

**RESISTANCE IN CONTEMPORARY NEWFOUNDLAND FICTION**

by © Jonathan Parsons

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## Abstract

“Resistance in Contemporary Newfoundland Fiction” focuses on writing by four Newfoundland novelists: Michael Crummey, Wayne Johnston, Lisa Moore, and Edward Riche, in particular the ways in which their novels demonstrate resistance through both content and formal construction. The kinds of resistance expressed in the novels in this study are not militant or obviously revolutionary, and they are not necessarily self-aware of their positioning of resistance or the comment they make on cultures of resistance in Newfoundland. The central argument of this dissertation is that forms of resistance expressed in novelistic writing outline the contours of the culture of resistance in Newfoundland; even as specific novels may express cynical or reactionary views on the efficacy of resistance, they nonetheless represent such resistance as an important part of the broader Newfoundland cultural landscape. This dissertation, then, is a very different kind of study of resistance and novelistic writing from those works of literary criticism focused on writings from or about revolutions and military occupations, in which more immediately recognizable forms of insurrectionary or militant resistance is apparent. Rather, “Resistance in Contemporary Newfoundland Fiction” examines the resistance that simmers just below the surface of everyday life, resistance that is sometimes then expressed as an upsurge of anger or a moment of outrage. Forms of resistance represented in these novels that are ultimately most effective are those grounded in grassroots, anarchistic practice, while forms of resistance embedded in traditional, formal political structures, such as unionism and partisan politics, are ultimately shown to be less effective or ineffective.

In each chapter, I focus on specific flashpoints or moments of protest that are central to the texts, such as an act of vigilantism in Crummey’s *Galore* (2009), an anti-government riot in

Johnston's *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams* (1998), an armed standoff with government agents in Riche's *Rare Birds* (1997), and ecologically-motivated sabotage in Moore's *Alligator* (2005). The way each of these novels contextualizes and presents such acts of resistance functions as an entry point for interpretation and critical analysis, directing further close reading of the novels with respect to their own specific content. Some of the broad thematics in these novels that I explore through theories of resistance are capitalism, nationalism, conservatism, and debt.

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Some material in Chapter 4 appears in “Branded Newfoundland: Lisa Moore’s *Alligator and Consumer Capitalism*” in *Newfoundland and Labrador Studies* (2013), in a review of Lisa Moore’s *Caught* for *The Independent NL* (2013), and in “Anarchism and Unconventional Oil” in *Materialism and the Critique of Energy* (2017).

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## Introduction

### Tactics and Strategies of Resistance in Newfoundland Literature

Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power.

–Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*

A world in which many worlds fit.

–Zapatista slogan

I am writing this dissertation at a time of significant unrest, at least in recent memory, in the Canadian province of Newfoundland and Labrador. Throughout 2016 and 2017, numerous flashpoints of dissent roiled the province, such as the mass revolt in the wake of the 2016 provincial budget, an ongoing mass movement focused on environmental and social concerns associated with the Muskrat Falls mega hydro project, protests by fishers over quotas, and protests by northern communities over services and costs of food, to name a few. In the past two years, there were hundreds of demonstrations and different actions, very often organized by regular, everyday people in communities throughout the province.<sup>1</sup> Mass demonstrations, blockades, protest camps, hunger strikes, and occupations are some of the prevalent tactics of

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this dissertation, I use terms like “common people,” “everyday people,” and “regular people.” I prefer these terms, at times, to terms like “working class” or “workers,” since there are many struggles that do not fit within an analysis based on social class and many forms of domination and hierarchy (some of which I discuss in this dissertation) that cannot be qualified with respect to social class. I am following Michel de Certeau’s dedication of *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984) to the “common hero,” the ordinary and everyday people, the “ubiquitous character, walking in countless thousands on the streets” (v). These terms, the common, everyday, regular people, are of course sweeping generalizations and are posited only for the sake of creating a vantage point for discussion. I discuss the concept of “the people” and other formulations of collective political subjectivity at greater length in Chapter 2.



these protests. Many thousands of people took part in the various demonstrations, and as the province slides deeper into economic turmoil it seems likely such protests and popular dissent will continue. The last time there was such significant unrest was arguably in the early 1990s when the cod moratorium was announced; and before that around Newfoundland's Confederation with Canada in 1949; and before that at the time of the collapse of responsible government and the end of democracy in Newfoundland in the 1930s as a result of financial crisis and corruption.

On the one hand, it is difficult to witness the fallout of the economic maelstrom sweeping the province: tax increases and cuts to services will have a disproportionate effect on the poor and the most vulnerable; rural communities are hit particularly hard, with proposed closures of over half the province's libraries and numerous provincial courts; the nonstop stream of calls to open line radio shows and letters to the editor of the province's few local media outlets have ranged from angry to bitter to despondent about the future of Newfoundland and Labrador. But on the other hand, in the midst of such hardship it is inspiring to see the way the common people of the province have come together to resist and to find ways to support one another. Certainly, with respect to my work on this dissertation, the timing of such an uprising in Newfoundland and Labrador is uncanny.

Over the course of writing this dissertation, my ideas about any culture of resistance in Newfoundland have changed and vacillated. Initially, I set out from the perspective that the history of Newfoundland obviously laid the groundwork for resistance; however, as I dug deeper into the specific materials that make up this dissertation, I came to believe that Newfoundland

culture was, in fact, inherently reactionary and defeatist.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, as will be borne out in the analysis to follow, Newfoundland novels are pessimistic about the possibility of social, political, and economic justice, a pessimism that is, I believe, ingrained in the cultural fabric of the province; specifically, this pessimistic or reactionary tendency is most evident in the novels I examine from Wayne Johnston, Edward Riche, and Michael Crummey. Nonetheless, just as I am finalizing my research, a widespread grassroots movement emerged in Newfoundland and Labrador that has given me a newfound optimism, reinvigorating my hopes for positive change and rekindling my faith in the importance and necessity of resistance. Even as Newfoundland culture is mired in pessimism with respect to the possibility of change, there is a part of that culture that exhibits the will to resist. Of the four authors I focus on in this dissertation, Lisa Moore's novels carry the most of this fighting spirit and optimism of the will.<sup>3</sup>

As someone who wears many hats, including that of an academic and that of an organizer of contentious politics in the streets, my purpose in setting out on this research project is to offer a work of literary criticism that will speak to other academics but also to offer an analysis of cultures of resistance, and specifically the strain of resistance in Newfoundland culture, for the benefit of those engaged in protest and dissent. The kind of activist-oriented research I am

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<sup>2</sup> Reactionaries are those who, during revolutionary times or times of social and political upheaval, call for a return to, or maintenance of, the status quo. I discuss reactionary mentality in greater detail in Chapter 2.

<sup>3</sup> The phrase "optimism of the will" comes from an oft-quoted line in one of Antonio Gramsci's prison letters (19 Dec. 1929): "I am a pessimist because of intelligence, but an optimist because of will" (299). This quotation is often shortened to a motto and is used by organizers, agitators, radicals, and rebels: "pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will." This wonderful sentence from Gramsci and the motto derived from it have been the subject of many scholarly articles, including Richard Johnson's "Optimism of the Intellect?" (2013). The issue of optimism and pessimism about the possibility of social, political, and economic justice comes up a number of times throughout this dissertation. I also discuss at greater length the issue of optimism and pessimism with respect to the efficacy of contentious politics later in this introductory chapter.

gesturing toward is becoming more common in some social science fields,<sup>4</sup> but it is also an approach that is frequently being brought to the study of literature and other humanities and arts disciplines (more on this below). Literary scholars are likewise well positioned to examine the cultures of movements, the cultures of activism, and the cultures of resistance, since literary criticism and literary theory are so often grounded in provisionality and indeterminacy rather than objectivity and fixed notions of truth.<sup>5</sup> Even if it is not explicitly stated, a great deal of contemporary literary criticism is already participating in this activist-oriented project. Take, for example, the way literary scholars investigate dissident subjects with respect to colonialism, gender, ecology, or violence.<sup>6</sup> Of course, literary criticism is not an entirely radical enterprise; however, it is difficult to authentically engage in critical reading and critical writing without coming up against questions of power and oppression, and so literary critics are often compelled, even if unknowingly, to take a position on resistance. This is true, I argue, of novelists as well. All the various facets of the cultures of resistance I have been involved with and witnessed first-hand are clearly borne out in the novels in this study. Indeed, the body of contemporary Newfoundland fiction offers itself as a microcosm of the Newfoundland cultural milieu, and so for me, as a literary critic, the study of fiction is a way to engage with and interpret the

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<sup>4</sup> See Max Haiven and Alex Khasnabish, *The Radical Imagination: Social Movements in the Age of Austerity* (2014); Charles R. Hale, “Activist Research vs. Cultural Critique: Indigenous Land Rights and the Contradictions of Politically Engaged Anthropology” (2006); Nancy A. Naples, *Feminism and Method: Ethnography, Discourse Analysis, and Activist Research* (2003); and Francesca M. Cancian, “Conflicts between Activist Research and Academic Success: Participatory Research and Alternative Strategies” (1993).

<sup>5</sup> For example, criticism informed by poststructuralism, postmodernism, or cultural studies. Some texts that inform such approaches include Julia Kristeva’s *Revolution in Poetic Language* (1984), Jacques Derrida’s *Writing and Difference* (1978), and Jean-François Lyotard’s *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1979).

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, David Jefferess, *Postcolonial Resistance: Culture, Liberation and Transformation* (2008); Lizbeth Goodman (ed.), *Literature and Gender* (1996); Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm (eds.), *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* (1996); Danine Farquharson and Sean Farrell (eds.), *Shadow of a Gunman: Violence and Culture in Modern Ireland* (2008).

contemporary zeitgeist, and carries implications that extend beyond the borders of Newfoundland culture. Certainly, the public discourse – the news, opinion columns, blogs, and other sorts of nonfiction texts – also offers such a microcosm; however, novelistic writing provides a unique view, since authors have creative licence to depart from the everydayness of the world and to reimagine how things are or could be. The imaginative space of novelistic writing is especially fruitful with respect to cultures of resistance, since protest and dissent are so often about breaking from the status quo and moving beyond the supremely frustrating phrase, “that’s just the way things are.”<sup>7</sup> Nonetheless, novelistic writing is also a literary form that is potentially useful for shoring up the status quo in that novels may help construct, reproduce, and maintain dominant values and codes; novels are also consumer products, branded and sold in a commercial space and not without limitations on their capacity to open up the social imaginary.<sup>8</sup> This dissertation, then, is not setting out with any illusions about novelistic writing being inherently progressive or radical.

I should state clearly that to speak of resistance in Newfoundland fiction is not to say I will be examining novels that represent militant or insurrectional aspects of resistance. None of the texts at the heart of my study are explicitly about revolution, even though they do have moments or flashpoints I will discuss in terms of protest and dissent. In fact, what motivates much of this dissertation is the fact that the novels I work with are not obviously about militant or insurrectional resistance. My goal is to investigate and theorize the ways in which resistance

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<sup>7</sup> A later section of the Introduction offers various positions on the novel as potentially politically dissident or, conversely, potentially ineffective as a vehicle for political or social change.

<sup>8</sup> For a perspective on novelistic writing and the commercial publishing industry, see Sarah Brouillette’s *Literature and the Creative Economy* (2014). Although Brouillette offers a stark appraisal of the relationship between literary production and “the instrumentalization of culture,” she nonetheless notes that “literature can operate as a site of resistance” (13). I discuss consumer capitalism and literature further in Chapter 4.

seethes just below the surface of everyday life, how moments of protest and revolt emerge organically from the grassroots, and how seemingly small actions by regular people come together to create a culture of resistance. Even as contemporary Newfoundland novels are not specifically telling stories of revolution, they do push back against power and authority in a number of ways and can be read as staging a kind of protest in a broad sense, demonstrating resistance to domination in various forms. This is true even of those novels that take a pessimistic or cynical view on resistance and the necessity or value of protest. Resistance is signified through the actions of characters and events in the narratives, but also in the formal construction of the texts and the way the novels are positioned in relation to other texts and to Newfoundland culture more generally. In these novels, overall, it is the forms of resistance grounded in the grassroots actions and everyday practices of common people that are more often successful than those forms of resistance that are mobilized through established political structures like unionism and partisan politics.

Further with respect to setting out the parameters of my project, this dissertation is not an attempt to offer a general overview of Newfoundland literature or to establish the canonicity of Newfoundland novels. Newfoundland literature is a burgeoning field, in terms of artistic production by new and emerging authors as well as a proliferation of literary criticism, and so to do justice to such a field is quickly becoming, and perhaps always was, a fraught task. Rather, this project takes up various theories of resistance and dissident perspectives in order to understand a specific aspect of Newfoundland culture as it is evident in contemporary fiction.

It also needs to be said that my project does not specifically engage with texts from or about Labrador. While the official governmental title of the province is Newfoundland *and* Labrador, the island and Labrador portions of the province have strikingly different histories and

politics at play.<sup>9</sup> It is not an oversight that this dissertation focuses specifically on Newfoundland, and this is not any sort of wilful ignorance or sin of omission. This study does not intend to marginalize Labrador culture and heritage, but rather proceeds from an awareness that a study of literature from Labrador is something that deserves its own space. Indeed, a resurgent Labrador independence movement, which seeks to have Labrador become a territory in the Canadian federation similar to the Yukon or Northwest Territories, is some evidence of this.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, Labrador is home to a number of distinct cultural groups – Innu, Inuit, Southern Labrador Inuit, and settlers – each with their own internal cultural subdivisions.<sup>11</sup> A study of cultures of resistance in Labrador would not only be an interesting project, but a necessary one, and is a project I hope will be taken up by scholars whose rootedness in the Labrador context can bring the appropriate knowledge base and critical acumen.

It is tempting to say, from the outset, that resistance in Newfoundland is simply the result of such things as the island's peripheral place in Canadian federalism; or the raw feeling held by many Newfoundlanders that the former country was duped out of statehood by Confederation with Canada in 1949; or the collapse and subsequent dismantling of the fishing industry; or a general perspective on the experience of hardships and harsh conditions endured by the island's

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<sup>9</sup> For an overview from a literary perspective of some of the contemporary grievances and the cultural and social dynamics of ongoing colonial relations in Labrador, see my article, "The Naming Compulsion in Dillon Wallace's *The Lure of the Labrador Wild* and Mina Hubbard's *A Woman's Way through Unknown Labrador*" (2011) and Roberta Buchanan's "The Aboriginal Writes Back: Representations of Inuit in Wayne Johnston's *The Navigator of New York* and in Abraham Ulrikab's *The Diary of Abraham Ulrikab*" (2015).

<sup>10</sup> See Brandon Parry's "Self-Determined Nation" (2014) and "How Labrador Got Its Colours" (2014), as well as Max Blake's *Why Labrador Will Separate from Newfoundland: True Stories of Newfoundland's Exploitation of Labrador's Resources and Neglect of Labrador's People* (1998). I also discuss the Labrador independence movement briefly in my article "Resistance to Extractive Industries in Newfoundland and Labrador" (2015).

<sup>11</sup> The island of Newfoundland is home to Indigenous peoples as well, including Mi'kmaq communities on the West Coast and a large and dispersed Mi'kmaq band called Qalipu, which is currently involved in a settlement process to be recognized as a First Nation. There are also peoples of Inuit and Innu descent living in Newfoundland.

early European settlers.<sup>12</sup> Certainly these sorts of historical markers point to potentially fruitful avenues for exploring resistance in Newfoundland culture, and these historical events are well represented in Newfoundland fiction.<sup>13</sup> However, this sense of a victimized nation and people is not the primary formulation of resistance that will be elaborated in this dissertation. This sort of victimization is represented in many different fields of literature. Resistance, as it will be theorized here, is not in opposition to something that stands outside the field of Newfoundland literature, but rather a resistance that is internal, a force that works within-against. It is in this sense that the epigraph from Foucault is offered above; resistance is not to be understood as a purely external force, but rather as a necessary counterpoint to any kind of power or authority, whether speaking of politics or, in the case of a body of literature, a form of cultural authority. As Foucault would have it, this must necessarily be the case, and though implicit resistance is more immediately recognizable when thinking of political power and authority in a parliamentary system of government, in which, for example, the mechanism of opposition is expressly built into the system, this is also applicable in terms of culture. The resistance enacted in the Newfoundland novels discussed in this dissertation is a force of negation or opposition to particular ideas about Newfoundland, but it is also a productive force, infiltrating and invigorating Newfoundland culture in simple and sometimes overlooked ways. My analysis of

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<sup>12</sup> For a work of Newfoundland history covering these and other events, I recommend Sean Cadigan's *Newfoundland and Labrador: A History* (2009). I draw on Cadigan's work throughout this dissertation and discuss some of these historical flashpoints in further detail later in the introductory chapter.

<sup>13</sup> For example, the effects of the cod moratorium provide context for Crummey's recent novel *Sweetland* (2014); the issue of the Confederation debate and vote are a backdrop for Johnston's *Colony*; and Donna Morrissey's *Sylvanus Now* (2005) and Bernice Morgan's *Random Passage* (1992), among a number of other novels, represent the experience of settler fishing communities in outport Newfoundland. Generally speaking, Newfoundland novels are grounded in the Newfoundland historical, social, political, and cultural context, and so represent such flashpoints of Newfoundland history, obviously, as part of their subject matter being about Newfoundland.

resistance in Newfoundland fiction put forth in this dissertation often takes this double edge, examining at once forms of domination and forms of resistance, creating the grounds to make evaluative claims about specific texts in terms of the way resistance is enacted or expressed. Viewing contemporary Newfoundland fiction through this lens of resistance offers a critical analysis of Newfoundland culture, and also offers a Newfoundland-based analysis of cultures of resistance.

Before moving on to set out in greater detail the main theoretical lines for this dissertation, I want to speak briefly about the choice of texts for this study and, indeed, the rationale for the study itself. Although there are many texts that might easily fit within the rubric of my dissertation, an underlying premise of the study is that forms of resistance represented in Newfoundland fiction are an expression of a specific strain of resistance in the broader Newfoundland cultural landscape. This is not to say that authors specifically intend to demonstrate resistance in their work (though this is sometimes the case), but rather that the fullness and complexity of different aspects of the island's culture will necessarily be borne out in the broad sweep of the literature. Literary fiction is a ready-to-hand case study, a microcosm of the broader culture. Of course, the novels at the heart of the study do not represent stateless, non-hierarchical, or otherwise utopian societies, and they are not manifestos for how the world should be. Instead, they produce the potential of radically different worlds through the way characters in these texts enact resistance to domination as an ethical stand. A central premise underpinning this study is an ethical distinction: that regular people can and should be involved in the decisions that affect their lives, as opposed to the reactionary view that only a supposedly enlightened class of rulers is capable of making the best decisions for everyone else; it is this same reactionary and elitist view that is often at the heart of the injustice that spurs resistance in



the novels in this study. This resistance often finds its roots in Newfoundland history, folklore, and myth, and so the expression of resistance in Newfoundland fiction is what my project sets out to uncover or rediscover. It is this project of uncovering and rediscovering that has been the driving force behind the choice of texts, since all the novels central to my dissertation present opportunities to re-evaluate assumptions and taken-for-granted ideas about the island's culture.<sup>14</sup>

For example, Chapter 1 on Crummey's *Galore* examines the novel with reference to the mummering tradition, which of late has been commodified and arguably sterilized of its historically militant anti-authoritarian character. While the mummer was at times a fearful creature – a vigilante extracting revenge for perceived wrongs, often against authority figures or upper-class members of society – in the present day, mummers are represented as quaint and cheerful figures, parading in the streets of St. John's at Christmas time to the delight of shop owners, or represented in a stylized and romanticized form in the austere artwork of David Blackwood.<sup>15</sup> The anti-authoritarian aspects of mummering, such as the sinister anonymity of masks and disguise, and the gender-bending refusal of social norms and values, are sanitized in favour of a marketable, socially acceptable mummer that has become little more than another prop for the tourism industry and other consumerist elements of present-day Newfoundland. Crummey's *Galore* is thus a springboard into a discussion of the commodification of the mummering tradition and of Newfoundland culture. It is not that Crummey necessarily intended the text to function this way, but the presentation of mummering in the novel, nonetheless, is a

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<sup>14</sup> As I understand it, a novel does not have to take an optimistic position on the efficacy of resistance for the enactment of resistance, and specifically the enactment of resistance as an ethical stand, to be meaningful. I elaborate on this point in more detail later in the Introduction.

<sup>15</sup> See, for example, Blackwood's *Mummer Family at the Door* (1985) and *Fallen Mummer on Brookfield Marsh* (1996).

particular formulation of resistance and casts other aspects of the narrative in a new light. Initially focusing on a flashpoint of resistance and moving to a broader analysis is the basic modus operandi for engagement with all the novels in this study, as each novel offers a particular kind of protest and resistance that my criticism then focuses on in order to elaborate an overall argument about the text and about Newfoundland culture more generally. Thus, this dissertation offers a number of specific case studies of resistance in Newfoundland fiction, while also suggesting further possible readings of other Newfoundland literature from the perspective of resistance. The acts of resistance highlighted in the other three central novels in my dissertation are an anti-government riot in Johnston's *Colony of Unrequited Dreams*, an armed standoff with federal agents in Riche's *Rare Birds*, and the ecologically-motivated sabotage of heavy equipment in Moore's *Alligator*.

I engage with contemporary Newfoundland novels since I am most interested in the culture of resistance in Newfoundland as it exists today. Even though some of the novels discussed herein are set in the historical past, they are nonetheless cultural products of the contemporary period and have embedded within them contemporary attitudes about contentious politics.<sup>16</sup> For example, Crummey's *Galore* is set in the time frame of roughly 1800 to 1918, and Johnston's *Colony* is set in the time frame of roughly 1900 to the 1960s. Even though these novels are set in the past, the authors are writing from within the contemporary cultural milieu. Because they are writing out of their own lives and experiences in this contemporary period, they carry into their work, even if unintentionally, specific views on and of the contemporary world,

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<sup>16</sup> I understand the term "contemporary" to indicate broadly the time frame post-1945. More specifically, the novels I am working with are better understood as products of late contemporary times or of the postmodern period. As the term postmodern carries aesthetic or generic connotations for literary studies as much as a sense of historical time, I have opted for the term contemporary. It must be said, however, that there is no singular definition of contemporary beyond the term having a general acceptance in its utility.

and by extension views on resistance in the contemporary world as well. Newfoundland fiction written in earlier periods will potentially have significant things to say about the kinds of cultures of resistance that were present at that particular time, and it would be a worthwhile project to investigate this claim, even as it is a different project from this one. My interest in the way contentious politics shapes the current political discourse in Newfoundland suggests a need to consider contemporary literary texts, and that the analysis of the culture of resistance today will yield important insights both for literary criticism and for those interested in bringing into being a better and more just future for the province.

Although “Resistance in Contemporary Newfoundland Fiction” is rooted in a discussion of Newfoundland novels, and each of the chapters takes up specific cultural icons or ideas about Newfoundland in various guises, it also evaluates and deploys formulations of resistance as a concerted effort to work through identity politics and to suggest new directions for criticism of Newfoundland literature. Admittedly, this is comparable to beginning a journey that must remain unfinished, since the end result of working through Newfoundland identity politics can for now only be speculative and undefined. However, this study sets out as an *attempt* to move in a liberatory direction. Identity politics, and indeed literary criticism of cultural identity, are potentially a cul-de-sac, sometimes limiting the scope of the discourse and eventually falling back on questions of authenticity, comparing one version of Newfoundland identity against another and trying to evaluate which is correct (or more correct). It may seem that “Resistance in Contemporary Newfoundland Fiction” is destined to follow this same path, since saying that a goal is to “rehabilitate” or “uncover” something about the culture (a strain of resistance) seems to allude to an authentic Newfoundland culture and identity that is hidden and needs to be found. But the question of authenticity, from the perspective on resistance developed in this study, is

mostly moot, and moreover it seems more correct to say that any supposedly authentic Newfoundland identity is actually produced by various competing claims on place and identity. There is no singular definition of Newfoundland identity to be put forward in this dissertation, and any sense of the island's culture being "rehabilitated" is actually a call for Newfoundland identity politics to be transformed.

Specifically, the perspective on anarchism that is a core theoretical basis of this project necessitates a bottom-up, grassroots approach when discussing a cultural terrain that is the transformation of Newfoundland identity politics. It is the people of Newfoundland themselves who should ultimately determine the world to come – it is not for politicians or scholars or advertisers to say what this world must be. The slogan from the Zapatistas, a revolutionary movement in the Chiapas region of Mexico, chosen as an epigraph for the Introduction serves as a reminder of the move away from any calcified identity politics. The Zapatistas do not demand to be who they already are – they do not seek recognition of an identity that already exists, a given, however that is to be defined – but rather are fighting for the opportunity to *become* what they want, fighting for a transformative space in which it may be possible that "many worlds fit." This struggle is a break with typical identity politics in that it acknowledges the place from which the revolution sets out, in a shared identity of Chiapas, the family, Indigeneity, Christianity, and other local traditions, but the realizations or assertion of a defined identity politics is not the intended end of the struggle. The end, instead, is undefined; it does not drive toward a fixed identity but rather toward a space in which self-transformation is possible and in which new values may emerge (while recognizing that a struggle must take place for this to happen). Likewise, with Newfoundland identity, it is not the question of what is or is not authentic that is paramount, but instead whether it is possible to create a space in which

transformation can take place. Although my dissertation does engage with identity politics at times – there is no other place for a liberatory politics to begin than a sense of shared identity and social solidarity in Newfoundland – the important theoretical move is ultimately a tentative step away from questions of identity and toward liberation. The various theoretical lines of this dissertation, resistance and Newfoundland identity politics, are discussed at greater length in the following sections of the introductory chapter.

