muses, "Sexual identity may be less a function of knowledge than performance, or, in Foucauldian terms, less a matter of final discovery than **perpetual reinvention**"(6,

emphasis mine). I think this applies not only to sexual identity, but **all** notions of identity. I think our identities are never finalized, but are always works in progress<sup>iii</sup>.

With regard to identity as connected to place, I will be referencing Linda McDowell's insightful, postmodern work in geography, Gender, Identity and Place: Understanding Feminist Geographies. Her conception of place is particularly relevant:

Geographers now argue that places are contested, fluid, uncertain. It is socio-spatial practices that define places and these practices result in overlapping and intersecting places within multiple and changing boundaries, constituted and maintained by social relations of power and exclusion. (4)

Can we see “place” and “identity” as allegorical? Does McDowell? They are certainly interrelated and interdependent. If we take McDowell's model to be a useful one (which I think it is), the identity of Newfoundland Woman is constitutive of and constituted by “place”. Further, this place can no longer be thought about as a fixed, unified entity. Newfoundland is a diverse province, full of internal boundaries both physical and imaginary, but in view of McDowell's theory Newfoundland becomes an even more diverse and gendered space.



Of course, the idea that space is connected to gender is hardly new, especially in writing about women and the Newfoundland economy<sup>iv</sup>, but I think McDowell links the two in fascinating ways. She says:

These two aspects—gender as a set of material social relations and as symbolic meaning—cannot really be separated, in defining gender, and in the preceding discussion of the changing definition and understanding of place, it is clear that social practices, including the wide range of social interactions at a variety of sites and places [...] and ways of thinking about and representing place/gender are interconnected and mutually constituted.

(7)

In my exploration of various texts about Newfoundland I question how place is represented, through what “social relations of power and exclusion”, and how these imbricate with the identities of the women who inhabit these places.

## **Methodology**

“...within the broader postmodernist climate of “doubt”, readers (and reviewers) want and deserve to know how the researcher claims to know. How does the author position the self as a knower and teller?”(Richardson 930).

As I have already mentioned, I am using my own life experience as a text in this research. I use journal-type reflections and something I call ‘queered memory’ as two methods of personal exploration that are not merely confessional, but evince my connections to this

topic in meaningful ways. ('Queered memory' is my way of categorizing flashes of memory that are chronologically mixed, but which focus on the theme of identity formation. These recollections have been spurred by my readings in queer theory). Audrey Kleinsasser states, "Researcher reflexivity represents a methodological process of learning about self as researcher, which, in turn, illuminates deeper, richer meanings about personal, theoretical, ethical, and epistemological aspects of the research question"(155). By giving a glimpse into my life, I "share with readers the childhood experiences that provide context for undertaking the study in the first place"(Reinharz 212). Keeping in mind that my perspectives may change as the research evolves, I use this methodological process as a manner of tracing this evolution. In this way I develop a "keen understanding of what aspects of the self are the most important filters through which one perceives the world and, more particularly, the topic being studied"(Behar13).

I also see the process of writing as a methodology. In my case, the thesis is a means of finding and delving into questions, not a final proof or any definitive statement about identity. Stated succinctly, I feel that "...all academic writing should, as Gerry Pratt noted in her reflections on feminism and the influence of postmodern thought, 'be seen as a process rather than a product'"(qtd. in McDowell 227). I hope that my research will be seen in this way, for indeed I will not have come to 'the end' of this exploration by the time the last page is written. I consider this a first jump on a possibly infinite swim in the ocean of identity.

“Writing as a method of inquiry, then, provides a research practice through which we can investigate how we construct the world, ourselves, and others...”(Richardson 924). Indeed, my writing is just that. A way of investigating how the women in my texts construct the place called Newfoundland, or perhaps just pieces of that place, and how our identities are, in turn, constructed in and through that place. In this vein, my interpretation of my own place within the research is essential, though undoubtedly flawed. My own choices of texts, of places, and of theories are all implicated in this construction. They are not innocuous, nor is the result. All are then available for further interpretation beyond what I have offered.

On another level, this thesis employs the additional methods of oral history and textual analysis. My mother's is a “topical oral history”, according to Sociologist Sherna Gluck, in that it was conducted as an open-ended interview, and had a particular focus, which was the dominant female influences in her life (qtd.in Reinhartz 126). The interview was conducted almost three years ago. However, since that time, my mother has read the resultant paper and commented upon it, and we have had multiple informal discussions about the female relationships in our lives (as I imagine many mothers and daughters are wont to do). All of this communication is, in some way, reflected in the thesis, either through my recollections of conversations, or intimations in my journal writings.

Referring to Michal McCall and Judith Wittner, theorists of feminist oral history, Reinhartz says, “In their view, oral history compels researchers to confront how



individuals and groups create meaning”(Reinharz 141). This is what the oral history of my mother compels me to do, to analyze how she and I create meaning through our experiences as Newfoundland women. Most fascinating are the ways our ‘shared’ experiences, such as living with my grandmother Hallett, reading Random Passage and Waiting for Time, attending a SCUBA course (just to name a few), have led to the creation of diverse meanings of Newfoundland, and of our identities as women within it.

My critical examination of the texts in the thesis could be labeled many things.

“Sociologists tend to use the term ‘content analysis,’ historians the term ‘archival research,’ and philosophers and students of literature the term ‘text analysis’ or ‘literary criticism’”(Reinharz 148). I unravel the various strands of the texts to analyze the cultural assumptions that lie within them, support them, and give them meaning. I explore the stories of the female characters in order to bring to light particular gender norms of Newfoundland. In this way I delve into the source of their power to shape our identities.

This process involves not only analyzing the texts themselves, but also reading these texts against one another. “Laurel Graham advocates ‘feminist intertextual deconstruction’ or ‘feminist multi-text analysis’ by which she means looking for contradictions within or between texts that illustrate the pervasive effects of patriarchy and capitalism”(qtd. in Reinharz 148-149). I more precisely look for the effects not only of patriarchy and capitalism, which are without doubt two of the dominant modalities in Newfoundland

culture today, but also for the effects of their local interpretations. To me this means reading and rereading the texts through the lenses of Butler and McDowell's theories in "subversive ways" (Reinharz 149), ways that trace the hidden currents of gender norms and the related socio-spatial dynamics of place that mold the lives of the Newfoundland women in various historical and geographical settings.

## **Context**

I have chosen the texts Random Passage and Waiting for Time for a number of reasons. The books focus on the lives of two prominent and complex female characters, Lavinia Andrews and Mary Bundle. These women, not native to Newfoundland, become part of the place in the early days of its European settlement, and hence may represent some of the possible foundations of the notion of Newfoundland Woman. The work of these early migrants helped to produce and reproduce a 'place', a process that shaped them in ways specific to that place.

Katharine Pope has said that fiction may "provide a source of identity and validity for the woman who is struggling with debilitating and alien cultural assumptions about herself. Fictional portraits are a form of realistic fantasy, a therapeutic vehicle through which women recognize their own situations and validate their own perceptions..."(qtd. in Reinharz 154). This is part of why I use fiction in my thesis. The representations of Newfoundland women in these texts are complex and in many ways resonate with my

interpretations of women's identities in this province. This being the case, I identify the cultural norms that are cited, and that make these representations so very recognizable.

I also enjoyed the books very much. As I read them I was often reminded of stories my grandmother told me of her life in Flat Island, Bonavista Bay in the early 1900s. Like those stories, the books are a composite of facts and fictions, memories and musings that blur the lines between history and story. This porous boundary fascinates me and alludes to what Judith Butler calls "gender fables" and "the way in which [they] establish and circulate the misnomer of natural facts"(Gender xxxi)

Indeed this is also why I have chosen to explore my mother's life and my own. She and I have our own "gender fables" to tell. These fables are stories of our lives as girls and women and are "irreducible to fact"(Gender xxxi). They are 'true' in that they have meaning for us and can shed light on our subjectivity', and yet they cannot be reconstructed objectively or discussed scientifically. These narratives give a 'modern' perspective to work against/with the quasi-historical perspective of the books. Our 'typical' stories of life as Newfoundland women also serve as a way to work through our gender "assumptions", "where 'assumption' contains both the wish for an identification as well as its impossibility"(Butler, Bodies 104).

The books themselves are also gender fables. They tell the stories of women's struggles to define their identities while 'assuming' their genders in historical and present-day

Newfoundland. Perhaps this, more than anything else, resonates with me as something all women might share, that struggle to define ourselves in a place. It has made these books come alive for me, and made me want to inquire into the further connections between them and the lives of my family's cast of female characters. Let me begin with a fable about my mother.



## **Janus Faced Women**

### **My Mother and the Female Influences in her Life: A Gender Fable**

My mother, Sheila Daly Hallett, says she grew up surrounded by women. She is one of three daughters, the middle child. Her older sister, Ann, is three years her senior and her younger sister, Tralee, is eighteen months her junior. She always attended Catholic girls schools. Her mother, Ruth Davis Daly, never worked outside the home, while her father Desmond Daly was rarely home at all. He was a wireless radio operator on icebreakers that sailed into the Arctic Circle. Thus, the spectre of her father ruled the household in a hypothetical fashion, while the females navigated the realities of everyday life on their own. The other prominent figure in my mother's life was her father's sister, Sheila Daly, who would forever be known to my mother, her sisters, and all of their spouses and children, as Auntie Sheila. I believe this microcosm of matriarchy served as the inception of a feminist ideology that would not mature until years later under adverse conditions. This ideology would exist in a strange symbiosis with her traditional morals, and impel her to lead a double life.

But, I'm getting ahead of myself. Let us start at the beginning, with my Nan Daly. She was born in St. John's on July 8<sup>th</sup>, 1914, and always claimed that she started World War One. (Knowing my grandmother, it's not that farfetched an idea) She was one of two children. Her brother was born eleven years after her and thus, what little interest she

took in him was more maternal than fraternal. In recounting her childhood to her children and later her grandchildren, she clearly articulated her disdain for girls. She would say that she always preferred to play with boys because girls were too whiny and sissy and didn't know how to have any fun. As she grew older, social conventions forced her to keep female society. However, she retained her inherent preference for male company. Her husband became the centre of her universe upon her marriage in 1944. She took a tepid interest in her three daughters and two granddaughters, but was always charmingly coy with her sons-in-law, and grandsons. Even today, as an Alzheimer's victim, living in a nursing home, she remembers my father, whom she sees perhaps three times a year, but can rarely recall my mother, though she sees her every week. This may be simply an ironic twist of the disease, but it makes my family smile sardonically none the less.

Thus, a defining characteristic of my Nan Daly's personality has always been her androcentric perspective<sup>vi</sup>. That, and her staunch belief in the Roman Catholic Church. Perhaps her religious fervour was the source of her anti-feminism, or maybe the reverse is true. Either way, the two co-exist supremely well in a person's head, one reinforcing the other. The Church, to her, is the ultimate, infallible authority on all things. Since God is a man, a woman's place is behind her husband, and indeed behind all men. A woman's roles are primarily wife and mother, and her inherently superior moral character is to be used to restrain the naturally wilder side of men. Pre-marital sex is an unthinkable sin and birth control worse. When my mother's sister Tralee admitted to being pregnant at

age eighteen by her then boyfriend, and future husband, Nan Daly had but one thing to say, “Well at least you weren’t on that old pill!”

Drawn in striking contrast to Ruth Daly was her sister-in-law Sheila Daly. Auntie Sheila was born in a house on the “poor end” of Circular Road in St.John’s on September 24<sup>th</sup>, 1910. She lived in that same home until she died there in 1996. She never once set foot off the island. She never married and had no children. Despite what some might see as a narrow existence, she developed a broad intellect, and an encompassing heart. She was strong and independent, a woman who lived alone after her family members died or moved away, at a time when women simply didn’t live alone. She was an exceedingly private individual; not until she became ill in her eighties did she allow my mother to have a key to her house. Yet, she welcomed those people she loved and more importantly, those she liked, into her house, and her heart with warmth and grace. She was well read and had definite opinions on subjects ranging from politics to NHL hockey.

She was unique, a study of paradox. She was the epitome of class, yet she possessed neither pedigree nor riches. She was contentedly childless, yet she adored all her nieces and nephews. She was a slight, stooped woman, who appeared as if a strong breeze would blow her over, yet she was shot through with a vein of iron. Once when she was in her late seventies, burdened with a dowager’s hump and a heart condition, she was attacked by a young mugger on the street. She had her purse wrapped tightly around her

arm and held on to it while shouting at the cur. The surprised criminal ran off, without Auntie Sheila's purse, when people came out of their doorways to see what the racket was about. She recounted the story to us with self-deprecating humour and a rueful shake of her head.

These two women, both strong in very different ways, were the female role models for my mother and her two sisters. Thus it is that my mother and two aunts are all strong women. They are all married and have children, yet at times they all look back and wonder if Auntie Sheila didn't have it right. They all speak with guilty ambivalence about their mother and with fervent reverence about Auntie Sheila.

For my mother these women's influences have been particularly pervasive throughout her life. My Grandmother Daly moved into Mt. Pearl, on the same street as our family, after my Grandfather Daly's death in 1977. Then, in 1997, when she became ill, she moved into my parent's home. Now that she requires twenty-four hour care, however, she lives in a nursing home where my mother is the only regular visitor. In addition, my mother cared for my Auntie Sheila on a drop-in basis at her home on Circular Road for the last three years of her life. Auntie Sheila was only able to remain at home, as she wished, with the help of my mother and the "Meals on Wheels" program, and of course her own indomitable will. I believe these contrasting influences can be perceived in my mother's own behaviour. While she has, by some accounts, led a conservative life, she has also led a life resistant to patriarchal, conservative norms. I wish to explore this resistance as it



developed from a seed of rebellion against autocratic in-laws, and grew into a feminist philosophy.

My mother was born on May 20<sup>th</sup>, 1950 in Gander, Newfoundland. She, her parents and sisters lived there until 1957 when the family moved to Topsail. The reason for the move was significant. Ruth's father was gravely ill and she moved to be with him in order to nurse him until he died in 1958. This role of nursemaid was a familiar one to my grandmother as she had nursed her own mother and her Aunt Rose before their deaths in the 1940's. She would also play this role once more in her lifetime. She nursed her husband for almost three years after a debilitating stroke in 1975 until his death in 1977. Auntie Sheila had also nursed her mother before she died in 1946. Consequently, the further female responsibility for the care of elderly relatives was established in my mother's mind.

In 1958 the Daly family moved to Torbay and two years later to Church Hill, St. John's. My mother spent her adolescence "on the streets of St. John's" as she tells it. Not that she was homeless, of course, simply that she and her sister Tralee loved to roam around and were relatively free to do so. My grandmother believed in a sort of hands-off approach to parenting. My mother thinks that she had enough faith in their moral character, and the watchful eye of God, to allow them to come and go as they pleased. "Benign neglect", my mother calls it now. Motherly advice was basically proscriptive. Don't cry, don't whine, don't make a nuisance of yourself, don't disobey the nuns, don't defy God, and

don't let boys touch you until you marry one. Hence females dominated life. Despite any views expressed by Nan Daly to the contrary, females seemed to run the show. Her mother ran the household, albeit absentmindedly, her Auntie Sheila had a job and lived alone, the nuns ran the school, girls were her classmates, friends, enemies, competitors, and constant companions. Men and boys were present, but peripherally, and didn't infringe upon my mother's female-centred vision of the world. Thus, Mom grew up following the doctrine of the Catholic Church; while forming a belief that women were free to be anything they wanted to be.

Unfortunately, when she got married at the tender age of nineteen she received a rude awakening. The family into which she married was quite different from the one in which she was raised. My father's family is from Flat Island, Bonavista Bay, a small fishing community that now exists only as a halcyon memory. The Halletts moved to Mt. Pearl in 1954 when it became evident that the Labrador schooner fishery was collapsing and the choice was to move or be moved. So, sisters, brothers, cousins, aunts and uncles took up residence within a stone's throw of each other in their new home as to maintain the community they had lost. When my mother married my father in 1969, the newlyweds moved into the basement apartment of my grandmother and grandfather Hallett's house. Sheila Daly Hallett became the latest addition to the already burgeoning Flat Island borough of Sunrise Avenue.

It wasn't long before my mother went into culture shock. She was thrust into the bosom of a tightly integrated network of people who all knew what was best for her, and the code of conduct she was supposed to follow as a married woman. Of course being from "Town", my mother was thought to know nothing. She couldn't sew, she couldn't knit, she couldn't bake bread, and she had no idea what "*making fish*"<sup>vii</sup> meant. My grandparents couldn't get over what a "*stunned*"<sup>viii</sup> woman my father had married. My mother's intelligence, wit, thirst for knowledge, and love of books were disregarded as "foolishness". So, my grandmother Hallett took it upon herself to "educate" my mother. Nan Hallett began to give informal lectures on knitting, baking bread, sewing, housecleaning procedures, and even modes of dress at every opportunity. The opportunities were ample as my grandparents came and went in my parent's apartment as they pleased, having no concept of privacy. Knocking on doors was for "strangers". Mom was to be up at the crack of dawn so that she could get a jump on the housework, before cooking breakfast for her husband who was going off to work. Then she was to keep busy all day cleaning, mending, baking bread, knitting, or doing some other "useful" task as befit a woman. If she were caught reading by either Nan or Pop Hallett, they would ask her why she was wasting her time!

Well, as you can imagine, all of this was rather difficult for my mother. In the beginning she called her own mother and complained about the draconian rules and regulations of her new living arrangements. Nan Daly was unsympathetic. My mother recalls that her attitude was basically "you've made your bed, now lie in it". Her sisters were powerless

to help. Ann had married five years previously and was living in Texas, and Tralee was still living at their parent's home. Calling Auntie Sheila wasn't an option, for how could she understand such marital woes? In Mom's mind her marriage vows were, and remain, set in stone. The dye was cast. My mother was abandoned to her fate.