Newfoundland literature is at once a part of the field of Canadian literature and a field on its own. With respect to the way forms of resistance are represented in Newfoundland novels, studies of Canadian literature are helpful signposts, in that Newfoundland and Anglo-Canada have similar histories and cultures. In her landmark work of Canadian literary criticism *Survival* (1972), Margaret Atwood argues that “Canada has from the beginning defined itself as a place where revolutions are really rebellions, against lawful authority” (171).<sup>17</sup> This lawful authority is often the state, or state functionaries like the RCMP, and attempts to rise up against authority are, broadly speaking, futile, at least in the Canadian novels Atwood examines. She suggests that the Canadian psyche has two sides with respect to the possibility of revolution: one side that “distrusts and fears any attempt to overthrow even a repressive authority,” and a second side that,

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<sup>17</sup> In this dissertation, I use the term revolution to indicate an overturning or fundamental shift in the political, economic, social, or cultural constitution of a polity. Theda Skocpol, in *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia, and China* (1979), contrasts political revolutions, in which a regime change may happen in a given state, with social revolutions, in which a massive change takes place in the structure of a society (5). Revolutionary movements are contrasted with reform movements, which James DeFronzo, in his *Revolutions and Revolutionary Moments* (1991), defines as “attempts to change limited aspects of society” but which do not aim at “drastically altering or replacing major social, economic, or political institutions” as revolutionary movements do (8). A rebellion or a revolt, as I am using the terms, indicates an upsurge of unrest, but which may or may not lead to a revolutionary moment. Bülent Diken, in *Revolt, Revolution, Critique: The Paradox of Society* (2012), suggests that a revolt is a “relatively unorganized individual or collective upheaval” (12); however, Diken is keen to avoid the notion that revolts are simply irrational outbursts of mass hysteria, since he sees them emerging from longstanding grievances. Following this definition, for my purposes a revolt or rebellion is an explicit and intense resistance to authority and domination in a relatively short time.

while sympathizing with the underdog or the victims of repressive authority, sees attempts at revolution as misguided since they do not, in the Canadian context, ever succeed (171-72). It is these pessimistic and defeatist tendencies that lead Atwood to conclude that “Canadian rebellions have never become revolutions precisely because they have never received popular support” (172).<sup>18</sup> Atwood was taken to task for her thematic approach in *Survival*, notably by Frank Davey in *Surviving the Paraphrase* (1983). Davey argues that literary criticism needs to examine the formal construction of a text as much as the obvious thematic content; this is an important insight for my study, which examines the form of the novels by these Newfoundland authors alongside the explicit content, and the form is always important with respect to a novel’s perspective on resistance. Nonetheless, Atwood’s argument about the anti-revolutionary tendency in the Anglo-Canadian zeitgeist is also true with respect to Newfoundland.<sup>19</sup> The same broad generalizations can be made about the possibility of revolution, and the efficacy of resistance, as it is expressed in Newfoundland fiction. All the novels at the centre of this

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<sup>18</sup> See also Daniel Coleman’s *White Civility: The Literary Project of English Canada* (2006), in which he argues that “White Canadian culture is obsessed, and organized by its obsession, with the problem of its own civility” (5). Coleman is specifically interested in the deeply embedded notion of ‘peace, order, and good government’ in the Canadian literary imagination, such that civility and order are seen to be more important than addressing long-standing grievances and injustice. Specific to Maritime Canadian literature but not to Newfoundland, David Creelman’s *Setting in the East: Maritime Realist Fiction* (2003) echoes Atwood’s argument that an anti-revolutionary tendency exists in Anglo-Canadian fiction, if only tangentially, by suggesting there is an undercurrent of conservatism in novelistic writing from the Maritimes.

<sup>19</sup> Atwood’s *Survival* is among the most cited theoretical works in Canadian literary criticism, though there are few subsequent scholarly works that have explored in depth her claims about the anti-revolutionary tendency in Anglo-Canadian fiction. An article from a sociological perspective, Seymour Lipset’s “Historical Traditions and National Characteristics: A Comparative Analysis of Canada and the United States” (1986), does draw on Atwood’s *Survival* to further its claims about anti-revolutionary Canadian identity. There are also a vast number of literary studies that tangentially move this argument forward with respect to a range of specific concerns, such as feminism, postcolonialism, and dystopia, to name a few. See Fiona Tolan, *Margaret Atwood: Feminism and Fiction* (2007); Laura Wright, “‘This Is Border Country’: Margaret Atwood’s *Surfacing* and Postcolonial Identity” (2012); Allan Weiss, “Offred’s Complicity and the Dystopian Tradition in Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale*” (2009). For an exhaustive list of criticism on Atwood’s work, see Shannon Hengen and Ashley Thomson, *Margaret Atwood: A Reference Guide 1988-2005* (2007).

dissertation have the prototypical futile heroes that Atwood identifies in Canadian literature, and in general all the various acts of resistance that serve as springboards for my critical engagement with the texts are subverted, or amount to nothing, or are regarded with cynicism and indifference by those in power. This is why contemporary Newfoundland fiction has a pervasive sense of pessimism about the value of resistance and the possibility of liberation.<sup>20</sup>

Nonetheless, the moments of resistance enacted in the novels I study are seldom undertaken with any concern for whether those acts will bear fruit. Rather, such acts are justified and are inherently legitimate because resistance is understood by those who enact it as morally and ethically right, regardless of the eventual futility of such acts. Although grand acts of revolution, acts like the storming of the Bastille or the toppling of the Czar, do indeed seem to be beyond the pale in the Canadian and Newfoundland contexts, I argue that every act of resistance to repressive authority needs to be understood in the broader context of an ongoing struggle for the negation of domination and hierarchy. In this sense, no act of resistance, regardless of how small or seemingly insignificant, is ever truly futile.

### **Theorizing Resistance in Literature**

To speak of literature and resistance brings to mind stories of grand revolutions or accounts of partisan fighters making a desperate stand against occupying forces. One might think of the starving masses holding down the barricades in Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables* (1862), or the attempted uprising organized by Okonkwo in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958), or

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<sup>20</sup> This is not to say that other forms of artistic production from Newfoundland will necessarily represent a similar pessimism about the value of resistance. A broader study of the way resistance, protest, and dissent finds expression in other forms of art may yield quite different results. For example, a project of resistance studies might examine drama, such as in plays by the Mummers Troupe and CODCO, or visual art, such as in the early work of Will Gill, or music, such as in songs and albums by Liz Solo and the Black Bags Media Collective.

perhaps even Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* (1953), for those understanding the play as an allegory for Beckett's experience with the French resistance during World War II. World literature abounds with tales of resistance, and often resistance movements are represented in fiction in their classical militant guise. These sorts of explicit, overt narratives of protest and rebellion are not, as said above, present in the novels taken up in this dissertation. Nonetheless, at the centre of all the primary texts in this study are particular actions and events that can be understood in relation to these more militant forms of resistance. Specifically, these moments include a riot described in Johnston's *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams*, the sabotage of industrial logging equipment in Moore's *Alligator*, the mutilation of a local merchant by a band of mummers in Crummey's *Galore*, and an armed standoff between two of the central characters and federal agents in Riche's *Rare Birds*. These moments of resistance are pivotal to each of these novels, and in each case function as a literary-critical wedge, opening other aspects of the novels to a broader interpretation through theories of resistance. Even though these novels do not represent insurrection or all-out revolution, reading through theories of resistance is a viable avenue for exploration of Newfoundland novels and brings about radically different interpretations.<sup>21</sup>

By some accounts, the last number of years has seen a proliferation of protest and unrest across the globe. This statement is qualified by a 2011 paper by researchers at the New England

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<sup>21</sup> Insurrection refers to prolonged revolt situated in a specific terrain of struggle. Insurrectionary activity can be understood as more organized and focused than revolts and may have as its end goal a revolutionary moment. Insurrectionists may attempt to disrupt the normal functioning of states or economies in order to generate or increase social unrest toward a revolutionary moment. Alfredo M. Bonanno, a well-known insurrectionary anarchist, suggests in his essay "The Anarchist Tension" (1996) that insurrectionists must understand the permanent nature of the conflict at hand and be capable of "attacking the reality in which they find themselves without waiting for orders from anywhere else" (26). Bonanno also provocatively suggests that insurrectionary activity is relatively easy to carry out, if one is sufficiently motivated, since significant targets are readily available and often easy to sabotage or destroy.



Complex Systems Institute think tank, “The Food Crisis and Political Instability in North Africa and the Middle East” (2011), which notes that “despite the many possible contributing factors, the timing of violent protests in North Africa and the Middle East in 2011 as well as earlier riots in 2008 coincides with large peaks in global food prices” (1). For these researchers, it is not so much that widespread unrest is only the result of “long-standing political failings of the system, but rather from its sudden perceived failure to provide essential security to the population” (2). This failure to provide security, in the form of access to affordable food, undermines the legitimacy of systems of government and, indeed, the necessity of such systems at all. However, once this kind of undermining of legitimacy happens, “the resulting protests can reflect the wide range of reasons for disaffection, broadening the scope of the protest, and masking the immediate trigger of unrest” (2). The link between food prices and the Arab Spring makes sense in this regard, and the paper goes further to point out that rising prices disproportionately affect developing countries. This trend of rising prices has been particularly acute in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis, and the regions experiencing significant unrest have been those that were struck particularly hard by fluctuations in the global market. In the North American and European context, even though rises in food price have not been so significant, there has also been a proliferation of unrest, notably in the form of the Indignados movement in Spain, the Occupy movement in the United States, and the Idle No More movement in Canada.<sup>22</sup> There has also recently been a bloodless revolution in Iceland, which kicked out the sitting government and

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<sup>22</sup> See also Donatella Della Porta and Alice Mattoni (eds.), *Spreading Protest: Social Movements in Times of Crisis* (2014); Marcos Ancelovici, Pascale Dufour, and Héloïse Nez (eds.), *Street Politics in the Age of Austerity: From the Indignados to Occupy* (2016); The Kino-nda-niimi Collective, *The Winter We Danced: Voices from the Past, the Future, and the Idle No More Movement* (2014).

rewrote the country's constitution.<sup>23</sup> However, Greece has in recent years been the scene of some of the most virulent protests in the West, stemming from severe austerity measures imposed on the country by a so-called "troika" of banking interests and lender states.<sup>24</sup> In recent years protest movements have been apparent and unrest has been widespread, such that in 2011 *Time Magazine* named "the protester" as their person of the year.

Even as the current wave of unrest is significant and immediately springs to mind, protest and resistance movements are certainly not new phenomena, either from the perspective of political and economic analysis or with regard to works of literature that take up this subject matter. Though these recent movements around the globe have been a source of much discussion, and though they have inspired me to undertake this study, popular uprisings and revolutions do not entirely encapsulate the understanding of resistance to be theorized here. This term, resistance, has itself been the topic of a good deal of scholarly writing and is a term that is philosophically rich in its many connotative and denotative values. One example of recent scholarly activity taking up this topic is the journal *Resistance Studies* (founded in 2008). In the inaugural issue, Tim Gough, in his article "Resistance: Under What Grace" (2008), underlines the difficulty and complexity inherent in the term:

There is an apparently paradoxical nature to resistance. Resistance is resistance against something, towards which it appears inimical. This resisted thing, however, requires such resistance in order to define itself and keep itself safe. Should it fail to do so, that which succeeds it will require resistance in turn. . . . Resistance and

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<sup>23</sup> See Jón Gunnar Bernburg, *Economic Crisis and Mass Protest: The Pots and Pans Revolution in Iceland* (2016).

<sup>24</sup> See Georgios Karyotis and Roman Gerodimos (eds.), *The Politics of Extreme Austerity: Greece and the Eurozone Crisis* (2015).

counter-resistance, resistance and counter-move, resistance and incorporation are the means by which this pre-existing order will maintain itself and neutralise that which opposes it. It will maintain itself, more or less successfully, and will neutralise resistance, more or less successfully, but will never, for strategic reasons, do so too well. (17-18)

Gough sees resistance as integral to the exercise of any sort of authority, such that an opposing force is necessary for any system of power or authority to function. Even though resistance “appears inimical,” as Gough puts it, to the particular thing being opposed, resistance is always pointing toward and defining that which it stands against. Moreover, resistance presupposes and recognizes that which is opposed by the act of standing against it, and in this sense resistance is, according to Gough, necessary for any dominant order or authority to exist.

This paradoxical notion of resistance intersects with Foucault’s discussion of power, in that power is never exercised in an absolute way. In an interview titled “Power and Strategies” (1977), Foucault notes that power is coextensive with the social body and “there are no spaces of primal liberty between its networks,” to the extent that power is interwoven with many forms of relation beyond the political realm, such as relations of production, the family, sexuality, and most any sort of relation at all (142). Power, as theorized by Foucault, is ubiquitous, and functions in simple and often overlooked ways, infiltrating itself in all aspects of social relations. Nonetheless, he goes on to say that “there are no relations of power without resistances” and resistances are “formed right at the point where relations of power are exercised” (142). Throughout Foucault’s work on power relations, whether speaking of penal systems in *Discipline and Punish* (1975), the medical establishment in *Madness and Civilization* (1964), or social relations and sexuality in *The History of Sexuality* (1976), resistance is not only an

important concept but a central aspect of the exercise of power.<sup>25</sup> Foucault further elaborates this notion of resistance in his essay “The Subject and Power” (1982):

[Forms of resistance are] another way to go further toward a new economy of power relations, a way which is more empirical, more directly related to our present situation, and which implies more relations between theory and practice. It consists of taking the forms of resistance against different forms of power as a starting point. To use another metaphor, it consists of using this resistance as a chemical catalyst so as to bring to light power relations, locate their position, and find out their point of application and the methods used. Rather than analyzing power from the point of view of its internal rationality, it consists of analyzing power relations through the antagonism of strategies. For example, to find out what our society means by sanity, perhaps we should investigate what is happening in the field of insanity. And what we mean by legality in the field of illegality. And, in order to understand what power relations are about, perhaps we should investigate the forms of resistance and attempts made to dissociate these relations. (780)

This Foucauldian vision of power has been taken up by numerous scholars and activists, and a particularly relevant example is the action-oriented theoretical work of The Invisible Committee in their text *The Coming Insurrection* (2007). For The Invisible Committee, an anonymous group of authors, “power is no longer concentrated in one point in the world; it is the world itself, its

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<sup>25</sup> This notion of resistance is also important for Foucault’s work on discourse, since any discourse functions as a power system (or as part of the power-knowledge nexus) in the way dominant and subordinate claims are expressed. Subordinate and dissenting voices are necessary in that they give a defining structure to a discourse in general, mapping out the boundaries of what can legitimately be said. In Chapter 2, I draw on and discuss in more detail Foucault’s work on power and discourse, specifically with reference to “Truth and Power” in the collection of essays and interviews *Power/Knowledge* (1977).

flows and its avenues, its people and its norms, its codes and its technologies” (131). This concept of decentralized and diffuse power mirrors The Invisible Committee’s theory that revolutionary struggle is not about a grand confrontation with the state but rather about seemingly separate and isolated acts of defiance. Small and apparently disconnected acts that disrupt power in some way can have much larger consequences, as “anyone who defeats it [power] locally sends a planetary shock wave through its networks” (131).

Investigating forms of resistance as a way of understanding power relations speaks to the basic critical method of this dissertation. Each chapter begins by examining specific acts of resistance that are central to the novels, and then draws out the forms of power and authority such resistance stands against. In each case, forms of resistance then point to structures of power and associated social relations; my overall evaluative claims hinge on the way particular novels represent resistance: cynically, pessimistically, naively, optimistically, as worthwhile, or otherwise. Indeed, this question of the efficacy of resistance is taken up by some of the scholars interested in Foucault’s writing on the topic. In his book *Critical Resistance: From Poststructuralism to Post-Critique* (2004), David Hoy highlights the way resistance is central to the thought of Foucault, Nietzsche, Derrida, and Deleuze, and specifically how resistance is formulated in each of their work. Hoy suggests that some readings of Foucault come to the conclusion that resistance is futile, since systems of power incorporate and even require resistance, which leads to a pessimistic position on the usefulness of resisting at all.<sup>26</sup> Hoy does

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<sup>26</sup> See, for example, Jerome Roos’s article “Foucault and the Revolutionary Self-Castration of the Left” (2011), in which he argues that Foucault’s theory of resistance is entirely pessimistic: “Because it connects power with knowledge through discourse, and because it posits that knowledge and power are continually reproduced through both formal and informal institutions, there is ultimately no way for willful agents to escape the choking grasp of their culture without reproducing the same forms of oppression they are trying to overcome. As a result, Foucault’s philosophy precludes the possibility for revolutionary action” (n.p.).

not agree with this perspective on the futility of resistance, and says that neither does Foucault fully agree with this perspective, but suggests that a somewhat more nuanced understanding of resistance is needed to move to a space where action is effective in confronting power structures and striving for freedom:

The general point is that utopian imaginings of freedom may not be aware of the extent to which they presuppose the patterns of oppression that they are resisting. This is not to say that resistance is inevitably ineffectual or hopeless, but it does suggest that resistance is contextually bound to the social and psychological structures that are being resisted. Indeed, drawing a distinction between resistance and compliance would not be possible outside of a given power regime. The particular social structure provides the grid of intelligibility for making sense of the actions as conforming to or dissenting from the given power configuration. (3)

What is clear here is that resistance does not somehow stand outside of power but is necessarily intertwined with the function of any sort of power. Hypothetically speaking, were power to be absolute and have no opposition or resistance, then that power would not be able to function. Legal structures and the function of power through the law, for example, require illegality, that some people break the law, in order for that power to be put into practice and recognized. The correlate of this is that if no one ever broke a law, then legal power would not be exercised and would not in any substantial way exist.

To underline this slippery idea of resistance as implicit in the functioning of power, and to draw out the argument that, even if this is the case, resistance is still worthwhile, a less than cordial scholarly exchange among Simon Critchley, Slavoj Žižek, and David Graeber is illuminating. The occasion for the back-and-forth between these three was Žižek's review of

Critchley's book *Infinitely Demanding: Ethics of Commitment, Politics of Resistance* (2007).

Critchley recommends what he calls an anarchic metapolitics, which is rooted in an ethical experience of responsibility (even as aspects of taking on ethical responsibilities in the context of cynical or nihilistic politics, epitomized by what Critchley calls militarized neoliberalism, may be absurd);<sup>27</sup> he posits as a central figure of resistance the anarchist jester or trickster, one who knows that the demand for a better world, a world in which injustice, domination, and hierarchy is ended, is a demand that cannot realistically or presently be met. This figure of resistance, knowing full well that its task is impossible, nonetheless laughs at that impossibility and carries on resisting, not because resistance will necessarily be successful, but because resistance is ethical and right – indeed, this is one of the core ideas of Critchley's ethics, “where ethics is the disturbance of the political status quo” (13). Critchley distinguishes his ethical subject from various strains of passive and active nihilism – other avenues that contemporary subjectivity may slide into – in the construction of this figure of resistance and its anarchic metapolitics. (In this sense, he understands anarchism as the political articulation of ethics.) Critchley sees resistance as the necessary No that comes before any Yes – resistance as the act of opening up a space in the social imaginary where radical ideas about how the world could or should be, ideas that are otherwise dismissed as impractical or hopelessly utopian, may be explored.

Žižek responds to Critchley's book with a review in *The London Review of Books* titled “Resistance Is Surrender” (15 November 2007). Žižek suggests that radical leftist politics has utterly failed in the last thirty years, evidenced by the collapse of the Soviet Union and the

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<sup>27</sup> Critchley is adapting and breathing new life into Sartre's existentialist notion of commitment, such as he described in *Being and Nothingness* (1943). The common thread is that the ethical commitment compels resolute resistance (to fascism or militarized neoliberalism or other expressions of tyranny) even when such resistance may have little hope of success – i.e. resistance as an ethical, rather than purely pragmatic, stand. For an overview of the development of neoliberalism as political economy, see David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (2005).

system of Chinese state socialism “presiding over arguably the most explosive development of capitalism in history” (8). Žižek dismisses a number of theories and formulations of contemporary resistance, including those proposed by Critchley, arguing that there is a futility in such approaches and that they are merely the counterpart of power. Critchley’s work and the work of other contemporary radicals, Žižek writes, “simply demonstrate that today’s liberal-democratic state and the dream of an ‘infinitely demanding’ anarchic politics exist in a relationship of mutual parasitism: anarchic agents do the ethical thinking, and the state does the work of running and regulating society” (8). Žižek’s position on the futility of resistance focuses not only on Critchley’s ethics but also on currently functioning political movements, like the Zapatistas, as well as what he characterizes as radical streams of academic postmodern theory. All of this, for Žižek, is evidence of the “strange symbiotic relationship between power and resistance” (9).

David Graeber then responds to Žižek’s review in a letter to *The London Review of Books* (3 January 2008), in which he comes to Critchley’s defence, and also to the defence of leftist and radical politics and the possibility of effective resistance. He calls Žižek a “delightful provocateur and a gifted intellectual comedian,” and says that “if you ask Žižek to review a book your readers are unlikely to learn much about it” (4). Graeber goes on to say that “Critchley is one of the few intellectuals who have taken seriously the possibility that those who are actively engaged in fighting capitalism might have something relevant to say” (4). Aside from slinging slights and barbs, Graeber suggests that it is not for Žižek to say what the best way to go about resistance is, but that, instead, intellectuals should look to the ways regular people are already carrying out struggles against power and authority; this is a fairly good contrast of Žižek’s somewhat more authoritarian approach versus Critchley’s and Graeber’s anti-authoritarian,



anarchist approach (more on Graeber and anarchism below). Graeber says Žižek's position is that radicals should call off speculation about and experiments with alternative ways of doing politics, just at the moment when such speculation is most needed, and give up on the forms of resistance that create the spaces in which such speculation can take place. "And if one does wish to think about alternatives to capitalism," Graeber wonders, "how better to do this than to engage [as Critchley does in his book] with those building such alternatives in the present?" (4).

Critchley also responds to Žižek in an article for *Naked Punch* magazine, titled "Violent Thoughts about Slavoj Zizek" (Autumn 2008), and in fact the two keep up a less than amiable back-and-forth for years. Critchley writes,

Zizek's [*sic*] work leaves us in a fearful and fateful deadlock, both a transcendental-philosophical deadlock and a practical-political deadlock: the only thing to do is to do nothing. We should just sit and wait. Don't act, never commit, and continue to dream of an absolute, cataclysmic revolutionary act of violence. . . . The truth is that Zizek is never ready. His work lingers in endless postponement and over-production. He ridicules others' attempts at thinking about commitment, resistance and action – people like me and many others – while doing nothing himself. (4)

Critchley continues on to say that for Žižek, all the contemporary forms of resistance are "simply surrender and complicity with established power" (6). Critchley does take time to clarify further his own position on the efficacy of resistance, suggesting that "working within the state against the state is an articulation, an inventive movement, the forging of a common front that opens a space of resistance and opposition to government and the possibility of significant political change" (6). This position is rearticulating his arguments in *Infinitely Demanding* that functional

sites of resistance in the contemporary context are the interstices of power within statist systems, the creation of critical distance within the state, against the state.

Of course, there is a great deal of detail lost in quickly summarizing both Critchley's book and the various responses it has elicited. But the important point for the current discussion of this dissertation is the overarching differences of Critchley's and Graeber's perspective on resistance as opposed to Žižek's. Critchley and Graeber are more interested in working in the current context with what is available, working within-against a statist or capitalist system that they fully recognize is an adversary that cannot immediately or easily be overcome. Moreover, they are also interested in the ways common people are already going about the task of resisting state and capitalist power, and they are interested in incorporating existing forms of resistance into their theory and practice (even if that resistance is not presently capable of moving to a revolutionary moment), understanding such resistance as prefiguring or creating space for further developments. Critchley and Graeber certainly recognize the fraught nature of resistance against seemingly overwhelming forces, but they nonetheless see such resistance as important and worthwhile; people are carrying out such resistance as an ethical stand, because they cannot help but do so, at times because their communities and ways of life are threatened by such forces. There is a perspective on resistance that is bottom-up, grassroots, and grounded in the everyday lives of common people. Grassroots, bottom-up resistance, resistance grounded in an anarchic politics as Critchley theorizes it, informs my own understanding of resistance in this dissertation.

A related and elegant formulation of grassroots resistance "of the everyday" is offered by Michel de Certeau in his book *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984). De Certeau suggests that acts of resistance are always a making do with available resources, an appropriation of the mechanisms and forces of a given system that is being opposed. This theory of resistance

suggests that people will often make use of these resources in unexpected ways, such that systems of power and authority are unable to anticipate or contain resistance. De Certeau's work is informative in relation to the discussion of the efficacy of resistance, because the unexpected nature of resistance and the many ways resistance plays out are as important (perhaps more important) than any sort of institutionalized cultural codes and norms, propagated in whatever manner. An example de Certeau uses is the conquest and colonization of South America by the Spanish. He notes,

Even when they were subjected, indeed even when they accepted their subjection, the Indians often used the laws, practices, and representations that were imposed on them by force or by fascination to ends other than those of their conquerors; they made something else out of them; they subverted them from within – not by rejecting them or by transforming them (though that occurred as well), but by many different ways of using them in the service of rules, customs or convictions foreign to the colonization which they could not escape. (31-32)

De Certeau suggests that in a somewhat similar fashion, though certainly not so extreme a case as the colonization of the Americas, people in their everyday lives make use of norms and values diffused by the elite in unexpected ways.<sup>28</sup> Many of the examples of such appropriations discussed by de Certeau have to do with cultural production, such as speaking, reading, cooking, and dwelling. Although the dominant cultural codes for such acts are propagated by a social

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<sup>28</sup> De Certeau uses the term elite to refer to a hegemonic social class, by which he means not only a ruling or political class but also those in various positions of power and authority in cultural, spiritual, economic, or social spheres who propagate, model, and diffuse the dominant culture and traditions to the common people (xiii). Echoing de Certeau, in his essay "Structures of Discourse and Structures of Power" (1989) Teun van Dijk suggests that along with the ruling class and those in obvious positions of political authority, "journalists, writers, artists, directors, academics, and other groups" are part of the elite, as they play a role in the diffusion and maintenance of norms and values (22).

elite, the way that these acts are carried out by everyday people often contain a playful defiance of the dominant or imposed mode: “What is called ‘popularization’ or ‘degradation’ of a culture is from this point of view a partial and caricatural aspect of the revenge that utilizing tactics take on the power that dominates production” (32). As with Foucault and Critchley, resistance for de Certeau is integral to any kind of power structure or authority, be it cultural, political, or economic, but in this conception resistance is also a form of mocking and blasphemy. In de Certeau’s work, resistance is perhaps best understood as a form of laughing at authority, even while those who are doing the laughing are necessarily being subjected to domination and are on the losing end of unequal relations of power. Forms of everyday resistance come up in all the novels at the heart of my study; indeed, subtle and easily overlooked forms of resistance are far more common in these novels than grand acts of defiance.

In terms of a theoretical model for understanding resistance, my approach draws specifically on theories of anarchism, and it seems correct to say that anarchism is at the heart of many theories of resistance. Anarchism, a Greek term that means “against authority” or “no rulers,” is an action-oriented philosophy centred on resistance to domination, authority, and hierarchy in various forms. Anarchist theory has a colourful and amorphous past, and the terms “anarchy” and “anarchism” have a diverse history of use. Mikhail Bakunin, the Russian revolutionary and classical anarchist thinker, promoted anarchism as an anti-statist political doctrine, one that explicitly called for militant action aimed at demolishing the state. Bakunin suggests that anarchist principles are best spread through action, rather than through argumentation or rational discourse, a tactic which came to be called propaganda of the deed. In his “Letters to a Frenchman on the Present Crisis” (1870), Bakunin notes that deeds, rather than words, are “the most popular, the most potent, and the most irresistible form of propaganda”

(195-96). In the days of classical anarchism, examples of this principle often took extreme forms, such as armed revolts, assassinations, and bombing campaigns – precisely where the stereotype of the bomb-throwing anarchist comes from.<sup>29</sup>

However, contemporary anarchists more often speak of direct action as a guiding principle rather than propaganda of the deed. Whereas propaganda of the deed refers to actions designed to spread anarchism, direct action refers to enacting a desired change, though there is of course some overlap between these tactics. In *Direct Action: An Ethnography* (2009), Graeber notes,

Anarchists reject states and all those systematic forms of inequality states make possible. They do not seek to pressure the government to institute reforms. Neither do they seek to seize state power for themselves. Rather, they wish to destroy that power, using means that are – so far as possible – consistent with their ends, that embody them. They wish to “build a new society in the shell of the old.” Direct action is perfectly consistent with this, because in its essence direct action is the insistence, when faced with structures of unjust authority, on acting as if one is already free. One does not solicit the state. One does not even necessarily make a grand gesture of defiance. Insofar as one is capable, one proceeds as if the state does not exist. (203)

In terms of social justice and protest movements, it is curious how often demonstrations are held at government buildings, and this is a good example of how resistance can at times prop up and

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<sup>29</sup> As an aside, and with respect to the intersection of anarchism and literary studies in Canada, George Woodcock, who established the journal *Canadian Literature*, was a well-known anarchist. Woodcock wrote a number of books on anarchism including *Anarchism: A History of Libertarian Ideas and Movements* (1962) as well as biographies on famous anarchists, such as William Godwin and Pierre-Joseph Proudhon.

grant legitimacy to the very thing it seems to oppose. However, direct action, in the sense that it is developed by Graeber, is not the same thing as making limited demands of some authority – as Žižek suggested in his review of *Infinitely Demanding* – but is instead prefiguring the kind of world to be desired. The Occupy movement is a good example in this regard, in that it embodied the desired end in its collectivist, mutual aid characteristics, and through the forms of direct democracy enacted in the general assemblies.<sup>30</sup> A further example of direct action, though one that carries with it some of the supposedly negative connotations of propaganda of the deed, is black bloc tactics, often employed as a form of resistance and mutual aid during G8 and G20 summits or during other large-scale demonstrations.<sup>31</sup> Some of the most striking images from the so-called anti-globalization protests in Seattle in 1999 were of masked anarchists dressed all in black smashing the windows of multinational chain stores, including Nike and Starbucks.<sup>32</sup> On the one hand, a black bloc is a protective unit, creating an indistinguishable mass of people, and often this tactic is deployed in order to deter police from attempting to disperse a demonstration.

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<sup>30</sup> There are a number of books and articles from scholars and activists examining the workings of Occupy. The functioning of the movement and the form and process of the general assemblies have specifically been recounted and analyzed in such works as Janet Byrne (ed.), *The Occupy Handbook* (2012); Noam Chomsky, *Occupy* (2012); Todd Gitlin, *Occupy Nation: The Roots, the Spirit, and the Promise of Occupy Wall Street* (2012). I discuss democracy and democratic politics at length in Chapter 1 and Chapter 2. Direct democracy, as I use the term here and as Critchley uses the term, refers to a form of collectivist, participatory politics in which constituents themselves make decisions, rather than in representative democracy in which delegates or representatives make decisions on behalf of constituents. Noting the amorphous use of the term, Wendy Brown, in *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution* (2015), defines democracy in its basic form: “self-rule by the people, whoever the people are. In this, democracy stands opposed not only to tyranny and dictatorship, fascism or totalitarianism, aristocracy, plutocracy or corporatocracy, but also to a contemporary phenomenon in which rule transmutes into governance and management in the order that neoliberal rationality is bringing about” (20).

<sup>31</sup> A black bloc is a group of demonstrators, often anarchist in orientation, who dress all in black and march or engage in protest activities as a collective or cooperative unit. See Francis Dupuis-Déri, *Who's Afraid of the Black Blocs?: Anarchy and Action Around the World* (2013).

<sup>32</sup> “So-called” because some of the radical left groups involved in the movement call for the removal of all restrictions on travel and residency, arguably a much more authentic kind of globalization in its own right, as is suggested by David Graeber in *Fragments of an Anarchist Anthropology* (2004).

On the other hand, the tactic is also a form of prefigurative politics in that the targets of the attacks represent capitalism and private concentrations of power, things anarchists wish to do away with.<sup>33</sup>

Books and articles on anarchism sometimes go out of their way to distance themselves from this sort of anarchy – the anarchy of propaganda of the deed, direct action, and violence.<sup>34</sup> Some theorists sterilize this militant element of anarchism and make it primarily a philosophy. Yet it is this enactment of anarchism through acts and deeds that is revelatory for the literary theory developed here. All of the texts at the centre of this study have actions and events that can be understood as direct action. The riot in Johnston’s *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams* is initiated through the symbolic act of breaking a window at a government building, and in Moore’s *Alligator Colleen* sabotages bulldozers as a stand against ecological exploitation. Regardless of the relative success of any of these actions, they involve directly resisting power and authority through acts and deeds. Although none of the characters in these novels self-

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<sup>33</sup> Those who smash windows of multinationals know that a few panes of shattered glass will not bring down global capitalism. The point is to show that even as it seems monolithic, capitalism is vulnerable and can be attacked. Breaking windows “breaks the spell” of hegemony. The source of my use of the phrase “breaks the spell” is a documentary focused on the actions of anarchists from Eugene, Oregon, who organized a black bloc for the 1999 Seattle protests. See Tim Lewis, *Breaking the Spell* (1999). Strategic and tactical considerations of black blocs are discussed in A. K. Thompson’s *Black Bloc, White Riot: Anti-Globalization and the Genealogy of Dissent* (2010).

<sup>34</sup> For example, even one of the most famous books on anarchism, Alexander Berkman’s *ABC of Anarchism* (1929), explicitly states in the preface what anarchism is not: “It is *not* bombs, disorder, or chaos. It is *not* robbery and murder. It is *not* a war of each against all. It is *not* a return to barbarism or to the wild state of man. *Anarchism is the very opposite of all that*” (2). Such a statement is instructive as it shows the common disavowal of violence by those interested in describing a more philosophical or theoretical form of anarchism, but also because Berkman was jailed for fourteen years for an assassination attempt on a wealthy industrialist. Berkman recounted the assassination attempt, his experience in prison, and his understanding of anarchism in *Prison Memoirs of an Anarchist* (1912). However, it is important to note when Berkman and anarchists from the late nineteenth and early twentieth century discuss violence they mean something different than some contemporary discussions of violence. As Uri Gordon points out in *Anarchy Alive* (2007), earlier anarchists understood violence to mean “armed insurrection” or “assassinations of heads of states and capitalist bosses,” whereas today violence is understood to mean (absurdly, for Gordon), “scenes of property destruction and confrontations with police” (80).

identify as anarchists, it is their actions that convey anarchist principles and open the texts up to an anarchist reading.

Only one example mentioned above explicitly involves resistance to state power (the riot in *Colony*). While Bakunin understood anarchism as principally a revolutionary political doctrine, later theorists have broadened notions of anarchism to include resistance to domination in many forms. For example, Noam Chomsky, in *Chomsky on Anarchism* (2005), suggests anarchism is not a doctrine but “a historical tendency, a tendency of thought and action, which has many different ways of developing and progressing and which . . . will continue as a permanent strand in human history” (6). Various schools of anarchist theory have developed based on the kinds of domination and hierarchy that are revealed and resisted, for example, anarcho-syndicalism, anarcho-communism, anarcho-feminism, queer-anarchism, and eco-anarchism.<sup>35</sup> Some theorists, such as Lewis Call in his book *Postmodern Anarchism* (2002), have

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35 Anarcho-syndicalism views unionism as the base for revolutionary activity. The writings of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, notably *What Is Property?: An Inquiry into the Principle of Right and of Government* (1840), arguably originated anarcho-syndicalist thought. A significant movement based on anarcho-syndicalist principles, the social experiment carried out in Catalonia during the Spanish Revolution and the Spanish Civil War (1936-39), was represented in Hemingway’s *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1940) and Orwell’s *Homage to Catalonia* (1938). Rudolph Rocker’s *Anarcho-Syndicalism: Theory and Practice* (1938) analyzes the anarcho-syndicalism practiced in that period. Anarcho-communism arguably goes further than syndicalism in that it sees the entire social collective as involved in the revolutionary project. Anarcho-communism is epitomized by the writing of Peter Kropotkin, such as *The Conquest of Bread* (1892) and *Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution* (1902). A leading figure of anarcho-feminism was Emma Goldman, best known for the journal she edited, *Mother Earth*, and her *Anarchism and Other Essays* (1910). Goldman argued that patriarchy, just as other forms of hierarchy and domination, was unjustified and that the project of social liberation must include women’s struggles. Queer anarchism critiques forms of direct and structural violence to do with gender. Berkman’s writing on homosexuality in his *Prison Memoirs* and Goldman’s writing on homosexuality in *Mother Earth* are early examples of queer anarchism, but so too is writing by John Henry Mackay, such as his book *The Anarchists* (1891). Judith Butler is a central figure of contemporary queer anarchism; Butler elaborated some of the concerns of contemporary queer anarchism in the paper “Queer Anarchism and Anarchists Against the Wall” (2015). Eco-anarchism is a school of thought that analyzes and critiques forms of hierarchy and domination in human-non-human relations. Murray Bookchin is one of the central figures of the eco-anarchist movement, and specifically for theories put forth in his books *Post-Scarcity Anarchism* (1971) and *The Modern Crisis* (1987). More recently, writing by John Zerzan in *Why Hope?: The Stand Against Civilization* (2015) and Derrick Jensen in *Endgame* (2006) have continued the eco-anarchist tradition.



suggested a consolidation of different anarchist philosophies to include insights from semiotic, postcolonial, and poststructuralist thought. In recent years, there has been a concerted effort by anarchist thinkers like Call to reinterpret (or, perhaps, appropriate) such philosophers as Nietzsche, Derrida, Foucault, Kristeva, and Deleuze and Guattari under the umbrella of anarchism.

Theorizing resistance as a reading method along anarchist lines is similar to offering a Marxist reading of a text. However, some of the differences between these two schools of thought help in understanding anarchist theory. Classical anarchists like Bakunin differed from some classical Marxists as they understood revolution as something that should not be encumbered by the control of vanguard parties or other kinds of traditional political organizations. Whereas some early Marxists like V. I. Lenin wanted to appropriate the state so the dictatorship of the proletariat might transform society in a progressive march to communism, anarchists wanted to bypass this phase of revolution suggested by Marxism and immediately let people work out for themselves how to run their own lives.<sup>36</sup> In *Statism and Anarchy* (1873), Bakunin suggests that “no scholar can teach the people or even define for himself how they will and must live on the morrow of the social revolution. That will be determined first by the situation of each people . . . not by guidance and explanations from above and not by any theories invented on the eve of the revolution” (198-99). Anarchy, therefore, is a situation in which people directly make decisions about how society functions, and in the absence of such a directly democratic society, anarchist practice is to assume one’s own freedom, rather than to look for its delegation.

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<sup>36</sup> Lenin speaks to the distinctions between classical Marxism and classical anarchism, and also sets out his argument for the necessity of the dictatorship of the proletariat in *The State and Revolution* (1917).

Of course, contemporary anarchism, just as with contemporary Marxism, has changed immensely since the split of these two socialist factions in the First International,<sup>37</sup> and it must be said that there are as many affinities between today's anarchism and today's Marxism as there are clear differences. Graeber makes a distinction when he suggests, in *Fragments of an Anarchist Anthropology*, that "Marxism has tended to be a theoretical or analytical discourse about revolutionary strategy," whereas "anarchism has tended to be an ethical discourse about revolutionary practice" (3). Critchley's work on anarchism and ethics in *Infinitely Demanding* is further informative in this regard, as he focuses on ethics as a "binding factor" in anarchist political practice, as opposed to the "silence or hostility to ethics that one finds in Marx's work and in many Marxist (Gramsci is an obvious exception) and post-Marxist thinkers" (125).<sup>38</sup> This distinction between Marxist theory and anarchist practice speaks to the present subject of practices of resistance as reading method. In this dissertation, I am not so much attempting to create a theory or a strategy to direct those involved in resistance or to offer some program for creating a different world – though such theorizing and imagining is certainly important and worthwhile in its own right. Instead, I have set out to learn from the ways various forms of resistance are already embedded and expressed in Newfoundland culture, specifically as that

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<sup>37</sup> This is not to say that all the various schools of anarchism are clearly socialist, just that a group of people self-identifying as anarchists made up a faction that held sway in the First International, led by Bakunin and other anarcho-syndicalists: the First International was an association of socialist political parties, labour unions, and intellectuals. For example, Max Stirner's individualist, egoist anarchism, described in *The Ego and Its Own* (1844), as well as a number of autonomist, mutualist, and free market schools of anarchist thought, are not easily described as socialist in orientation, if socialism is understood in its basic definition as collective ownership of the means of production.

<sup>38</sup> Critchley defines his approach to ethics thusly: "My claim will be that all questions of normative justification, whether with reference to theories of justice, rights, duties, obligations or whatever, should be referred to what I call 'ethical experience'. Ethical experience elicits the core structure of moral selfhood, what we might think of as the existential matrix of ethics. As such, and this is what really interests me, ethical experience furnishes an account of the motivational force to act morally, of that by virtue of which a self decides to pledge itself to some conception of the good" (8-9).

culture is reflected and produced in novelistic writing. It is in the sense of working with the resistance in Newfoundland culture as it exists, and not as I might imagine it or want it to be, and also in valuing resistance as ethically justified even as it may face insurmountable foes and may not be strategically or tactically sound, that my approach is fundamentally anarchistic.

At the same time, I do not take an intransigent view on the particular theorists that are to be considered anarchists or included in my study. For example, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, whose work I draw on at a number of times throughout this study, can be understood as writing out of an anarcho-communist (anti-statist communism) and autonomist tradition, and yet their work is sometimes understood by anarchist theorists, such as David Bates in his essay “Situating Hardt and Negri” (2012), as typically neo-Marxist. A paradoxical aspect of anarchism, inasmuch as there are those who self-identify as anarchists, is that it is opposed to any sort of authoritative definitions, since this is also a form of authority, and so it is difficult to say exactly who ought to be included in this body of theory – this is arguably part of the reason Marxism is more common in the academy, since it has a clearer and more well-defined body of theory. As Call notes in *Postmodern Anarchism*, “it is perhaps a bit of a cliché to suggest that there are as many anarchisms as there are anarchists, but there is nonetheless some truth to this observation. The strength of contemporary anarchism comes precisely from its diversity” (21). For my purposes, anarchism is not considered to be a clearly defined ideology or body of work *per se*, but rather a tendency of thought and action that takes a critical stance on forms of domination and assumes the burden of proof rests with authority. In this sense, one might make the claim that a great deal of critical theory and practice has anarchistic qualities.

The initial focus of each chapter of this dissertation on flashpoints of protest and dissent, and the further analysis of sometimes small and disconnected acts of resistance, follows a

number of anarchist thinkers interested in micropolitics. To examine micropolitics is to look at the way that simple events or actions, and even relationships between people, make up the much broader political sphere. Anarchist thinkers have adapted theories of micropolitics from, among other sources, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's discussion of micropolitics in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1987). Deleuze and Guattari suggest that an analysis of politics needs to look not only at the large formal structures of the state and macropolitics, but also at the simpler ways politics happens in the family, in the workplace, and in other aspects of everyday life: "The modern political system is a global whole, unified and unifying, but is so because it implies a constellation of juxtaposed, imbricated, ordered subsystems" (210). With respect to anarchism and to a theory of revolutionary struggle, a micropolitical approach suggests that it is on the terrain of the everyday and in the sphere of social relations that some of the most significant battles are fought. Indeed, such an approach is not new for anarchists, and something like a micropolitical approach was articulated by Gustav Landauer in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century when he suggested that "the State is a condition, a certain relationship between human beings, a mode of behaviour; we destroy it by contracting other relationships, by behaving differently toward one another" (94).<sup>39</sup> These conceptions of micropolitics and of resistance on the level of the everyday inform the analysis in this dissertation of specific acts of protest and dissent that characters undertake that are not grand acts of defiance. Nonetheless, these acts, while small, are significant and constitute a form of revolt in their own right. In fact, some of these disconnected and seemingly small acts of protest are the most significant moments of resistance in the novels.

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<sup>39</sup> Landauer's notions of decentralized revolution, of revolution in the everyday, have been analyzed and developed by contemporary anarchist thinkers, such as by Jeff Shantz in *Living Anarchy: Theory and Practice in Anarchist Movements* (2009).

Along with these various theories and interpretations of resistance and anarchism, there are also a number of literary and semiotic approaches that are relevant and informative for my dissertation. The notion of resistance in literature has, for example, an affinity with the work of Mikhail Bakhtin. The form of the novel is, according to Bakhtin, inherently dissonant, and his notion of heteroglossia suggests that various types of narration brought together in the novel (for example, the speech act of the narrator as opposed to the speech act of the character) have a revolutionary potential that Bakhtin associates with the carnivalesque, which is similar, in a number of ways, to Nietzsche's notion of the Dionysian impulse in art: the strain of chaos as the necessary counterpoint to Apollonian order.<sup>40</sup> In *Rabelais and His World* (1965), Bakhtin says that the function of the carnivalesque is

to consecrate inventive freedom, to permit the combination of a variety of different elements and their rapprochement, to liberate from the prevailing point of view of the world, from conventions and established truths, from clichés, from all that is humdrum and universally accepted. This carnival spirit offers the chance to have a new outlook on the world, to realize the relative nature of all that exists, and to enter a completely new order of things. (34)

His sense of the carnivalesque, of holding up representations that are humorous and yet also self-deprecating, as well as the role of uninhibited laughter, relate to and inform Critchley's notion of the impossible demand and the figure of the anarchist trickster. Laughter, Bakhtin continues, has

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<sup>40</sup> In *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872), Nietzsche explores the Dionysian impulse towards disorder, as opposed to the Apollonian order, and contends the greatness of Greek tragedy – a greatness that for Nietzsche has not been surpassed – lay in the fusion of these two impulses. The expectation or imagining of a utopia of the true and good (whether that utopia is in this world or the next) has stifled the Dionysian aspect of humanity, leaving us short-sighted and ever more rigidly bound to logic. For Nietzsche, this is something to be lamented, as the denial of our intrinsically necessary impulse to chaos foreshadows a fractured and nihilistic society.

strength; it “overcomes fear, for it knows no inhibitions, no limitations. Its idiom is never used by violence and authority” (90). Julia Kristeva, in *Revolution in Poetic Language* (1974), further develops Bakhtin’s theory of the novel, introducing her concept of the revolutionary text.

Kristeva argues that novels have the potential to destabilize and subvert accepted norms and conventions in that they may “disturb the logic that dominated the social order and do so through that logic itself, by assuming and unraveling its position, its synthesis, and hence the ideologies it controls” (83). Kristeva writes further that the modern revolutionary text is conditioned by (and is a response to) “the capitalist mode of production’s numerous signifying practices” (88).

Throughout this dissertation, I write a good deal about capitalism, and capitalism is a specific focus of Chapter 4 on Moore’s *Alligator* and consumer capitalism. At other times, I also discuss and describe various formulations of capitalist political economy, such as neoliberalism.

However, even as capitalism is a central focus of this study in some respects, it is just one aspect of the many intersecting forms of domination and hierarchy that will be discussed. Other such forms include statism, colonialism, and extractivism, to name a few. Admittedly, none of these other forms of domination are entirely separate from capitalism in the contemporary world, but I wish to make clear that capitalism is not being held up in this dissertation as a singular or clearly defined thing to be opposed.<sup>41</sup> That said, Kristeva’s point, with respect to novelistic form, is that on the eve of the overturning of various historical modes of production there is a regular occurrence of what she characterizes as revolutionary texts. In the way that novels are theorized by Bakhtin and Kristeva, the question of a novel’s form is as important as its explicit content in terms of representations of resistance. I move forward with an awareness of the inherently

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<sup>41</sup> Indeed, as Mark Corske demonstrates with clarity in *Engines of Domination: Political Power and the Human Emergency* (2012), forms of domination and hierarchy predate capitalism by a very long time, arguably to the beginnings of civilization.

dissonant form of the novel, and each chapter examines not only the latent content of the specific texts but also the way they are constructed in terms of formal and generic conventions.

On the other hand, literary theorists also write extensively of the novel form as inherently reactionary. For example, Raymond Williams, in *Marxism and Literature* (1977), argues that one of the functions of literature and of novels is to promote and replicate the dominant bourgeois ideology, which he defines as the belief system of a particular group or class; a system of illusory beliefs and false consciousness; and a semiotic system of signs which produce meaning in a society (58). Fredric Jameson, in *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (1981), also develops this argument, suggesting that novelistic writing is a mode of replicating conservative ideological material. For Jameson, novels can at once introduce potentially subversive ideas such as overthrowing forms of domination, if only to then quell those same ideas. He notes,

If the ideological function of mass culture is to be understood as a process whereby otherwise dangerous and protopolitical impulses are ‘managed’ and defused, rechanneled and offered spurious objects, then some preliminary step must also be theorized in which these same impulses – the raw material upon which the process works – are initially awakened within the very text that seeks to still them. (287)

Jameson resolves this contradiction by suggesting that the novel can be at once conservative in orientation, in the sense that it can promote a specific set of values and social norms, but can also be “a revolt against that reification [of a bourgeois culture]” and a “compensation for increasing dehumanization on the level of daily life” (42). The novel, in this view, is something like a release valve, an imaginative space for readers (Jameson is referring specifically to the literate

industrial workers and underclasses) to enter in which revolt against the dominant system can be safely managed. With respect to maintaining a capitalist system, this is a formulation of resistance being built into the system, in this case within the safe realm of culture (or at least safer from the position of authority than the political or economic realms).

A work of literary criticism and theory that further develops this line of thought on the novel as inherently reactionary is Lennard Davis's *Resisting Novels: Ideology and Fiction* (1987). Davis is not interested in examining resistance in novels as I am in this dissertation. Instead, Davis sets out to theorize how readers (specifically how he as a reader) can put up resistance to novels. Novels, for Davis, have become somewhat fetishized by literary critics, and the impact of novels on the social imaginary is often assumed to be a positive one. Drawing on Williams and Jameson, Davis says that "novels of progressive political content can be derailed by the conservative nature of the literary form" (231). He argues that,

All novels are inherently ideological and in that sense are about the political and social world. That is, even overtly apolitical novels have embedded in their structure political statements about the world and our organization of our perceptions about that world. Further, the political statement is one that by and large preserves the status quo and defends against radical aspirations. (224-25)

For critics and theorists like Williams, Jameson, and Davis, novels are still an important cultural terrain for the critical enterprise; however, novels should be approached with an awareness that there is not necessarily anything fundamentally progressive about them. This insight is important for my study, and moreover most of the novels I explore in detail in the main chapters to follow need to be understood as reactionary to greater or lesser degrees. While I draw on Bakhtin's and Kristeva's theoretical and philosophical perspectives on resistance in the literary form of the



novel, I am also wary of assuming that novels are somehow immediately and obviously sites of liberation.

Along with these somewhat more theoretical views on the political impulse of novels, there are also a number of works of literary criticism that specifically examine resistance and novelistic writing and that serve as useful models for this dissertation. One example is Barbara Harlow's *Resistance Literature* (1987), which examines texts produced during periods of large-scale uprisings or military occupation in places such as Palestine, Vietnam, India, Argentina, Algeria, and Angola. Harlow notes that "resistance literature calls attention to itself, and to literature in general, as a political and politicized activity. The literature of resistance sees itself furthermore as immediately and directly involved in a struggle against ascendant or dominant forms of ideological and cultural production" (28-29). This notion of literature as political activity says that writers and critics play a role in creating the cultural and theoretical positions that make resistance possible. But this is also a notion of literature that, on the other hand, makes possible domination and oppression, and Harlow does not mince words in this regard: "Not just anthropologists, economists, and political scientists, but students of literature too, with their theories of discourse, rhetoric, and textual criticism, provide the necessary information and tools of analysis for the propagation of cultural and even military domination" (14). Harlow perceives academia, and literature specifically, as a means through which legitimacy is granted to state actors to invade or colonize countries and to exploit downtrodden people. For Harlow, literary studies are essentially part of the propaganda machine of the state and contribute directly to what Noam Chomsky and Edward Hermann famously called the manufacture of consent.<sup>42</sup> Even

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<sup>42</sup> See Noam Chomsky and Edward Hermann, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* (1988).

though Harlow does see a redemptive move toward new figurations of resistance emerging in critical theory, there is no cause for celebration. For example, she notes that even though “Eagleton and Jameson do gesture significantly towards the political relevance and even the urgency of new forms and strategies of cultural resistance, these forms themselves have yet to alter in any manifest way the organization and discipline of literary studies in western institutions” (15). The important point for my work is Harlow’s discussion of literature as political activity. The texts she focuses on were produced in the context of what might be characterized as militant forms of resistance, and the texts under analysis in my study were not. Nonetheless, Newfoundland fiction is similarly a political activity and Newfoundland novels take up various positions in the political arena. Some of these Newfoundland novels are politically resistant, while others are better characterized as taking up political positions that propagate, or remain neutral to, the dominant order. Once again, that the novels I examine are not obviously about militant forms of resistance or about revolutions is precisely part of the point. I am interested in the ways resistance is expressed throughout even those cultural landscapes that are relatively peaceful and politically stable, the way disconnected or seemingly small acts of resistance are in their own right a form of revolt.

Claudia Johnson and Vernon Johnson’s *The Social Impact of the Novel: A Reference Guide* (2002) is a work of literary criticism that also provides a roadmap for my analysis of resistance in literature. Johnson and Johnson organized their study according to global geography, examining some 200 novels with specific chapters taking up novelistic writing from the five continents and countries therein. Their criticism is often focused on what they call “protest novels,” which includes many works that influence national myths in former colonial countries. They argue that the novel has been important in its relatively recent history as a

literary phenomenon that is “exceptionally well suited to the exploration of social ideas and social protest” (vii). Their understanding of the novel is, in this regard, quite different from that of Jameson:

Rising to prominence in the eighteenth century, in this time of earthshaking change, was the modern novel, a genre that itself would become an appropriate agent for social change and ideological challenge . . . the novel can be more expansive and more selective [than poetry or drama] in its exploration of ideas and criticism of culture and can simmer slowly for years, waiting to catch fire. (ix)

Johnson and Johnson argue that the novel itself, as a literary genre, was likewise influenced by “significant changes in society” such as an “increase in literacy, especially among the middle and lower classes,” a factor that “greatly affected both the independence of the novelist and the subjects that novelists were willing to write about” (ix). Much of the focus of this criticism is on novels that have anti-colonial themes, or otherwise approach the subject of liberation from occupation. Such novels can, however, be strongly nationalistic and can promote specific ideas of cultural identity, which is arguably just the sort of reactionary move Jameson and others are concerned about.

A further literary critical study that describes novels as sites of resistance is Paul Maltby’s *Dissident Postmodernists* (1991), in which he presents two streams of postmodernist literature, distinguishing the “current of writing [called] dissident postmodernist as a species of adversarial postmodernism,” from the “introverted” current (14). Maltby argues that writers in the dissident stream are wilfully subversive and raise “the general problem of late-capitalist society” as a theme in their work. This conception of dissident postmodernism is, in some ways, setting out evaluative criteria for analysis of texts in a similar fashion to the way my study

theorizes resistance as an interpretive method, though without the postmodern bent. More importantly for the current discussion, however, is that Maltby sees in novels more than the simple replication of dominant cultural codes and systems of values, but also the potential for dissent and for taking a stand. Contemporary novels are quite literally products of late capitalism, and they implicitly or explicitly take up a position on capitalism and may carve out a space in which resistance is possible. Indeed, this is a good summation of my own criticism of Moore's *Alligator*; although the novel participates in capitalism (as a consumer product) and through its content replicates many of the norms and values of capitalist culture, the novel is working within-against the system as what I characterize as a literary culture jam.