It wasn't long before she realised that she would have to work within the confines of her situation to find some way to preserve her sanity. Small acts of resistance<sup>ix</sup> began to take place. She kept a spotless house, but left cupboard doors ajar, though she thought it slovenly, just because she knew Nan Hallett **loathed** it. She found time to read books while the washing machine chugged away. She defiantly wore jeans in a family full of flowered dresses. She baked bread and knit sweaters in a desultory fashion, but mysteriously she simply **couldn't** learn to sew. Nan Hallett still shakes her head in rueful wonderment at my mother's inability to sew a straight line.

About nine months after her marriage her resistance took on a new dimension. When my brother Des appeared, two months premature and looking as fragile as spun glass, Mom was overjoyed and terrified. How was she to care for this minute creature that had to spend the first five weeks of its life in an incubator attached to tubes and machines? When she finally brought him home from the hospital, she was surrounded by the Hallett clan, who laughed at her insecurities. Sure hadn't Nan Hallett's first baby been a mere four pounds after being born three months premature? And hadn't Nan gone temporarily blind just before the induced labour? And hadn't she travelled for hundreds of kilometres

on a schooner to bring both her new-borns home just days after labour? Yes, it was all true, and my mother felt helplessly inept under the weight of all that gruesome experience. So much so that she was unable to change the baby's cloth diaper for fear of sticking him with a pin. She ran out of the room crying, leaving her mother-in-law to change the diaper, and make plans for her further education.

My mother gracefully accepted most of the child rearing lessons given her by my grandmother Hallett. In a very short while she became adept at all the physical aspects of the job. I came along four years after my brother. Never did either of us two children get stuck with a pin. However, aside from the mechanics of physical care, my mother felt she knew how to raise children. In her heart she was full of unconditional love and joy, and she wanted to pass this on to us. She felt that children couldn't be spoiled by too much love. So, she played with us, cuddled us, and read to us whenever our hearts desired it. This ran contrary to what my grandparents Hallett thought. They believed she would make "*sooks*"<sup>x</sup> out of the two of us. My mother believes this was the point in her life when she began to let them "wash over her"; while she would smile and nod at their opinions, she would then happily continue to do what she thought best for us.

I believe it was also at the time I was born that her inchoate feminism took on a new, resistant force. When I first was announced as a girl my mother says she was heartsick at the thought of raising a female child in the Hallett hothouse. She thought about the relative value they would place on a girl as opposed to a boy, and despaired of my

growing up believing I was less important than Des. When I was brought home from the hospital, my grandmother had reassuring words for my cash-strapped parents; “This is grand, sure now you won’t have to worry about putting two youngsters through university”. My mother vowed at that moment that I would go to university if I wished, come hell or high water, or bankruptcy. My grandmother may as well have put the seal on my Bachelor’s Degree right there and then.

My mother was determined to raise my brother and me as equals. She made sure to treat us as individuals with equal rights and opportunities. When Des was five and wanted to help in the kitchen and feed me my bottle, he was allowed despite my grandparent’s protests. When I was three and wanted a backhoe truck like Des’s, I was given one, though my grandparents thought I should simply share his. My mother told us that we could be anything we wanted to be. She broadened our horizons with books, and encouraged our independence by assuring us that the world was ours to explore. She told us that failure to try was the only real failure. Of course, this was the antithesis of what my grandparents believed. They identified very strongly with the gendered division of labour, and had a more curtailed view of the world. They thought that Newfoundland was where you should stay forever. You only left if absolutely forced to by economic hardship, then you would go to Ontario or Quebec and return as soon as you had earned enough money. Failure to them was not getting married, not having children, and not bringing home a steady paycheck.



My mother's resistance did not stop at her unorthodox parenting methods, or her domestic life. She also challenged my grandparent's ideas about women's place in the paid work force and in secondary education. In doing so, she challenged the ideas of the patriarchal society in which they are so entrenched. When I was five years old my father was laid off from his job in the construction industry. My mother went to work at a bank in a clerical position. This was acceptable to my grandparents because she was "helping" my father, so Nan Hallett conceded to baby-sit the kids after school. My grandmother Daly was living in Mt. Pearl at the time, but had even less interest in looking after her grandchildren than she had had in looking after her own children. My father was unemployed, yet did not feel compelled to take care of us, or do any housework. Only my mother saw the unfairness of this double standard.

Two years later my father was employed again on a part-time basis, which necessitated my mother's continued employment. When my father did find full-time work a few years later, my mother was expected to quit her job and get home where she belonged. By this time, however, my mother's salary was providing the family with opportunities we hadn't had before, such as travel and a savings account. My father is not such a caveman that he couldn't see the up side of that, so he didn't join ranks with his parents on the issue of Mom's quitting her job. His support of Mom persuaded Nan Hallett to continue caring for Des and me.

His support didn't, however, extend to Mom's desire to finish the university education she had begun a year before getting married. Thus it was that Mom began taking courses toward her BA (major in philosophy, minor in commerce) by correspondence in 1980. This was permitted as long as it didn't interfere with her domestic duties. It wasn't until we kids were old enough to look after ourselves that Mom could start taking night courses at Memorial University. It took twelve years, but she finally graduated with her BA in 1992, then went on to pursue graduate studies in philosophy, earning her Master's Degree in 1998. All of this work she undertook mainly for her own personal development. As a banker, a philosophy degree, no matter what the level, was hardly going to boost her into the presidency, as many an ignoramus reminded her. However, my mother has enough integrity to have pursued what she considers "true education". This true education is a search for truths, wisdom, knowledge, and expansion of the mind, which has little to do with finding a better job. If you were to call that Quixotic, I'm sure she would be flattered.

She continued to work full-time at the bank, and indeed still does. She worked her way up the corporate ladder from a clerical position to upper management levels. Along the way she has worked within one of the staunchest bastions of patriarchal culture, trying to effect some change from the inside. She has been involved as the bank's representative in a number of feminist causes from the Women's Enterprise Bureau, to The Bread and Roses Lunch, to Iris Kirby House. For her efforts she has been scoffed at and labelled a troublemaker by her male colleagues and bosses. Besides her formal feminist

endeavours, she has also tried informally to build a feminist culture in the bank. She has fostered the careers of junior women in the bank where she could. She has tried to create female networks with other professionals to counteract the *old boy's network*.

Undoubtedly, her unwillingness to become one of the boys has cost her more than one promotion. She has developed a callus from repeatedly hitting her head on the infamous glass ceiling. She has been denied the position of vice-president, that she is more than qualified for and capable of handling, because of a stipulation in the hiring code which states that she must be “mobile” in order to be considered. In other words, she must be able to move anywhere in the country the bank requires. For my mother, and countless other women, this has been impossible because of family commitments including care of elderly, ailing parents and relatives. Still, she remains with the bank, working twice as hard as she should and getting half as far. She continues to struggle for a fair deal for herself and her female co-workers. As she is fond of remarking, if all the women quit, then there would be no one left to fight.

Mom has led a life that would have crushed many a fainter soul. Without support from her mother, and having only a tenuous emotional connection to her sisters, she forged her own way in a family of in-laws bent on moulding her to fit their own constrictive gender norms. She raised children in a traditional environment to become very non-traditional, freethinking adults. She has succeeded in obtaining a graduate level degree despite very real opposition from her spouse and in-laws. She has risen through the ranks in a profession dominated by men, and helped many other women along the way. All of these

feats, she performed simultaneously. In addition to the incredible accomplishments I have discussed, she has kept the peace on both sides of our family, and earned the respect of everyone. She has coerced my Neanderthal father into an evolutionary state resembling that of modern man. She has become an inspiration to her friends and family, and been a true friend to her children. Probably most extraordinarily, she has managed to preserve her sanity and remain an optimistic idealist through it all.

Her resistance has always been accomplished within the boundaries of a patriarchal framework. This common thread has woven her life together in a tapestry of contrast. When she talks about her past she says that she often had to wear one face for the situation she was in, and quite another for the goal she was trying to accomplish. In our taped interview I jokingly called her a Janus-faced woman, thinking of the deceitful connotation of the word. Upon further reflection I remembered its further meaning, that of having two clearly distinguished aspects. I recognised that my mother was both; deceitful out of necessity, not malice, and in possession of two distinct aspects, that of idealist and realist. I believe the profiles of my Nan Daly and my Auntie Sheila can also be seen as two shadows that linger behind the guardian of the doorway, with its double visage. Like that guardian my mother has always looked to the past and the future to find her true course.

## **Lavinia Andrews, Mary Bundle and Lav Andrews: Three Gender**

### **Fables**

Having grown up in the presence of complex and often contradictory female characters, I was immediately captivated by the cast of women in Bernice Morgan's fiction. Here were women of strength, integrity, frailty, ingenuity, and foolishness. They, like the women of my own story, were difficult to categorize and difficult to forget. These women of Newfoundland, past and present, have shaped and been shaped by the places in which their stories are set.

In this next section I explore the fables of the three main characters in Morgan's fiction, Lavinia Andrews, Mary Bundle, and Lav Andrews. Then I explore the gendered backgrounds of their and my mother's stories and how they are connected. These backgrounds are largely created by gender norms. These norms are discussed by Judith Butler as the cultural basis of gender identity, which is "an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylized repetition of acts" (*Gender* 179). These acts are the learned behaviours that mark us as masculine or feminine, "that array of corporeal theatrics understood as gender presentation" (Butler, "Imitation" 28). They are culturally and temporally specific, and their stylized repetition is what makes gender performative as opposed to essential, or based upon an unassailable physical touchstone. I examine how the female characters, both 'fictional' and 'real', have negotiated these norms throughout their lives.

There are two primary female characters in Random Passage and its sequel Waiting for Time. They are Lavinia Andrews and Mary Bundle. These two dynamic women come to live together in Cape Random, Newfoundland in the early nineteenth century. They come to the island via different roads, but their paths intersect in the new colony and their lives become intertwined there. This new place shapes both of their identities, just as their identities shape the place they will come to call home. A third important female character is Lav Andrews, a modern day descendent of these original settlers. She comes to Newfoundland in the late twentieth century on a journey vastly different from that of her ancestors. However, it is a journey that will have strangely similar effects.

We meet Lavinia as a teenaged girl in Weymouth, England where she lives with her mother, brothers, sisters-in-law and nieces and nephews in a tiny flat. She works as a maid for the richest family in town, the Ellsworths. They are the family that also employs her brother Ned, and owns her home and much of everything else in the town. Her life is suddenly uprooted when her brother Ned is discovered to have 'cheated' Mr. Ellsworth on his last fishing voyage to the Newfound Land. The family is evicted from their home and Ned is threatened with hanging. The family decides to make a hasty getaway on ship to the New World where they feel they can make a better life.

The family lands in the tiny fishing station of Cape Random instead of St. John's, which was their intended destination. Lavinia is unhappy in the desolate place where starvation looms all winter. She continually dreams of home and regresses to a childlike state. She



begins a journal in which she records her impressions, feelings and events on the Cape. Eventually she becomes the Cape's teacher. She also falls in love with the mysterious Thomas Hutchings, and spends the rest of her life on Cape Random.

Mary Bundle is a more elusive character. In Random Passage her past is a complete secret, but all is revealed in Waiting for Time. What we ultimately learn is that Mary was a poor orphan in the Shepton Hills of England who toiled in a workhouse as a young girl before becoming an indentured servant to a wealthy English family living in St. John's. When she arrives in the new colony she is badly mistreated by her mistress and master and eventually absconds with the criminal Tim Toop after they take revenge on the wealthy couple. They vandalize the house, steal goods and Tim kills the master in a struggle.

Now a wanted criminal herself, Mary is forced to live underground with Tim. She takes on the role of boy thief, and is able to conceal her identity until she becomes pregnant with Tim's child. After she has the baby Tim sends her away on a ship he says is bound for England. When she learns that the ship is bound for Labrador, she steals ashore in Cape Random. She becomes part of the struggling community, eventually marrying Lavinia's brother Ned. In time Mary becomes a respected healer, midwife, and mother of many children. She also becomes the overseer of the fishing station and its final owner. She, like Lavinia, spends the rest of her life on the Cape.

In Waiting for Time we come to know a modern counterpart to the female characters of the past. We are introduced to Dr. Lav Andrews in her thirties, working for the Department of Fisheries and Oceans in Ottawa. It is nearing the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and change is in the air. Lav has lived her entire life in Ottawa with her mother, with whom she is not particularly close. She knows virtually nothing of her dead father or her ancestry. One day, seeking family information for a security check at DFO she discovers her Newfoundland heritage. Some years later, following a break-up with her lover, she takes a job in Newfoundland in the last years before the cod moratorium of 1992. Once there, she is spurred on a journey of self-discovery through an intriguing journal found in the annals of Memorial University's archives. It is none other than Lavinia's journal, kept two hundred years before. She finds her modern-day relatives in Davisporte, Cape Random having long since been abandoned. Once there she finds new love, and new connections with history, identity, and place. She has a child and settles in Davisporte, where she remains until her death.

These women all made tumultuous journeys within/to Newfoundland. They may all be called Newfoundland women. Yet, despite the ostensible similarities, these women are all unique, all have individual connections to the place(s) they call home, all have constituted and been constituted by these places. In order to explore their notions of identity and its relation to place I will first have to analyze their most fundamental journey, that of womanhood. Much like other journeys, the "success" of this one depends upon the correct reading of signs. In order to be a "successful" woman, one has

to follow the signs that tell one how to get to culturally acceptable womanhood, or in Judith Butler's terminology, "cite the norms" of gender in order to achieve "cultural intelligibility". In the following section I will follow the steps of each woman's journey and try to decipher the signs that they interpreted and reinterpreted along the way.

### **Identifications Made and Disavowed**

According to Butler:

... 'performance' is not a singular 'act' or event, but a ritualized production, a ritual reiterated under and through constraint, under and through the force of prohibition, taboo, with the threat of ostracism, even death controlling and compelling the shape of the production, but not, I will insist, determining it fully in advance. (Bodies 95)

These performances only succeed because of their status as ritual, their familiarity. They are drawing on countless past performances of the same conventional acts.

The journeys to womanhood of the primary female characters in my tableau are all different, all intricate, and all imperfect. All were influenced by the particular historical and cultural norms of their time. These forces combine to propel Newfoundland women to assume an ideal of womanhood. However, as Butler reminds us:

The practice by which gendering occurs, the embodying of norms, is a compulsory practice, a forcible production, but not for that reason fully determining. To the extent that gender is an assignment, it is an assignment which is never quite carried out according to expectation, whose addressee never quite inhabits the ideal s/he is compelled to approximate. (Bodies 231)

Thus, any examination of female identity is an examination of the powers that construct that identity, of the norms that human beings must cite in order to achieve “cultural intelligibility”(Butler, Bodies 2) as women in a given place(s).

One such norm is the notion that women’s physicality is fully determinate of their gender. “Sometime during the bleak winter months Lavinia noted that her menstruation period had stopped. [...] Now as she shuts winter away, along with her preoccupation with death, starvation and freezing, her body and mind, in complete accord, appear to reverse the aging process and make her once more a child”(Morgan, Random 52, ch.4). This is significant in relation to the notion of gender performativity. Lavinia seemingly wishes to be a child and so adopts the mantle of girlhood, and her body’s accord is yet another thing that sets her apart from the other women and enables this. Yet how much of this gender assignment is Lavinia’s choice, and how much is it thrust upon her? Is it simply that there are no norms of gender in this place for women to cite that involve scribbling in books and long moments of contemplation? As such, she is citing norms that more closely resemble childhood, and is therefore treated as a child.

As Butler maintains, "...a radical refusal to identify with a given position suggests that on some level an identification has already taken place, an identification that is made and disavowed" (Bodies 113). This would seem to more accurately reflect what is happening. Lavinia has ascertained the 'choices' available to her. There is the life of women with its endless drudgery and worry, the intimate and 'necessary' relationships with men, or that of children which is more carefree, less prone to agonizing work, holds less responsibility, does not involve intimate relationships with men, and allows her time to write down her thoughts. The particular historical and cultural milieu in which Lavinia finds herself has no provision for the disavowal of 'proper' women's conduct. It is considered an oddity, and is assigned the closest role to fit its behavior, that of strange, overgrown child.

Consequently Lavinia is left out of adult discussions and decision-making. Witness the scene the morning after Ned and Mary are caught *in flagrante delicto*, and given a stern reprimand by the women of the Andrews' house:

When she wakes, Lavinia wonders if she could have dreamt the chaotic scene. There is no sign of Mary Bundle, of spilled water, scattered firewood, or of the angel with the fiery sword. There is only Meg [...] sitting at the table with Ben, Ned and Jennie. Quite everyday, all of them, eating porridge and talking softly so as not to disturb the still sleeping children. (Random 8, ch.6)

Lavinia is not invited to participate in this cozy, adult chat. She has not been privy to what went on in the hours before she woke, and was not going to be involved at all. She is present only as a silent observer in the worldly affairs of these adults. We see that her subjectivity is being partially (per)formed through the actions and sanctions of those around her. In this vein, Mary Bundle has definite opinions of Lavinia. “Mary, helping Sarah wrestle wet blankets onto a line, can see Lavinia and the children skimming rocks down on the landwash. ‘Some life that one got, silly as her brother, gormless lump of a woman actin’ like a youngster!’ she mutters.”(Random 70, ch.5) She is party to the forces of exclusion marking Lavinia as a child. Simultaneously however, her gender is being partially constituted through the actions of those around her. She is considered a woman and is treated accordingly, despite being the same age as Lavinia.

“The normative force of performativity—its power to establish what qualifies as “being”—works not only through reiteration, but through exclusion as well” (Butler, Bodies 187-188). Vinnie, herself only comes to realize this later in the book, as she ponders her place in the community, her love life, and her gender.