Cathy Moses's *Dissenting Fictions: Identity and Resistance in the Contemporary American Novel* (2014) is another work of literary criticism that models a theory of resistance for my work. Examining novels from authors such as Toni Morrison, David Bradley, and Russell Banks, Moses's phenomenological approach analyzes the way dissenting fictions construct subjectivity in terms of embodied lived experience:

Dissenting fictions focus on the materiality of the excluded, of the marginalized body in history and in resistance struggles. They perform a cultural analysis of the resisting subject. In dissenting fictions, resistance to culturally produced identities is not merely reactionary; it has its genesis in the body. Resistance, in dissenting fictions, is the result of the lived experience of actual bodies, and it necessarily involves the recovery of history and the constitution of interactive agency. (3)

Moses examines how novels construct difference in terms of race, class, and gender, as well as the way these categories of power relations are represented. She suggests that dissenting fictions are those that depict power relations in a nuanced manner, and in so doing “multiply the

possibilities for resistance” (10). The specific kind of subject Moses finds in common among the various novels is one that is “forged in struggle” and is an agent in the construction of their own identity (12). This theory of resistant subjectivity is especially relevant with regard to resistance in Newfoundland fiction, as characters in all of the Newfoundland novels I examine attempt (more or less successfully) to create or recreate themselves.

Kimberly Drake’s *Subjectivity in the American Protest Novel* (2011) examines subjectivity as it is constructed in dissident fiction. Drake’s psychoanalytic study focuses on novels produced in the United States during the Great Depression, specifically by African American women writers. Drake suggests that the characters in these novels manifest a “split self that forms as socially marginalized individuals, who have developed behaviours that match the expectations of dominant society, attempt to maintain private identities that can disregard those expectations” (12). At the same time, Drake points out that protest novels, in positing this split self, compel a process of self-reflection in readers and can act in a therapeutic manner: “most protest novels and short stories challenge prevailing images of the socially marginal in order to confront mainstream readers with realities of social and economic oppression, but these texts are also intended to provide critical tools for minority readers” (15). Specific characters in the Newfoundland fiction examined in this dissertation can certainly be understood as marginal in this regard. Johnston’s Fielding is an odd brand of marginal character, but so too is Judah in Crummey’s *Galore*. This notion of deploying marginality as a means of confronting social and economic oppression is significant in relation to a politics of resistance, as is the suggestion that it is from marginal subjective positions that subversion of cultural and social norms is made possible.

Many of the literary studies working from theories of resistance, dissidence, and protest bump up against the question of identity. This is perhaps not so surprising, given that, as Jameson, Williams, and others argue, cultural productions function as part of an ideological superstructure that shapes or reinforces specific formulations of subjectivity and social relations, at times in the service of power and authority. Richard Kirkland, in *Identity Parades: Northern Irish Culture and Dissident Subjects* (2002), suggests that identity is a “darkling plain where the confused armies of competing interests clash by night” (2). Kirkland discusses the construction of sectarian identity politics in Northern Ireland from a neo-Marxist perspective, attempting to uncover the “chameleon-like nature of cultural identity” in its ability to “remake itself in strategic interests,” specifically those interests of the bourgeois ruling class (14). But Kirkland’s criticism also attempts to move beyond this discussion of identity politics, if only by indicating that the “normative ‘two traditions’ version of Northern Irish culture has proved incapable of reimagining the sectarian polarities” (2-3). Kirkland does not set out on a project of “locating the obsolescence” of identity politics, “but rather with the objective of tracing their implicit inner contradictions” (3). Similarly, this dissertation gestures toward a reimagining of Newfoundland identity that recognizes how identity politics function as a structural violence implicit in capitalist systems of production, consumption, and control. It is not so much that any clear sense of what is beyond identity politics is to be described, but rather that a discursive space is created in which a reimagining of Newfoundland identity may take place.

It is in this sense that the concluding chapter of this dissertation calls for liberation, and specifically for liberation from normative articulations of Newfoundland identity. Cultural identity is a contested terrain in Newfoundland fiction, and the way particular novels frame Newfoundland as place and Newfoundlander as subjectivity carries political implications.

Literature and literary criticism may speak powerfully to the hopes and aspirations of the people of the province, but critical activity that aims to define or pin down these hopes and aspirations as an identity may ultimately be a disservice if such a discourse on cultural identity is co-opted and put to use as a tool of power. With regard to the kind of transformative, liberatory space suggested in this dissertation, anarchist theory is once again useful. Murray Bookchin, in *Post-Scarcity Anarchism*, articulates an anarchist approach to transformation, noting that the true project of liberation is always aimed at the disruption of identity politics itself:

“Power to the people” can only be put into practice when the power exercised by social elites is dissolved into the people. Each individual can then take control of his daily life. If “power to the people” means nothing more than power to the “leaders” of the people, then the people remain an undifferentiated, manipulatable mass, as powerless after the revolution as they were before. In the last analysis, the people can never have power until they disappear as a “people.” (xi)

Resistance, as it is expressed in Newfoundland fiction, is gesturing to this working through identity politics and to the end of any supposedly fixed notions of Newfoundland identity. It is not the case that my dissertation sets out to trample on the dreams and fierce pride held in the hearts of many Newfoundlanders, but rather to undertake a study of the ways those dreams are wrapped up in seemingly benign ideas about cultural identity, are commodified, and, ultimately, debased to the point where they become somewhat meaningless. Resistance is represented in different ways in each of the novels discussed in this study, and the texts present more and less pointed critiques of various kinds of hierarchical power relations that shape the culture of the province (through such things as the representation of class, gender, ethnicity, and nationality). In this way, my dissertation develops an analysis of resistance in contemporary Newfoundland

fiction. I turn now to a brief overview of the field of Newfoundland literature, and explore in greater detail some of the dynamics at play in Newfoundland cultural identity and identity politics.

### **Newfoundland Literature and Identity Politics**

Critical studies of Newfoundland fiction depict a culture under pressure, and often the notion of Newfoundland itself, as place or subjectivity, is the central concern of critical activity. But criticism of Newfoundland fiction does not depict this place or subjectivity in monolithic or absolute terms. Rather, Newfoundland is generally understood as a contested cultural terrain, and Newfoundland cultural identity is not described as static or calcified. In recent years, Newfoundland fiction has received a great deal of critical attention, with readings of Newfoundland texts through various theoretical models. Literary criticism of Newfoundland fiction generally brings with it an awareness of alterity and multiplicity, and so any definition of Newfoundland as place or subjectivity is offered provisionally, if at all. Even those foundational critical engagements that set out, implicitly or explicitly, to establish canonicity of Newfoundland texts or to create a rubric for qualifying or describing Newfoundland cultural identity are inherently skeptical of that same project.

For example, Patrick O’Flaherty, in his book *The Rock Observed: Studies in the Literature of Newfoundland* (1979), was among the first scholars to define a canon of Newfoundland writing. O’Flaherty examines the colonial history and literature of Newfoundland, focusing on writers such as E. J. Pratt and Margaret Duley. His overview continues past Confederation (1949) into the 1960s and the arrival of writers such as Art Scammell, Farley Mowat, and Harold Horwood. O’Flaherty’s purpose, as he sets it out in the



preface of the book, is to “provide a survey of literary responses to Newfoundland and Newfoundlanders over the centuries” (ix). O’Flaherty’s discussion of Pratt, and other writers, examines the ways the writing presents a singular Newfoundland identity. He dismisses Pratt for creating what he sees as an inauthentic version of the island and its people:

There was nothing in his poems that showed a genuine curiosity about the outport way of life, no fingering of out-harbour contrivances, no examination of the mechanics of fishing and sealing, no investigation of how the people adjusted to the demands of their harsh environment, no detailed studies of the individual fisherman. (124)

O’Flaherty similarly dismisses Margaret Duley’s *The Eyes of the Gull* (1936). Duley’s novel is set in outport Newfoundland but fails to take up adequately the hardships of fishing, and the only representation of fishing in the text is a single dory floating idyllically on the bay. Duley’s pastoral representation evocatively expresses the beauty and romanticism of the island, but does so in a way that is, for O’Flaherty, superficial. On the other hand, Harold Horwood’s *Tomorrow Will Be Sunday* (1966) is an example of what O’Flaherty calls authentic Newfoundland fiction, in that it is set in a small outport community, telling the story of a young man coming of age while at the same time learning to navigate the many religious, social, legal, and economic barriers he faces as a Newfoundlander.<sup>43</sup> In the way he engages with these novels, O’Flaherty seems to posit an essentialized Newfoundland identity.

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<sup>43</sup> A number of Newfoundland novels are Bildungsroman that function in much the same way as Horwood’s *Tomorrow Will Be Sunday*. For example, Jessica Grant’s *Come, thou Tortoise* (2010), Wayne Johnston’s *The Story of Bobby O’Malley* (1985), and Joel Hynes’s *Down to the Dirt* (2004) all present characters coming of age in a culture in process, a culture in conflict between past, present, and future. However, these three novels are not set in the historical past like Horwood’s.

In his review of *The Rock Observed*, Ronald Rompkey picks up on this totalizing depiction of Newfoundland cultural identity and says that while O’Flaherty pretends to the “detachment of historical criticism,” the book “is an idiosyncratic statement about how Newfoundlanders view themselves and how they are perceived by outsiders” (125). Rompkey suggests that O’Flaherty reductively categorizes the authors according to broad thematic extracted from their work, and “sympathy with local character or knowledge of local life (chiefly in the outports) serves to measure such writers as if these were their principal concerns” (126). Thus, Rompkey questions the notion of supposedly authentic Newfoundland cultural identity he sees at the root of O’Flaherty’s criticism. However, it must also be said that O’Flaherty, seemingly as an afterthought in the final pages of his study, recognizes the potential of this same reductive take on Newfoundland cultural identity in his own work:

[I] was left with a sense of the utter inadequacy of familiar catch phrases often used by authors, phrases such as ‘the nature of Newfoundland life’ or ‘the shape of Newfoundland history.’ So little is known about the true history of Newfoundland, and indeed about the character and motivation of many of those who tried to influence or describe it, that any writer who summarily reduces the complexity of Newfoundland’s past or present to a ready formula must be regarded with great suspicion. (186)

A disclaimer like this one at the end of O’Flaherty’s book is typical of those studies that, while trying to define something like Newfoundland cultural identity, generally express a sense of skepticism about that same project, such as literary criticism by Ronald Rompkey and by Paul Chafe, which will be discussed in greater detail below. The unsettledness of Newfoundland as place and subjectivity is, in a basic sense, a premise for a study of resistance in Newfoundland

literature. Newfoundland cultural identity is in a certain way produced and represented, such as through literature and through criticism, but this identity must also be understood as a product of resistance to any sort of master narrative expressed in literature or criticism. The attempt to define or qualify authentic Newfoundland cultural identity, such as in O'Flaherty's *The Rock Observed*, necessarily compels resistance to definition or qualification, such as in Rompkey's commentary and in O'Flaherty's self-reflexive gesture at the end of his book.

Cultural identity and identity politics, as I am using the terms here, need to be briefly defined. Stuart Hall, in his introductory chapter for the edited collection *Questions of Cultural Identity* (1996), suggests that contemporary studies of cultural identity are "in one way or another critical of the notion of integral, originary and unified identity" (1). Rather, cultural identity, Hall argues, is constructed and produced in specific ways, just as Newfoundland cultural identity is produced and constructed rather than being somehow inherent, ubiquitous, or obviously deterministic. For Hall, cultural identity is also fundamentally historical, needing to be understood in relation to historically specific developments and practices, sometimes related to broader social, political, economic, or cultural factors. In "late modern times," he argues, cultural identity is "increasingly fragmented and fractured" and must be considered "in relation to the processes of globalization" (4). Hall continues: "Though they seem to invoke an origin in a historical past with which they continue to correspond, actually identities are about questions of using the resources of history, language and culture in the process of becoming rather than being" (4). This notion of cultural identity as a process of becoming highlights the somewhat paradoxical character of the concept, for example, in light of the supposedly fixed cultural identity of a place like Newfoundland that Rompkey critiqued in O'Flaherty's book. Nonetheless, fixed or ahistorical notions of cultural identity are at times mobilized for political

projects, sometimes in what may be characterized as political projects of liberation and resistance, but also as forms of nationalism, patriotism, exceptionalism, populism, or nativism (more on this below). Along these lines, Hall suggests that cultural identity, along with being produced out of a specific historical context, also emerges “within the play of specific modalities of power, and thus are more the product of the marking of difference and exclusion” (4).<sup>44</sup> Defining cultural identity is as much a task of saying what that identity is not, and so even as Hall’s initial definition (or aspiration for the concept) of cultural identity is as a process of becoming, or of opening up a space in the social imaginary in which various formulations of identity may be expressed, cultural identity also potentially involves subsuming internal differences.

A similar tension between identity as a process of becoming as opposed to identity as a process of subsuming difference can be elaborated in relation to the concept of identity politics. These terms, cultural identity and identity politics, are closely related, though not exactly interchangeable, since identity politics refers more specifically to the kinds of political theories and practices the production of cultural identity makes possible. Craig Calhoun, in his introduction for the edited collection *Social Theory and the Politics of Identity* (1994), observes that while academic scholarship critiques and dismantles fixed or essentialist notions of identity by looking at the historical context and construction of identity (social constructivist theories), “there is some risk, though, that simply showing a process of construction fails to grapple with the real, present-day political and other reasons why essentialist identities continue to be invoked

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<sup>44</sup> Hall draws on Foucault’s writing on discourse and power to describe cultural identity in relation to modern subjectivity; however, he also describes the way cultural identity is understood or variously elaborated through other critical frameworks, such as through Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis, in Homi K. Bhabha’s notions of cultural difference and hybridity, and in Judith Butler’s work on gender and sexuality.

and often deeply felt” (14).<sup>45</sup> Calhoun describes a number of examples of marginalized groups that have used formulations of essentialist identities as a political practice of resistance or as an assertion of political rights:

Under certain circumstances – mainly identified as political but I think arguably also intellectual – self-critical claims to strong, basic and shared identity may be useful. At its simplest, the argument suggests that where a particular category of identity has been repressed, delegitimated or devalued in dominant discourses, a vital response may be to claim value for all those labeled by that category, thus implicitly invoking it in an essentialist way. (17)<sup>46</sup>

However, while Calhoun can see the strategic value of mobilizing a fixed identity for political projects, he is extremely concerned that such identity politics can go terribly wrong. He points out that scholars of contemporary social movements that rely on identity politics, and especially those identity politics that the researchers may approve of, omit negative or inconvenient examples of identity politics, such as “the new religious right and fundamentalism, the resistance of white ethnic communities against people of color, various versions of nationalism, and so forth” (22). Such negative incarnations of identity politics can lead to situations of (or be a

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<sup>45</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak used the term “strategic essentialism” to describe the mobilization of an identity politics in the service of liberatory movements, such as struggles for national liberation. However, in *Other Asias* (2008), Spivak critiqued the term, suggesting it had been turned to the service of nationalism and to other exclusionary or non-strategic forms of essentialism that she disagrees with (260).

<sup>46</sup> In the present day, examples of such re-evaluation of suppressed or marginalized identities, which are expressed at least in part in self-critical ways, might be the Black Lives Matter movement and the Idle No More movement. From the perspective of progressive or leftist politics, such movements can be argued to be important assertions of agency and existence; however, from the perspective of reactionary politics, such movements can be argued to be (absurdly) exclusive and divisionary in the sense that they are potentially essentialist. Drawing on the broader discussion of resistance in the previous section of this introduction, such arguments from progressives and reactionaries alike can be judged by the degree to which they recognize differences in power and privilege, histories of oppression, and the ability to work within formal political and social institutions.

component in) ethnic conflict, intolerance, and a host of other stark consequences. It must be said that Newfoundland cultural identity, and the identity politics associated with it, has some characteristics of both parts of this tension between essentialist and constructivist notions of identity. On the one hand, people who self-identify as Newfoundlanders may do so as a form of resistance to a perceived marginalization within broader Canadian and globalized Western culture; however, politically, Newfoundland identity can be, and is, mobilized by politicians and others as a form of nationalism, excluding or marginalizing Indigenous identities and other settler societies, in short, as a form of subsuming differences.

The field of Newfoundland literature and its criticism necessarily intersects, on some level, with questions of cultural identity and identity politics, since authors and critics engage on the imaginative and theoretical terrain of this place called Newfoundland, and all the tensions inherent in the concepts of cultural identity and identity politics manifest in Newfoundland literary discourse. This is evident, for example, in a work of literary criticism such as O'Flaherty's *The Rock Observed* and Rompkey's critique of the potential essentialism in the book. However, as I noted, O'Flaherty ends on a note of skepticism about any kind of unified Newfoundland identity, which is a common tendency in many works of criticism of Newfoundland literature. A further example of this skepticism of fixed identity is evident in Lawrence Mathews's essay, "Report from the Country of No Country" (2004), which takes up the project of establishing canonicity for Newfoundland literature where *The Rock Observed* left off. Mathews's criteria are the same as O'Flaherty's, "literary responses to Newfoundland and Newfoundlanders" (1), and some of the authors he includes are Donna Morrissey, Michael Crummey, Wayne Johnston, and Annie Proulx. Many of the novels Mathews discusses, such as Crummey's *River Thieves* (2001) and Johnston's *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams*, depict

historical Newfoundland and take important figures in Newfoundland history for characters. In this way, the novels construct a particular idea of Newfoundland cultural identity, one that is rooted in the Newfoundland outports or the colonial past. However, Mathews also introduces an emerging writer (when his article was published in 2004), Lisa Moore. Mathews is looking at writing from Newfoundland that either addresses historic issues of identity or, like Moore's, "has moved beyond such concerns" (10). He suggests that Moore has no interest in creating "an overview of Newfoundland identity" but that still "the Newfoundland setting is integral to her artistic projects" (12). Like O'Flaherty's evaluation of Pratt, Mathews recognizes that Moore's fiction does not fit within historically situated ideas of Newfoundland identity. However, unlike O'Flaherty's impulse toward exclusion, Mathews does not exclude Moore's writing from Newfoundland literature but instead indicates a need to reformulate ideas of Newfoundland cultural identity. In Moore's *Alligator*, for example, the Newfoundland setting of contemporary St. John's provides an important context for the narrative, but the cultural geography of the text is nothing like what could be called traditional or typical Newfoundland. *Alligator*, in this way, resists a historically situated or romanticized Newfoundland cultural identity, but at the same time produces a specific vision of Newfoundland as place and subjectivity by resisting those tropes.<sup>47</sup>

Paul Chafe's postcolonial analysis in his PhD dissertation *Place and Identity in Contemporary Newfoundland Fiction* (2008) is another example of criticism of Newfoundland literature that expresses a skeptical attitude toward totalizing notions of Newfoundland cultural

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<sup>47</sup> It is also the case that, along with working with different thematic material and setting, many contemporary Newfoundland authors experiment with novelistic form. Texts such as Johnston's *Baltimore's Mansion* (1999), Kenneth J. Harvey's *Blackstrap Hawco* (2008), and Michael Winter's *The Death of Donna Whelan* (2010) all break with typical novelistic convention, blending storytelling with historical documents, family histories, and other nonfiction elements.

identity. Chafe suggests the “concept of a ‘Newfoundland literature’ is more troubled than solidified” and “authors take the island and its occupants as their subject and produce diverse depictions of Newfoundland existence: rural or urban; nostalgic and romantic or cynically realist; beleaguered by the past or unfettered and open to any possibility or interpretation” (2). Chafe’s study discusses novels by Johnston, Moore, Crummey, and Riche, specifically the ways the texts represent different versions of Newfoundland as place and identity. In many cases, Chafe finds a cultural identity that is tied to place, and texts that represent what could be called “authentic” Newfoundland, as place, have characters with the best sense of their Newfoundland identity. In this way, the study juxtaposes “authentic” versions of Newfoundland with, for example, the romanticism of Annie Proulx’s *The Shipping News* (1993). Some novels play into idealized or stereotypical notions of Newfoundland as quaint and culturally distinct, while others resist this trend and instead present the “authentic” culture and identity of the island. This notion of authentic Newfoundland cultural identity comes with its own pitfalls, for just as Chafe interrogates monolithic or totalizing definitions, his study’s claims to anything approximating authenticity are open to this same criticism of creating an idealized vision of Newfoundland. Chafe’s criticism is self-reflexive in this regard, as he indicates with the proviso in the dissertation’s introduction, the ironic quotation marks implied in any discussions of authenticity, and also with regard to the broad variety of possible Newfoundland identities he describes in his criticism. Newfoundland identity is presented in fluid, provisional terms, as there is no solid footing from which to make evaluative claims about the relative authenticity of a given production of subjectivity over another.

Chafe’s study is also helpful in articulating a distinction between place and space. Place, when discussing cultural identity, is not the same thing as a physical geography, such as the



island of Newfoundland, the Avalon Peninsula, and so on. The distinction between place and space is important in the discussion of Newfoundland literature, since just as the supposed fixity of cultural identity is troubled by viewing its historical construction, so too a place like Newfoundland is created through acts of imaginative production, largely on a discursive terrain. This is something that is discussed by a number of postcolonial theorists, such as Paul Carter in *The Road to Botany Bay: An Essay in Spatial History* (1987): “[A name] also indicates, concisely and poetically, the *cultural* place where spatial history begins: not in a particular year, nor in a particular place, but *in the act of naming*. For by the act of place-naming, space is transformed symbolically into place, that is, a space with a history” (xxiv). A place (as opposed to a space) is not fixed in position. As Ashcroft et al. point out in the *Post-Colonial Studies Reader* (1995), “the theory of place does not simply propose a binary separation between the ‘place’ named and described in language, and some ‘real’ place inaccessible to it, but rather indicates that in some sense place *is* language, something in constant flux, a discourse in process” (391). Physical geography, in this sense, can be understood to accumulate cultural thickness, acting as a palimpsest by retaining the imprint of many different notions of cultural identity, some of which may be overthrown and displaced. This formulation of place is, once again, an indicator of the troubled nature of presenting totalizing depictions of cultural identity, and also a helpful reminder that no place exists without some kind of a discursive and cultural creative act.

One example of literary criticism that takes up the question of cultural identity from a fresh perspective, and also provides a critique of the notion of authenticity and a supposedly unique Newfoundland cultural identity, is Fiona Polack’s PhD dissertation *Littoral Fictions: Writing Tasmania and Newfoundland* (2002). Polack’s study works out of a theoretical position

on island studies, which carries with it an awareness of place and cultural geography, similarly distinguishing such concepts with space or physical geography as discussed above. The “littoral” is the zone where the sea meets the land, but for the purposes of Polack’s study also indicates a poetic place, a kind of friction (perhaps even resistance) inherent in typified definitions of place, as the metaphorical shore of a given culture is constantly in flux and reconstitution. *Littoral Fictions* is a comparative study, examining patterns of cultural productions of two islands, Tasmania and Newfoundland, and makes an unexpected claim:

Contemporary modalities of emplacement construct geographically distant locations in distinctly similar ways. In discerning these similarities the thesis concludes that there is a profound paradox at the heart of contemporary fictional constructions of Tasmania and Newfoundland as distinct and unique territories. By relying upon reproducible modalities the currency of ‘uniqueness’ is ultimately devalued. (21)

Polack shows that constructions of Newfoundland as a distinct place are strikingly similar to constructions of Tasmania as a distinct place, even to the extent that the tourism slogans for both islands reproduce the same tropes: “Both places have recently marketed themselves, for example, through the almost identical slogans of ‘More than you can imagine’ [Tourism Tasmania 1998 campaign] and ‘Imagine that’ [Tourism Newfoundland mid-1990s campaign]” (19). These same patterns of uniqueness appear in novelistic writing from both islands as well, and Polack’s criticism examines the ways that notions of a distinct or authentic cultural identity are actually something that is quite consciously produced and reproduced in geographically distant regions. Polack’s work is something of a move away from identity politics, since the construction of identity is shown to be more akin to a form of reification and commodification of culture. These

kinds of repeated patterns of production of supposedly distinct cultural identities undercut the drive to define what is authentic about a place, showing that cultural identity exists only as a placeholder, an imaginative terrain mapped out through various intersecting and competing claims.

Herb Wyile's *Anne of Tim Hortons: Globalization and the Reshaping of Atlantic Canadian Literature* (2011) is another important work of literary and cultural criticism that examines writing from or about Newfoundland. Wyile's analysis looks more broadly at the Canadian Atlantic region, but he also he writes extensively on Newfoundland authors and is keenly attuned to issues of Newfoundland identity. Part of Wyile's project is to investigate the way neoliberalism is expressed and resisted in literature, such as through novels that represent, and at times dismantle, the commodification of Newfoundland identity in the tourism industry. I draw on Wyile's *Anne of Tim Hortons* and a number of his other essays throughout this dissertation, specifically his work on novels by Moore, Riche, and Crummey.

The issue of the commodification of cultural identity raises the question of the overarching systems of political economy, and, indeed, it seems correct to understand ideologically loaded terms like culture, society, politics, and economics as necessarily connected. Cultural productions, such as novels, spring from a particular context, and so it is difficult (if not impossible) to tease culture, politics, and economics apart. This is something discussed at length by Fredric Jameson in his writing on postmodernism, taken to indicate the cultural tendencies inherent in contemporary capitalist societies. As Jameson suggests in his book *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991), "every position on postmodernism in culture—whether apologia or stigmatization—is also at one and the same time, and *necessarily*, an implicitly or explicitly political stance on the nature of multinational capitalism today" (3).

Artistic productions are situated alongside or within the economic context, and the way a novel, for example, represents an imaginative world is always making some kind of political statement on capitalist systems of production, consumption, and control. Jameson is offering a different perspective from the modernist or romantic take on aesthetics, in that he does not assume the artist somehow stands outside the political and economic realm as a kind of observer or unbiased ethnographer. Quite the opposite, cultural productions are implicated in the political economy and may serve to reproduce norms and values of dominant political-economic modes. As Polack suggests, with reference to the Newfoundland and Tasmanian context, “late capitalism has had harsh economic consequences for Tasmania and Newfoundland, but the shift to a new kind of world economy has also seen both become increasingly fetishised and commodified as zones of the ‘unique’, the ‘authentic’, the ‘different’, the ‘past’ and ‘home’” (18). The construction of supposedly authentic cultural identity is, from this perspective, more akin to an exercise in marketing and branding, and this is an act of commodification that authors (perhaps unwittingly) sometimes participate in.

A similar critique of the commodification of cultural production in economic terms is put forward by Rompkey in his article “The Idea of Newfoundland and Arts Policy Since Confederation” (1998), in which he suggests that the development of arts policy by the Newfoundland government has proceeded from a desire to market the island as a tourist destination. He argues that artistic production in Newfoundland is not encouraged as an “end in itself,” and that “despite the repeated invocation [by the provincial government] of Newfoundland’s distinct culture and its rich heritage, direct support to artists . . . remain[s] a low priority” (77). Funding has more typically gone to extravagant festivals and to nongovernmental organizations, always with the provincial government’s logo featured prominently in

promotional materials, while artists have continued to struggle. These comments are anticipated by Chris Brookes's *A Public Nuisance: A History of the Mummers Troupe* (1988), which examines the development of a number of theatre companies in Newfoundland. Brookes, a playwright, actor, journalist, and broadcaster, offers anecdotal accounts that suggest certain theatre groups were promoted by the provincial government, while others (specifically those he was most involved with, such as the Mummers Troupe) had difficulty finding funding because the messaging of particular productions did not gel with the cultural development strategy set out by the provincial government. At one point Brookes whimsically quips, "Once, in desperation, we challenged the Division of Cultural Affairs to an 'arts race' at the annual St. John's Regatta, on the offchance that maybe if we rammed the bastards in the middle of the lake we could sink the province's whole arse-backwards arts policy at one blow" (194). Many of the plays produced by the Mummers Troupe were decidedly anti-capitalist, and at times might best be characterized as agitprop – explicitly radical political theatre focused on social justice issues – and so perhaps it comes as little surprise that the Mummers Troupe ran into difficulty when trying to secure funding. The plays disrupted the logic of postmodern capitalist culture, as Jameson would have it, and so the Troupe was censured and subjected to disciplinary mechanisms (funding cuts), while other cultural productions and theatre groups, those that represented an acceptable vision of Newfoundland cultural identity, were promoted and championed by the provincial government.

The time when the Mummers Troupe was active in the 1970s provides further context for an understanding of the commodification of culture for economic ends. Examples of this commodification are strikingly evident when looking back at what has come to be called the

Newfoundland renaissance, announced by Sandra Gwyn in 1976.<sup>48</sup> It was a burgeoning of creative energy in the province, and this period coincided with the rise of CODCO to the national stage and to television audiences throughout Canada, something that carried with it a new sense of Newfoundland nationalism. “Cod on a Stick” (1973), for example, played up stereotypes of uneducated Newfoundlanders, but with a biting satirical twist that, as Shane O’Dea puts it in “Culture and Country: The Role of the Arts and Heritage in the Nationalist Revival in Newfoundland” (2003), gored the “sacred cows” of mainland Canadian sensibilities (383). At this same time in the late 1970s and early 1980s there was also a flowering of other forms of art in the province – music, visual arts, poetry, and fiction – and a number of Arts and Culture Centres were built in various communities. Yet, as has been suggested above, this renaissance did not happen in a vacuum, but was, rather, encouraged by funding from the provincial government for specific ends. The not-so-subtle politics of CODCO, for example, carved out a space in the Canadian consciousness for Newfoundland, playing off the stereotype of the “stunned” Newfoundlander while also satirizing Canadian sensibilities. But this wave of cultural production in Newfoundland, exemplified by CODCO, also coincided with the growth of the Newfoundland economy, the discovery of massive quantities of oil in Newfoundland’s offshore, and the creation of the provincial government’s Department of Tourism and Recreation.

The Newfoundland renaissance was a vital turning point for Newfoundland literature, and other arts as well. However, this burgeoning of arts in Newfoundland took place within a specific context and against the backdrop of rising economic prosperity. The most recent surge of Newfoundland writing (which can basically be understood to have occurred from Annie Proulx’s 1993 novel *The Shipping News* to the present) coincided with another economic boom,

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<sup>48</sup> See Sandra Gwyn, “The Newfoundland Renaissance” (1976).

precipitated once again by an expansion of the province's industrial base in offshore oil and other resource extraction industries like mineral mining. The Newfoundland Symphony Orchestra, for example, benefited immensely from funding from the oil industry, such that now the yearly gala is called the "NSO Hibernia Gala," Hibernia being one of the largest offshore oil production fields. Exxon-Mobil is the main sponsor of the LSPU Hall-Resource Centre for the Arts, one of the province's major theatre venues and production companies. And though not sponsored by an oil company, one of the province's most prestigious literary awards, the BMO Winterset Award, receives funding from Bank of Montreal.<sup>49</sup> Along with this, the Newfoundland and Labrador Arts Council continues to receive primary funding from the provincial government and has specific criteria set out for what sorts of cultural productions can be considered for Arts Council funding. So although Rompkey's intuition about the linkages between politics, economics, and cultural production in Newfoundland remains true, perhaps what has changed is that currently it is major corporations that are the driving force behind cultural production and not only the provincial government. Now that the Newfoundland economy has once again gone bust, it will be interesting to watch, in the years to come, the way the provincial government regards the arts community and the priority given to the production of Newfoundland culture.<sup>50</sup>

Some contemporary Newfoundland novels are pushing back against the commodification of Newfoundland culture, such as novels that show cultural identity as not something that can be typified through easily reproducible motifs. Moore's *Alligator* and Riche's *Rare Birds* are two

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<sup>49</sup> Of course, these companies are not necessarily setting out to shape Newfoundland culture, other than in the sense that they would like to appear as good corporate citizens. For a critique of corporate social responsibility policies, see Bruce Harvey's "Social Development Will Not Deliver Social License to Operate for the Extractive Sector" (2014).

<sup>50</sup> The provincial government announced in February 2017 a plan to remove the word "culture" from the Department of Tourism, Culture, Industry and Innovation, but reversed the decision after a public backlash.

examples of this, as the novels resist, parody, or satirize commodified representations of Newfoundland culture as quaint and distinct. Along with this, many of the literary critics mentioned above show the unsettledness of Newfoundland cultural identity as it is understood and expressed in literature. Another way to state the case is to say that Newfoundland as place and subjectivity is not, in any absolute sense, produced as a single, readily available identity; neither is there any true or authentic concept of Newfoundland as place or subjectivity waiting to be discovered and properly defined. Instead, Newfoundland cultural identity resists, initially, totalizing notions of Newfoundland cultural identity itself. Newfoundland cultural identity is not, in what follows, to be understood as something to be described and agreed on, but is instead understood as a placeholder for something indefinable, as a question mark. The more important question for the purpose of this study is not precisely what the shape and texture of Newfoundland cultural identity is, but rather how that identity is produced and reproduced, and to what ends. Indeed, as this dissertation strives to demonstrate, Newfoundland cultural identity is produced through a process of constitution and reconstitution, influenced in no small way by forces that may be described as dominant discourses. But Newfoundland cultural identity is also, and necessarily, produced by resistance to these same dominant discourses.

To illustrate the point, some of the dominant discourses explored in this study are consumerism, nationalism, and colonialism, each of which plays a particular part in the production of Newfoundland cultural identity. At the same time, Newfoundland identity must also be understood to be produced by resistance to these same impulses of consumerism, nationalism, and colonialism, since none of these mechanisms produce a subjectivity that may be understood as definitive or absolute. However, these various claims on Newfoundland identity can be usefully understood through theories of resistance, since Newfoundland cultural identity,



such that it can be described as any sort of totality, is produced by many intersecting and often competing claims, some dominant and some subordinate, each contributing different aspects and particularities.

Even though my study of resistance in Newfoundland fiction begins from this necessary discussion of cultural identity, and though this theme is reprised at times throughout the pages that follow, an important goal of this project is a concerted effort to move away from questions of identity politics. The cue for this is a body of fiction that, while deeply self-conscious, at times points beyond its own production as Newfoundland literature, containing the seeds of a different conception of subjectivity that alters, and perhaps liberates, the very idea of Newfoundland as place and subjectivity. This is most evident in the writing of Lisa Moore and Edward Riche, whose novels constitute a frontal attack on the old guard of Newfoundland culture. Although Michael Crummey's and Wayne Johnston's novels also provide a fertile ground for an exploration of different understandings of Newfoundland identity, this is not so much their project as it is Moore's and Riche's. In novels by Moore and Riche that I examine in this dissertation, identity politics functions as a kind of structural violence, and there is little sense that anything approximating a distinct or authentic Newfoundland cultural identity can be redeemed; both these authors seem aware of the stark implications of identity politics and have cast this as something to be overcome.<sup>51</sup> Added to this, the general sense of ambivalence toward any fixed notions of Newfoundland identity as expressed in literary criticism is a further indication of this working through identity politics, this aspiration to transform that very identity.

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<sup>51</sup> Structural violence refers to forms of hierarchy and coercion that are institutionalized and that cause harm in sometimes subtle ways, as opposed to direct physical violence. I discuss structural violence at greater length in Chapter 1.

Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, in their book *Commonwealth* (2009), offer a theoretical take from an anarcho-communist perspective on the transformation of identity politics, and a move toward dissident and revolutionary theories grounding this study. They discuss identity politics in relation to revolutionary politics, noting the conflicted relationship between the two:

Here is the conundrum we face: revolutionary politics has to start from identity but cannot end there. The point is not to pose a division between identity politics and revolutionary politics but, on the contrary, to follow the parallel revolutionary streams of thought and practice within identity politics, which all, perhaps paradoxically, aim toward the abolition of identity. Revolutionary thought, in other words, should not shun identity politics but instead must work through it and learn from it. (326) <sup>52</sup>

My dissertation takes its cue from the troubled interaction of identity politics and revolutionary politics, in that it situates Newfoundland cultural identity as an initial theoretical position from which to posit a fundamental reformulation of that cultural identity. In order to sketch a

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<sup>52</sup> Hardt and Negri's work has been criticised by a number of postcolonial and anti-racist scholars. For example, Benita Parry in *Postcolonial Studies: A Materialist Critique* (2004) argues that Hardt and Negri's concept of (global) Empire elides the very real and ongoing colonial and imperialist projects perpetrated by imperial states. From Parry's Marxist perspective, rather than left intellectuals like Hardt and Negri playing a role in recuperating internationalism in the struggle against capitalism, "what we find are a proliferation of proposals which, even when emanating from the left, are designed to dispense with notions of class politics, class solidarities and class struggles" (101). A similar critique is made by Robert Spencer in *Cosmopolitan Criticism and Postcolonial Literature* (2011), when he suggests that Hardt and Negri's imagining of a utopia of the multitude beyond nations and identity politics ignores and covers over an ongoing colonial situation that is "neither ambiguous or serendipitous but inexcusable and radically objectionable" (31). I agree with these critiques in many ways and see a particularly Western-centric bias in Hardt and Negri's work. Regardless, their analysis remains pertinent to Newfoundland identity politics, which I characterize as a project that has been carried to fruition. This is, for me, a cue that identity politics should now turn to a revolutionary and liberatory politics, which should specifically engage with and support the ongoing struggles of marginalized and oppressed people, both within Newfoundland and abroad.

discursive space in which liberation from, or transformation of, Newfoundland identity becomes possible, an understanding of how Newfoundland identity is culturally constructed must be the starting point. This is all the more true because there is no fully formed or transparent alternative, and this dissertation will not necessarily provide one so much as indicate a path that might be taken toward this end. Although there is good reason to want to do away with identity politics, and it seems right that this is the goal of any revolutionary politics, there is nowhere else to start a project such as this except some sense of shared Newfoundland identity, as an initial point of starting out in social solidarity, even if that identity is to be defined tentatively or as a confluence of competing claims.

At this point, it is prudent to pause and put forward some reasons why there is a need to work through identity politics in the Newfoundland context. The call for a revolutionary politics may appear trite; however, it is not simply a matter of intellectual curiosity or scholarly busy-work, but it relates in a concrete way to the real conditions and social context of the people who call the island their home. James Overton, in *Making a World of Difference: Essays on Tourism, Culture and Development in Newfoundland* (1996), describes the production of Newfoundland identity with reference to an idealized image he ironically calls “the ‘Real’ Newfoundland”:

“The ‘Real’ Newfoundland” is said to be those parts of the province which are remote from towns and highways of major importance. To find “the ‘Real’ Newfoundland” visitors are urged to “go down the side roads” and “poke into the bays,” to “turn to the ocean and ‘test’ the breeze; smell the salt, the wave torn kelp, the spray washed air, the saturated, aged sand.” (106)

This production of Newfoundland identity is precisely the one Rompkey and others critique, and also the version of Newfoundland identity that has been turned into a consumer product and

tourism brand. Overton continues to describe what he sees as the problems with such a production of identity, noting that “once ‘the “Real” Newfoundland’ exists as an idea, it is fed back onto the landscape and the pattern of people’s lives. A whole set of government actions is undertaken to make reality conform to this image” (118). Overton elaborates on this point:

Why bother writing about such an insignificant phenomenon as “the ‘Real’ Newfoundland”? In capitalism, a dominant way of life and thought is widely diffused throughout society in all spheres. Seemingly “innocent” ideas, especially those presented in the form of cultural traditions and myths, function on a wide scale to mask the realities of the system and so help perpetuate the existing order. We partially accept such ideas because they speak powerfully to our experiences, dissatisfactions and hope. (122)

What Overton is pointing toward here, and what I find important with respect to resistance in Newfoundland culture, is the way he relates cultural identity to the underlying systemic inequalities and injustices of the capitalist mode of production.<sup>53</sup> Moore’s novel *Alligator* is the text in my study that most directly confronts capitalism, but the critique of capitalism, the resistance to this mode of production, is embedded in many works of Newfoundland fiction. In the way that the inequalities of the overarching economic system are masked by the supposed egalitarianism of Newfoundland cultural identity, within which everyone supposedly has equal opportunities and standing, productions of cultural identity are certainly not neutral or benign.

The mobilization of cultural identity is also functional for political ends, something that is most evident in Newfoundland politics as an expression of nationalism – this is something

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<sup>53</sup> Once again, my focus in this dissertation is not only on sources of exploitation rooted in capitalism, but rather, and implicit in an anarchistic analysis, on exploitation, oppression, and domination that flow from various sorts of hierarchical relations beyond only the economic sphere.

Newfoundland literature potentially feeds and reinforces, depending on the way cultural identity is constructed in a particular text. Newfoundland nationalism has been used to some effect by every government that has held power since Confederation, and indeed by Newfoundland governments before Confederation as well. Sean Cadigan makes the case for this in his *Newfoundland and Labrador: A History* (2009), noting,

Nationalism is an ideological construct partially based on the fabrication that peoples of diverse interests are really one and should mobilize in support of a particular interest group or party. Newfoundland and Labrador is the home of a variety of people who, on a day-to-day basis within the context of their communities, are defined far more by their class, gender, and ethnicity than by the mythical nationalist identities invented by political elites. Since Confederation, politicians have used a particular form of neo-nationalist Ottawa-bashing to distract the people of Newfoundland and Labrador from the failures of provincial policies and to co-opt their support. (296)

A striking example of this neo-nationalist Ottawa-bashing occurred during the campaign for the 2008 Canadian federal election, when then-premier Danny Williams took the Canadian flags down at Confederation Building in St. John's and put out a call for a province-wide "ABC" vote (Anything But Conservative). This act of political showmanship was a reaction to what Williams perceived as the Conservative-led federal government reneging on promises made with regard to Atlantic Accord payments to the province for offshore oil revenues. The campaign was a success on two fronts, as Newfoundland and Labrador shut out the Conservatives in the province's seven federal ridings, but also in that it precipitated a significant rise in William's approval ratings at

home since he came to be seen by Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, as Cadigan puts it, as a “regional David standing against Goliath at the centre” (287).

Yet another popular nationalist trope in Newfoundland is the notion of the “secret nation” and the “Republic of Newfoundland,” an idea that draws on the widely held belief in Newfoundland that the province should be an independent country in the international order and was robbed of statehood by a rigged election in the 1949 vote for Confederation with Canada. One common example of the iconography of the Republic of Newfoundland movement is the pink, white, and green tricolour flag, reminiscent of the Irish Republic’s tricolour and numerous other republican-styled tricolours used around the globe. Along with this, a feature-length film titled *Secret Nation* (1992), written by Edward Riche and starring Cathy Jones, Mary Walsh, and Rick Mercer, is a good example of a cultural production that has helped fuel Newfoundland nationalism, in that it presents a narrative account of a conspiracy of letters disclosing the nation’s hidden history. A number of Newfoundland historians have also given credence to the claims of fraud and gerrymandering made in the film, such as John Fitzgerald in his edited collection *Newfoundland at the Crossroads: Documents on Confederation with Canada* (2002), in which he presents letters uncovered in the British National Archive showing that the British and Canadian governments apparently colluded to influence the outcome of the Confederation referendum. In 2006 Fitzgerald was appointed by then-premier Danny Williams as the representative to the Newfoundland and Labrador Office of Federal-Provincial Relations in Ottawa. More recently, Greg Malone (formerly of CODCO) published a book, *Don’t Tell the Newfoundlanders: The True Story of Newfoundland’s Confederation with Canada* (2012), which reprises and re-examines the historical circumstances and takes up a conspiratorial perspective. It is no exaggeration to say that the mythology of the Confederation vote continues to occupy a

central position in the Newfoundland popular consciousness and is a point of contention for many Newfoundlanders.

That said, it is not necessary for the purposes of this study to take a stand on whether or not the Newfoundland vote on Confederation was rigged or whether there was collusion by outside actors to influence the outcome.<sup>54</sup> The important point for this discussion is to indicate that these kinds of narratives of the secret nation and the Republic of Newfoundland are a form of nationalism, playing off an idea of a victimized nation and people. And as with surges in artistic production in Newfoundland, surges in nationalist sentiment have coincided with political and economic interests, such as the province's bargaining position in Canadian federalism and negotiations over oil royalties (something that was most evident during the Brian Peckford and Danny Williams administrations). This sort of nationalism is also a consistent undercurrent in figurations of Newfoundland cultural identity, such as it is expressed in literature and literary criticism. What is troubling and potentially harmful about this is that such figurations of Newfoundland cultural identity serve to further mask and perpetuate social inequality and injustice inherent in what is sometimes called the status quo. Thinking back to Cadigan's comments quoted above, Newfoundland nationalism serves to cover over oppression in terms of class, gender, and ethnicity, and the mechanism of covering over is in no small part a cultural, discursive act. It is encompassed in the naive populism that says "we are all Newfoundlanders" and, thus, that all Newfoundlanders are on equal footing and have the same opportunities within structures of political, economic, and social power. Most damaging, perhaps, is the way that

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<sup>54</sup> Contemporary arguments on the Confederation vote generally admit only traditional statist perspectives, for example, that Newfoundland should have continued to be an independent state ruled from St. John's, or that Newfoundland rightly joined Canada to be ruled from Ottawa. Cadigan is one of very few historians to speak of the Confederation vote as a statist reaction against an emergent social revolution, though he does not precisely use these same words to describe it.

forms of cultural identity such as Newfoundland nationalism are an act of exclusion, in that playing up ideas of uniqueness and distinctiveness marginalizes differences and requires conformity to a specific cultural code and system of norms and values. This is especially true with respect to marginalization of the struggles of Indigenous peoples in the province, of women and of gender nonconforming people, people with disability, refugees and new immigrants, and with respect to the many and various marginalized and excluded people who do not fit within the paradigm of what it supposedly means to be a “real” Newfoundlander.<sup>55</sup> Furthermore, as has been seen in the context of the current economic crisis and austerity in the province, the pumped up nationalism of the past decade has made the return to the status of a debtor province in the Canadian federation all the more difficult for Newfoundlanders to bear.

Although in the case of this dissertation the principal form of identity politics under scrutiny is a nationalist or statist identity, most all forms of identity politics similarly gesture toward exclusivity and potentially contain an inherent structural violence. In this context, Hardt and Negri point out in *Commonwealth* that

the struggle to make visible the violences of identity may be even more urgent today, in an era when the dominant discourse, especially in North America and Europe, proclaims race, gender, and class hierarchies to have been overcome. . . . The mandate of feminism, antiracist activism, workers struggles, and other identity politics are over, according to this view, and the social divisions of identity are only perpetuated by those who continue to speak of them. That is how those who promote consciousness of social inequalities along identity lines are cast as creating

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<sup>55</sup> For a discussion of Newfoundland literature and identity in relation to the many Newfoundlanders living outside the island, see Jennifer Bowering Delisle’s *The Newfoundland Diaspora: Mapping the Literature of Out-Migration* (2013).



class, race, gender, and other identity divisions. And as a result we are increasingly facing paradoxical forms of “color-blind” racism, “gender-blind” sexism, “class blind” class oppression, and so forth. (327-28)

Critiques of the violence of identity politics are well expressed in academic circles; from the perspective of resistance and revolutionary politics, identity is, whether speaking of gender, class, ethnicity, or nationality, a form of violence, and identity is implicitly connected with most any kind of oppression to be named.<sup>56</sup> However, it is not enough to theorize such notions of identity-blind culture and to think that it will somehow just come about without a struggle.

It is from this perspective that my dissertation is working to indicate a transformative space and a working through identity politics in the criticism of Newfoundland literature. The ideas at the heart of Newfoundland cultural identity are a powerful elixir, partly because they call upon the very real experiences of disaffection and the aspirations of the Newfoundland people. But these ideas also function as a mechanism of power and control, something that functions to perpetuate the current order, with its many injustices and various forms of oppression. Newfoundland literature is a microcosm of the functioning of this identity politics, in that writing that takes Newfoundland as its imaginative or critical terrain is always, implicitly or explicitly, participating in the construction and reproduction of Newfoundland cultural identity. The first task of a liberatory identity politics must be to make visible the violence of identity, and so, once again, this dissertation does not lose sight of that point of starting out. But all too often identity politics, and explorations of identity in Newfoundland, remain stuck in this first task and begin to

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<sup>56</sup> See Amartya Sen, *Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Identity* (2006); James Fearon and David Laitin, “Violence and the Social Construction of Ethnic Identity” (2000); Kimberle Crenshaw, “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color” (1991); Nancy Fraser, “Social Justice in the Age of Identity Politics: Redistribution, Recognition, and Participation” (1996).

defend that identity as if it were under siege, reifying it instead of moving on altogether to the second task of a struggle for liberation from these co-opted notions of Newfoundland identity. In addition to offering specific readings and arguments of forms of resistance in Newfoundland novels, a second goal of this dissertation is to offer this perspective on identity politics in the criticism of Newfoundland literature. Theories of resistance and dissident perspectives allow for an analysis of Newfoundland novels in terms of the ways these identity politics are played out, and this model subsequently allows for evaluative claims about whether that resistance is progressive, revolutionary, reactionary, or otherwise. Although the question of cultural identity is revisited at times throughout the main body chapters of this dissertation – mostly in relation to the secondary criticism I draw on in discussion of specific novels – it is in the concluding chapter that I return to this issue and make further substantial comment on Newfoundland identity politics and resistance.

## **Chapter Outline**

Along with the Introduction, this dissertation has four body chapters and a conclusion. Chapter 1, “Mummers and the Making of Indebted Newfoundland in Michael Crummey’s *Galore*,” examines the novels of Michael Crummey, and specifically his book *Galore*. *Galore* represents an undercurrent of resistance to a class-based hierarchical society, in that the characters’ lives play out in the way money changes hands, in the way labour is done, and according to social class. The central moment of resistance animating my analysis of the text is when a band of mummers mutilates the local merchant as a way to settle a score with the community’s patriarch. Crummey’s text presents class as being determined by one’s family and social standing at birth, and the society in which his characters find themselves is not an upwardly mobile meritocracy. Class and other forms of hierarchy are also expressed and reinforced through violent acts

perpetrated on, and by, the characters, such as confinement, branding, and mutilation. These acts of direct violence are offset by other forms of indirect structural violence, most notably in the form of debt. Such debts are often economic; however, my analysis of Crummey's novel also examines the way social debts function within the fictional communities of Paradise Deep and the Gut. Individual characters are ostracized (Judah, for example), but also entire families and communities may be marginalized for not conforming to social, cultural, and economic norms, and especially for not paying their various debts. Resistance in the novel is at times strikingly obvious, such as when the band of mummers mutilate the local merchant. However, resistance also takes more subtle, everyday forms. The common people and the poor families represented in *Galore* rely on many collectivist and communistic forms of exchange for survival, and if not for the presence of mercantilist, church, and statist elements dominating the political order, there would exist something like a functioning communism. Some of the critical engagements with Crummey's work I discuss in this chapter include a section from Herb Wylie's *Anne of Tim Hortons: Globalization and the Reshaping of Atlantic-Canadian Literature* (2011), as well as Cynthia Sugars's "Genetic Phantoms: Geography, History, and Ancestral Inheritance in Kenneth Harvey's *The Town That Forgot How to Breathe* and Michael Crummey's *Galore*" (2010), which critiques the novel from the perspective of its multigenerational look at family in outpost communities.

Chapter 2, "Revolt and Reaction in Wayne Johnston's *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams*," examines fiction by Wayne Johnston and specifically focuses on his best-known novel, *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams*. Johnston's *Colony* depicts an anti-government riot, a scene which is based on a historical riot that took place in St. John's in 1932 and precipitated the collapse of the government. Johnston is unkind in his representation of street protest and popular

expressions of discontent, framing the riot as the actions of a chaotic, unorganized rabble. However, from an anarchist perspective, this riot (and indeed a number of seemingly inconsequential events in the novel) can be understood as a people's resistance to state oppression and unremitting exploitation. Both of Johnston's central characters, Smallwood and Fielding, take cynical and reactionary positions with respect to the riot, and in a broader sense the novel is entirely reactionary in the way it depicts the common people of Newfoundland. I rely on Hardt and Negri's trilogy of books, *Empire* (2000), *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (2004), and *Commonwealth* (2009), in order to build a theoretical framework for this chapter, and specifically their discussion of the "multitude," which is a reformulation or critique of "the people," as this concept is deployed in liberal-humanist thought. I also employ crowd theory to help interpret the riot and the supposed irrationality of the mob. There is a fair amount of scholarly criticism on Johnston's *Colony*, much of which is centred on the question of the accuracy of the novel's representation of historical Newfoundland and the way the text's metafictional elements deconstruct and reimagine that history. Along with discussion in Chafe's dissertation, some further examples of critical work on Johnston's text are Stan Dragland's "*The Colony of Unrequited Dreams: Romancing History?*" (2004), Stuart Pierson's "Johnston's Smallwood" (1998), and Alexander MacLeod's "History versus Geography in Wayne Johnston's *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams*" (2006).

Chapter 3, "Anatomy of a Standoff in Edward Riche's *Rare Birds*," takes up a critique of novels by Edward Riche, and specifically his novel *Rare Birds*. *Rare Birds* is a satirical novel that skewers the pretensions of bourgeois Newfoundland culture. The character Phonse is a prototypical libertarian who resists domination by the state and encourages his neighbour, Dave the restaurant owner, to not play by the system's rules. Phonse's version of resistance is

expressed in the novel, at first, through the duck hoax the two characters pull off in order to generate business for the restaurant. However, the specific moment of resistance I focus on in *Rare Birds* is a standoff with agents of the Canadian government. I theorize the standoff in relation to theories of right-wing libertarianism and through reference to standoffs that have occurred involving members of right-wing or reactionary groups, such as the Freemen-on-the-land, the militia movement, and the Christian Identity movement. Although it must be said that a good deal of my dissertation is situated within leftist and radical streams of theory, in this chapter I specifically work through and attempt to understand conservative tendencies in Newfoundland culture. Indeed, resistance is not the exclusive domain of the left, and Riche's novel offers a number of important insights on right-wing resistance that contribute to a fuller understanding of resistance in Newfoundland culture. Along with a number of review essays, I make reference to secondary criticism of *Rare Birds* including Wyile's *Anne of Tim Hortons* and Chafe's PhD dissertation.

Chapter 4, "Lisa Moore's *Alligator*: Sabotage and Consumer Capitalism," examines the novels of Lisa Moore, and specifically Moore's first novel, *Alligator*. The Newfoundland found in *Alligator* is flush with money. The text depicts contemporary, cosmopolitan St. John's as a city experiencing an economic boom. But along with presenting wealth and opulence, the novel functions to highlight those who are victimized by capitalist systems of production and control. In *Alligator*, the most obvious victim is Frank the hotdog salesman, but all of the characters manifest pathologies of capitalist culture. In each case, vices including consumerism, kleptomania, or drug use prove to be their undoing. Moore's critique of capitalist exploitation in *Alligator* is scathing, and the novel, through its form and not just its content, is a clear expression of overt resistance in Newfoundland fiction. In this chapter I theorize resistance through a

discourse on consumer capitalism and eco-anarchism. The central moment of resistance I focus on is when the character Colleen sabotages bulldozers as a form of ecologically-oriented protest. There are, however, a number of smaller, everyday examples of resistance in Moore's novel as well, and most all the characters, even as they are damaged and made abject, find ways to resist an all-encompassing capitalist system of production, consumption, and control. Moore's *Alligator* has been fairly well represented in scholarly criticism, and in this chapter I draw from a number of critical engagements with her work. Will Smith's dissertation *Re-Placing Regionalisms: Atlantic Canada in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Narratives* (2007) discusses branding and other aspects of capitalist culture as it plays out in the text, while Tracy Whelan's "An Aesthetics of Intensity: Lisa Moore's Sublime Worlds" (2008) carries out a textual analysis of the novel from the perspective of hyper-reality, accentuating Moore's uncanny knack of focusing readers' attention on minute detail in order to intensify the effect and impact of the narrative.