For the first time she begins to hear the quiet conversations women have—talk of a child's fever, what their mothers had said about this or that, how to prevent miscarrying, what they pray for, the pain in their backs, the timing of their periods, how the berries are coming, ruminations about the question of sin, what is cooking over their fires. She catches glimpses of lives as varied as the grains of sand. (Random 123, ch.9)

She considers her exclusion from such conversations, ponders the significance of this for her own life, and wonders if she is missing something. In what appears at first to be a contradictory passage, Lavinia muses about the mysterious maps of womanhood.

The gift will come, the girl will wake and hear the morning sounds—of goat's hoofs clattering down rocks, the bell-like sound of boats on collar, the lap of water—and the map of her day, her life, will be there all spread out. That day the girl will not come out with the children, will never again skip rope, play house, collect shells and bits of broken china. Mysteriously she has become a woman, a possessor of secret charts that foretell phases of the moon, the ebb and flow of tides and blood. (Random 138, ch.11)

This has not happened to Vinnie at this point and she wonders why. It's an odd passage, because Vinnie has already started her menses, but it was halted, most likely by the stress and strain of a chaotic move to Newfoundland, and a winter of near starvation. Is Vinnie musing on why the coming of her menses did not automatically activate this secret

womanhood? Or is she wondering why it has failed to appear again? This passage also equates her gender directly with her physicality, as if the beginning of menstruation makes one unequivocally a woman in every sense, mentally, spiritually and physically. Vinnie imagines that this is experienced in the same ways by all women.

Lavinia is considered a girl and Mary Bundle is considered a woman, yet the two are the same age. This oddity begs the question why? Part of this can be attributed to their different life experiences up to the point where they meet in Cape Random. As Mary sees it “Lavinia, with brothers to provide for her and a mother to pamper her, is safe and secure. Whereas she, without friends or family, must be inconspicuous and useful”(Random 55, ch.4). Yet, even this is linked to the perhaps-greater part; that is their divergent performativity of gender, the very different gender norms they cite. Lavinia cites the norms of girlish behaviour, while Mary cites those of a woman.

Lavinia is in Mary’s words:

contrary regards some things. Never did a scrap around the house, no scrubbin’, or cookin’ and she only turned up to make fish the scattered time—when the rest of us was beside ourselves with work. [...] she were content enough scribblin’ in her book and traipsin’ off across the bog with the youngsters.(Morgan, Waiting 128, ch.9)

Lavinia is thus regarded as a child due to her lack of interest, or perhaps inability to participate, in the adult world. She refuses most adult work, spends most of her time in children's company or alone, and shows no interest in a relationship with a man.

Her writing is viewed by turns as suspicious and ridiculous. In that historical and cultural setting, writing in a book was something reserved for business people, those with something worth writing down, such as Thomas Hutching's entries in the ledger. Otherwise, such pursuits were frivolous, indeed beyond the capabilities of many on the Cape, and as such were suspect. As well, one has to consider the nature of the 'place'. It was an unforgiving climate, where virtually ceaseless work was required in order to survive. Anyone of an age to be working was supposed to do so from sun up until sun down, without exception. Lavinia's "foolishness" is only tolerated because she is unwittingly minding the children, freeing the adult women for other work, and can be pressed into service for the "*making of fish*" when necessary.

### **Resistances, Disclaimers, and Refusals to Identify with the Terms**

Mary, on the other hand, is immediately consigned to the world of women the moment she lands on the Cape. She has a baby with her, which automatically makes her a woman in everyone's eyes, regardless of her age (a mere seventeen). She also works like a woman, cooking and cleaning with boundless energy. The women of the Cape waste no time in making Mary conform to the appropriate standards of dress and comportment.

They dress her in clothing exactly like their own, put up her hair and cover it with a bonnet. Thus properly feminized, Mary, “for the first time in years [...] felt safe.”(Waiting 126, ch.9) I think this security, though tied to her criminal past, is also the security of melding with the norms of society, performing gender to the best imitation of one’s surroundings. This performance makes Mary safe from ‘discovery’ because she is less likely to stand out, to be outcast or shunned by those around her. The Cape is not an environment in which she was likely to survive alone, and so becoming an accepted member of this tiny company of humans is essential.

However, “When some set of descriptions is offered to fill out the content of an identity, the result is inevitably fractious. Such inclusionary descriptions produce inadvertently new sites of contest and a host of resistances, disclaimers, and refusals to identify with the terms”(Butler, Bodies 221). Lavinia and Mary both display certain resistance to the entirety of their gendered identities. They both take certain gender norms and reinterpret them.

Lavinia, caught in a sort of netherworld between girlhood and womanhood, tends to defy the contingencies of both. She is not quite a girl, nor a woman, but gradually becomes more of an acceptable woman through her teaching and her relationship with Thomas Hutchings. Still these things cause ripples. Many considered anything but the most basic education a waste of time. However, Lavinia persists in her vocation, eventually garnering a tiny schoolroom for her and the children. Her “scribblin’” becomes her life’s

work. Even her relationship with Thomas is scandalous, for they refuse to abide by the most basic moral code and be married before living together. This acceptance of heterosexuality is assumed even when she is still considered a child. Any other sexuality is inconceivable, and is indeed never mentioned in either of the novels or the television miniseries.

Mary, despite adopting most of the proper attitudes of a woman of the Cape, is often dissatisfied with her 'place' as a woman. Witness her disdain for the dominant economic realities of the fishery, and her dreams of being independent. "She'd have her own walls around her, look out of her own windows, bring home her own wood and eat food she herself had earned. Having, after days and days of silent thought, come to this decision, she stopped paying any attention to the men in the place"(Random 67, ch.5). She also flouts convention in dallying with Ned, before agreeing to 'marry' him in the eyes of the community, if not exactly in the eyes of God.

Indeed, Mary is rarely swayed by the prevailing wind of religion that swept the Cape, a fact not lost on its inhabitants. She ignores the Sabbath and is known as a blasphemer. She thinks the idea of building a church on the Cape was ridiculous until a practical purpose is suggested for its spire. Her notions of prayer are more akin to spells than the incantations of Christianity.

This is indicative of Mary's inability to ever truly "fit in" on the Cape. Perhaps most telling of this inability/unwillingness is an episode from the early years of her married life. Mary spies a piece of ground she knows is more fecund than that in which the women's garden is planted. She secretly sows her own potatoes in the hopes of "getting ahead" through trading excess vegetables. When the flourishing plants are discovered, the other women feel betrayed. Jennie Andrews speaks for them all when she cries "I'll not have it—you hear me! I'll not have it!"(Random 99, ch.7).

As Mary reflects on her long life on the Cape she realizes that "she was some strange kind of fish—different and unlikable. In all the years she'd been married to Ned she'd never been accepted by the Andrews' crowd, not once in all that time had she ever been called Mary Andrews"(Waiting 170, ch.12). We see here how despite her marriage and performance of acceptable womanly duties, she remains an outsider, a 'stranger' to use the Newfoundland parlance, due to her forthright manner, avarice, and sharpness. She is at one and the same time a proper woman, yet different from the rest. Can it be assumed that these differences stem partly from her formative experiences?

Back in St. John's, Mary had lived like a boy with Tim Toop. She had performed the proper gestures of boyhood, had worn leggings, had shorn her hair, stolen things, and had hung about on the streets as boys could do. As she recalled years later to her great-granddaughter, "Tell ya the truth girl, I relished it—if ya ever gets a chance ta be a boy take it—'tis more fun!"(Waiting 114, ch.8). The other boys hadn't questioned Mary's

gender, at least it doesn't appear so in the book. They took her for a boy based merely upon her performance of the appropriate gender norms. It was assumed that a girl or woman could, or would, never do such things. Indeed, until Mary went into labour, she was one of the gang. What does Mary's pseudo-drag say about the nature of gender? To quote Butler, "Just as bodily surfaces are enacted **as** the natural, so these surfaces can become the site of a dissonant and denaturalized performance that reveals the performative status of the natural itself" (Gender 186).

These women's resistances are constitutive of place and identity. They are emblematic of, yet challenging to the stereotypical identity Newfoundland Woman. They are carried over to further construct the place and identity of Lav Andrews generations later.

The modern character of Lav is interesting because though she begins the novel as a woman living very much in the present, a modern woman in a modern Ottawa, she is haunted by her unknown past. Her gender formation is not as detailed as that of Lavinia and Mary in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. It does, however, serve as a contrast, evincing the historicity of certain gender norms in the Newfoundland context. She gradually 'discovers' her heritage as her relationship with Newfoundland deepens and we watch as her identity is shaped by this journey of myth and memory.

Early in her journey to Newfoundland, but well along in her journey to womanhood, Lav "will dedicate the week-end to her physical well-being, do something about her



appearance, about her face and hair” (Waiting 40, ch.2). She knows that it is simply not acceptable to begin to look one’s age as a woman. Morgan ties this cultural norm of beauty to the modern, urban setting, but shows that women, even in the 19<sup>th</sup> century were supposed to be concerned with their looks and their physical presentation. When planting the garden Meg, Jennie, Sarah and Mary stop to take a break and, “Taking time to look around at what they have done, they talk quietly, become female again, tidying their hair, rubbing aching limbs”(Random 58, ch.4).

The modern Lav is a study in contrasts, very much like her foremothers.

Lav, for her part, watches Lori (the young university student) with fascination, intrigued with the **process by which people invent and reinvent themselves**. Why has she herself never learned this trick? The girl reminds Lav of her mother. How soft I’ve always been, how malleable, how conforming to any role life has assigned to me, Lav thinks. (Waiting 55, ch.4, Emphasis mine)

This is ironic, of course, as Lav eventually goes on to “invent and reinvent” herself in her adopted home of Davisporte. This scientist, this urban Canadian woman, will eventually become a “baywoman” in 20<sup>th</sup> century Newfoundland.

During these years Lav learns many things from Selina: how to pickle caplin, to knit, to hook mats, to make jam and make a garden. From Alf she learns how to keep a set of books, two sets in fact, how to brew beer, drive nails. He teaches her to trout, in distant swift-flowing rivers in summer, and through pond ice in winter. With her son she learns to skate, to snow-shoe, to watch Hockey Night in Canada without being bored. (Waiting 226, ch.17)

In short, she is learning how to be a woman in this new 'place', learning what are the acceptable norms of gender in Davisporte, and within her immediate circle of friends and family there. She is negotiating her acceptance in her adopted home. This makes a nice contrast to the things Mary Bundle learned in her youth on the Cape. Some things are the same, some different. We see the continuation of some gender norms, certain behaviours that have been passed along from the early female settlers in Newfoundland, such as knitting, hooking mats, gardening. But, we also see the different influences of the men in Lav's life. This is a change from historical patterns visible in Lavinia's journal where men and women rarely participated in the same activities.

Reflecting on Lav Andrews and her reinvention, I'm sure my grandmother Hallett would have wished for a daughter-in-law as malleable as she was. Nan Hallett has definite notions of what a woman should be and do. As was obvious from the section on my mother's life, these notions were based upon her own life experience, historical and

cultural roots as a woman on Flat Island, and did not change simply because she moved to Mt. Pearl. On the contrary, she was determined to maintain as much of Flat Island existence as was possible through her reinforcement of boundaries of place and identity.

In my mother, she had to contend with a “townie” daughter-in-law who was not content to be taught everything there was to know about being a respectable (read: Flat Island) housewife. This is not to say that my mother did not partially conform to the ideal being foisted upon her. In some ways she did cite the appropriate norms of womanhood. In other ways, she reinterpreted my grandmother’s norms and turned them into resistant acts of defiance.

As a nineteen-year-old newlywed, my mother was eager to fit into her new family. Ostensibly this should not have been difficult. Certain norms were ‘unproblematic’ in the sense that they were assumed by both Mom and Grandmother Hallett. The heterosexual pair bond of husband and wife was never questioned as anything but natural. Having children was considered the goal of any married couple. That my mother would stay at home and raise the children was also not seen as an issue.

The problems arose when my mother felt stifled by the way she was expected to carry out these roles, when her notions of what was proper “gender presentation” (Butler, “Imitation” 28) conflicted with those of Nan Hallett. As a married woman my mother was shocked at the myriad informal regulations that Nan Hallett tried to enforce. There

was indeed a litany of taboos. Married women did not wear jeans. They did not have long hair. They did not read books for it was a waste of valuable time. They did not socialize without their husbands unless it was with other female members of their family. They did not do much of anything without their husbands or at least their husband's expressed permission.

As far as possible my mother bent these rules. She dressed the way she always had, she read books in the lulls between housework, and dreamed about returning to university. She would have liked more social contact with her female friends, but they had all married around the same time and were in similar situations. When my brother was born, my mother could not go out unless my grandmother or my father agreed to look after him, babysitters being unaffordable. They rarely acquiesced unless there was a practical purpose for her errand.

Her performance of motherhood was also a resignification of traditional norms. She tried her best to treat my brother and me as equals, gave us the same opportunities, the same freedoms, and the same responsibilities. All this despite my grandparents' reassurances that as a girl I would not require a university education. My mother also never gave up on her dream of returning to university herself. Like Lavinia, she was unfazed by those unsympathetic to her yen for learning. She began by taking correspondence courses, being unable to leave the kids. Then, when we were old enough, she began taking night classes after work. This baffled my grandmother, and often she would chastise my

mother for her dereliction of duty to her husband and children. My mother, however, was very careful not to neglect us, though she felt the sting of these barbs. She was, and remains a loving, consistent presence in our lives. I believe she balanced her resistance with pacifying citation of tyrannical norms. In this manner she was able to rock the boat without swamping it.

This resistance has resulted in my mother's feelings of ambivalence toward and from her in-laws. In much the same way as Mary Bundle, my mother has never truly felt that she "fit in" with the Hallett clan. She, like Mary, has always been "some strange kind of fish", unable, and unwilling, to fully blend in with her surroundings, to perform gender perfectly in sync with the normative expectations of her husband's family.

Mom's identity was reinvented time and again throughout her life. From naïve newlywed to wise stranger, she has made innumerable adjustments in the balancing act of living with autocratic in-laws whose ideas of proper gender conduct are relics of a different time and place. Keeping her sanity while keeping the peace has required a lifetime's negotiation of nuances, respecting borders and yet crossing boundaries.

I believe all of the female characters in this tableau can be called Janus-faced women. As I have shown, all were forced to negotiate strict gender norms in ways that compelled them to wear two, or more, faces at any given time; distinct aspects that clearly illustrate the complexity of gender in accordance with Butler's theory of performativity.

Their performances of familiar gender scripts were necessary in each of their particular situations. In order to 'fit in' with their milieux and not be ostracized, they had to approximate ideals of gender, and yet, they were all able to style their performances uniquely to form identities that did not precisely fit these ideals. Perhaps the most extreme example is the case of Mary Bundle, who was able to approximate the ideal of delinquent boyhood, with relish, when her dangerous St. John's situation required it, thus revealing the "performative status of the natural itself" (Butler, Gender 186). In other words, Mary's drag performance sheds light on the very unnaturalness of what are considered to be natural expressions of an innate gendered self.

Of course, performativity of gender depends not only on the actions of the individual, but on those of society. The ways that people react to one's performance also affects that performance. Lavinia is a good example. Her early disavowal of the gender code of behaviour for women in Cape Random meant that she was treated largely as a child, not as an unusual adult. Her exclusion from adult conversations and activities was partly her choice, and partly the choice of her peers. In many ways my mother was also treated like a child by her in-laws due to their gender preconceptions. My mother's perceived lack of knowledge and skills incensed my grandmother Hallett to undertake her 'education' in the ways of women.

Like Lavinia, my mother tired of this childish treatment and they both learned to repeat the correct behaviours of women in their particular places. They did not, however, repeat them faithfully. They repeated them imperfectly, negotiating them so that they could avoid the outright reproach of their societies while maintaining certain resistances. For example, Lavinia did become part of a heterosexual pair, as was the norm, but refused to marry immediately, she turned her passion for books and writing into a life's work, a respectable job of school teacher, despite a common dismissal of the importance of 'learnin' on the Cape. My mother became a parent but maintained unconventional methods of raising her kids, she 'helped' my father by working outside the home, but then continued on to pursue her own career and educational dreams.

Perhaps aspects of my mother and Lav's fables tell of the located nature of gender norms best. Both these women moved to new places where they encountered new sets of gender norms that they were expected to assimilate in order to gain acceptance. Lav experienced this as a happy opportunity to connect with the world of her ancestors, to feel part of a place, for which she had been searching most of her life. It was a chance to perform some of the same tasks that Mary Bundle and her peers had performed, to use certain of the same resources for survival in a still-harsh environment. It was an environment that existed in space and time, but also in Lav's head. She had a large part in creating her version of Davisporte through her identification with the myths and memories contained in Lavinia's two-centuries-old journal.

For my mother, the experience was not as fortuitous. The place to which she came as a new bride was not one she could have imagined, nor one into which she desired to fit. It was a place of hopeful multiplicity. It was a relatively new community, nestled next to the capital city and filled with the aspirations of many migrant families from all over the province. The particular corner of Mt. Pearl into which Mom was thrust was dreamed largely by my father's kin. Their attachment to their former place, Flat Island, was strong and they were doing their utmost to preserve it in any ways they could. This included upholding strict gender norms and gendered relations to space that my mother has been forced to negotiate ever since. It is to the ambivalent nature of place and its impact upon identity that I now turn.