The concluding chapter of the dissertation, "Liberated Newfoundland Literature," is a consolidation of the criticism carried out in the study. I draw on Amitav Ghosh's *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable* (2016), specifically the way Ghosh calls into question the novel as an inherently dissident form. I pick up the thread of Ghosh's argument and suggest that my own study complements, complicates, and expands his own through readings of resistance. This chapter also posits the possibility of liberation from identity politics, specifically in relation to theoretical work by Hardt and Negri in *Multitude* and *Commonwealth*. This working through Newfoundland identity politics is not in any sense definitive and does not declare the existence of a utopian Newfoundland free of domination. Instead, the study concludes as a call to action and as a plea for critical vigilance in relation to seemingly innocent constructions of Newfoundland as place and subjectivity.

## Chapter 1

### Mummers and the Making of Indebted Newfoundland in Michael Crummey's *Galore*

Under suppression, mummers no longer paraded aggressively into upper-class homes, and generally abandoned overtly violent attempts at social retribution. The whole tradition became safer and more careful.

–Chris Brookes, *A Public Nuisance: A History of the Mummers Troupe*

Debt harnesses and exercises the power of destruction/creation, the power of choice and decision.

–Maurizio Lazzarato, *The Making of the Indebted Man*

At the centre of Michael Crummey's *Galore* is a striking scene of vigilante justice, a moment of resistance that opens up a reading of the novel. A band of mummers sets upon the local merchant and cuts off his ears with a fish-gutting knife. The mummers at first request a drink of rum from the merchant, Levi Sellers, but when he ignores their request they instead ask for salt pork, or tea, or some flour (214). In the Newfoundland mummering tradition, it is highly unusual for mummers to ask for foodstuffs in this way, as typically it is only alcohol they desire as a way to spread Christmas cheer. However, this request for basic staples like pork and flour and tea is being made in the context of a particularly difficult year for the common people of the twinned villages of Paradise Deep and the Gut, the names Crummey has given to the fictional towns that make up the community in his novel. Although the local fishing families have produced about as much fish as ever, they are at the mercy of the merchant with respect to the price they are given, both for their fish and for the goods they have bought on credit. The merchant, Levi Sellers, has a particular dislike for one family in the community, the Devines, even though (but also partially

because) the Sellers and the Devines have interweaving family trees. And, indeed, it is a group of the Devine men who exact vigilante justice on Levi Sellers: “He’s ears do not work proper,” one mummer says to the others. “Perhaps you needs a operation, Master Sellers. Perhaps we’ll have to fix ’em up for you” (214).<sup>57</sup>

The merchant’s ears are sliced off to settle accounts, and the group of mummers are the agents of violent retribution. Although the merchant house in the village of Paradise Deep is the centre of economic life and holds the ledger of credits and debts for all the fishing families, there is another sort of accounting in the community that is not about economics in a formal sense of dollars and cents and money changing hands. The society is maintained by a social contract structured by the various debts the people owe to one another, a kind of moral and ethical ledger requiring care for others in the community. Since Levi Sellers has left the Devines to suffer and go hungry as a kind of vendetta, the family is well within its rights, according to this contract, to attempt to extract justice. And since the merchant is also the local magistrate, it is useless for the Devines to appeal to legal authority. The only resistance available is through extra-judicial methods like vigilantism.<sup>58</sup> Crummey’s *Galore* is, in this sense, an immediately recognizable story of oppression and domination in historical Newfoundland: that of the merchant’s dominion over the outport fishing community. At the same time, *Galore* is also a prototypical story of

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<sup>57</sup> Crummey may have found inspiration for this scene in a historical incident that took place on the road between the towns of Carbonear and Harbour Grace in the 1830s, when a political journalist, Henry Winton, had his ears mutilated. See Sean Cadigan, *Newfoundland and Labrador: A History*, 115.

<sup>58</sup> The *Encyclopedia of Victimology and Crime Prevention* (2010) suggests that vigilantism is when “individuals, or more commonly, groups, will work ‘outside the law’ and prescribed institutions to achieve justice and/or stability” (n.p.). In his article “What Is Vigilantism?” (1996), Les Johnston offers an in-depth analysis of vigilantism, arguing that it has six necessary characteristics: “(i) it involves planning and premeditation by those engaging in it; (ii) its participants are private citizens whose engagement is voluntary; (iii) it is a form of ‘autonomous citizenship’ and, as such, constitutes a social movement; (iv) it uses or threatens the use of force; (v) it arises when an established order is under threat from the transgression, the potential transgression, or the imputed transgression of institutionalized norms; (vi) it aims to control crime or other social infractions by offering assurances (or ‘guarantees’) of security both to participants and to others” (220). See also R. G. Abrahams *Vigilant Citizens: Vigilantism and the State* (1998).



resistance in Newfoundland in the way that the mummers, as figures from Newfoundland folklore, are presented as an extra-judicial means of levelling the playing field, settling a debt, and resisting forces of domination and authority. Although not all the representations of mummers in the novel are explicitly associated with violence, and more often the tradition is set as a lighthearted social event, mummering is always a challenge to various structures of power.

There are a number of examples of vigilantism in *Galore*, not all of which are explicitly to do with settling debts and not all of which are to do with mummers. Nonetheless, all these acts of vigilantism occur as a form of resistance against, or sometimes in order to maintain, systems of authority and domination. The political economy and social structures of the fictional community in the novel depend on a set of rules that everyone must adhere to, regardless of social class, ethnicity, or gender. Even though these rules are often unspoken, they are enforced in many ways, and in those instances where the rules are broken, the community has at its disposal a number of remedies, sometimes legal or economic, sometimes through folk traditions or other informal social institutions. However, the political economy and set of social conventions presented in *Galore* are not static, and the novel traces several subtle shifts with respect to methods of authority and control. To be clear, the novel is not presenting a narrative of overcoming domination and authority; some of the forms of domination, such as patriarchy, remain constant throughout the roughly hundred-year time frame. But no matter the kind of system of power and authority presented in the narrative, there is always some form of resistance. Most importantly, the common people resist the merchant and a system of debt and hierarchy; democratic forces resist paternalism and patronage; union forces resist mercantilism

and the truck system.<sup>59</sup> Resistance, in each of these cases, is successful to some extent, and the novel does track some changes with respect to the structures of power and authority in the communities.

Even though there are various examples of resistance to systems of power and authority, the novel ends on an extremely pessimistic note with respect to the possibility of progressive change. In the final sections of the narrative, the Fishermen's Protective Union (FPU) (a fishing labour union) has organized the workers of the communities of Paradise Deep and the Gut, and one of the Devine men has become a local politician and Member of the House of Assembly for Newfoundland, which seemingly means the community has escaped the tyranny of merchant families like the Sellers. However, the working people of the community quickly realize the union and their new democratic political representation are no better equipped to stem corruption and exploitation; even though the system of power has somewhat changed, the new masters are no better than the old masters, and, indeed, the old masters in many ways remain entrenched within the power structure. Crummey's novel contains an underlying pessimism regarding the possibility of progressive change and the efficacy of resistance. Such pessimism is embodied in the overall structure of the text, which is based on the biblical story of Jonah and the whale, a story of a man sacrificing himself to pay a debt, and is also evident in the way the narrative is structured around the subtle shifts and reconfiguration of the dominant political economy.

While my own reading of *Galore* is concerned with the way it represents resistance in its form and content, other critics have examined the novel as a historical lament and with respect to the way it both affirms and troubles Newfoundland identity. There is a good deal of scholarly

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<sup>59</sup> A truck system is an economic order in which workers receive commodities, rather than wages, in exchange for labour or product. In the case of historical outport Newfoundland fisheries, the truck system was one in which fishing families were given food and other provisions in exchange for fish.

engagement with Crummey's writing, much of it focused on the author's earlier poetry and novelistic writing, notably one of his books of poetry, *Hard Light* (1998), and the historical novel *River Thieves* (2001). Crummey's most recent novel, *Sweetland* (2014), which is set in the contemporary day and is thus something of a departure from his other historically oriented novelistic writing, entrenches his position as one of Newfoundland's pre-eminent writers. For some scholars, such as Herb Wyile in his *Anne of Tim Hortons*, Crummey's writing is "permeated by a sense of loss, a loss grounded in both the history of the province and in the history of Crummey's own family" (186). Wyile takes up an analysis from a perspective on settler-colonialism to understand this sense of loss, arguing that while Crummey "is conscious that he is writing at a time when Newfoundland is at a kind of threshold" in reconciling the sometimes brutal history of colonialism and pervasive settler-colonial mentality in the contemporary day, he also "troubles the very authority of that culture [Newfoundland culture] and thus the tendency to nostalgically celebrate its passing" (196). Wyile is focused especially on Crummey's novel *River Thieves* and the way it works through the trauma of the apparent eradication of the Indigenous Beothuk.<sup>60</sup> However, his comments on Crummey's re-evaluation of the past and of the troubled nature of the authority of Newfoundland culture itself are prescient for my study.<sup>61</sup> Indeed, this notion of re-evaluation and of troubling the past is evident

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<sup>60</sup> Mary Dalton has examined the way the Beothuk are represented as a trope in the literature and poetry of Newfoundland in her essay "Shadow Indians: The Beothuk Motif in Newfoundland Literature" (1992). See also Cynthia Sugars, "Original Sin, or, The Last of the First Ancestors: Michael Crummey's *River Thieves*" (2005).

<sup>61</sup> For a study on historical fiction in Canadian literature, see Wyile's (ed.) *Speaking in the Past Tense: Canadian Novelists on Writing Historical Fiction* (2006) and Andrea Cabajsky and Brett Josef Grubisic's (eds.) *National Plots: Historical Fiction and Changing Ideas of Canada* (2010). I discuss theoretical approaches to historical fiction at greater length in Chapter 2. My reading of *Galore*, though working with an awareness of the novel as a work of historical fiction, does not deploy a theoretical framework based in historical fiction, as I do in my reading of *Colony*.

in *Galore* as well, and furthermore intersects with my own project of working through Newfoundland cultural identity, an argument which I develop in greater detail in the concluding chapter on “Liberated Newfoundland Literature.”

Cynthia Sugars, in her article “Genetic Phantoms: Geography, History, and Ancestral Inheritance in Kenneth Harvey’s *The Town That Forgot How to Breathe* and Michael Crummey’s *Galore*” (2010), takes a similar position on Crummey’s construction of Newfoundland identity as Wyile. Sugars is interested in the way *Galore* represents a geo-historically determined version of Newfoundland identity through the way it posits an inherited ancestral unconsciousness, such that the land and the past are woven into the characters’ subjectivities. At the same time, Sugars does not see this constructed Newfoundland identity as monolithic, and she argues that part of Crummey’s project in *Galore* is to frustrate such notions. She suggests that in *Galore* Crummey is at once “affirming and unsettling” Newfoundland identity, “since to conjure the ghost of inheritance is both to fix and ‘unhinge’ the individual’s self-presence as a modern-day Newfoundlander” (12). As part of her analysis, Sugars is also interested in the way *Galore*, with its elements of magic realism, evokes Newfoundland legend and creates an aura of fantasy – such as through curses and wards, and notably through the mystic character of Judah. However, she further argues that Crummey approaches the appropriation of such legend and the romanticism of the past with skepticism, since he is aware of the “potential conservatism that motivates his desire” to use such materials (24). While Crummey draws on notions of a distinct Newfoundland cultural identity founded in a shared historical and geographical experience, he recognizes such constructions as “transitory and dependent on an unsupportable investment in discourses of determinism” (32). In this regard,

Sugars, like Wyle, is positioning Crummey's writing as at once invested in but also resistant to fixed notions of Newfoundland cultural identity.

Samuel Martin's PhD dissertation, *Bleached Bones Rattling: Reviving the Art of Sacramental Reading* (2012), examines Crummey's *Galore* with respect to its many Christian and pagan elements. Martin argues that *Galore* is "more than a historical lament or an imaginative recovery of something irretrievably lost," but that it is a novelistic act of "re-imagination in which old wounds between warring factions—Catholic and Protestant, Irish and English, the Devines of the Gut and the Sellers of Paradise Deep—are inflicted and healed . . . in a mythic retelling of Newfoundland outport life" (245). Sectarianism is a source of contention, but specific characters and incidents in the novel highlight, for Martin, the way "different worlds in *Galore* are 'twined' and deep divisions fused into supple scars" (255). In the end, Martin sees *Galore* as a novel of redemption, though not in any absolute sense, since we, as readers, "learn through the generations of betrayal and prophecy, lust and love, what it means to be both holy and unholy, that is to say, more fully human" (275). My own reading departs from Martin's more optimistic take on redemption, since, I argue, the novel is inherently pessimistic. Nonetheless, Martin's nuanced analysis of the way spirituality and sectarianism function in the novel is a touchstone for my own comments on religious aspects of *Galore* below.

Terry Goldie's "Is *Galore* 'Our' Story?" is a further work of literary criticism on Crummey's novel. Goldie is interested in the mythic qualities of *Galore*, specifically the famous stories underpinning the novel, such as that of Jonah and the whale as well as the way Crummey weaves a number of heroic Newfoundlanders into the tale. He suggests that *Galore* is an "incessant Newfoundland story, of the Rock and the sea" (95). Goldie also makes an argument for *Galore* as a kind of foundational myth of Newfoundland, one that casts the European settlers

to the island as its native inhabitants, in the absence of an Indigenous population. Crummey had explored aspects of the question of Indigeneity in his earlier novel *River Thieves*, and Goldie subtly suggests this earlier work was taken by Crummey as a licence to move on to tell a story of the new Newfoundland natives. “To erase the Beothuk completely from a historical novel, even a mythical history, might seem extreme,” Goldie says, but perhaps “the imperative is far less historical fact than the necessity of what the story must tell. The Newfoundlanders must belong to this land, must be as though indigenous” (94). Goldie’s criticism is, in this regard, a welcome reminder that even as *Galore* does not represent any Beothuk or other Indigenous peoples of Newfoundland, that absence is still a kind of presence, and significantly so.

In the remainder of this chapter I examine, first of all, the incident of resistance and vigilante justice enacted by the band of mummers on the merchant, and also a number of other significant scenes in the novel involving mummers. I discuss the way mummers are, in *Galore*, figures of resistance but also the way the mummering tradition has a conservative impulse. Working from this initial analysis of an overt act of resistance, I then describe the way debt functions in the novel. Debt precipitates conflict, such as the act of vigilantism, and also structures the social contract in the community, and the act of vigilantism by the mummers is rooted in a conflict over debts. I examine debt in *Galore* with respect to economic, social, and political formulations. I draw on theoretical writing on debt by, among others, David Graeber and Margaret Atwood to elucidate my argument that debt conditions economic, social, and political relations in *Galore*.

## Mummers as Subversive, Mummers as Social Control

Mumming (or mumming as it is sometimes called) is a Newfoundland tradition that arguably has its roots in the sword dancing and masking folk traditions of Britain, Ireland, and other European countries, as is suggested in the seminal edited collection on the Newfoundland mumming tradition by Herbert Halpert and G. M. Story, *Christmas Mumming in Newfoundland: Essays in Anthropology, Folklore, and History* (1969).<sup>62</sup> In its basic elements, Newfoundland mumming involves people of a community, men, women, and children alike, dressing up in costumes and donning masks, then visiting houses throughout the community begging (or demanding) alcohol. The tradition is generally practised over the Christmas season. The mummers' costumes are often made up of readily available clothes, sometimes borrowed from family or friends, and masks that can be specially made or simply fashioned from empty flour sacks or pillow cases. Mummers may wear clothing inside out or backwards, and males and females often dress as the opposite sex. At each house the mummers visit, the hosts attempt to guess who is who, despite their disguises. The tradition has a colourful history in Newfoundland, with many variations on costume, manner, and other formal and informal aspects of the performative nature of mumming recorded throughout the island.<sup>63</sup>

From the outset, it needs to be said that the most obvious function of historical mumming activities in a Newfoundland community was as a fun and lighthearted folk

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<sup>62</sup> For various uses of “mumming” and “mumming” in the Newfoundland tradition, see J. D. A. Widdowson, “Mumming and Janneying: Some Explanatory Notes,” in Halpert and Story’s *Christmas Mumming in Newfoundland*. Widdowson notes that both terms are used in the Newfoundland context, but that “mumming” is the most common. The term “mumming” is preferred in this chapter.

<sup>63</sup> See, J. D. A. Widdowson and Herbert Halpert, “The Disguises of Newfoundland Mummers,” in *Christmas Mumming in Newfoundland*, 145-64. For an overview of the development of scholarship on Newfoundland mumming by Halpert and others at Memorial University, see Jeff Webb, *Observing the Outposts: Describing Newfoundland Culture, 1950-1980* (2016).

tradition, and those who participated in mummering mainly did so in order to spread Christmas cheer. Even though the behaviour of mummers was sometimes boisterous and aggressive, including some pushing and shoving, or grabbing men and women in an overt and usually inexcusable sexual manner, many of the folklorists and anthropologists who have studied the tradition indicate that such violence was mostly performative. For example, Craig T. Palmer in his essay “Mummers and Real Strangers: The Effect of Diminished Isolation on Newfoundland Christmas House Visiting” (1992), suggests that “it is the recognition of the difference between actual aggression and playful aggressive-*like* behaviour that promotes trusting cooperative relationships between those participating in mumming” (127). For Palmer, any “real anger and violence are seen as completely distinct from the playful violence traditionally associated with mumming,” the primary function of which was to promote social cohesion (127). Other studies, such as Melvin M. Firestone’s “Mummers and Strangers in Northern Newfoundland” (1969), likewise suggest the tradition was important for social cohesion, though Firestone has a somewhat different perspective on the performative violence of mummering. He suggests that while the tradition does have lighthearted aspects, it was also a somewhat disturbing or unnerving experience to be visited by mummers, and that their aggressiveness offered an opportunity to “displace generally acquired hostility” onto the figure of the mummer (75). Firestone argues that such displacement of hostility was a kind of release valve for grudges or hurt feelings that might otherwise disrupt the harmony of a community.

Furthermore, historians have noted that in the context of isolated outport Newfoundland communities, which remained the primary pattern of settlement on the island until the second half of the twentieth century, folk traditions such as mummering can be understood as stand-ins for more formal social institutions. For example, outport communities seldom had any sort of



state representatives in the form of police, judges, or politicians, and so informal social institutions and even folk traditions were thus quite important for maintaining social cohesion. In his essay “Newfoundland: Fishermen, Hunters, Planters, and Merchants” (1969), his introductory essay for the collection *Christmas Mumming in Newfoundland*, G. M. Story notes,

Throughout most of their history these villages existed without many of the institutions which, in other parts of the overseas English-speaking-world, shaped the development of organized societies. Their “laws” were those of a different pattern of custom, unenforced by magistrate, constable, or town council and with their own rationale for the maintenance of harmony within the community. (33)

Indeed, it is this aspect of mummering as an informal social institution, a means of maintaining harmony and at times for settling scores, which is of interest in this present discussion of mummering in Crummey’s *Galore*.<sup>64</sup>

Crummey describes the tradition just as one would expect, first of all, stating that “the nights were ruled by bands of mummers roaming from house to house in the dark, five or six to a group and all dressed in outlandish disguises, brin sacks and old dresses or aprons, coats worn backwards and legs through the arms of shirts” (41). Furthermore, Crummey also highlights that the mummers were “aggressive and rude, they were outlandishly genderless and felt free to grab the ass of man or woman for a laugh” (41). But Crummey is also attuned to the mummering tradition as an informal

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<sup>64</sup> Mummering is represented in a number of Newfoundland texts, including plays, reports, government documents, biographies, periodicals, and other sources, some of which are catalogued in the “Select Bibliography” in *Christmas Mumming in Newfoundland*. A further literary representation is a scene in Johnston’s memoir *Baltimore’s Mansion*, which touches on many of the aspects of the tradition described here.

social regulator, something that is especially pronounced in a mummer character he calls Horse Chops:

Horse Chops was a seer who could answer any question put to him . . . a man covered in a blanket, a wooden horse's head on a stick before him. The eyes were painted . . . [it had] nails for teeth. . . . No subject was too lewd or personal, no question was taboo. Secret love and affairs, unpaid debts, illegitimate children, ongoing family arguments, sins buried and unconfessed, all were fair game. (42)

Firestone, among others, refers to a Horse Chops-like character in traditional mummering, which he describes as a “frightening mask in the shape of a horse's head with a movable jaw controlled by a string. The jaws contain teeth of nails” (66). As the character is developed in *Galore*, it functions at one point to attempt to dissuade Mary Tryphena Devine and Absalom Sellers from their burgeoning adolescent desires for one another, the two being cousins. Horse Chops, along with the larger band of mummers, first visits the Devine household and then the Sellers household, with the “King mummer” asking questions of the horse head who claps his jaws once or twice to answer yes or no (42-46). In this manner, the mummers are able to convey to the two youth that their secret love is in fact now public knowledge, and also to let them know, in a way that preserves the anonymity of the adults carrying out the ruse, that their incestuous relationship is outside the bounds of what is socially acceptable. Even though the Devine and Sellers families are not on good terms, the informal social control exercised through the mummering tradition is acceptable to all (except perhaps the two youth).

Later in the novel, the Horse Chops and King mummer characters make another appearance, and once again carry out the charade of exposing or censuring forbidden love, this time a homosexual relationship between Eli Devine and Tryphie Newman. It is on the occasion

of Tryphie's marriage to Minnie, a young woman from the community, that the band of mummers enters the community hall. Once Eli recognizes that the mummers intend to pay any attention to him, he "bolted for the door but a handful of mummers fell on him, dragging him back to a chair set in the center of the hall, the crowd urging them on" (245). They announce that they will discover who it is that Eli is in love with, and Horse Chops and the King proceed to point at a number of single young women in the crowd, each time indicating no, that none of them are Eli's secret love. The King finally comes to a stop "directly behind the groom," but before they can formally expose the affair "Eli was out of his chair and aboard the King before another word was spoken, hammering at the man's head with a fist" (246). As with the example of the mummers exposing the incestuous desires of Mary Tryphena Devine and Absalom Sellers, in this example the social function enacted by the mummers is likewise to enforce a taboo, this time against homosexuality. In this example, mummering as a force of social control is shown to be a conservative impulse, and in light of the fact that Tryphie is getting married into a heterosexual relationship it is unclear whether the actions of the mummers are at all necessary with respect to the community values they are trying to uphold. Nonetheless, if their intention is to expose Eli to public humiliation and to dissuade him from any further homosexual relationships, then they are initially successful, as he forms a relationship with a young woman whom he eventually marries.

Crummey at times also presents the mummers as a force of ostracism in the community. At one point the mummers purposely avoid the house of Martin Gallery, who is an abusive, distrustful husband and a notoriously violent drunk, and so the "mummers passed by without calling on the house in the droke that Christmas" (105). On the one hand, the mummers simply do not want to spend time in the company of such a disagreeable man, whose irrational suspicion

of his wife's infidelity means that he distrusts his neighbours even when they are not in disguise. On the other hand, the mummers exclude Gallery from the festivities as a less-than-subtle hint that he should reform his abusive ways. There is also an informative scene in which a mummer is himself ostracized upon being recognized in the houses he visits. The character Father Phelan has been disavowed by the Church but decides to stay in the community, and at Christmas he dresses up as a mummer and visits houses for drinks: "he walked from house to house, taking drink and food and offering a few moments of foolishness before he was recognized and his hosts turned their backs or left the room altogether" (132). In this example, the mummering tradition is being taken advantage of by someone the community is attempting to purge, and after this experience of being ostracized Father Phelan leaves the parish for good.

While the mummers in *Galore* are at times presented as forces of order or social control, they are also at times presented as vigilante characters, and, indeed, as figures of resistance. The clearest example of this is the scene in which some of the Devine men, disguised as mummers, attack and mutilate Levi Sellers, as described above. In this sense, mummering violence and vigilantism is a recourse when grievances cannot be addressed through formal institutions of law and justice. This notion of violence and mummering is something that is somewhat marginalized in contemporary Newfoundland, when mummering has become in many ways a commodified cultural practice.<sup>65</sup> Nonetheless, violence and mummering has been studied and documented by a number of scholars. The most famous historical example of mummering violence in Newfoundland was a murder perpetrated by a band of mummers in the mid-1800s, as recounted by G. M. Story in "Mummers in Newfoundland History" (1969):

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<sup>65</sup> Some examples of present-day commodification of the mummering tradition include the annual Mummers Parade in St. John's, as well as the mass-produced ornaments, trinkets, calendars, and other kitsch representations of mummers sold throughout the province and to the Newfoundland diaspora.

A Protestant named Isaac Mercer was murdered, supposedly by Roman Catholic mummerns, and the incident was followed by rioting. The disturbances spread to other Conception Bay towns and the widespread turbulence, exacerbated by denominational rivalry and a failure of the fisheries, continued for some time.

(178)

The phenomenon of mummering violence has been studied in detail by Joy Fraser, who reviewed court documents and police reports in the Provincial Archives, as described in her article “Mummerns on Trial: Mummerng, Violence and the Law in Conception Bay and St. John’s, Newfoundland, 1831-1863” (2009). Fraser is interested in the folk tradition itself, but she is also primarily working with empirical data and not the more typical sorts of field data collected by folklorists and anthropologists, such as narratives solicited from informants in contemporary Newfoundland communities. Based on the document evidence, Fraser suggests that the majority of violent incidents involving mummerns happened in urban areas, where the house-visiting aspect of mummering was less common but where the mummerns parade was the general practice.<sup>66</sup> In the larger urban centres of Harbour Grace and St. John’s, a number of small groups of mummerns would join together and march through the community, often drinking in public and generally being rowdy. In the witness statements of the cases Fraser has examined, “the mummerns are almost always described as carrying some combination of hatchets, sticks, ropes and whips, all of which clearly have the capacity to serve as aggressive weapons” (80). And with respect to cases where there were reports of violent actions of mummerns, she notes that “of this

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<sup>66</sup> Fraser is making this claim based on the documents available, though mummering violence in rural and outport Newfoundland may well have happened just as it did in urban centres, but without being reported or brought to light through the formal legal system. Lack of documented evidence is not necessarily evidence that outport mummering was more or less violent or peaceful than urban mummering.

total of twenty cases, sixteen are so far known to have been brought to trial, of which nine involved charges of assault and battery, and one – the Isaac Mercer case – a charge of murder” (77). Fraser goes on to note that social class, ethnic, and sectarian conflicts are factors in some of the documented cases, but she also cautions against “making sweeping generalizations such as that *all* violent incidents involving mummers” were directly related to these factors (82). This caution against sweeping generalizations is an important one, as it is tempting, from the perspective of mummering and resistance studies, to frame the tradition as entirely to do with resistance to class-based oppression. However, as it was a tradition infused with binge drinking and with public anonymity through masking, both of which can be considered as affecting the willingness of participants to adhere to typical social conventions and enact good judgment, the violence associated with mummering had a certain randomness.