## **The Notion of 'Place' in the Newfoundland Imaginary**

It's never the same twice. Come out here ten days in a row and the shoreline is different each day. [...] The idea of a place that is forever reshaping itself, or being reshaped by ice and sea, horrifies and delights Lav. She wonders if the Cape will vanish completely someday, but Alf says no, it is the changing that saves it, 'One bit of beach crumbles away and another bit appears.' (Waiting 210, ch.16)

There are key questions to consider regarding the concept of 'place' and its relation to identity. Many of these can be drawn from the work of Linda McDowell, a feminist geographer who draws on the work of many poststructuralist and postmodernist thinkers. She argues that places are more than static geographic locations on a map. Notions of place are both constitutive of and constituted by gender, as well as class, sexuality, race, and ethnicity. On page 56 of her book Gender, Identity and Place: Understanding Feminist Geographies she states:

Social relations and spatial processes are mutually reinforcing (in different ways at different times and places, of course, which is what makes a geographical analysis of gender relations so pertinent and exciting) in the construction of gender regimes with particular patterns of the segregation of the sexes and gendered hierarchies of power.

In this section I relate these ideas to the place(s) called Newfoundland. I integrate the ideas of McDowell and those of Butler to explore how the construction of place and the construction of gendered identity are related in this local context. To accomplish this I first examine not only the physical aspects of Newfoundland geography that have been integral to my character's lives, but also what McDowell terms the "relationships and spatial practices"(30) of the characters with and within that physical land and seascape. This gives us clues as to the conception each woman has of her 'place'. Next, I evince what Judith Butler terms the "modalities of ...identities" (Gender 6) that are particular to different regions. In this subsection the focus is on what I consider the important modalities of the Newfoundland context. These are work, family structure and the notion of "the stranger", religion, and compulsory heterosexuality. Contained within these modalities of identity are multiple examples of the social and spatial relations essential to the constitution of place as per McDowell. This discussion, using narratives from my texts, illuminates how variables that construct place are inextricably linked to those that construct identity. They intersect to create a sense of bounded identity such as that of Newfoundland Woman.

In this vein I explore the ways place is constituted by and constitutive of all the main female characters in my narratives (Lavinia, Mary, Lav, Grandmother Hallett, Mom, and me), the relationships, memories and metaphors that are used in this process and how they are contorted over time and space. Is Newfoundland a different place for all of these

women? Is it, indeed, different place(s) at different times for different subject positions?  
How does the place influence each woman's concept of identity?

## **The 'Places' of the Female Characters**

### **Land and Sea**

It is more than physical geography that makes a place unique. However, in Newfoundland, the physical landscape has always been a striking feature of the place, and is noted as a contributing factor in the nature of the economy, settlement patterns, even the temperament of the people (Faris 1972, Matthews 1984, McGrath et al. 1995). I am only referring to Newfoundland here, Labrador being virtually a different country to me, and I would venture, to the people of Labrador. This became evident to me when I visited Labrador last summer and discovered that Labradorians refer to Newfoundlanders as "people from the island". They made it clear that we are different from them in subtle ways, and have little idea what life is like for them there. I couldn't argue the point. Indeed, as Kelly points out "Labrador is, in many ways, as disaffected with its union with Newfoundland as Newfoundland is with its union with Canada" (59).

Newfoundland's island geography has fostered a sea-faring way of life, and a (European) settlement pattern that hugs myriad tiny bays that are sparsely populated and generally far apart. There are, of course, settlements in the interior that rely on the land-based resources of the province, but the bulk of the island's residents live near the ocean. Historically the settlements along the coast have been inaccessible except by boat in the

summer and early fall, which led to a distinct feeling of isolation in these communities. Each was separated from the other and from the “mainland” of Canada. In fact, the lingering effects of this isolation can still be heard in the distinctive dialects spoken by each community in the province. According to Rex Murphy, in his foreword to the second edition of the Dictionary of Newfoundland English:

...the speech of Newfoundlanders has an astonishing variety. The speech of the Northeast Coast is not that of the Cape Shore, just as the speech of the St. John's Irish is not that of Trepassy. Speed of delivery, tone, inflection, and cadence are peculiar to the particular territories of the island and Labrador, and in their aggravated, or 'pure', state can offer problems of understanding even for natives. (xi)

In addition to the physical geography, there are other things that create a sense of place.

As per McDowell:

Places [...] touch the ground as spatially located patterns and behaviours. And [...] for all but the most affluent members of any society, everyday life is a local affair. However, to understand these local relationships in places where, for example, Chilean migrants reconstruct their sense of 'home' in Glasgow, or Tamil refugees in London, combining cultures and habits from 'there and here' to create a new sense of place, requires not just an analysis of 'in place', but the unpicking of relationships and spatial practices across space and over time. It is at the nodes of these networks, and through the cultural meanings associated with them, that places are constituted. (30)

So, relationships also constitute a sense of place; relationships with the physical environment, with family and friends, and with the built environment. In my texts the most important relationships are those of women with the land and sea, women with their memories of the past, women with their families and members of their communities. The most important spatial relations here are those that are based upon gender and which aim to restrict women to certain spheres. These relationships and practices change over time and space, but continually shape women's Newfoundland.

In the Newfoundland of Random Passage, and of my grandmother's stories, people's relationship to the land and the sea was complex, even paradoxical. The land was not bountiful. On the contrary, people had to work very hard to coax a few root crops from it to support their families. Thus, while they depended upon the resultant vegetables, they would often curse the toil that was necessary to produce them. This laborious task was generally that of the women in the community. "In the short time before the fish are expected to strike in, the women begin to clear a place to grow potatoes. [...] It is a narrow, fairly flat strip of rocky soil [...], not a promising location for a garden, but almost the only one possible in a land newly emerged from eons beneath glaciers" (Random 57, ch.4).

The sea represented another paradoxical relationship for women. They were generally forbidden on board fishing vessels for fear of the bad luck they brought; yet they were dependent upon the sea's magnanimity as surely as the men were. They had important jobs to do in relation to the sea, such as "*making fish*", but in general their involvement with the sea was confined to waiting, watching and working on the shoreline. Despite their largely shore-bound existence, the sea inexorably carved women, as E.J. Pratt's poem Erosion demonstrates. The sea gave life and took it away, and women's relationship with it reflected this often-macabre equilibrium.

The sea is both agent and object. It is agent of destruction, agent of creation, agent of despair, agent of whittling away. Above all else, the sea is agent of change. Yet it is

object of our fear, desire, and imagination. The sea is both our creator and our creation. It has molded the people of Newfoundland into seafarers, and sea gazers. Simultaneously we have molded the ocean, through our use and abuse of it, into 'management zones,' wildlife preserves, fishing berths, and in extreme cases cesspools. We have delineated boundaries upon it and police them in the hopes of keeping others out. We have used it in our imaginations to define our heritage, our culture, ourselves.

Yet, the sea is not important to all Newfoundlanders in the same way. If you grew up in Badger, perhaps the sea was no more than the distant destination of the three rivers that converge upon the town. Or, if you lived in Mt. Pearl, for instance, the sea might have been a distant backdrop; a thought that swished innocuously in the back of your mind, an actor in your grandparents' and father's stories of fishing or birding "on the water". In these stories the sea was often unforgiving. It took the lives of loved ones at its whim and offered no consolation. It was not romantic or magical. It was dangerous.

In the common Newfoundland imaginary, if such a thing can be said to exist, the sea is also a barrier, a moat around our island that keeps others out and keeps us in. Despite our modern abilities to transverse this barrier, it still hampers those without enough money to pay for a ferry passage or an airline ticket to "the mainland". In terms of separation both real and imagined, it keeps us apart from the rest of Canada. In this way, the sea is a symbol of "otherness", a method of othering those that lie on either side of the salty divide.

Indeed, within the confines of our island, the sea maintains its ability to separate people. It separates us into categories mentioned earlier, those of seafarer and sea gazer. For example Lavinia “will come to know that on this coast all things—houses, faces and graves—look out to the sea” (Random 51, ch.3). Sea gazers could be said to include just about everyone who lives or has lived within gazing distance of the ocean, women and men, seniors and children. Seafarers, on the other hand, have generally been men. (Of course, there have been exceptions to this rule, and there are more and more all the time, but I think it is fair to say that men continue to dominate the category.) Hence, our relationships with the sea and its relentless forces are a large part of any conception of place and identity that Newfoundlanders might have.

The land/sea boundary represented a very real gendered boundary for most Newfoundland women. Their work was, and still is, confined to shore in the main. Annie Vincent’s crossing of that boundary in Random Passage is significant for this reason. When she puts on oilskins and goes to sea with her brother she challenges not only hundreds of years of tradition, but also the gendered space of the sea. This was tolerated because the male head of the household was dead, one of her brothers was absent, and the other brother needed a ‘*shareman*’<sup>xi</sup> to work in his boat. Annie herself was also unmarried and childless. However as soon as she could she “put on a dress and married Frank Norris”( Waiting 142, ch.10), and stopped fishing.



In Random Passage and Waiting for Time there are a number of references to people's relationship to the land and the sea, but I will concentrate on those of my main characters Lavinia, Mary, and Lav. Immediately at the beginning of the novel, Lavinia's relationship with her new home is evoked as a stormy one. When she feels the slight warmth of a rock against her back she thinks, "Does this mean the sun sometimes shines in this grey, forsaken place?"(Random 13, ch.1). She is 'at odds' with the place in which she has been deposited, and compares it unfavorably with memories of 'home' in Weymouth.

As her first season progresses, Lav is shocked by the harsh realities of winter. At this time there is little for the women to do outside. They are trapped indoors, cooking, cleaning, mending, knitting, and nursing the ailing Hazel. The men venture out to hunt birds and to haul trees back to house to be used as insulation for the walls. As spring arrives, so does the first seal hunt on the Cape. Lavinia witnesses it with ambivalence. She is grateful for the sustenance it will provide after the near starvation of winter, but she also feels a "pointless resentment" towards the men for their reckless bravado in the face of such danger. She wonders if she would have the same ability to venture out on the ice with such seeming lack of concern. I wonder if perhaps she is resentful of their freedom to do such dangerous work. Is she angry at the assumption that women and children are unfit for this important task that carried with it the automatic respect and admiration of those who would benefit from its daring? Does she want to cross the material and metaphysical boundaries that keep her off the ice?

Time moves on and yet Lavinia is finding it difficult to call this new place home:

She would like to write down the names of all the places round about, longs to see a map of the Cape, of the Newfound Land, a map showing just where she is in the world. A map with names of every cove and bay. But there are no maps of the Cape, nor is there, in Lavinia's mind's eye, any picture of the world. She has no concept of continents, oceans, no image of the Americas with a triangular shaped island, almost as big as Ireland, broken off from its upper edge. She knows only that she once lived in Weymouth, England and now lives on the other side of the world—imagines herself clinging to the rim of a dark unknown hinterland facing an unending sea. (Random 137, ch.11)

How does this affect Lavinia's 'place' in her own head, her own heart? Images of clinging to a piece of rock are forefront in her mind. She does not feel safe. The land is characterized as dark and unknown, a forbidding image. It is allegorical of her identity, which also seems to be 'out of place'.

## **Metaphors and Memories**

The Cape is a new place, not only for Lavinia, but for all of its European inhabitants.

They are creating it day by day, building it materially and metaphorically. And indeed, a large part of this creation is the keeping of one another's secrets.

Talk of Annie and Frank's dalliance, of Ida's curses, of the attack on Annie may be hushed about firesides late at night or whispered of in bed between husband and wife, but it never becomes the subject of talk around the Cape, and certainly never spreads to Sarah's family on Pinchard's Island or to Josh's people in Pond Island. It is doubtful whether Alex Brennan, or even Reverend Eldridge, hear of it. It is a secret, like many others, kept on the Cape. (Random 156, ch.12)

This reticence, this metaphorical isolation, binds a community together, unites it against others who do not share their intimacies. Such confidences indicate a relationship of power and exclusion, constitutive of and constituted by boundaries of place. The power resides with those who know to the exclusion of all others who do not. It also gives people power over one another, the power to tell the secret should one wish. Maintaining secrets creates a feeling of isolation and insulation from the outside world, while the geographic isolation of the place allows many secrets to remain hidden.

We see evidence of this power many times in the story. Peter has this power over Mary Bundle when he discovers she is a wanted fugitive. He reminds Mary of his power (Random 143-147, ch.11), but is careful to tell her that she has nothing to fear from him. Mary, however, also has the power of secrets on her side. This is demonstrated to dramatic effect when she 'saves' the Cape from oblivion after Tim Toop threatens to shut down his fishing station there (Waiting 174-179, ch.12). Thus Morgan demonstrates how the power of secrets can both destroy and unite a community.

These newcomers have secrets and they have memories of the places they used to call home. These memories are also used in the construction of 'place':

Strangely familiar and still strangely different the Cape was. Filled with secrets. Sometimes it seemed to Mary she had travelled around the earth only to arrive in the country of her childhood. Digging in the thin soil of the Cape, memories of hut and dirt garden below Shepton Hills rose unbidden in her mind. Words she had forgotten echo in Sarah Vincent's queer sayings, in her cautions about spirits that live in bogs and woods and ponds. The barefoot children and the way they gobble anything edible remind Mary of herself and Tessa. (Waiting 127, ch.9)

For Mary, the Cape evokes memories of home, of fishing in the river, of playing outdoors with her sister, a rugged rural life that was not unpleasant. She recalls being happy roaming about the countryside before her family was deserted by her father and thrown

out of their home by unscrupulous landlords. For Lavinia, on the other hand, the Cape evokes a yearning for her home in Weymouth and all of the things she left behind there. There is nothing familiar to her in the Newfound Land and compared with her idealized recollections of England, it is not a place to settle.

Yet, they do settle. They both live in Cape Random until their deaths. Mary's relationship to the place becomes more and more symbiotic as she comes to be a healer, using the natural environment as a medicine chest. "Year in year out, from early spring when the first tiny white flowers appear until the ground freezes in the fall, the old woman and her great granddaughter would be outdoors. Together they picked fairycaps..."(Waiting 79, ch.6). This passage goes on to list all of the things the two picked and then the ways they used them in the creation of cures and medicines for all types of maladies. Mary is passing down her knowledge of cures and incantations to her great granddaughter. In this manner she is reinforcing a memory of her own mother, cementing Rachel's relationship to her past, and their place on the Cape. Together they share intimate knowledge of, and connection to, the place where they live. It is a connection to place forged through memories of the past and dependence upon the present landscape for much more than food and shelter.

Lavinia too becomes more attached to her place as she is able to recreate, from memory, an important piece of Weymouth on the Cape. Her schoolroom represents a happy assimilation of her past to her new home. It is reminiscent of her education in England,

yet operates according to the rhythms of the fishing season. As a teacher, Vinnie becomes entrenched in her place as she constructs a fledgling educational system and learns to love her new life.

In many ways the Cape residents' relationship with their surroundings in the early days of settlement was a continued battle for survival. The place created them as much as they created it. It forced them into a constant routine of work, worry, feast and famine. The harshness of their environment pushed them to work together for survival. It forced them to live an intimately connected existence, sharing and keeping one another's secrets, witnessing all their joys and sorrows as a quasi-extended family. But even then, as now, there were people who were "not made for the place" (as Frank Norris says to Annie in the film). People like Emma, who cannot stand to return from St. John's, or Peter who loves the woods, but not the company of the Cape.

One of these people is Lav Andrew's mother Charlotte. She had been a Second World War bride from England who stayed on the Cape just long enough to decide she loathed it, not long enough to see her husband return from battle. When Lav asks her about Newfoundland, she says, "I promised myself I'd get away from the Cape, away from Newfoundland, before you could walk or talk—before the place owned you like it did them" (Waiting 19-20, ch.1). Charlotte tries to impress upon Lav the horror of the place and the strange power it held over its inhabitants. She warns Lav against ever going there.

Lav does not listen for she is too enthralled by thoughts of her arcane ancestry. She goes to Newfoundland, finds her long lost relations in Davisporte, and comes to understand the bizarre power her mother had intimated to her. After living in the outport for an extended period, “Lav finds Ottawa noisier, faster, sharper than she remembers. Ottawa smells of chemicals, its water tastes of detergent. Things are depressingly well-finished—too shiny” (Waiting 218, ch.16).

Eventually the sea erodes Lav’s memories of life in the city. Its force carves a new place and a new identity for her, until one day she “sits on the sand, watching gulls and seabirds swoop and dive, watching the sea roll up on the beach. She tries to imagine a city, but cannot”( Waiting 203, ch.15). In the end all three of these female characters cannot imagine themselves living anywhere else. They become part of the place, just as the place becomes part of them.

### **“The Only Bay Without a Wharf”**

My family has always called Newfoundland home. We did not have to learn its rhythms, or adapt to its climate. However, my family is not entirely unified on the subject of Newfoundland or their attachment to it. My mother’s family and my father’s family have very different versions of Newfoundland and this has created no small amount of

controversy in the Hallett household, a household where boundaries of place and identity have been erected and maintained for decades.

“[T]he wives of fishermen, that is the owners of boats [which my grandmother was], have used their vital roles [...] in the fish-producing economy not to destroy the sexual division of labour but to establish its boundaries in such a way as to confirm their control over at least their own spheres”(Porter 45). According to Porter, these spheres constituted both ‘public’ and ‘private’ space because they encapsulated not only the shore line fish producing grounds and the garden, but the entire house, with the kitchen effectively serving as the public centre of the community.

The significance of boundaries and borders here has to do with the way people create the place in which they live. According to McDowell, “It is socio-spatial practices that define places and these practices result in overlapping and intersecting places with multiple and changing boundaries, constituted and maintained by social relations of power and exclusion”(4). As we can see from Porter’s example, such socio-spatial practices were a very real part of Newfoundland fishing communities on the northeast coast in the late 19<sup>th</sup>-early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

This is particularly significant because Porter’s descriptions are reminiscent of my grandmother Hallett’s stories of life on Flat Island in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. She maintained these particular boundaries and spheres of control as best she could upon



her arrival in her new home in Mt. Pearl. She and my grandfather tried to live life in a way that recreated Flat Island as closely as possible. Thus it was that socio-spatial practices were carried from the bay as carefully as Pop's weatherglass and Nan's sewing machine. In their new home, these would collide with other such practices to create "overlapping and intersecting places with multiple and changing boundaries".

Mt. Pearl is widely known in Newfoundland parlance as "the only bay without a wharf". Indeed, the place to which my mother moved as a young bride was a near perfect Flat Island replica. The kitchen of my grandparents' upstairs quarters was the centre of family life and Nan Hallett was undisputed ruler of that domain. That kitchen was witness to myriad activities from baking bread, to skinning rabbits, to extended family camping when the power went out, all of which were coordinated under Nan Hallett's watchful eye. Nan's boundaries extended into my parent's apartment as well, at least in her mind, and she felt no compunction about barging in at any given time of day.

She also took pride in maintaining the garden and greenhouse on equal footing with my grandfather. However, her dominion stopped short at the 'store'. This recreated fishing shed was male territory, my grandfather's sanctum sanctorum, and pity anyone who thought otherwise. This was where my grandfather built boats and furniture, stored his meticulously arranged tools, and prepared rabbit snares. This was where men gathered to hang moose meat, share a 'nip', and discuss whatever they did not wish to discuss in

front of women. These were atavistic borders to my grandparents, and what had been learned in Flat Island was maintained in Mt. Pearl.

My mother came from a place decidedly unlike Flat Island. She came from ‘town’, which has always been seen as the antithesis of ‘the bay’. This was not strictly true, of course, but my mother did have a different set of relationships to her environment. In town the only gender segregation she knew as important was that of school. Her interaction with nature was limited to long walks to Torbay or Topsail, cavorting around the precipices of Signal Hill, and long contemplation of the sea, wondering when it would bring her father home again. Thus when she moved to Mt. Pearl, and the evolving pseudo-bay community there, she suffered culture shock in no small degree. She felt decidedly out of place, no matter that she was only a twenty-minute drive from her former home. St. John’s, and the freedom she had enjoyed there, seemed light years away.

My own relationship to place in my early childhood was shaped most powerfully by my family and our living arrangements in Mt. Pearl. In my days as a youngster, ‘my’ Mt. Pearl was a much more bucolic setting than it is today, a largely rural place that was beginning to fancy itself as a city, and my grandparents were a large presence therein. I spent a great deal of time with them and, of course, with my mother. With my grandparents I would help in the garden, or at least help eat the produce of the garden as I pottered around after them. I was not averse to laying out salt fish, or helping to skin

rabbits. As I grew older, however, Mt. Pearl grew as well, and my grandparents' influence waned (or at least so I imagined). I became more and more a product of my larger environment. I felt torn between what I saw as competing influences in my life. As I grew into a teenager, I became sensitive about privacy and the lack of it in our house. I began to resent my grandparents for their intrusions into my life and their intransigence on issues ranging from proper female dress to my future career moves. I became determined to get away from Newfoundland, the way my grandmothers and mother never had (oh arrogant youth), and the stranglehold of tradition which I felt my grandparents represented.

At twenty-two, fresh out of university, I began to work and travel, first across Canada, then to Europe. When I was twenty-four I moved to Indonesia to teach English as a second language. My grandmother Hallett asked why in God's name would I want to go all the way over there, especially when I had a job in Newfoundland. She found the atlas and informed me that I was going to the other side of the world, and if I went any farther I would be on my way back. I told her I was aware of Indonesia's location and I wanted to go because I wanted to see and experience an entirely different culture. She sighed with incomprehension and predicted dourly (and incorrectly) that they would "probably never see Vicki no more."

Now that I have lived and traveled for long periods in far-flung locations I have a different perspective on the province. I appreciate my roots, both bay and town, both

orange and green, though my loyalties to them are still confused and mixed. I also have connections to these places that stem from different sources, such as good friends, a passion for the land and the sea, and an interest in our cultural heritage. My “relationships”, to bring us back to McDowell, to *my* place are very different from Grandmother Hallett’s. I now love the ocean for the recreational opportunities it represents for me, SCUBA diving, kayaking, swimming, and long moments of contemplation and “scribblin’” in the tradition of Lavinia Andrews. It is a love I share with my mother who taught me to swim before I could walk. I also respect the ocean and its power to give and take life because of stories told by my grandparents Hallett and Daly.

Metaphorically, Newfoundland is “The Rock”, yet unlike Lavinia Andrews, I do not find it a forbidding and dark place, but a touchstone of my identity. It is illuminated by memories that extend back generations, memories that were my grandmother’s, my mother’s, and are now mine. I imagine this was how Lav felt upon reading Lavinia’s journal. At times I have clung to those memories as a drowning woman to a rock, to keep me above foreign waters that threatened to sink my sense of self. Perhaps that is what all our memories are used for at one time or another, perhaps that is what has kept my Grandparents Hallett living in memories of Flat Island all of these years, and what kept Lavinia clinging to memories of Weymouth for so long.

My relationships to my family are perhaps the most important to my sense of place. As this thesis makes clear, these relationships are complex and multi-dimensional, but deeply loving. Those “currents of salty blood and tricky tides of memory” that I mentioned at the outset of this journey are powerful forces. And while I do not depend, as did residents of the Cape, on my immediate family for daily physical survival, I do depend on them for emotional support, for warm welcomes upon my return, and they never let me down. Does the place “own me” as Lav’s mother Charlotte put it? Yes, I believe it does.

I, like many in the Newfoundland Diaspora, hope to one day find gainful employment on the island so that I might live by the sea once again, near family and friends, at home. This place that I long for is partly a conjuring, a dream, of Newfoundland, a place that is “contested, fluid and uncertain”(McDowell 4) despite its solid nickname. But, then, are not all places partly thus? In the next section I will explore some of the tangible and intangible modalities that have created, and been created by, this place(s) and the identities of my female characters therein. The modalities that I see as most influential are those of work, family structure (and the related notion of the “stranger”), religion, and the concept (borrowed from Judith Butler) of compulsory heterosexuality.

## **Modalities of Identity and Place**

### **Work**

“Gendered identities are created and recreated at work, rather than individuals entering the labour market with their unchanging gender identity fixed firmly in place”(McDowell 134).

When talking about the work that was done on Flat Island, the fishing, the making of fish, hauling water, raising livestock, building boats, sewing clothes, maintaining fields, “rearing youngsters”, erecting a church, my grandmother says “the women worked like dogs, and the men worked like horses”. This is particularly fascinating because the people of Cape Random are described in similar fashion. “Each day the men make three or four trips to the fishing ground along the shoals offshore and the women must spend every waking minute down on the flakes gutting and splitting fish. [...] They all work like beasts”(Random 61, ch.4).

This ethos of work is immensely important to the identity of Newfoundland Woman. The work of women has, throughout the province’s history, done a great deal to constitute the place(s) called Newfoundland. In material and metaphorical ways, their labour has created communities. The way they worked in the past is described in Hilda Chaulk Murray’s More than Fifty Percent as almost mythic. The men describe their mothers and grandmothers as epic figures of tireless drive, energy, and ingenuity. These are women who could work ceaselessly from dawn until dusk, and beyond. Therefore,

work must be an essential modality of the Newfoundland context, in the making of the identity 'Newfoundland Woman'. The question then becomes what are the implications of this for women today? Can the Newfoundland woman of today ever hope to live up to this mythic figure of industriousness, this engine of work, driven by little more than the will to survive? The context has changed for there is no such work anymore. There is no more "*making fish*", but it still exists as a standard to be met in the minds of an entire generation of Newfoundlanders.

A stalwart work ethic has for so long defined my grandparents Hallett that they say of their octogenarian selves "we're no good for nothin' now" because their Herculean capacity for toil has been drastically diminished. Of course, my grandmother still does most of her own cooking and cleaning, and does a great deal to care for my grandfather who has suffered many debilitating strokes. She will not abide the thought of "home care", for the prospect of "strangers" coming into their home to do work for them is abhorrent. What does this imply for her self-identity, for the identities of the women (my mother and me) who have lived with her for most of our lives?

Work is a modality that ties the notion of gender to the domestic and public spheres, as well as to the notion of place. In the historico-fictitious setting of Random Passage and Waiting for Time, work is a centrally defining characteristic of womanhood. The work of the women is brutal, and seemingly never-ending. It is also assigned on a relatively strict gender basis. There are many accounts of the work that women do, work that is not

always of the typical “domestic” variety. There are accounts of them cleaning and cooking, making and mending clothes, but also attending births, tending the sick, washing and preparing the dead, picking berries, collecting eggs, making fish, and creating a vegetable garden.

By mid-summer Mary was proud to be able to keep up with Sarah Vincent on the flakes. Everyday she learned something new, how much salt to spread, when the fish needed turning or covering, how to render oil out of cod liver, how to gather mussels, cut out cod tongues, dry caplin, dig fish-guts and caplin into the potato garden, how to gut herring, fill their bellies with salt and pack them into barrels. She learned how to make soap and candles, bread and hay and rag-mats—even how to mend nets. (Waiting 125, ch.9)

Mary is proud when she can “keep up with Sarah on the flakes” for it means greater acceptance as a properly gendered member of the community.



Their faces become ingrained with smoke and soot, their fingernails tear and split, blisters rise, break and bleed until their hands grow as hard and calloused as the men's. During the first weeks arms and shoulders pain constantly. [...] For all that the women love working on the garden [...] Taking time to look around at what they have done, they talk quietly, become female again, tidying their hair, rubbing aching limbs. Mary and Sarah nurse their babies.[...] There by the fire they all feel happy, satisfied that they are doing something worthwhile, something unlike cooking and cleaning: something that will last. (Random 58, ch.4, Emphasis mine)

This passage is significant for two reasons. First, it is ironic that Morgan would say that the women "become female again" when they stop work for a moment. In her Cape Random, work is a huge part of what defines women. Constant drudgery is expected from any good woman. Second, it shows that they somehow regard their daily chores of cooking and cleaning as lesser work. It is not "worthwhile" because it will not "last". It is a classic internalization of a patriarchal culture's attitudes towards "women's work". However, judging by Morgan's own work and the work of other chroniclers of Newfoundland society, the gendered division of labour was far from simplistic.

Obviously these women and their work are intimately connected to the 'place' in which they live. We can see that through their efforts they are creating a home, a society, and simultaneously the place is creating them as workers of the land, and by proxy the sea. In this place they are struggling along with the men in order to survive. In many ways this

creates an egalitarian atmosphere among the inhabitants. Various texts (Antler 1977, Porter 1995, Murray 1979) testify to the toil of Newfoundland women and the belief that their work was as important as the men's in maintaining life in the outports. My own grandfather and grandmother Hallett have often expressed this view. Recently as I bid them good-bye before moving to Manitoba, my grandmother remarked that David and I need to work together to "make a go of it", and my grandfather chimed in saying, "yes maid, we been workin' together sixty year or more now." And indeed this year marks their sixty-fourth wedding anniversary.

Does this imply that men and women were strictly equal on every level? Was Newfoundland once an egalitarian utopia of gender relations? I do not think that is how I would interpret this evidence. I think the situation was more complex than a strict gender division of labour scenario would imply, but the evidence suggests that there was not much freedom to deviate from the roles that were assigned each gender, nor to deviate from the strict gendered norms, and sexual positionings they implied.

"In summer, fishermen's wives were expected to combine homemaking with long hours of work outside the home, either at the fishery or at the gardens"(Murray13). This is evident in the descriptions of the backbreaking toil required by the women in Random Passage and Waiting for Time. If a woman did not do such work, she was considered lazy, good for nothing, no better than a child. One only has to look at Mary Bundle's summation of Lavinia's activities to see this. "Never did a scrap around the house, no

scrubbin', or cookin' and she only turned up to make fish the scattered time—when the rest of us was beside ourselves with work. [...] she were content enough scribblin' in her book and traipsin' off across the bog with the youngsters”(Waiting 128, ch.9).

Not only was endless work required to make one a woman in the eyes of the community, but also to make one a good candidate for a wife. “The consensus among my older informants was that if a man married a lazy woman, “he was finished, he’d get nowhere”(Murray 12). And certainly being a wife and mother was considered the ultimate goal for all women. Heterosexuality was assumed, there were no other options, none even considered. As Mary Bundle put it “...for a woman nothing could be worked out without a husband...”(Morgan, Waiting 88, ch.6). Spinsterhood was the only alternative to marriage, and that was something akin to failure as a woman, though the women who chose this option likely did not think so.

The women were “more than 50%”, as Murray says, but still their labour was counted among that of the men, and credited to the male head of the household, a fact that Mary Bundle found deeply unfair. Did other women find this unfair I often wonder? Their labour was only counted under the auspices of a male-headed household. If they didn’t work for their husbands, then they worked for their fathers, or uncles, or brothers. Women could not be the heads of households, no matter how essential their toil might have been.

Thus women's work was essentially tied to notions of their sexuality, their suitability as wives, their necessity to be married. This reality hits Mary Bundle hard as she watches the first tally of a summer's work on the Cape. "If [she] could add nothing to her possessions without a man—then a man she would have. And since Thomas Hutchings seemed to control the distribution of credit, if not of money, she would have Thomas Hutchings"(Random 66, ch.5). Thus marriage was often as much an economic partnership, albeit an unequal one, as an emotional partnership.

My grandfather Hallett certainly did not marry a lazy woman. My grandmother was, and in many ways still is, an engine of enterprise. When she married my grandfather, he, his father and brother were engaged in the Labrador fishery. This meant that for the long months of the fishing season, my grandmother was the effective head of the household, maintaining things by herself. 'Things' meant the garden, the animals, the house with no running water, and the two children. All their clothes she sewed or knitted by hand, and of course all preserves, such as beets, pickles, jams, and bottled meats were her creation. Speaking about the work of women in such outports, a woman is quoted by Ursula Kelly as saying, "The men were away so much at that time that women took on, at home, probably ninety percent. And when men fished, women did all the work"(71).

Perhaps the most succinct description of these duties is to be found in Ellen Antler's work. She writes, "Women did contribute to the household production in other ways [beside the "*making of fish*"] as well. They tended gardens, carded and knitted wool,

sewed, picked berries in addition to performing services necessary to the maintenance of the family”(109). Such skills were a matter of survival on tiny Flat Island in Bonavista Bay in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. So was the operation of a boat, the only means of transportation. Nan Hallett learned early how to navigate her way to the other islands in the bay, and to all of the small communities that dotted the shoreline. Fortunately, this prepared her to obtain a driver’s license when the family moved to Mt. Pearl in the late fifties.

My grandmother transferred many of her skills to her new home in Mt. Pearl. The new plethora of pre-packaged goods did not lessen her determination to preserve, jam, bake, sew, knit, or grow things. A huge vegetable garden and greenhouse were erected beside the store in the back yard. Everything from rhubarb, to beets, to cucumbers erupted in gloriously geometric fecundity. Miniature versions of “*fish flakes*”<sup>xii</sup> appeared (and still appear) on the lawn in summer. The memory of self-sufficiency would not be erased. In recreating these patterns of gendered work in Mt. Pearl, she was metaphorically and materially recreating Flat Island.

My grandmother Daly had a vastly different life from my grandmother Hallett. She had been born and raised in St. John’s. Thus there were no gardens to tend, fish to make, or boats to pilot. She did, however, learn the skills of a homemaker, the cooking and cleaning, plus those of a nursemaid. She had to nurse her Aunt Rose, her father, and

eventually her husband at home, for years before their deaths. These were no easy tasks, but ones she accepted as her duty.

Thus my mother was trained in these same arts, those of the “townie” housewife. One did not bake bread, one bought it at the store. One did not make fish, one bought it at the fish mongers, and so on and so forth. My mother and her two sisters lived most of their lives in a rented flat and spent their spare time reading books or ‘gallivanting’ about the streets of St. John’s. They assumed they would one day get married and have children, or become nuns, for those were the options of good Catholic girls in my grandmother Daly’s eyes.

When Mom did marry, she was immediately confronted with the draconian Flat Island work schedule. Before she returned to work outside of the house, she was continually pestered about her housework and domestic abilities. As I have already mentioned, being from town, my mother was thought to know nothing of importance. So my grandmother Hallett was determined to teach her such basics as how to bake bread, how to knit and sew, and how to make jam and pickles. These skills were not strictly necessary in our lives as suburban dwellers. They were necessary, however, to make my mother fill the role of ‘good woman’.

When she returned to full-time work my mother practiced the “double day”. She was expected to come home from work, mind the kids, do the housework, and cook meals.

She somehow managed to combine all of this with the completion of her Bachelor of Arts degree and then a Masters in Humanities, making her days seem more like “triple”.

When elderly relatives needed care, my mother, dutifully following her mother’s example, and a long Newfoundland tradition, took responsibility for their needs. So in spite of the fact that my mother did not have the opportunity to perform the grueling labour of my grandparents, she certainly equaled, if not surpassed their exertion in a modern setting. Ultimately, even my grandparents have come to bestow what is perhaps their highest honour upon Mom. According to them, she is a “fine hand to work”.

Thinking and writing about work on this Friday, I am struck by the vast amounts of work that my grandmother and mother have done all their lives. Suddenly it becomes more than an academic exercise. It becomes a recrimination of my own lack of effort. I feel guilty, not about my procrastination in writing the thesis (that comes late at night with cold-sweat insomnia), but about my dirty bathrooms and piles of laundry that have sat untouched for weeks. And yes, there are two of us living here, both able to clean bathrooms, but today, under the scornful imaginary eye of my grandmother, they are MY dirty bathrooms. I am unable to write another word. My grandmother’s admonition rings in my head... “I’d be ashamed of me life if anyone happened to drop in.” I save my puny bit of writing for the morning and attack the toilets with vigour, throw the laundry in the washer, thinking all the while how much more difficult this would have been for my grandmother Hallett on Flat Island. No running water, no washing machine... “no my dear, you will never toil as did your ancestors, you will never live up to the standard

of labour set by them"...whose voice is this now? Perhaps a long-deceased great-grandmother, mistress of field and flake, bearer of multiple youngsters, keeper of immaculate outhouses and starched white garments?