While taking Fraser’s argument into account, Kelly Best offers a further compelling case for the way the tradition was sometimes an expression of protest and dissent in her article “‘Making Cool Things Hot Again’: Blackface and Newfoundland Mummering” (2008). Best documents the mummering tradition in relation to ethnic- and class-based resistance and protest, looking at the way the mummering tradition drew on, and was informed by, the racialized blackface performances in working-class American theatre. Her paper documents numerous instances of blackface in the mummering tradition, from the early decades of the 1800s up until the 1960s. Ocean traffic and commerce on the seas made Newfoundland a site of confluence for the largely Atlantic-European mummering tradition and the largely East Coast American origins of blackface. Speaking of particular instances of mummering in the early-1800s, Best suggests “they were less a celebration of a calendar custom than they were an opportunity for public protest,” and generally an opportunity for protest for the burgeoning Irish Catholic population

that found itself at odds with the English Protestant political establishment (232). Best then looks at the way the tradition evolved in the 1900s, noting that even as mummering may have been less explicitly about political protest, it still consistently contained a racialized element of blackness. Perceived threats to the community, such as witchcraft, Satanism, or any threatening outside forces, were often cast as expressions of blackness. Although none of Crummey's mummers in *Galore* are in blackface, the novel does have an important black character who is certainly ostracized and marginalized, Ralph Stone. He lives alone, away from the community, next to a pond that came to be known as Nigger Ralph's Pond, and there are some who thought "his blackness a sign of defilement or witchery and turned their backs at the sight of him" (84). Even after Ralph Stone dies, the name of the pond remains, and at one point Ann Hope Sellers, who is among the most progressive characters in the novel, remarks that the name is "a black mark on the shore" (151). Questioned why she thinks the name is problematic, Ann Hope Sellers replies, "You know what I mean" (151). The use of the word nigger in *Galore* is important to note, as is the novel's construction of blackness and the way that blackness is another form of ostracism. Indeed, ostracism in many forms is a consistent undercurrent of the novel, and this is part of the reason that the mummering tradition, whether in its violent or its more lighthearted expressions, is important as a means to both subvert and at times reinforce social conventions and taboo.

Even as the violence associated with the historical tradition of Newfoundland mummering was not always to do with resistance to oppression, and even as the participants in the tradition did not necessarily self-reflexively understand it as a political act, whether at those times it was an expression of violence or not, mummering is from another perspective quite clearly *always already* violent with respect to its relationship to authority. A practice such as mummering does not have to entail physical violence or obvious attacks against figures or

symbols of authority, such as would be the case in the incidents Fraser studies, for that practice to offer a challenge to existing structures of power. In *Galore*, for example, the mummers are not explicitly violent in a scene when they visit King-me Sellers, but they are nonetheless challenging his power and authority simply by enacting the tradition and by visiting his home:

King-me despised the mummers, who treated him as no one would dare without their disguise and the license granted by the tradition. He only let them in for fear of what they might do if he refused . . . he was frugal with the food and drink he offered. The mummers ensured they had plenty of snow on their shoes and clothes to leave a mess behind them, as a protest against King-me's lack of enthusiasm for their entertainment. (44)

In this example, there is no explicit violence, at least not the kind of violence the band of mummers later in the novel use against King-me's great-grandson Levi, but there is certainly a sense of a structural violence against the figure of traditional authority and power in the community. One could argue that such a challenge, even if offered on a symbolic level, is far more violent and threatening than a physical attack, at least from the perspective of a ruling class (the Sellers family in this case) whose interest is to preserve its power and right to rule.

However, when the band of mummers attacks and mutilates Levi Sellers, they justify any response he takes through the legal system, any corporal punishment he doles out, and in an odd sense such physical violence as is perpetrated by the vigilante mummers can potentially be seen to strengthen the position of the dominant order. This is precisely the fraught notion of resistance that is the central concern of this dissertation: resistance not only as acts of defiance, but sometimes as a necessary and sometimes even encouraged partner for the exercise of authority; resistance as the vitality and lifeblood of power. In the recorded history of Newfoundland



mumming, such as is described by Fraser and others, violent incidents like the murder of Isaac Mercer likewise justified the banning of the tradition, exacerbated sectarian tensions, and the ensuing rioting potentially provided a way for the state apparatus to strengthen its influence in the affected communities, since many people quite naturally could be expected to call on the authorities to do something to remedy the situation. Whether or not the authorities could do anything about the ongoing violence is less important than the fact that people turned to the government and security apparatus for security and order, and in doing so legitimized ongoing systems of domination and authority.

However, the symbolic violence associated with the mumming tradition needs to be understood in its own way; that is, as a tradition or cultural practice that subverts domination, even if temporarily, and thus shows the ephemeral nature of authority. Although it needs to be stressed that in its current form, much of the subversive quality of the tradition has been expelled or covered over in the interest of marketing a viable cultural product, the very form and style of mumming itself retains some of its subversive qualities. What we are seeing in the mumming tradition, in the dress and actions of the mummers, is an inversion of hierarchy and of the social norms of a community. Gender roles and their associated hierarchy, for example, are subverted, in that mummers are basically asexual or gender-benders, since men and boys will often dress in women's clothing and women and girls will often dress in men's clothing. And because it is a masked tradition and makes participants into anonymous "strangers," as Firestone and others put it, class, ethnic, or religious boundaries are dissolved into the unknowable mass of the costume and the mummer band. These sorts of social boundaries are also breeched in that mummers may enter physical spaces that would otherwise be off limits, such as the homes of elites or the homes of families of different classes, ethnicities, or religions. The way animal figures and other sorts of

nature-related tropes are expressed in mummering is arguably a challenge or an inversion of the exploitative resource-based economy, which views the world as simply a standing reserve of things to be extracted, manufactured, and consumed. Even the way mummers take up public space and engage in rambunctious activity is a subversion of norms and typical decorum that constrains people to certain types of acceptable behaviour. Again, in the present day any challenge of the dominant order offered by the mummering tradition is potentially blunted by the commodification of the tradition, yet it still remains, at least at the level of a performative rejection of social norms, an inherently subversive act.

Along with being inherently subversive, mummering is also a particular kind of act or demonstration or performance, one that is infused with mischief and play. In the same way it is important to note that the true violence of mummering is generally symbolic rather than physical, it is likewise important not to lose sight of the upsurge of playfulness or uninhibited joy that comes with the spirit of transgression embodied in the act. This jubilation in transgression is what Mikhail Bakhtin is pointing to in his notion of the carnival spirit, which he says “offers the chance to have a new outlook on the world, to realize the relative nature of all that exists, and to enter a completely new order of things” (34). This sense of carnival is easy to see in the mummering tradition, and other such carnivalesque upsurges (Mardi Gras, for example) echo the kind of subversion of power and authority the performative act of mummering contains. Perhaps what is most subversive about the act, once again, is not even that there are instances of physical violence associated with it, but that it is a kind of laughter at authority, poking fun at social hierarchy and at structures of power that outside the carnival must be taken seriously. Laughter, Bakhtin continues, has strength; it “overcomes fear, for it knows no inhibitions, no limitations” (56).

Mumming as a performative act of play and laughter is something that was quite purposefully revitalized in Newfoundland culture by a theatre group calling itself the Mummers Troupe. One of the central figures in the Troupe, Chris Brookes, wrote a book on the exploits of the group, appropriately titled *A Public Nuisance: A History of the Mummers Troupe*. The Troupe was most active in the 1970s, in the beginnings of what came to be called the Newfoundland renaissance, a time when artists and academics attempted to revitalize Newfoundland culture and make it something to be celebrated and considered worthy of scholarly attention. Indeed, it seems correct to say the Mummers Troupe was the vanguard of this movement, as the loose association of writers, actors, and academics involved in the theatre company laid the groundwork for subsequent theatre by CODCO, music by the Wonderful Grand Band, and for an explosion of literary writing that continues today. However, the plays and more broadly the theatrics of the Mummers Troupe were much more militant and radical in their artistic vision and views on cultural production than was the general tenor of the Newfoundland cultural revival it spurred into being.<sup>67</sup> Only a couple of the plays produced by the Troupe were explicitly to do with mumming, the best known of which is the *Traditional Newfoundland Christmas Mummers Play*, that was performed a number of times over a ten-year period between 1972 and 1981. But central to all the work produced by the Troupe was both the carnival spirit, as one would expect of good grassroots, agitprop drama, and the subversive counterpower and resistance that is a core quality of mumming. The Troupe stirred up

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<sup>67</sup> The theatrics of CODCO, and other literary and artistic productions of the time, certainly pushed the envelope with respect to subject matter, just as the Mummers Troupe did; however, part of the reason I claim the Troupe was more militant and radical is because of the way their plays were produced and staged. Often the Troupe would workshop the plays in working-class communities throughout the province, using the material provided by the people of the community for the script. The play was, then, an act of reflecting the experience of the community back to itself. A fuller account of the theory and practice of the Troupe is provided in Brookes's *A Public Nuisance*.

working-class discontent in Buchans, NL, during a mining strike, and prompted protests by residents of the community of Sally's Cove against the expansion of Gros Morne national park, among other such theatrical-political activities.<sup>68</sup> Brookes himself described the activities of the Troupe as agitprop, theatre which sets out to agitate and propagandize a political message, a term that is often applied by anarchists to the tactic of propaganda by the deed. This is just to say that the way in which the Troupe set about appropriating and revitalizing the mummering tradition was expressly political and subversive, tapping into the undercurrent of resistance in the folk tradition of mummering.

Brookes understands the history of the mummering tradition as implicitly tied to the development of class consciousness in Newfoundland, and he sees the banning of mummering in the 1800s as a cynical attempt by the merchant ruling class to suppress the subversive grassroots theatre of the common people (28-30). The Newfoundland elite saw mummering not only as entirely uncouth, but also a potential challenge to their authority, since even cheerful moments of laughter contained a sort of mockery that was always at their expense – this was the kind of playfulness and indifference to authority the Mummers Troupe sought to rehabilitate. Brookes also sees the mummering tradition as having a part in precipitating the union movement:

I'm not suggesting that mummering led directly to collective bargaining. But I *am* suggesting that it was far more than just a litmus paper of social unrest. As a vehicle of social change, the spontaneous anarchy of mummering was unorganized, and unlikely *in itself* to accomplish much. It was less the custom itself which the establishment considered dangerous than the encouragement

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<sup>68</sup> For accounts of the Troupe's political agitation in Newfoundland communities, see Brookes, "Gros Mourn – A Diary" and "Company Town – The Story of Buchans" in *A Public Nuisance*, 78-96, 111-27. See also Alan Filewod's "The Mummers Troupe, The Canada Council, and the Production of Theatre History" (1998).

which mummering contributed to working-class political organization. As class struggle in nineteenth-century Newfoundland took off the gloves, mummering represented a traditional vehicle for solidifying class consciousness, providing a cultural underpinning for primitive socialism. (28)

This perspective on mummering and class conflict borders on the sort of totalizing remarks that Fraser warned of; however, Brookes is speaking from his own view of mummering as a people's folk theatre tradition. He makes a compelling argument along these lines by noting that at the same time as the mummering tradition was banned, "the reins of the Newfoundland theatre began to be taken over by the higher echelons of city society," who encouraged a more formalized theatre by staging scripted plays and operettas (31). By banning mummering, Brookes suggests, the establishment "made sure that in future the Newfoundland theatre would stay safely behind a proscenium" (30). However, in *Galore*, and as will be discussed in greater detail below, Brookes's observations are prescient: that while historically the mummering tradition was officially suppressed, it laid the groundwork for forms of collective action and was then "supplanted by more effective forms of social action, such as industrial unionism" (30). A notable difference, as I argue below, is that while Brookes suggests industrial unionism was a more effective form of collective action, unionism is not presented as a more effective form of resistance than mummering in Crummey's *Galore*. This progression from informal folk institutions as forms of resistance to unionism is expressed in *Galore* through the development of the FPU, which attempts to break the stranglehold of the mercantilist economic order.

Finally, to understand Crummey's use of the mummering tradition in *Galore* it is important to consider some of the present-day representations of mummering in relation to the commodification and more generally to the construction of a supposedly distinct Newfoundland

cultural identity. Fraser notes the commodification of mummering when she makes her argument that the violence associated with urban mummering has been largely forgotten. She suggests that “the resurgence of Christmas mumming in Newfoundland [since the late 1970s and early 1980s] is largely based on a selective and idealised conceptualisation of the custom” (71). Other scholars have discussed the revival of the mummering tradition in relation to “cultural nativism” or an emergent Newfoundland nationalism, which was an important aspect of the cultural revival in Newfoundland and arguably has been encouraged by the provincial government (as noted in the introductory chapter and especially in the discussion of Ronald Rompkey’s analysis of government funding for the arts in Newfoundland). In his article “The Mummers Song in Newfoundland: Intellectuals, Revivalists and Cultural Nativism” (1988), Gerald Pocius understands cultural nativism, such as was expressed in the revival of the mummering tradition, as “an implicit agenda to document tradition, preserve a record of the past, and present this genuine material to the public. Such activities, then, will hopefully encourage the continuity and even revival of certain cultural practices” (79). Pocius further suggests that “mummering has become *the* collective identity symbol for Newfoundland’s nativistic movement” (76). Pocius argues that the nativist movement in Newfoundland was driven largely by the intellectual and artistic community, and that with regard to the revival of the mummering tradition this cultural elite was centred in the folklore and anthropology departments of Memorial University in St. John’s and in such theatre groups as the Mummers Troupe. The audience for the intellectuals and revivalists was a growing Newfoundland middle class, who were likewise mostly located in the provincial capital St. John’s and included those employed in an expanded public service, like teachers and government bureaucrats, as well as a growing number of small business owners and entrepreneurs:

Mumming for this middle class had become one of those nostalgic icons to be fondly remembered, to be sung about, and something that might even still go on in those mythical communities that many Newfoundlanders suspect exist somewhere – communities where all things old-fashioned are believed to still run rampant. This same middle class was often involved in the consumption of a Newfoundland culture that could be safely viewed as nostalgic fragments that mainly added colour to modern life. (Pocius 77)

And yet even as these folklorists and anthropologists “kindled an initial interest in mumming” and even as artists “like the Mummers Troupe brought this cultural form to the attention of a wider public,” Pocius is most interested in the way a song by a somewhat obscure band from small-town Newfoundland, a band called Simani, revived the custom “beyond all expectations” (80). This song, the “Mummers Song” (1984), which is immediately recognizable to Newfoundlanders young and old, continues to evoke nostalgic reflection every Christmas season. Pocius argues that the way mumming is described in the song, and furthermore the way the song is soaked in the traditional iconography of a supposedly distinct Newfoundland, has made the figure of the mummer, and the mumming tradition more broadly, the central symbol of the Newfoundland cultural renaissance.

The cultural production of the figure of the mummer has been a consistent part of Newfoundland visual art, perhaps best epitomized by the works of David Blackwood such as *Mummer Family at the Door* (1985) and *Fallen Mummer on Brookfield Marsh* (1996). In 2009 the provincial government, through the Heritage Foundation of Newfoundland and Labrador, funded an annual celebration called the Mummers Festival, one aspect of which is an annual parade in St. John’s. Along with this, over the last decades a number of local artisans began

producing mummer figurines and mummer ornaments for Christmas, which has since been turned into a booming trade of mass-produced mummers that are now made in factories in China. Mummers appear on T-shirts and calendars and drinking glasses, such is the extent to which the tradition has infused the Newfoundland cultural imagination. In this sense, it must be said that one obvious outcome of the revival of the tradition was its immediate and, over time, intensifying commodification.

Crummey, in the way he represents mummering in *Galore*, is participating in the playful and subversive aspect of the tradition, as it can be understood through the carnival spirit described by Bakhtin and also in the agitprop theatrics of the Mummers Troupe. Crummey's mummers are spreading Christmas cheer and are helping to bring the community together in the way they play and poke fun, yet at times they are explicitly violent and the author certainly does not shy away from aspects of the tradition that have been marginalized or covered over by some of the contemporary cultural productions of mummers. Along with this, Crummey's mummers are also agents of social control, resolving tensions in the community; this aspect of social control at times involves the maintenance of taboo and at times involves ostracism. But on the other hand, Crummey is also participating in the present-day commodification of the mummering tradition, in that mummers feature so prominently in *Galore*, a book that is a consumer product and Newfoundland cultural production. In this sense, Crummey is at once working against the sanitized and commodified mummers that have come out of the Newfoundland renaissance, but is also situated within and participating alongside the nativist and nationalist revival of the tradition. The point here is not to say what the author should or should not have done, and really there is no contemporary Newfoundland novel that consciously understands itself as Newfoundland literature that is not in some way participating in this same



commodification of tradition. Nonetheless, if there is to be a central figure in the Newfoundland cultural imaginary, even if that figure is a flawed and incomplete construction based on a folk tradition fraught with ambiguities and uncertainties, to have a mummer as that figure speaks to a certain strain of resistance in Newfoundland culture. A large part of the commodification of the mummering tradition has been the expulsion of the violent or subversive aspects, and so it seems that Crummey, through the way he has explicitly framed the mummers as being potentially violent and subversive, is further reimagining what mummers were or could be.

### **Debt in *Galore***

Just as mummering punctuates *Galore* in particularly potent ways, so too does the functioning of debt and the different ways people and communities resist the authority that arises from systems of debt. Debt, as I theorize it, is not only about economics, such as the monetary debts owed to the merchant house by the common people of Paradise Deep and the Gut. Debts also structure the interpersonal relationships between families and individuals, as well as the political life of the community. The payment or nonpayment of various types of debt precipitates conflicts and are a driver of the plot. I discuss, in a general sense, different sorts of debt and associated relations – economic, social, political – however, there is something absurd in separating these out, and there is a good deal of overlap in the analysis that follows. In *The Making of Indebted Man* (2012), Maurizio Lazzarato argues that debt unites within a single apparatus the political, the social, and the economic, even as “sophisticated political theories continue to conceive of [these] as separate” spheres of life (162). The socio-political-economic debt nexus is also central to theories of debt put forward by David Graeber and Margaret Atwood, which I draw on below.

When the mummers set upon and mutilate Levi Sellers, they are seeking redress for a perceived wrong. The Sellers family can on a whim decide who in the community prospers and who starves simply by the way they reckon and quantify credit and debt. King-me Sellers had first generated the capital to begin his merchant operation by working as a “small-time lender in St. John’s, fronting cash to fishermen and sailors to buy their drink. It was a job that required a minute attention to detail alongside a measured ruthlessness and he was perfectly suited to the undertaking” (74). The name Sellers itself, of course, is drawing on connotations of commerce, in that King-me, and later his grandson Absalom and great-grandson Levi, are the ones who buy and sell all that is produced in the community, and moreover provide on credit all the supplies the fishing families of the Gut and Paradise Deep will need for the season.<sup>69</sup> When some of the Devine men, dressed as a band of mummers, attack Levi Sellers, it is a direct result of the merchant giving them a poor price for their fish and leaving them in crushing debt.

Of course, the debt the Devines owe to the merchant is simply a note on a ledger sheet. The debt exists because of the cruelty of the merchant and, in a more general sense, because of the whims of the global trade in cod fish, something that is out of the hands of both the merchant and the fishing families in the community. Nothing has changed on the ground for the Devines: the supplies they received on credit from the merchant at the beginning of the fishing season were much the same as any other year; they catch and process an amount of fish comparable to any other year. Even at the times in the narrative when the merchant is obviously not carrying out a vendetta against the fishing families and is a benevolent or paternal head of the community

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<sup>69</sup> To be precise, King-me Sellers is a merchant’s agent, working for a company called Spurriers. It is Absalom who is able to raise the capital to set up the family as a proper merchant in their own right. Nonetheless, King-me’s power and authority in the community is virtually the same as Absalom’s and later Levi’s, even if the later generations have a somewhat different business model, and so specific members of the family are here generally referred to as the merchant.

(as is the case with Absalom, to be discussed below), it is extremely difficult for the working people to square accounts and to get ahead. The system of credit and debts between the merchant and the fishing families is regulated by the overarching merchant-dominated economy. On a basic level, the economy is mercantilism (also called the truck system in the Newfoundland context), a system of trade in which goods and services are exchanged for a product, namely cod fish. However, there are also a number of other components that regulate the economy of the fictional community in *Galore* (as will be discussed in greater detail in subsections below). It is these various components, like patriarchy, patronage, and sectarianism, to name a few, that dictate how the life of the community proceeds, from production of goods in economic terms, to the social relations between various members of the community, to the political institutions. And yet, none of these various components of the political economy of the community go unopposed, and there is always some form of resistance, which materializes in various ways.

In *Galore*, Crummey is intensely interested in an economy based on debt, even as debt has little to do with money or banks in their contemporary form. Economies, plural, is perhaps the best word to describe the various formal and informal transactions and negotiations throughout the novel. The various micro economies – such as the household, the fishing outfit, the churches, the merchant house – are all part of a larger macro economy. Some of the exchanges that happen in *Galore* are so simple as to be overlooked, and indeed some exchanges happen whereby one party does not immediately receive anything in return but is only repaid years (or even generations) later; other debts are never repaid. More precisely, debt is a central driver of the narrative, and some debts become sources of contention and may lead to acts of retribution and violence, such as the vigilante attack on Levi Sellers. The novel is, to no small extent, a literary meditation on debt, and in this sense it is a most important contribution to

Newfoundland literature, given that debt is historically (and presently) among the most significant forces in the economic, social, and political life of the island. Margaret Atwood in her book, based on a series of Massey Lectures, called *Payback: Debt and the Shadow Side of Wealth* (2012) examines debt as a literary phenomenon, in terms of plot lines revolving around debt, looking at how the “debt plot changes over time, as social conditions, class relations, financial climates, and literary fashions change” (86). She suggests that the way debt is understood and represented in a particular society, either as sin or as virtue or otherwise, speaks to the underlying values and the cultural milieu.<sup>70</sup> Debt in *Galore* is presented as an eternal condition, as a state of being that the characters can never truly escape. In Crummey’s imaginative Newfoundland, debts can never be entirely repaid, and this is true for the common people and for the merchant alike, since debt here is understood as indicating more than just pure economic calculation but also social debts and the care due to others. If the community in *Galore* were keeping a tally of cruelties, Levi Sellers should have lost more than just his ears.

The concept of debt elaborated here, of debt as a social and ethical category and not simply an economic calculation, can be traced to Nietzsche’s *On the Genealogy of Morals* (1887). Nietzsche meditates on the way that punishment and suffering, collective and individual, stands in for economic debts, and questions the morality of such reckoning. He suggests that creditors are inherently amoral: “To the extent that *inflicting* pain occasioned the greatest pleasure,” Nietzsche argues, “to the extent that the injured party [i.e. the creditor] exchanges for the damage done [i.e. the debt owed] an extraordinary pleasure which offsets it: the opportunity to inflict suffering—an actual *festivity*, something which, as I said, is valued all the more highly

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<sup>70</sup> With respect to literary debts, *Galore* is a novel that is indebted to a number of other stories and authors, such as the way it works intertextually with the biblical story of Jonah and in the way it draws on other magic realism texts.

the more it contradicts the social standing of the creditor” (47). The higher the social standing of the creditor the greater the pleasure they receive from doling out punishment and suffering to those indebted to them.

In his book *Debt: The First 5000 Years* (2011), David Graeber draws from and builds upon Nietzsche’s work, offering a detailed historical and anthropological account of what debt is and how it operates. Graeber’s book was released in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis and examines the evolution of present-day attitudes on debt, and its forgiveness, from ancient times. He notes,

Debt is a very specific thing, and it arises from very specific situations. It first requires a relationship between two people who do not consider each other fundamentally different sorts of beings, who are at least potential equals, who are equals in those ways that are really important, and who are not currently in a state of equality – but for whom there is some way to set matters straight. (120)

This notion of equality, or at least potential equality, seems at first contradictory as a way to describe debt, and more so in the context of merchants and fishing families in Newfoundland as presented in Crummey’s *Galore*. However, the distinction Graeber is drawing out is perhaps best understood when considering that there are parties that could never have a genuine economic relationship, since one party is so exponentially more wealthy or powerful and the other so much poorer and weak. The example Graeber gives is of a monarch not being able to owe a debt to or be owed a financial debt by a commoner: since the monarch has all the wealth in the world and issues currency, and literally embodies all the power in a given system of government, no commoner, for whom money and wealth are an object, could ever make a fair exchange with that sovereign. A merchant and a fishing family, on the other hand, have a shared system of

economic value in a commodity, fish, which they can exchange on a relatively even footing, even if the merchant does have some significant advantages. They are, compared to the example of the monarch (divine king) and the commoner, both mortals trading in mortal goods. And moreover, there is a possibility that the debt that is formed between the merchant and the fishing family can be resolved.

### **Economic and Ethical Debts**

In *Galore*, which takes place over many fishing seasons and several generations, Crummey presents years when debts are not paid back to the merchant, as well as years when they are. Sometimes the fishing families' debts are not paid back simply because there is a bad fishing season. This is the case in an instance recounted early in the novel: "The cod had never been so scarce, not in living memory. . . . By mid-July it was clear the season was beyond salvaging, that no one would clear the debt incurred in the spring to gear themselves for the fishery" (21). The merchant, King-me Sellers, is not one to forgive or forget the debts that are owed to him, and the same ruthlessness that recommended him to the St. John's elite as a possible agent is enacted in Paradise Deep and the Gut. Some of the fishing families "were in arrears from one failed season aboard another," and the merchant took the opportunity to force some of the families "to grant him a mortgage on their land estates as a surety. He'd already taken possession of half a dozen fishing rooms and seemed determined to own both harbours entire" (21). In this instance, King-me is exploiting the hardships of the fishing families for his own gain, essentially building an empire and putting the working people of the community in an even more compromised position. One can imagine that it might be made conveniently difficult, from the merchant's point of view,

for those families to settle their debts the next season even if their fortunes in fishing improve, in order for the merchant to continue to acquire property.

King-me Sellers is something of a caricature of the tyrannical Newfoundland merchant. It is only the intervention of a religious figure, Father Phelan, that brings the starving people any reprieve, when he goes before King-me as a supplicant on their behalf. The particular language Crummey uses to describe King-me's charity is striking:

Toward March some families were so weak they hardly moved from their bunks for weeks at a time. . . . [Father Phelan] went begging to King-me Sellers on their behalf, coming away with a pocketful of green fish not fit to feed a dog, a bag of brown flour infested with weevils. It was enough to keep them another week or two and stave off starvation until the seals came in on the Labrador ice. (40-41)

Even though the merchant needs the fishing families in order to maintain his position of wealth and power, there are sometimes acceptable losses to be incurred, encapsulated by the choice to give out charity and encourage laziness (from the merchant's perspective), or to allow a certain portion of the population to starve. The only reason for this, as irrational as it is to consider human life in such a utilitarian manner, is that there is a note of debt on a ledger book. In this way, debt is precisely where the power of the Sellers family flows from, and it is in their interest to keep the population in debt, or at least dependant on the merchant's good graces, in order to maintain control. This is how debt creates hierarchy. As Graeber notes, "during the time that the debt remains unpaid, the logic of hierarchy takes hold. There is no reciprocity. . . . But always there is the assumption that the situation is somewhat unnatural, because the debt really ought to be paid" (121). The debts of the fishing families ought to be paid, as Graeber puts it, yet in

reality this may not be possible, at least not in a given year. The result, then, is that the hierarchy is entrenched, and the Sellers family is able to retain its hold on the community.