This criticism, imaginary or not, is one felt deeply, so deeply that I cannot rationalize it away with thoughts of my intellectual strivings, hours spent at keyboards, with books, taking notes, thinking grandiloquent thoughts. None of this is 'real work' in the tradition of my grandparents Hallett. It is merely school, what you do **before** you go to work, get a job, make money, become an adult. My Nan Hallett, on a Christmas trip to the drug store, told me that she is worried about me because she thought "by this time I'd see you with a good job". Yet, I know she is proud of me, proud to tell anyone who will listen that her granddaughter is at the university, doing her Masters. She just wonders why it is taking so long. "And why, for the love of God, would you be attempting to sign on for how much longer? Another four years, maybe more? And what will you have then?"

### **Family Structure and "The Stranger"**

In my memory, strangers were those who were unfamiliar, not part of the circle of my family. My grandparents used the term frequently and it was always subtly pejorative. If my grandparents wished to explain the odd behaviour of someone who was not from Flat Island, it was enough to merely cast the aspersion of 'stranger' upon them. The term was also used to chastise the family. If you were too long a time between visits, Nan or Pop



would exclaim “Sure you’re a stranger, I’ve got to shake hands to ya!” It was a not-so-subtle rebuke of your errant ways.

“...the subject is constituted through the force of exclusion and abjection, one which produces a constitutive outside to the subject, an abjected outside which is, after all, “inside” the subject as its own founding repudiation”(Butler, Bodies 3).

One of the most important modalities of Newfoundland culture, at least in my experience, and in the context of the books, Random Passage and Waiting for Time, is the pattern of virilocal, extended family relations. In this pattern a wife is expected to live with, or in close proximity to, her husband’s family. This may entail moving to a different town or city, or to a different part of the same community. As McDowell makes clear, a focus on domestic arrangements is not a narrow one:

...a focus on the social relations within a domestic space crosses the boundary between the private and the public, between the particular and the general, and is not, as is often incorrectly asserted, a focus on the ‘merely’ domestic or the private sphere. (72-73)

This pattern has been significant for the formation of women’s identities in Newfoundland. If a woman married and moved to another community to live with or close by her husband’s family, then this family, and most importantly the mother-in-law, likely came to have profound effects upon the wife. Certainly these effects would be

compounded if the woman was very young, and if she had to move to a community that was isolated, or far away, or quite different from her own. Considering the control women exerted over their particular spheres in the community, it is not difficult to imagine the impact such powerful women would have had upon a newcomer. We only have to remember the quick and efficient revamping of Mary Bundle's appearance and work habits upon her arrival on the Cape as an example. Such refashioning is not complete, of course. Mary never did completely fit in on the Cape, and perhaps many women have felt the same over the years.

In the case of Random Passage, the pattern is already becoming established by the time the Andrews clan arrives at Cape Random in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Sarah Vincent lives with her husband Josh, having left her family in Pinchard's Island. She comments on this situation to Lavinia on the occasion of Lavinia's mother's death. "At Jennie's graveside, Sarah had kissed Lavinia. "'Tis hard girl, with yer mother gone. I knows, I been among strangers all me married life'"(Random 114, ch.9).

This pattern continues into modern times in Waiting for Time. Alf Andrews' crowd lives in Davisporte. His ex-wife had come from another community to live in Davisporte. His brother's wife also came from another town to live within walking distance of the family. Alf's mother lives in the small town also. When Lavinia decides to stay, she inadvertently repeats this pattern. She lives with Alf's mother, as she becomes his consort.

Porter and Faris also discuss this pattern. They relate it to the inshore fishing industry of the late 19<sup>th</sup> to early 20<sup>th</sup> century on the northeast coast. In this historico-geographic location a girl would work for her own family until she got married. At this time, she moved to the home of her husband's family and began working for them. Porter refers to the "awkward transition from the time that a household is dependent on a daughter's labour to the time when another household is dependent on her labour as a wife"(43). Of course, this is not to be interpreted in too simplistic a fashion. Porter makes it clear, as I have mentioned earlier, that women, despite living in a predominantly patriarchal culture, exerted great influence of their own, especially within their own "spheres".

In my life, this pattern was repeated despite the economic changes that had occurred in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. My mother came to live with my father's parents on Sunrise Avenue when she married. This street was also home to my father's sister and her family, my father's aunt and her extended family, plus sundry relations and friends who had migrated to Mt. Pearl from Flat Island and lived in the same manner as my grandparents.

The concept of "the stranger" is an important one here. Sarah Vincent refers to strangers among whom she has lived her entire married life. This indicates the kind of relationship she had with her in-laws and neighbors as a woman from another community. It was obviously not a close one. This seems to be similar to the feelings harboured by Mary

Bundle about her married life as well. As an old woman she recalls, "...she was some strange kind of fish—different and unlikable. In all the years she'd been married to Ned she'd never been accepted by the Andrews' crowd, not once in all that time had she ever been called Mary Andrews"(Waiting 170, ch.12). Mary remains a stranger, one who is never fully integrated despite years spent among its inhabitants, despite learning the correct behaviours, despite becoming part of a family.

My mother has had a similar experience. She has been referred to as a stranger by my grandmother on more than one occasion. This, despite being married to my father and living with my grandparents for more than thirty years! This concept of the stranger creates relationships of exclusion. Seeing oneself as a stranger or being labeled a stranger by one's in-laws effectively excludes one from a bond of commonality with the rest of the community. As Linda McDowell points out:

...a community is a relational rather than a categorical concept, defined both by material and social relations and by symbolic meanings. Communities are context dependent, contingent, and defined by power relations; their boundaries are created by mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion. (100)

I believe that labeling someone a stranger is an efficacious and often cruel mechanism by which to maintain such boundaries in the Newfoundland context.

“Anyone could come and go as they pleased—but were forbidden to pass into the ‘private’ areas of the house. Only ‘strangers’ or those in authority knocked...”(Porter 44). In this case, strangers represent a socio-spatial relationship of exclusion that delineates clear boundaries of community. Those who are “in” the community are allowed past the front door without knocking, while those who are “outside” the community must knock on the door to be permitted entry.

At one point early in the days of Vinnie’s pedagogy, the children learn this lesson.

Before all the children have recited the text there is a persistent tapping on the outside wall. At first, thinking Ben is at work on some part of his ever expanding house, they pay no attention to the sound. The children have never known, and Lavinia has forgotten, that in more civilized places people do not open doors and walk in. The knocking continues for several minutes before the door opens and Thomas Hutchings steps inside.

(Random 144-145, ch.11)

In this instance Thomas Hutchings is demonstrating his respect for Vinnie, and his discomfort at entering the classroom, due perhaps to his own feelings of ostracism from their newly formed school community, and to the very different places he inhabited as a boy. He takes on a more formal air by knocking on the door, something unheard of on the Cape up to that point.

Though Sarah Vincent says that she lived among strangers for her married life, this does not indicate that she knocked on doors for entrance to any households on the Cape. It indicates more subtle feelings of exclusion. These feelings come from having married and moved away from her family to a different community. Such is the abstruse nature of this relationship in emotional and psychological terms.

In these terms the stranger is a label that might not indicate your knocking on the front door, but it points to the differences that exclude you from complete symmetry with the rest of the group. Most commonly, and in the case of married women, the differences stem from family and/or geographic roots. Indeed, these roots might also indicate a different cultural background, in which case, differences are exceedingly pronounced. Such differences create suspicion and mistrust.

The causes of such suspicion may be multiple, but are seen by many as a product of Newfoundland's distinct history of settlement. Morgan incorporates it in her book, and James Faris deals with it extensively in his ethnography of a Newfoundland fishing settlement on the northeast coast, Cat Harbour. The European settlement of the island was largely accomplished by people with something to hide. There were illegal deserters of the British Navy, French and English fishermen who had deigned to build homes and "bide" despite being forbidden to do so by foreign overlords, Irish indentured servants searching for freedom in anonymity, and various other folks on the run from the law. These circumstances combined with the remoteness of most settlements along the coast,

and a decidedly hostile and fearfully ignorant relationship with the Beothuck to make the early inhabitants of the island vulnerable to attacks from many quarters. These threats were still very real in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Sarah Vincent illustrates them thus, “What difference when you’re froze in a snowbank who put you there, English or American, French or Turk, brigantines or pirates, fishing admirals or the British Navy, you’re still froze, innit ya?”(Random 73, ch.6).

Faris claims that this fear of being routed out of one’s home by powerful forces lingered as a shadow in the Newfoundland psyche for generations (indeed until the time of his fieldwork in the 1960’s) and persisted as an inherent distrust of anyone deemed a “stranger”. The historical roots of this relationship run deep and as is common with such long held fears, the roots have become tangled and intertwined with myth and prejudice, until a complex and multifaceted snarl has formed. Indeed it has become a complicated notion, interpretations of which are context dependent.

There have formed, over time, what I think of as degrees of ‘stranger-ness’ in the Newfoundland dialect. The continuum has at one end the “black stranger” with its racist and religious overtones, who is a person over whose head you have never before seen the sun shine. Witness Mary Bundle’s opinion of a young man whom she intensely dislikes and does not trust, “Far as I’m concerned Stephen Vincent’s a black stranger. S’posin’ he is Charlie’s grandson—and we only got his word for that, I don’t take to him” (Waiting 81, ch.6). On the opposite end of the continuum is “a practical stranger” who

might be a family member or friend that one has not seen for an unacceptably long interval. In between these two extremes can be found the kind of stranger that Mary Bundle felt herself to be, and that my mother still feels herself to be, a stranger amongst family. This kind of stranger is one who is never fully accepted into a family or a community due to their inexplicable behaviour and uncommon roots.

‘The stranger’ also came to represent nameless, faceless fears among Newfoundlanders. It became a catchall for whatever made you shiver without explanation, a sort of local boogey-man. “Them days was hundreds of wild animals about—along with Indians and pirates. Strangers, too, the youngsters’d always be seein’ strangers in the woods”(Waiting 155, ch.8).

How is the modern Lav a stranger? In Ottawa she does not seem to fit into a family unit with her mother. They are opposite personalities. Lav demands more of her past from her mother, yet her mother resists. She is unwilling to delve into their history as a family, or her experience in Newfoundland. She also does not feel particularly comfortable with Phillip’s (her partner) family. They have entirely too much history, all of it perfectly preserved, and perfectly structured. Ironically, it is only upon her return to outport Newfoundland that she appears to find her ‘place’ in the world. Despite being ostensibly a “mainlander” and a “stranger”, she is accepted as a blood relation. As such she ‘belongs’ to the Andrews crowd, to Davisporte, and hence to Newfoundland.



My mother says that she still feels like a stranger in the Hallett household, despite being a member of it for over thirty years. This would not have surprised Faris, for as he found in Cat Harbour, “once a stranger, always a stranger”(83). However, I wonder how much is this a self-adopted label, one worn with a certain amount of pride? I think in my mother’s case, there is a degree of pride at having resisted the constrictive norms of the Hallett family. I think she has achieved a sort of appropriation of the term “stranger”, and now wears it as a defiant badge of survival. This is especially apropos in view of my mother’s child-rearing strategies and her determined pursuance of secondary education, and as I will explore in the next section, her Catholicism, which was in direct conflict with the prevailing religious currents in the Hallett family.

## **Religion**

As a child I occasionally went to the Anglican Church with my grandmother, Aunt and Uncle. The only differences I noticed were that they received wine with the host during mass, took this communion on their knees at the altar rail, and sang a heck of a lot louder than the Catholics. I did not think this was a big deal. It was, however, a big deal for my mother’s mother. I believe she prayed for the conversion of my father’s soul every day until her mind succumbed to the sorrowful mystery of Alzheimer’s disease.

Religion is an important aspect of the books Random Passage and Waiting for Time. It is also a large part of the miniseries. If anything people seem more religious in the

miniseries than in the book. The preacher does not have to come to Cape Random in the film to save the people. They are already quite devout. In fact one of the interesting things about the books and the film is that the women seem to be the keepers of religion in the Cape, despite Thomas Hutchings' secret vocation. One display of this piety is the language they use. Often men in the book and the movie blaspheme and are chastised by the women. The only woman to use profanity is Mary Bundle, who is also the only one who refuses to attend church or respect the Sabbath.

The building of a church is an important, if controversial, project on Cape Random. Significantly it is Meg who is the primary force behind this idea. In the movie this role is denied Meg, and given to Lavinia. Nevertheless, it is a woman who pushes the people to sacrifice in lean times to erect a house of God. The preacher that appeared on the Cape becomes an important influence on the lives of its inhabitants, but it is the women of the Cape, Meg and Sarah, who carry on with church services after the preacher's departure. It is only women we hear give moral guidance and chastisement on the Cape. When Ida Norris attacks Annie with a knife, Sarah scolds her daughter for her dalliance with Frank Norris. "I told ya my girl—time and time again I warned ya! Evil begets evil, the Lord will not have his commandments broke nor his words mocked"(Random 155, ch.12). There is no evidence of Frank ever receiving such a dressing down.

Religious observance is the only thing that routinely interrupts the seemingly infinite work of the Cape. The Sabbath is sacred, and not even Mary Bundle is able to make

parishioners stir from church service to work. When Mary takes over the job of overseeing the economy of the Cape from Thomas Hutchings, she becomes an odious taskmaster, blind to the more esoteric needs of the community. One Sunday she attempts to rouse the worshipers to collect much-needed caplin, but is frustrated by Meg. “No one in here will cast for caplin on this day—we’re not going to break the Sabbath for you, Mary Bundle. You might think you owns our bodies but I can tell ya, you don’t have no claim on our souls!”(Waiting 161, ch.11). This keen observance has been passed down through the generations, in many denominations of Newfoundland society whether in outport or town.

In apparent contradiction to this, another tradition dominates many Newfoundland Sundays. That is the “Sunday Dinner”. It has been tradition on sides Anglican and Catholic in my family, for as long as anyone can remember, and while the menu has varied, the meal has always been observed, well... religiously. The Sunday Dinner has customarily been a huge production generally involving a roast, four or five kinds of vegetables, salt meat, and probably dessert. This kind of meal requires hours of preparation and clean up, traditionally accomplished by the women of the family, yet is not considered “real work” that breaks the Sabbath.

As I have mentioned, my family is a mixture of two religions, Anglican and Catholic, Orange and Green as some might say. My mother and father married at a time when such things were still frowned upon, especially by staunch Catholic mothers, such as my

Grandmother Daly. My mother and father had to agree to raise their children Catholic in order to be married in the Catholic Church. Thus my mother became the 'soul' provider as it were. My brother and I went to Catholic schools. We attended Catholic mass every Sunday until we turned sixteen and were given the choice of whether or not to attend. By our turns we both choose not to attend mass. Nevertheless, religion has been a formative influence in our lives, one of the few not directly impacted by my grandmother Hallett.

As on the Cape, religion in my mother's life was dominated by women. Of course, the priests were men, but it seemed that quotidian moral and religious instruction was women's domain. At school it was the nuns who held sway on matters moral and religious, and they were not to be questioned. At home, her mother was the keeper of religious traditions. She was the one who took them to church. She was the leader of the rosary, the preacher of doctrine, and authority on the evils of sin. Perhaps most importantly, she was the arbiter of guilt, that Catholic mainstay of behavioural adjustment.

My own childhood was similar in that my mother and grandmother Daly dominated moral teaching. My grandmother Daly is the figure I most associate with my childhood experiences of organized religion. She was a devout Catholic, a staunch believer in the tenants of the faith, the sort who would whip out the rosary beads to fill an idle moment in the car while waiting for your mother to come out of the drug store. She attended mass

with us every Sunday, and then spent the rest of the day with our family. On these days impromptu diatribes on proper moral conduct (a la Nan Daly) were not uncommon.

The prevailing theme in many of these mini-sermons was that women were of an inherently superior moral character to men. This did not make them more important or able to take decisions alone, of course, but it did make them responsible for the refinement and control of men's "unruly nature". Women were to be good in all ways and through their example men would be uplifted. "Good", at least in terms of the gospel according to Nan Daly, meant that women were to be chaste until marriage, after which they were to be pliable to the will of their husbands. Notions of sexuality were simple. Sex was a matter for husband and wife, for the procreation of children, at the husband's behest. In any other context sex was shameful and immoral.

### **Compulsory Heterosexuality<sup>xiii</sup>**

"Gender norms operate by requiring the embodiment of certain ideals of femininity and masculinity, ones that are almost always related to the idealization of the heterosexual bond"(Butler, Bodies 231-232).

"..."sex" is an ideal construct which is forcibly materialized through time"(Butler, Bodies 1).

The materialization of “sex” in Newfoundland has predominantly been about heterosexualizing people into “proper pairs” for the purpose of procreation, but also for work. Working as a team has been a major purpose of the married couple in Newfoundland for years, dating back to the time of the first settlers.

Evidence of this is present in both the books and the miniseries. Homosexuality is as unthinkable as it is invisible in both the books and the television miniseries<sup>xiv</sup>. This might be plausible in the Newfoundland of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, but surely not in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century?! If Morgan is intent on showing how the lives of women in Newfoundland have changed in 200 years, I think she would have been wise to include some mention (at the very least) of homosexuality and/or bisexuality. Can we accuse Morgan of being tendentious? Perhaps. I believe Butler would contend that this is the natural extension and expression of the “heterosexual matrix”<sup>xv</sup> in our culture. Is this a plausible excuse? Does the otherwise excellent quality of the book make it forgivable? No.

Despite the female characters’ complexity and infinite ingenuity, they seem incapable of even imagining a life without a husband. Granted the economic realities of early 19<sup>th</sup> century Newfoundland would have made it nearly impossible for a woman to support herself, especially in a small outport community like Cape Random. Perhaps Morgan presents no choices because the choices were actually that limited. Men were seen as necessary to complete one’s life, if only for monetary reasons.

Ever the pragmatist, Mary Bundle's attitude toward men in the beginning of Random Passage is in keeping with the realities of her time. She has a rather functionary view of men at the outset, using them to achieve financial stability. She sets her cap for Thomas Hutchings solely for this reason. Yet after she marries Ned and has children with him, she claims to love him and never re-marries after his death. As an old woman recounting her life story to her great-granddaughter Rachel, she remains bitter at the loss. "That night Mary rants on for hours, weeping at the ancient grief, pouring out her rage at having lost Ned, at having been left with a crowd of children and pregnant"(Waiting 155, ch.11).

Once again the necessity of a man is made apparent in Mary's thinking, even as an old woman, widowed for over sixty years. "'I'll work something out', Mary Bundle had promised—and she meant it. And for a woman nothing could be worked out without a husband—this lesson Mary had learned long ago"(Waiting 88, ch.6). While the other female characters do not express it in such baldly pragmatic terms, it is assumed in the books that all of the women are heterosexual and that finding a male partner is a necessary part of womanhood. The fact that Rachel never marries and manages to have a life and be independent is a positive move, seemingly indicating the progress of women through the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. While her heterosexuality and womanhood are firmly established by her affair with Stephen Vincent and the birth of her child, we see that just as Mary herself did for so many years as a widow, women can live without husbands.

Lavinia is more of a romantic than Mary, and pines for Tomas Hutchings. She does not seem to become fully a woman until they are together. Indeed, if a woman at that time did not find a husband she would be derided as a failure. Witness Vinnie's nieces as they prepare to sail for St. John's, "'Lizzie says the three of ye, Annie, Pash and you, will all be old maids', Emma said with great satisfaction"(Random 141, ch.11). This dour prediction was indicative of the common belief that without a husband a woman was incomplete.

Witness Lav in "modern" times. Modern heterosexuality ostensibly allows Lav more freedom than her female ancestors. This freedom, however, is limited to sleeping with men out of wedlock. There are no other options for this 'modern' woman. She seems incapable of living happily as a single woman. Ultimately, many of women's roles with relation to men, and assumptions about such roles, are unchanged. At one point Lav sees Wayne Drover and thinks, "He looks happier, better groomed than when he first arrived—someone, doubtless some woman, is taking care of him"(Waiting 55, ch.4).

There is no mention of any sexuality other than heterosexuality. Even in Morgan's late-20<sup>th</sup> century Newfoundland, homosexuality is as unimaginable, and untenable, as it was two hundred years previous. It strikes me as odd that in novels as sharply focussed on women's lives and their relationships with both men and women, Morgan would completely ignore the possibility of lesbian or gay relationships. Many of the women in



these books love each other deeply, yet there is never the slightest intimation of sexual feeling amongst them.

As a reminder of how ignorant I was just a few years ago, how firmly entrenched in the “heterosexual matrix”, I did not even notice these attributes of the books when I first read them in the early nineties! I thought nothing was amiss in the complete absence of homosexuality. The stories were reflective of my life up to that point. Homosexuality had been virtually invisible to me. I had never wondered at the policing of my own sexuality, or questioned the incessant image-mongering, the consistent barrage of happy heterosexual couples in the media, of the heterosexist society of which I have always been an accepted part.

At home in my mid-teens I watched television and read lots of books. There were absolutely no representations of homosexuality on any of the shows I watched or in the books I read. In contrast, there was a glut of heterosexual couples and families on television, in books, and certainly all around me. I knew virtually nothing else. I did not question this. This was ‘natural’. I did not think that my own sexuality was being policed despite clear indications to the contrary. For instance, there were two labels for girls in my high school, “slut” and “tight”, and I viewed both with trepidation. “Family Living” classes paired people off to “parent” hard-boiled eggs, a phenomenon that remains baffling.

In my current readings of the books and the film I agree with Butler in that:

...it will be as important to think about how and to what extent bodies are constructed as it will be to think about how and to what extent bodies are **not** constructed and further, to ask after how bodies which fail to materialize provide the necessary “outside”, if not the necessary support, for the bodies which, in materializing the norm, qualify as bodies that matter. (Bodies 16)

Through their invisibility in this story, and indeed in much of my own story, gay and lesbian identities are supporting the naturalness, the assumed ubiquity of heterosexual identities in Newfoundland culture.

Homosexuals’ “failure to materialize” in Random Passage and Waiting for Time, books that are quasi historical, is a demonstration of their inability to fully materialize in Newfoundland society. If homosexuality is an impossible category in books full of characters as complex and vibrant as these, it leaves little hope for lesser books. And as Kelly reminds us:

As significations or representations of history, language, culture and identity, Newfoundland books, like all books, are ideological; that is, they explain in certain ways particular versions of social relations of history, language, culture and identity. These versions can work to suggest to readers, through the discourses of understanding available to us, who we are and might become and what place we occupy in the social spectrum.

(41)

That being said, there are certain 'que(e)ries' one can make into the books and the life of my family. For example, spinsterhood was not a simple state. While many may have derided single women of a certain age as failures, these women likely did not see themselves as such. In Waiting for Time we learn that part of Emma's prediction did come to pass. Pash is an "old maid" as is Mary's daughter Tessa. We are given only a glimpse of these two, as cheerful old women who live together and share a taste for news. This glimpse tells us some things, and allows us to speculate about others. It tells us that in defiance of Mary's logic, a life can be "worked out" without a husband, even in late 19<sup>th</sup> century Newfoundland. It tells us that women could find ways to support themselves, and each other, and be happy, without men. It allows us to speculate about the relationship between these two women. Is spinsterhood a conscious choice? They share a home, and a life, and likely a great love, but we wonder if that life, that love is platonic. Is spinsterhood a socially acceptable mask for their commitment to each other?

Is this a well-known secret in the community? Is it yet another example of the binding reticence of the Cape?

Similar questions arose after the death of my Auntie Sheila, Grandfather Daly's sister, daughter of the legendary Great Grandmother Daly. The day of her funeral 'Mom's side' of the family sat in my Nan Daly's apartment reminiscing about her singular life. Once more we marveled at her strength and resilience, living alone until her death at eighty-six. We remembered her great capacity for love and kindness. Familiar stories were told, but a certain anecdote gave me pause. It was the tale of Maggie, a friend who used to come and stay with Auntie Sheila for prolonged periods after the rest of her family had died or moved out of the house on Circular Road. For the first time I speculated about the Auntie Sheila I did not know, the young woman who chose to live alone after her mother's death, who worked to support herself, who never had a boyfriend. I wondered out loud (though quietly enough not to raise the ire of Nan Daly) if Maggie might not have been Auntie Sheila's lover. I could tell by the blank looks of incomprehension on all faces, that this was the first time such a query had been made. It was not long, however, before incomprehension turned to recognition. Indeed, I was quite surprised by the equanimity with which this subversive suggestion was met. I believe it was my Aunt Tralee who spoke for us all when she exclaimed, to the confused chagrin of Nan Daly, "Well whether she was or she wasn't, I just hope they had a hell of a good time".

That moment represented a kind of sea-change in my thinking about Auntie Sheila, and what she meant to me, and perhaps to all the women in her family. I realized that she had always been a queer influence in my life, an alternative example of how to live as a woman. She was the only woman I knew of my grandparents' generation, who had never married and never had children, who had lived independently her entire life, and loved it. She was the only person I knew who had a library, tiny as it was, and who gave everyone a present in a handmade box when we gathered to celebrate someone's birthday. I saw her influence upon my mother, in the way my mother guarded her own independence and encouraged mine. I saw it in my mother's respect for and support of Auntie Sheila's lifestyle as she aged and became sick. I saw it in the way this respect translated into respect for everyone's right to live the way they wished, and the way she passed this respect on to her children.

So, "whether she was or she wasn't" is not really the point. The point is she was an important influence upon her nieces and grandnieces. She indicated that there are myriad paths to womanhood. That being a woman does not necessarily involve a heterosexual pair bond, and that "spinster" did not equal "failure". Indeed, she showed me, long before I was to read and recognize Judith Butler's theoretical relevance, that "the compulsory character of ...[gender] norms does not always make them efficacious"(Bodies 237).

## **The Ebb and Flow of Memory**

“The *Florizel* lost north of Cappahayden with 94 men, women and children...”(Waiting 221, ch.17). When I read these historical facts among Morgan’s fiction I became as sentimental as the people in the fictional scene she describes. This small reference ‘placed’ me and my family in Morgan’s story and the story of Newfoundland, not just metaphorically, but historically. I recalled the story of my great grandfather Daly (my mother’s grandfather) who was drowned when the *Florizel* foundered off Cappahayden in 1918. It is the story with which I began this thesis. The story of how my Great Grandmother Daly became a quasi-legend amongst the women in our family. As such, she is spoken of in reverential tones, around kitchen tables, over drinks. How did she do it? We ask each other in awe. The hard work, unflinching dedication, pride and dignity, these are the qualities we have assigned her, the standard by which we may have unfairly judged ourselves.

My great grandmother Daly became an icon in our family because we were free to create her as such. There is much that we do not know about her and very little that we do. However, this small amount of information has been enough to craft a legend of sorts. I imagine the less you know about a figure, the easier it is to create a legend around them. We may find it difficult to mythologize a person who came complete with warts, idiosyncrasies, petty jealousies, and other sundry flaws. For good or ill, these mythical identities influence our own.

Speaking of identity construction in this way illustrates how tenuous and contingent identities actually are, how much they are based on memory and forgetting, on history and story, on fact and fiction. It illuminates the already-shifting, ambiguous ground upon which identities often stand. This also shows that postmodern and queer theories have not created this phenomenon, but recognized its importance in the formation of gender and other identities. It is important because if we can recognize the ambiguity of nets of identity, we may be less inclined to remain permanently entrapped by them.

“Without our precious ability to forget, we should drown in an inextricable mass of old and new impressions which, being deprived of all order and hierarchy, would also be deprived of meaning”(Huston 117). This is a particularly relevant and interesting inversion of typical thinking about memory. We usually regard our ability to remember things as “precious”, our way of holding on to things, people, events and experiences, but as Huston suggests, it may be our ability to forget many things that allows us to sort our memories into meaningful boxes.

Her reference to drowning is also pertinent. Is our mind/imagination/memory like the ocean, a vast, perilous presence and our ability to forget our life preserver/ability to swim that saves us from death within it? What does this mean for me and the writing of this thesis? How have the things I have forgotten given meaning to the things I remember? It is hard to say, considering that I’ve forgotten what they were in the first place. (This

could lead down a farcical road if we're not careful.) I believe it means that a partial rendering is not only adequate, but necessary.

It indicates why I feel overwhelmed when I try to remember everything about my past and put it all together in some coherent way. It is not possible for a number of reasons. First, I will never be able to remember "Everything", nor will I remember the things that I can retrieve in any kind of logical sequence. That is why "Queered Memory" is so strangely reassuring. I do not feel it needs to be chronological or sequential, or ordered in any banal way. Memory is simply not like that. Memory is jumbled, tangled, irrational, triggered by random and unpredictable sensory impressions. A smell will bring me back to my Auntie Sheila's tiny, closet-like library and make me want to weep. A song on the radio will evoke a day of sea kayaking and general hilarity with friends and make me laugh out loud by myself in the car. This is the power and the mystery of memory. It often deceives, and deserts us, but also surprises us. Some things we wish we could forget, and others we relive often just to remind ourselves that we have experienced joy, or pain, or humiliation, or passion, or even to remind us of who we are, once were, or wish to become.



According to McDowell:

Instead of the identities of ‘oppositional’ or ‘minority’ groups being constructed as different from a ‘norm’, it is now asserted that all identities are a fluid amalgam of memories of places and origins, constructed by and through fragments and nuances, journeys and rests, of movements between. (215)

This is in fact the case with the identity ‘Newfoundland Woman’, or at least with the identities of my principal female characters, both fictional and real, who are all Newfoundland women. My grandmother Hallett’s journey from Flat Island was a pivotal part of her identity construction, and hence became important in my mother’s own reinvention, along with her own journey from St. John’s to Mt. Pearl. My own journeys have been just as important to my identity formation. Memories of these journeys, and the places we all have come from are crucial to these processes. Of course, memories can be convoluted and conflicted means of accessing the past.

Witness the ambivalent power of memory in this passage from Morgan’s fiction. “Yet when they do come to one of Lavinia’s accounts of something happening, Mary is no better pleased, interrupting the girl’s reading to insist that Lavinia has lied or completely misunderstood”(Waiting 93, ch.6). This is a great indication of the continual ebb and flow between history and fiction, memory and imagination. The way that Mary and Lavinia differently interpret the same events is marvelous, and shows how very

inconsistent and partial all historical accounts must be. It indeed shows the strange power of memory and imagination in the struggle to find truth and meaning. Is the past that Lavinia and Mary shared rendered ridiculous and meaningless through two differing accounts of it? Or is it more accurate to say that the past is rendered more complex and meaningful through such adverse perspectives?<sup>xvi</sup>

Could we interpret these accounts as “gender fables”, which are “irreducible to fact” (Butler, Gender xxxi)? I think we can, for they are stories of how each woman came into being as a woman, stories of their relationships with other women, with men and children, with their “place” in the world. They were each of them products of their particular historical moment, and yet acted and reacted differently to the powers at work throughout that time. Indeed, even their own powers of memory work differently to frame the events of their lives. Through the example of Mary Bundle’s ‘changing’ of Lavinia’s story of the Cape, we can witness the deceptive current of memory, the shifting tide of truth, the shifting shores of history, and how all of this impacts upon one’s identity.

The thematic ebb and flow of memory is brought out most spectacularly in Waiting for Time. The main character, Lav Andrews, is a descendent of the original Andrews clan from Cape Random. As she travels back to Newfoundland she is haunted by the lack of memories she has of her family there. She wishes to know more, and gradually as the empty spaces of her history are filled in by relatives past and present, she reinvents

herself through their memories. Early in the book, before her journey of self-discovery/self-recovery has begun we see Lav in Ottawa. Here, “Lav has observed that memories take on a life of their own, pick up detail, evolve into stories with beginnings, middles and ends—sometimes even with morals” (Waiting 12, ch.1).

When Mary is recounting her life for her granddaughter Rachel, we see examples of this elusive power of memory. Mary tells the story of the day she and Fanny almost drowned when Fanny was a baby. Ned and Thomas saved them both and, “Mary remembers it all, every detail. Although years later, Annie Vincent will swear that Mary did not even ask what had happened to her baby, Mary knows she was calling Fanny’s name as they hauled her out of the water”(Waiting 133, ch.9).

Our identities are, at least partially, based on half-remembered, half-contrived events in our lives, or in the lives of our ancestors. For Lav much of the new identity she fashions in Newfoundland is based on what she reads in Lavinia’s journal. This is a journal filled with the subjective, often-conflicting interpretations of a young Lavinia Andrews and an aged Mary Bundle. In many ways this is a journey for Lav. It is a journey into the past, into the history and mythology of a family, of a place, of a culture. The journal-journey is a formative experience for Lav as no other has been in her life up to that point.

“The mixing of dreams and reality—the idea frightens her. Is it better to have no history or an imagined one?” (Waiting 63, ch.5). The notion of having simply one or the other is

made ridiculous when considering the work of memory in Lav's (and conceivably everyone's) notion of identity. As Morgan shows in the book, memory often plays tricks, distorting events to fit a preferred image. So, Morgan's point, and the point of much postmodern theory, is that memory and imagination, fact and fiction, history and story are all intimately linked, moveable, and essential components of identity fashioning.

My experience and the experience of my mother bear this out. There are already discrepancies I can identify within this account. I have quoted my Grandmother Hallett as saying "The women worked like dogs and the men worked like horses." My mother recalls the quote as being "The women worked like men and the men worked like horses". This is not a vast difference, but I believe it's a significant one. The changing of one remembered word changes the meaning of this phrase, and changes the impact of its meaning from me to my mother. I take its meaning to read that the women and men worked equally hard, but that the men worked at the more physically demanding tasks. My mother insists that the phrase is indicative of my grandmother's belief in men's inherent superiority through their much harder work. We have discussed this and come to no satisfactory conclusion. In my more cynical moments I think my mother's interpretation is correct, yet at other times I am not sure.

Mom also claims that there are discrepancies between her account of childhood and her sisters' accounts. In our interview, and subsequent discussions, she has said that there are things that her sisters remember about growing up that she does not. Similarly there are

events that she can recount that her sisters believe she has created from fantasy. Incidents involving their mother and father, experiences at school, and various other commonplace happenings have become a source of bemused debate between the three when they are together, all of them sure that the others have got it wrong.

Lav “ thinks how strange it is that Charlotte and David—yes and her too—all three should have treacherous memories, memories that deceive, that obliterate, that lie” (Waiting 214, ch.16). I believe all of us have such memories. How can we remember perfectly? Do we wish to? For me, many memories are overlaid with the emotions I feel at the recollection. These emotions undoubtedly colour the memories and subtly change them. Thus they are distorted as if viewed under water. But perhaps without this hydroscope-effect the memories would seem drab, gray and stagnant?

## **Traps and Ghost Nets**<sup>xvii</sup>

“...perhaps this had something to do with my eventual writing life—the inability to distinguish between the real and the imagined, or rather the attitude that what we consider real is also imagined: every life lived is also an inner life, a life created” (Atwood 7).

“What constitutes through division the “inner” and “outer” worlds of the subject is a border and boundary tenuously maintained for the purposes of social regulation and control” (Butler, Gender 170).

Consider boundaries of identity, which are of course linked to boundaries of place, and control. That all of these are intertwined has already been discussed. Now, allow me to examine people’s zealous defense of such boundaries despite the fact that they are largely imaginary. I am interested in the ways that boundaries of identity are actually porous, shifting, and that consequently make identities ever-deferred notions. When conceived in this manner, and in relation to the place(s) of the Newfoundland imaginary, boundaries can be discussed more appropriately as traps and ghost nets. Such notions are perpetually re-invented and re-invested with meaning, political purpose and urgency. As such, they can ensnare us unwittingly, in traps of our own making, or in ghost nets of identity left behind by those gone before.

Witness the same-sex marriage debate raging at the moment across Canada and the United States. What is the problem with re-defining marriage? Did not divorce re-define marriage? Did not contraception re-define marriage? Why are Newfoundland Members of Parliament afraid of endorsing it? Why are people all across the country unwilling to support it? Why is George W. Bush talking about amending the Constitution to more effectively ban it? Why are people so afraid?!

I think part of the reason comes back to ghost nets, and how they are paradoxically so very ephemeral and yet so very difficult to find and remove. I am convinced that identities are works in progress, or works of “perpetual reinvention” as Diana Fuss phrases it. At the very end of The Psychic Life of Power Butler states that:

The power imposed upon one is the power that animates one’s emergence, and there appears to be no escaping this ambivalence. Indeed, there appears to be no “one” without ambivalence, which is to say that the fictive redoubling necessary to become a self rules out the possibility of strict identity. (198)

I am also convinced that this thesis is such a redoubling; a work in progress, a perpetually unfinished task that I will yet defend, and protect, against possible attack. The thesis forms part of my identity right now as intellectual, academic, feminist, writer, Master’s Candidate, wild-eyed hermit. Yet, strangely I have not thought about how this thesis is (at least partially) defining me until now, at a point when I am in the final stages

of the process. Is that how much identity is constructed? Partially behind your back, when you are “busy making other plans” as it were? Before you realize it, there IT is, YOUR IDENTITY, and you assume it has been there all along, since “the beginning”. And so, it must be inscrutable, highly important, and impervious to any perceived destruction.

Concurrent with this identity formation, my identity is informing the thesis. My choice of subjects has not been arbitrary. I have chosen to focus on my mother and my grandmother Hallett due to their overwhelming influence in my life. These two women were the most important influences in my early life, and continue to be so. They have been ostensibly stable influences, though they have changed over the years, and in my mind have “always been there”. In many ways, I may be trapping their identities in the mesh of this work. I may be lending a false sense of perpetuity to their attitudes and ideas.

Maybe I am guiltier of this in relation to my grandmother Hallett, who is perhaps being misrepresented in this writing. She appears as a phantasm of memory, a voice of conversations held, times past, though she is very much a part of the present. I have not interviewed her for this thesis. The reasons are complicated. She is quite old now, eighty-seven, and quite hard of hearing. She also has little idea of what I actually do “at the university”, and is disinclined to understand it. Part of the reason she seems so anachronistic to me is because virtually all she and my grandfather have talked about for



years is their life on Flat Island. And in many ways they do live in the past, and are most happy there. Thus it is that my grandmother Hallett has for a long time seemed (however unfairly or incorrectly) a static character in life's drama, a stable, predictable heroine of Newfoundland's history.

My grandmother Daly is, on the other hand, mostly a specter in these pages. The reasons for this are also complex. She had much less to do with my upbringing, as she was generally disinterested in children. She was always a persona more than a person to me. Granted she fed us many, many meals, and was a fixture in my life, yet she seemed to be much less passionately involved than my grandmother Hallett. Ultimately it is impossible to interview her now. She has been steadily declining in an old-age home for the last five years, suffering from Alzheimer's disease. It is a trap that no one saw coming, one that is inescapable.

Such entanglements are frustrating. In fact, I find any snarl that prohibits me from communicating with another person to be intolerable. However, unlike the trap of Alzheimer's disease, traps of identity are not closed by biology, and thus not inescapable. This is perhaps the crux of this thesis, my deepest held desire -- by evincing the ways that nettings of gendered identity are socially cast in the Newfoundland context, I hope that they will cease to be impenetrable.

The ramifications of this are personal and political. On a personal level, I have found that acknowledgement of identity as an unfixed, ever-deferred notion has given me a feeling of emancipation I had not believed possible. Spurred by my readings in queer and postmodern theory I have explored the underpinnings of my own identity and found them to be multiple and changing. This is a gift that looses the bonds of guilt over my ambivalence, my confusion in thinking about who I am. Loyalties to the different influences in my life no longer seem conflicted, but necessary and welcome. The possibilities of change in my identity are happily anticipated. The realization that the trappings (as it were) of my identity are largely imaginary frees me from the odious task of guarding them, for they are in no danger.

On a political level, Judith Butler maintains:

This raises the political question of the cost of articulating a coherent identity-position if that coherence is produced through the production, exclusion, and repudiation of abjected spectres that threaten those very subject-positions? Indeed, it may be only by risking the **incoherence** of identity that connection is possible...(Bodies 113)

Granted, incoherence is a scary term. Does it imply ignorance, confusion, and lack of any clear notion of self-hood? I think not. I think that incoherence in this context implies an unwillingness to remain caught in traps of identity that separate people into discreet categories of 'us' and 'them'. This incoherence would allow people to see that our notions of identity are not being attacked by postmodern and queer theories, but that

notions of identity have always been fluid, changeable, and in need of others for their formation. In order to envision this future incoherence, and not be terrified by it, we need to engage with the norms that perfidiously snare our identities now.

For some this “incoherence of identity” leads to a “subversion of solidarity” (Weir) in the feminist movement, a diminishing of women’s power to effect change due to the destruction of our unity as women. I do not agree. I think that an acceptance of the fluid nature of identity, its fundamental dependence on others for its formation, and its constitution through social norms contributes positively to conceptions of women’s power and hence the feminist movement. Butler maintains that “to authorize or safeguard the category of women as a site of possible resignifications is to expand the possibilities of what it means to be a woman and in this sense to condition and enable an enhanced sense of agency”(Butler, “Contingent” 16).

Indeed the implications are global. Chandra Mohanty succinctly states the positive possibilities thus:

Making connections between political economy and questions of subjectivity and identity and agency enable us to present a narrative that explicitly encodes the complexities of women's lives under globalization, that doesn't present us with caricatures of women. It's important for us to recreate more comprehensive stories of women's lives and agencies within this context, to combat the monolithic images that are circulated about women as victims. (Trotz & Dua 67)

Engaging with, and documenting the complexities of women's lives everywhere, not merely in urban centres and university settings, gives voice to more women's realities and struggles, winning them respect, understanding and support. Exploring the identity of Newfoundland Woman is a critical part of imagining this complexity.

## **Conclusion**

This thesis has been a personal journey, a political journey, an academic journey, and ultimately a feminist journey. It has explored and disrupted foundational notions of an identity known as Newfoundland Woman. It has done so through a perspective some might label “queer” or “postmodern”, perhaps both, or neither. It stemmed from a concern with gender and the ways it is imagined into being, with reified notions of identity and place and how we negotiate, and are negotiated by them. In querying the idea of Newfoundland Woman I hope I have expanded notions of what this local identity has meant, does mean, and might mean in future.

It has not been a completely smooth journey. I have encountered obstacles in many forms. There have been instances when I questioned my own memories, and even motives for attempting this process. I have been faced with the paradox of attempting to define terms like “identity” and “place” in a postmodern context that defies definition. There have been issues and avenues that have been left unexplored, for instance issues of class positioning that come into play regarding one’s identity formation. Such issues are ones that I hope to investigate further in the future when the dictates of time and space permit.

Indeed, this journey is far from over. The thesis represents a few strokes in the long swim that I plan to take in my future academic pursuits. The work contained here reflects my years of academic study, informal discussion, travel, work, and interaction

with family, friends and colleagues up to this point. It also indicates the direction in which I will continue to grow for many more years.

This has been a risky endeavor, for if as Butler warns, "...the subject loses itself to tell the story of itself" (Psychic 11), then perhaps I am left, after the thesis has run its course, a shell of my former self, destitute, not knowing who I am. Rather I think that telling the story of myself has also meant telling the stories of my family, and losing my/self has meant losing the certainty of the norms that condition/inhibit my existence. In this case, I am not less of myself, but more; able to imagine an identity which is not fixed and solidified, and in need of defense, but fluid, changeable, and in need of others.

My querying of the identity Newfoundland Woman has meant making connections between Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity and the lives of women in my family and those in Bernice Morgan's fiction. Through these links, I have discovered that there is no such caricatured entity. There are however myriad interpretations of Newfoundland Woman. What it means to be a woman in one part of Newfoundland is not necessarily what it means in another place. Through the additional use of McDowell's theories of postmodern geography it has become evident that these 'places' can be construed in one's head and heart as well as on the ground, and how one defines oneself as a woman can change over time and space.

One's identity is not fixed, but is ever evolving like the rock that is eroded by the power of the sea. This has been demonstrated most forcibly by the interaction of the female characters herein. Though they lived together in one place for many years, they never entirely agreed on the proper conduct of women. This is due to the different places from which they came, the various memories and myths they brought from these places, and which they at least partially maintained throughout their cohabitation. Their relationships with these places, with each other, and with the gender norms of their socio-historic contexts have been the constitutive forces behind their identities. And, just as the eroding rock shapes the outline of the ocean, so too have these women's identities shaped these places called Newfoundland. Like pebbles colliding in the tide, they have been sculpted by the waves and their movements against one another, deposited on a beach forever altered by their presence.

## **Epilogue**

My mother and I became SCUBA divers together. We attended the course together, and have done quite a lot of diving as partners. One day we were exploring the ocean floor around St. Thomas' in Portugal Cove. It was a beautiful day and we were having a wonderful dive. We had seen huge skates, schools of playful conners, myriad jellies, and multi-coloured starfish. We had been underwater for about 40 minutes and were down to 800psi in our air tanks. That was our signal to head for shore, a solid safety practice being to end your dive with 500psi remaining in your tank. We surfaced in customary form to check our position relative to shore. We were not terribly far out, perhaps 100 meters. We decided we would dive to the bottom again (approximately 17 meters below) and make a beeline for the beach. Swimming underwater is the easier option when you are laden with kilos of heavy SCUBA gear.

We submerged again and began our swim toward the beach, following the contour lines of the sand for direction. After swimming for what felt a longish time, we checked our air and found it to be at a dangerously low 400psi. We decided to surface again, and found ourselves further out than when we had started our return journey! Unbeknownst to us, a strong undercurrent had been pulling us out the cove all the while we thought we were making progress toward dry land. Exhausted and almost out of air, we began the laborious surface swim to the beach, using our snorkels to preserve emergency air in the tanks. We arrived on shore with aching backs and cramping muscles, relieved, proud of



our calm determination, and grateful for a relatively gentle reminder of the hidden forces of the sea.

The initial trepidation of getting in the water for a dive is something I have never lost. It is embodied as a fluttering in the stomach, a catch in the throat, a tightening of the muscles around my eyes as I stand on the beach, or edge of the boat. Perhaps it is because I have not been diving regularly these past years, not since that first, ebullient summer when I practically lived underwater. Still, I recall having a healthy worry in the back of my mind even then; an awareness of the possible problems we had been trained to deal with, and those unexpected tragedies that might leave a diver incapacitated or dead.

A similar embodiment of fear struck me as I prepared to plumb the depths of identity. So much was unknown, so much was, and remains, mysterious even in this realm of commonplace notions. There were dangers I was prepared for; the academic incredulity, the baring of one's most tenderly held beliefs, the dissolution of previously held 'truths', the incapacity to adequately express the complex nature of the subject. Plus there are the risks I haven't anticipated that could leave my thesis (and academic hopes) incapacitated or dead! Yet, like SCUBA diving, I could not resist its allure. I was, and continue to be, drawn by the uncertainty, the adventure. I have relished the experience, of testing my limits, of bringing theory to bear on my own life, and of finding a unique treasure with every plunge.

I imagine the results of these two kinds of exploration to be similar as well. When I SCUBA dive I am not able to traverse the entire ocean floor. I do not surface with an absolute idea of what the ocean looks like, or a catalogue of all its inhabitants. I am at the mercy of ocean currents that I may read correctly or may take me by surprise. I cannot say with certainty that I know the ocean completely. I have only experienced a tiny portion of its vastness, and can only report on what I have seen and felt while there. So it has been with my foray into the realm of identity. I do not believe that upon surfacing from these depths I have 'figured out' identity, how it is formed, or why. The currents of my identity formation are still at work and still surprise me. I cannot state conclusively that I have covered every aspect of Newfoundland Woman. I am only able to share my limited knowledge and experience, tell what I have seen and felt while in that 'place'. This minute snapshot is a humble thesis.

## Appendix

### **Hallett Family Tree**

Aaron Hallett = Eleanor Hallett (nee Ralph)  
Born 1916      Born 1917  
Flat Island      Flat Island

Desmond Daly = Ruth Daly (nee Davis)  
Born 1915      Born 1914  
St. John's      St. John's

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Mildred Hallett  
Born 1940  
St. John's

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James Hallett = Sheila Hallett (nee Daly)  
Born 1945      Born 1950  
St. John's      Gander

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Mary (Tralee) Daly  
Born 1951  
Gander

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Ann Daly  
Born 1947  
Gander

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Desmond Hallett  
Born 1970  
St. John's

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Vicki Hallett  
Born 1974  
St. John's

## **Endnotes**

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<sup>i</sup> My use of the television miniseries is protracted, a sidebar to the main discussion, presented mainly in endnotes. It is useful to consider it partly as a display of patriarchal rereading of the books by a male writer (Des Walsh) and director (John Smith).

<sup>ii</sup> I say “Newfoundland imaginary” because my thesis focuses on the island portion of the province. This does not reflect any bias against Labrador, but merely the fact that the texts I use are set predominantly in the island portion of the province.

<sup>iii</sup> A useful discussion of self-identity is to be found in McGowan 243-247. To him self-identity is “the product of a process [of constitutive social action], is radically nonautonomous, but is differentiated from other selves and possesses an identity that unifies its disparate experiences, guides the presentation of the self to others, and forms the context for the various choices that the self makes”(243). I would additionally argue that self-identity is an *ongoing* process.

<sup>iv</sup> For multifaceted discussions on this topic see Antler 1977, Kelly 1993, McGrath et al. 1995.

<sup>v</sup> I am using “subjectivity” as Wheedon does, in the feminist poststructuralist sense. She says, “feminist poststructuralism insists that forms of subjectivity are produced historically and change with shifts in the wide range of discursive fields which constitute them. However, feminist poststructuralism goes further ...to insist that the individual is always the site of conflicting forms of subjectivity”(33).

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<sup>vi</sup> Nelson and Robinson define androcentric perspective as one “in which males are assumed to be the centre of all aspects of social and scientific life”(33).

<sup>vii</sup> The process of drying and curing fish. See Story et al. 322.

<sup>viii</sup> Foolish, stupid, naïve. See Story et al. 543.

<sup>ix</sup> I believe that my mother employed strategies of implicit feminist coding in conjunction with more outright forms of resistance to the patriarchal norms of my grandmother. I believe there was Juxtaposition in the cupboard doors and the tidy house, Incompetence claimed with regard to the sewing, and Distraction used with the washing machine and the reading. See Radner and Lanser.

<sup>x</sup> A babyish child. See Story et al. 505.

<sup>xi</sup> Member of a fishing crew who receives a stipulated proportion of the profits of a voyage rather than wages. See Story et al. 466.

<sup>xii</sup> A platform built on poles and spread with boughs for drying cod-fish on the foreshore. See Story et al. 187.

<sup>xiii</sup> “Compulsory heterosexuality sets itself up as the original, the true, the authentic; the norm that determines the real implies that ‘being’ lesbian [or gay] is always a kind of miming, a vain effort to participate in the phantasmatic plenitude of naturalized heterosexuality which will always and only fail”(Butler, “Imitation” 20).

<sup>xiv</sup> Heterosexual coupling is made even more explicitly necessary in the television miniseries. The movie ends with a ‘happily ever after’ ending when Mary wins the fishing premises from Tim Toop. At this point almost everyone is left in couples. Ben and Meg are silent and ever benign. Annie and Frank are together, Ida having

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conveniently killed herself early on, unlike in the books. Lavinia and Thomas Hutchings are finally together after Lavinia made this ridiculous statement that never appeared in the books, “How am I to be a woman with you gone?” This makes Lavinia appear as though her entire gendered existence hinges on a heterosexual relationship.

<sup>xv</sup> The heterosexual matrix is the complex interplay of forces in our society that are continuously at work to produce the notion of binary and naturally complimentary genders in the interest of compulsory heterosexuality mentioned above. For a detailed discussion of the matrix and its complex underpinnings see Butler, Gender Trouble 42-100.

<sup>xvi</sup> One of the greatest differences between the film and the books is the very emphasis on memory. Granted, the book Random Passage, on which much of the film was based, does not focus on the memories of Mary Bundle or the modern character of Lav Andrews. Indeed the mini-series is set exclusively in historical times, but I think that a tremendous part of the story is lost when you take away the notion of memory and its inherent treachery. This absence of tangled memory and contrasting vision detracts from the power of the story. Its complexities are lost in the straightforward telling of the tale. Like a dry historical reading we are only given one, seemingly coherent account of all events on the Cape. I believe this sanitizes the story and makes for a much less interesting, and perhaps less accurate version of life on the Cape. We lose one of the most important insights of Morgan’s writing, that all history is part story, part myth, part fiction. It is this perspective that gives us pause when thinking about how we construct our history and identity.

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<sup>xvii</sup> Fish-net lost through storms or neglect, one which continues to entrap fish.

See Story et al. 215.

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