When the people of the community are starving, they do not simply gather in large number and take what they need. They are kept from doing so because debt, along with being an economic measure, is also rooted in notions of ethics and morality. It is a promise made between two people, and so it is honour, and not just material goods or commodities, that is at stake. This notion of debt as a moral obligation is one of Graeber's themes, and he points out that a great deal of our religious and ethical language, in fact, is discursively rooted in debt:

Terms like "reckoning" or "redemption" are only the most obvious, since they're taken directly from the language of ancient finance. In a larger sense, the same can be said of "guilt," "freedom," "forgiveness," and even "sin." Arguments about who really owes what to whom have played a central role in shaping our basic vocabulary of right and wrong. (8)

In the case of the people in Crummey's fictional community in *Galore*, those who are morally in the wrong, on the one hand, are the fishing families, since they have yet to fulfill their moral responsibility to repay the merchant. But at the same time, the merchant King-me Sellers is clearly a disreputable and immoral character, as seen in the example of his willingness to let people starve. In this regard, both parties in the exchange and debt relationship are carrying a moral burden of some kind, and perhaps the reason King-me Sellers is able to function as a merchant at all is in part because of his callousness and ruthlessness. Along these same lines, Graeber suggests that in the broad sweep of 5000 years of debt, "the majority of human beings hold simultaneously that (1) paying back money one has borrowed is a simple matter of morality, and (2) anyone in the habit of lending money is evil" (8-9). This certainly holds true



with respect to *Galore*. The fishing families hold it as a matter of honour to keep their end of the bargain, and at the same time they see the merchant as an embodiment of pure evil.<sup>71</sup>

Debt, as a moral and ethical principle rather than strictly an economic measure, is also explored by Atwood in *Payback*. Atwood sets out to examine “debt as a human construct – thus an imaginative construct – and how this construct mirrors and magnifies both voracious human desire and ferocious human fear” (2). She wonders whether “debt exists because we imagine it,” and presuming that is the case her project is to uncover “the forms this imagining has taken” (10). Atwood explores the roots of debt in ancient Assyrian, Egyptian, Babylonian, and Chinese cultures. The originary notion of debt as a kind of fairness, or a kind of reciprocity or retaliation in the form of *lex talionis* (i.e. an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth), is for ancient cultures “an underlying balancing principle in the universe, according to which we should act” and “appears to be almost universal” (27). From such ancient roots, this notion of fairness and balance of debts was carried forward into most world religions and into contemporary ethics and morality:

Some debts are not money debts: they are moral debts, or debts having to do with imbalances in the right order of things. Thus, in any consideration of debt, the concept of the balance is pivotal: debtor and creditor are two sides of a single entity, one cannot exist without the other, and exchanges between them – in a healthy economy or society or ecosystem – tend toward equilibrium. (163)

The system of credit and debt presented in *Galore* is not one that tends toward equilibrium and is not indicative of a healthy society, but is, rather, heavily weighted in favour of the merchant.

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<sup>71</sup> As will be noted later, although King-me and Levi Sellers are universally hated in the community, Absalom Sellers, though still a merchant and not without fault, is not so despised as his grandfather or his son.

King-me Sellers takes advantage of the fishing families, and moreover uses the morality of debt as one means of maintaining power.

Of course, in the context of the debts owed to King-me Sellers, morality alone is not what keeps people in the community from ransacking his warehouse as they are starving through the winter. Debt is also backed up and enforced by violence, if not direct physical violence then at least the threat of violence or use of force. If the people of the community were to simply take what they need from the merchant, they could expect that in the spring, once the ice left the harbour and word reached the capital St. John's of what had transpired, a naval vessel with a full complement of troops would quickly be dispatched to carry out justice on those who had been so bold as to break the law, in this case the law having specifically to do with property rights and legal forms of exchange in credit and debt. At the same time, the use of hunger as a weapon, as in the case of the merchant allowing people to starve, is also violence in its own right. It is easy to imagine that if there were no threat of violence, and only a moral sanction that comes with debt, the people of Paradise Deep and the Gut would quickly overcome any moral compunction against taking what they need or defaulting on their debts. But since, as Graeber points out, "violence turns human relations into mathematics" and debt is enforced through a number of violent mechanisms (14), the people of the community are essentially caught in a debt trap.

Even in the years when the fishing families are able to pay back their debts, the merchant is not at a loss and continues to benefit. In bad years, he is able to seize or mortgage the property of those who default, and in good years to sell the community's product and make a tidy profit – either way the merchant benefits and expands their operation. For example, in the year subsequent to the winter of starvation, the fishing families in *Galore* "did well enough on the fish to clear their debt with Sellers and set aside a good store for themselves, and the warm summer

delivered a historic crop of root vegetables to see people through to the seals” (41). King-me Sellers finds himself with surplus capital and decides to expand his operation “to meet the demands of the unexpected prosperity with a cooperage and smithy and a handful of new stores and warehouses, and additional clerks to keep account of the credit given to fishermen in the spring and the quintals of salt cod used to pay off their debt in the fall” (51). Presumably, some of the property and buildings he appropriated during the winter of starvation become the location of these new facets of his business empire, and so what has really happened is that the common people of the community have not only provided the financial means for Sellers to expand, but also the physical properties. It goes without saying that when times are good King-me does not offer to compensate those families whose properties he has acquired or those who have lost loved ones to starvation.

There are a number of ways that common people resist the merchant, and more specifically resist the system of debt and hierarchy. A clear example is the band of mummers cutting the ears off Levi Sellers. As Atwood would have it, this is a form of honour debt that the merchant owes the Devine family. As she notes, in typically acerbic fashion, “some debts can never be money debts: they’re debts of honour. With these, it’s felt that other forms of payment must be exacted, and these other forms most often have to do with the infliction of nasty blunt- or sharp-implement procedures on other people’s bodies” (125). However, the people of the community also have somewhat more everyday and indirect means of resisting, one of which is through sharing goods and labour in common. In fact, the novel opens with a scene of common

labour and common use of a resource (the beached whale from which Judah emerges).<sup>72</sup> The whale is a boon to the fishing families, both in terms of the sheer amount of food they will be able to put away and the easy access to oil for their lamps or even for sale on luxury markets. As they are harvesting the whale, King-me Sellers attempts to assert his authority, claiming the whale as his own. But “the fishermen argued that the beach in question wasn’t built over and according to tradition was public property, which meant the whale was salvage, the same as if a wreck had washed ashore”; King-me, in keeping with his habit of taking more than his share, “swore he’d have the whale’s liver and eight puncheons of oil or the lot of them [the fishermen] would stand before the court he ruled as magistrate” (2). On the one hand, this is a small victory for the people of Paradise Deep and the Gut, and King-me recognizes at least some legitimacy in their claim to the common property washed up on shore as salvage. But at the same time, he exerts his authority in an unjust way. It is at this point that readers learn where King-me’s name comes from as well – from the game of checkers he is so fond of. It is appropriate that he is associated with a kinged piece on the board, since he has special privileges and can make special moves. Crummey’s description of how King-me plays the game of checkers further reveals the merchant’s selfish nature: “[King-me] was known to change the rules to suit himself and was not above cheating outright to win. He owned the board, he told the complainers, and in his mind that meant he owned the rules that governed it as well” (2).

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<sup>72</sup> The scene of the beached whale, while being an allusion to the story of Jonah in the Bible, is also alluding to Farley Mowat’s *A Whale for the Killing* (1972), which focuses on the cruel manner in which an outport Newfoundland community harvests a whale that has washed up on the beach. In Mowat’s nonfictional account, the fishermen of the community take a savage and dark pleasure when killing and harvesting the whale. Because of the scathing critique in his description of the event, Mowat wore out his welcome in many parts of the island. Note, as well, that the Tribe of Judah was one of the twelve Tribes of Israel.

Again, on the one hand the merchant holds a mostly unassailable position of authority and dominance in the community, but in small, subtle ways, such as in the salvage of the whale, the fishermen are able to resist him. They know that he is a cheater and that he will always demand more than his share, but within his game they are sometimes able to work together for the common good. Another example of working together for the common good is the way the community comes together to care for those in need, such as Mrs. Gallery, who is carried in common by the debts of others: “Mrs. Gallery had no work of her own and she survived on offerings made to the church by the faithful, an account at Sellers’ store for the woman divided equally among the debts of the Catholics on the shore” (35). This notion of ‘to each according to need, from each according to ability’ is a very different sort of moral order and system of economic relations than a much more mercenary sort of exchange in mercantilism, and is perhaps best understood as an example of communism.<sup>73</sup> Graeber notes that a system based on communism “is not some magical utopia, and neither does it have anything to do with ownership of the means of production”; instead, communism is something that “exists right now” and is to some degree part of “any human society” (95), at least in the sense that people work together for common aims and share amongst themselves in a way that is not based on strict reckoning of value but based on needs and abilities. There has never been, according to Graeber, a society in

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<sup>73</sup> I am not suggesting that Catholicism *is* communism as it is presented in the novel. The Anglican community likewise engages in mutual aid and also participates with the Catholic community in ceremonies on the Commons. However, the sectarian divide in the fictional community in *Galore* means that, with respect to supporting someone like Mrs. Gallery, Catholics support Catholics and Anglicans support Anglicans. Moreover, the various sects in the community, Catholic, Anglican, and Presbyterian alike, change throughout the course of the novel. For example, the Catholic Church is more egalitarian in orientation earlier in the novel, under the ministry of Father Phelan, a mendicant, but later becomes more elitist and materialistic under Father Cunico. Even as the different churches undergo such changes, the collectivist and communistic aspects of mutual aid in the community remains much the same. This is just to say, it is not because they are Catholics that people come to Mrs. Gallery’s aid, but because they have a collectivist, communistic ethos that functions alongside or as a form of resistance to the dominant economic order.

which “everything has been organized in that way, and it would be difficult to imagine how there could be”; however, “all of us act like communists a good deal of the time” (95). Along these lines, Graeber provocatively argues that “*communism is the foundation of all human sociability*. It is what makes society possible” (96). This is, of course, quite a different idea of communism than the one that comes to mind when thinking of state systems that called themselves communist, like the former Soviet Union. This is a kind of grassroots, decentralized, and egalitarian idea of communism, as a simple way of living and tendency of thought, rather than a totalitarian apparatus of statism.

Any of the many times the characters in the novel work together and pool their resources, we witness some form of economic communism. Importantly, a place in the physical geography of the community – actually the space between the communities of Paradise Deep and the Gut – is called “the Commons.” This is a place in which social relations take place in a different manner than in the formal spaces of the villages themselves, an unregulated space where the normal rules of sectarian and ethnic separation do not apply. It is also a space in which people from both villages gather to share food, drink, and merriment outside the typical currency of debt and credit:

After the [confirmation] service a more secular sacrament was celebrated on the Commons above Kerrivan’s Tree with jugs of spruce beer and black rum and shine passed around. . . . Couples disappeared into the alders and berry bushes beyond the field as the night wore on, shifting clothes to accommodate the drunken love they had to offer one another. Shouting and singing and petty arguments flared among the congregation as they staggered toward the collective

hangover awaiting them. They were never more content with their lot in life,  
never happier to consent to it. (29-30)

This area is called the Commons because it is considered land that all the people are free to use but that none may possess as their exclusive property and may not exploit for its resources. Indeed, the only significant resource there is Kerrivan's Tree, which has a function in the communities' folk traditions for both the Irish Catholics and Anglo Protestants alike – children are passed through the branches of the tree to ward off illness.

Another example where resistance through the occupation of public space is a direct act of defiance occurs when the Catholics from the Gut, under the direction of Father Phelan, appropriate property on the beach to erect a church. They take for their use the only unused “hundred feet of waterfront” even though it has been “reserved by King-me Sellers” (121). The Catholics, through direct action, take it upon themselves to make use of the public land to build their church, thus standing against the merchant:

The work began in earnest before smoke showed in a single chimney of the shore, the corner posts laid and framed and the floor joists fastened across them. By the time King-me got wind of the project and roused his constables, badgering ahead of them to the waterfront, the wall studs were up and the ceiling trusses all but hammered into place. . . . King-me was directing the handful of constables to arrest the priest but they weren't willing to risk life and limb in the undertaking. (127-28)

The Catholic Church remains in place and King-me is forced, by the resolve of the people of the community, to allow it. It is a potentially explosive situation, and the constables mustered against the Catholics are a threat of violence. However, a communistic economic morality prevails. Just as in the example of the mummers as a subversive element that exists outside formal

mechanisms of law, the Commons, and more broadly the communist ethos underlying many of the activities and economic relations of the people of Paradise Deep and the Gut, is a challenge to the dominant system of economics – specifically the mercantilist truck system of credit and debt. This challenge, this resistance to oppression and exploitation, is generally not happening as some grand act of defiance – though the appropriation of land for the Catholic Church is such an act – but as part of the everyday lives of the average people of the community, as a survival mechanism. It is an everyday form of resistance that those in authority, namely King-me Sellers and his heirs, are unable to stamp out. These everyday forms of resistance, as with the more social and performative representations of mummering, are not militant or violent, but are nonetheless effective.

Everyday forms of resistance are also nicely illustrated even in the naming of the community – with language being another of those common aspects of everyday life. When King-me Sellers first arrives in the area, he thinks to establish himself in his position of authority by applying to the place a name of his choosing:

He settled on *Paradise* before he'd stepped off the boat. . . . The bushborns [locals] in the Gut knew the harbour simply as Deep Bay and the name was too apt to abandon altogether—Paradise Deep, they insisted on calling it. As if to tell King-me that something of the place would always be beyond his influence. (75)

King-me presumes himself to be the lord and master of the twinned villages that make up the community, thinking even the common land of the beach to be his property, and thinking he even ought to be the one to name the place. Yet the everyday people of the community find subtle ways to oppose and resist him and the subsequent generations of merchant Sellers who take over the family business. This is not to say that this resistance by the community is entirely effective.



Neither is the community organized on anything like a fundamentally communist or egalitarian model; it is a strict hierarchy, and is governed, at least in an economic sense, through debt and the threat of force. Even the everyday sorts of communistic fellowship and mutual aid is only a small reprieve from the oppressive control of the merchant, and since, as Graeber notes, those in positions of authority “use their positions to accumulate riches” instead of as a means of redistribution of wealth (113), the society represented in *Galore* is egalitarian only to a small degree, while the logic of debt and hierarchy is dominant.

### **Social Relations, Faith, and Debt**

The way the people of the community interact with one another, even if those interactions are seemingly simple in nature, also creates a system of debt, and although the tally of such debt cannot be reckoned as precisely as quintals of fish or quantities of supplies, there is nonetheless an acknowledgement that such social debts exist. To understand how this kind of social debt functions, Graeber’s voluminous study is once again helpful:

If we really want to understand the moral grounds of economic life, and by extension, human life, it seems to me that we must start instead with the very small things: the everyday details of social existence, the way we treat our friends, enemies, and children – often with gestures so tiny (passing the salt, bumming a cigarette) that we ordinarily never stop to think about them at all. (89)

This notion of exchange and debt in everyday life is not something Graeber is applying broadly to all human relationships, as he is keen to point out that “all human interactions are not forms of exchange. Only some are,” but that a society whose way of life is primarily characterized by exchange and debt “encourages a particular way of conceiving human relations” (122). In a

society such as the one represented in *Galore*, and indeed in a society such as contemporary Newfoundland, because economics and reckoning of economic value is the dominant ideological system (i.e. mercantilism in *Galore* and neoliberal capitalism in contemporary Newfoundland) such economic understandings and financial language is used to conceive of social life as well. In this sense, as Graeber argues, from a certain point of view “society is our debts” (136).

The social relations between the Devines and Sellers offer a good example of this view on ‘society as debts’ in the novel, and the movement of social debt between the families can also be seen as a challenge to the hierarchy of the merchant over the fishing families. The relationship between the Devines and Sellers is tumultuous from the start, and they are never, from beginning to end of the novel, on perfectly friendly terms. The initial source of the feud between them is that Devine’s Widow refuses a marriage proposal from King-me Sellers. The way Crummey describes the origin of the feud speaks to the notion of the interplay between economic and social conceptions of debt. Devine’s Widow is working in the barn when Sellers approaches her and unexpectedly springs a marriage proposal: “She could tell he felt it was a simple business decision about property and standing and knew she could never expect anything different from him. The thought of marrying a man so ignorant of his own motives seemed no different than indentured servitude” (69). After she curtly rebuffs him, King-me Sellers fires her and turns her out of his household, notably without paying her the back-wages she is owed. On the way out, Devine’s Widow speaks a stream of curses, “something about death to his household and the fruit of his loins and his livestock. . . . The words were flung about in the fury of the moment and she couldn’t have known they would tie her to Sellers as tightly as any wedding vow” (69). This is an interesting way to think of how social relations are potentially a form of debt, in this case the proposed marriage itself and also the resulting bad blood from the spurned proposal.

Although King-me Sellers understands marriage as an economic transaction to do with property and ownership, Devine's Widow understands it in social terms – as a relationship that ought to be on mutual footing – and the subsequent feud between the two families is a direct result of this initial bad transaction and the perception of a debt owed on both sides.<sup>74</sup>

A further major example of social relations being conditioned by debt in *Galore* is to do with religion. *Galore*, along with Crummey's more recent novel *Sweetland*, contains elements of magic realism, specifically in the birth of the character Judah from the belly of the whale, as well as the ghost of Martin Gallery, who manifests at numerous times throughout the narrative. Crummey's use of magic realism is part of the organizational framework for the text, along with the more obvious formal construction around the generations of the Devine and Sellers families. The novel opens with a strange incident of a man being born out of the belly of a whale that has washed up on the beach. This man comes to be known in the community as Judah – a portmanteau of the biblical names Jonah and Judas. The novel closes with another allusion to the biblical Jonah when Judah's great-grandson, Abel, throws himself into the ocean in the final pages of the book, having seen a “whale steaming clear of the ship's wake” that “seemed to be calling his attention” (333). The novel is, in this sense, framed by the story of God's wayward prophet, the prophet who owed God a debt and who was carried in the belly of a whale, though the biblical story is not mapped onto the narrative of *Galore* chronologically – i.e. the part where Crummey's representative of Jonah throws himself in the sea happens at the end instead of the beginning. This, incidentally, creates a kind of narrative loop in the novel, where the beginning is only explained by the end, and the great-grandson Abel needs to be understood as literally being

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<sup>74</sup> Given the limits of the dissertation, a detailed and fully adequate analysis of patriarchy, women as objects of transaction, and matriarchal resistance cannot be included here. The topics, however, are ripe for future research on *Galore* and other Newfoundland novels.

his own great grandfather. Of course, this is asking readers to make a leap of faith and to suspend a certain amount of disbelief, such as is required in works of magic realism, but it also encourages us to understand the novel as a closed circuit, an idea that is further reinforced in that the novel ends one calendar day before it began, on the Feast of St. Mark.

To set up a novel around the story of Jonah, even if that story is told back to front, is once again to make the story to do with debt, since Jonah's story is about debts being owed to God. In *Galore*, the character Jabez Trim recounts the Bible story in an effort to set the record straight for those in the community who may not have heard it:

Jonah was fleeing the Lord God Almighty, Jabez insisted. —God chose him to be a prophet and Jonah had rather be a sailor and he ran from God aboard a ship. And he was thrown into the sea by his mates to save themselves from a savage storm the Lord set upon them. And God sent a whale to swallow Jonah.

(9)

What Jabez says here is mostly correct, although it is in fact Jonah who tells the crew of the ship, "Take me up, and cast me forth into the sea; so shall the sea be calm unto you: for I know that for my sake this great tempest *is* upon you" (Jonah 1.12). In this sense, Jonah is sacrificing himself, in payment for the debt he owes God and in order to save the sailors from the storm.<sup>75</sup> But Jonah is also a prophet sent forth by God to call for contrition, or to redeem a debt to God, of the city of Nineveh. After he is eventually set free from the belly of the whale, Jonah accepts God's charge for him to go to Nineveh, and once there he calls on the people of the city to do penance for the insult they have done to God. Upon hearing Jonah's prophecy, that the city and

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<sup>75</sup> It is also a relevant book in the Bible in that it is a story of "a great fish" (Jonah 1.17) and moreover a story in which "the Lord spake unto the fish" (2.10), and so it is a story where the fish plays a central part, just like many stories of Newfoundland.

its inhabitants will be destroyed, even the king of the city calls on the people to fast and wear sackcloth, which is an uncomfortable garment worn as a means of mortification of the flesh. Because the people of the city repented, they have repaid the debt and God spared it from destruction.

Not only the story of Jonah, but many of the stories in the Bible revolve around debt and the repayment of debt. Of course, debts are not always called debts, and debts are not always cast in economic terms but rather in religious terms as we have been discussing them here. Speaking about this notion of debt in religion, Atwood notes that a line of the Lord's Prayer is variously used in different denominations of Christianity: "The Anglican faith (and Catholics as well, if I remember the prayers from my youth) say 'Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us'; whereas the United Church says, 'Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors'" (44). By way of resolving the inconsistency here, and assuming that "trespass" and "sin" are synonymous in this case, Atwood points out that in the Aramaic language, the language that would have been spoken by Jesus, the words for debt and sin are the same (45). Atwood goes on: "financial debt is not only a metaphor for sin, it is a sin. It's a debt/sin, as in the original Aramaic" (48). She further notes that "the whole theology of Christianity rests on the notion of spiritual debts and what must be done to repay them, and how you might get out of paying by having someone else pay instead" (67). She continues: "As regards the built-in debt of [original] sin, the creditor is sometimes thought to be Death, sometimes the Devil: this entity collects either (a) your life or (b) your soul – or both – as payment for the debt you yourself still owe due to your rascally distant ancestor" (67-68). Graeber adds to Atwood's point here regarding the original debt owed to God by arguing that this debt was, once again, actually a means of cementing power and authority, a means of maintaining control:

The first kings were sacred kings who were either gods in their own right or stood as privileged mediators between human beings and the ultimate forces that governed the cosmos. This sets us on a road to the gradual realization that our debt to the gods was always, really, a debt to the society that made us what we are. (58)

What is significant about this understanding of debt in relation to religion is that it presents the origins of debt as scarcely to do with economics at all. The kind of debt embodied in Christianity as sin is more like a method of social control than it is about actually owing someone money – though these moral and economic conceptions of debt are blurred to the point of being basically interchangeable. Moreover, debt becomes a functional means of exercising power and maintaining authority through ideology/theology rather than simply through use of force.

In many ways, the mute Judah is the redeemer of sins, and thus the redeemer of debts, in *Galore*. He takes responsibility for the mutilation of Levi Sellers, even as he was not present when some of the other Devine men carried out the act. He also takes responsibility for the death of a soldier during an altercation, even as there is evidence the soldier had accidentally fallen on his own knife (65). In both of these instances where Judah takes on the role of redeemer of sins, he is held in a fishing shack on the shore, as there is no prison in the community. This is another subtle allusion to the biblical story of Jonah, who sat in the shadow of a massive gourd on the outskirts of Nineveh. When he first arrives in the community, born from the belly of the whale, Judah is held to be responsible for a bad fishing season and a mob comes for him in order to ostracize what is held to be the source of misfortune. He becomes a scapegoat for the community, and so the community tries to purge him:

They came for the stranger eventually, as the priest expected they would. Two dozen men drunk and armed with fish knives and hayforks and torches and rope, a ragged medieval tapestry descending the Tolt Road in the dead of night. . . . The mob forced their way past her and then into the house and they carried out a drunken search [for Judah]. (22-23)

The community at first considers Judah to be “a goddamn jinker” (25). However, this notion of Judah as a jinx is quickly abandoned after he is taken fishing with the Devine men and hooks an endless line of squid (26). Judah quickly goes from being a source of misfortune to a lucky charm, since “fish seemed to float along beneath Judah’s feet” (28). What we see here is that the community, which was initially prepared to purge Judah just as Jonah had been thrown overboard by the crew of the ship, now embraces and is indebted to him for their renewed fortunes in the fishery. Judah is an intriguing character in this regard, because he is able to stand in for debt and sin in a number of ways, both positive and negative. Indeed, he is able to do this for the entire community because he bridges the various divides: “Irish nor English, Jerseyman nor bushborn nor savage, not Roman or Episcopalian or apostate, Judah was wilderness on two legs, mute and unknowable, a blankness that could drown a man” (75). He is the perfect redeemer of debts and carrier of sins, in this regard, as he crosses the various ethnic and sectarian lines in the community. Judah is arguably the most obvious figure of resistance in *Galore*. He is a consummate outsider, with respect to the way he is (initially) rejected by the community and his striking looks. He is also a constant source of trouble for authority figures. Nonetheless, Judah is not necessarily a figure of resistance because he sets out to be; he most often wishes to avoid conflict and prefers to simply live his life and be left alone. His acts of resistance and self-sacrifice arise in response to injustice perpetrated on his family and others in the community.

## Political Debt and Democratic Challenges

Along with being more recognizably economic or social, debt is also presented in a political sense in *Galore*. Over the course of the novel there are also a number of subtle shifts with respect to the political apparatus, with different components either replacing others or being incorporated into the system. For example, and as will be discussed here, the paternalistic politics associated with mercantilism is slowly supplanted or accentuated by patronage politics associated with sectarianism, which is likewise supplanted or accentuated by democratic politics associated with unionism. The first political system as such presented in the text is what in the history of Newfoundland politics was known as paternalism or paternalistic politics. In his article “Patronage and Paternalism: Politics in Newfoundland” (1971), George Perlin outlines some of the general parameters of paternalism, noting that it was essentially a political system in which a local strong leader or dominant figure was de facto in charge of the community:

Priests and clergymen, the merchants, and sometimes an unusually successful fisherman, provided leadership at the local level. Their authority was of broad compass – for two reasons. Firstly, there was no local government and the representatives of external authority, the police and the magistrates, could make only infrequent visits. Secondly, local elites were usually the only members of the community who were educated and who had the regular contacts with the outside; thus they were relied upon to mediate in most external transactions. (191)

This was a system of power and authority that was locally based and that did not rely on any sort of official appointment or election, and so was in a sense informal. However, in that the paternal



role was filled by the people who had the most power, and often the most wealth in the case of a merchant, there was nothing about the arrangement that was based on ideals of liberty or equality. In the first place, King-me Sellers is the clearest example of the paternalistic head of the community in *Galore*, just as subsequent generations of Sellers are also in this same role. As has been noted already, King-me uses his position of authority for his personal benefit whenever and however he can, often at the expense of the regular members of the community. As Perlin notes, “for the greater part of the population dependent upon the fishery, the future held little prospect. They were tied in perpetual debt to a local merchant who, in turn, was usually tied to one of the larger mercantile firms in St. John’s” (192). For the merchants there was also a degree of risk in carrying large debts and in giving out so much credit to local fishing families. But as Perlin suggests, “While the risks for those who supplied the credit [the merchants] were great, it was the fisherman who was most profoundly affected by this system [of mercantilism]” (191). The fishing families had “no independent choice either in the purchase of any goods” or “in the sale of [their] product,” essentially relying on the merchant to be an honourable steward of the community and not cheat them on the value of their product (191).

At the same time, there was something in the arrangement of paternalistic politics that required of the local leader, who again was most often the merchant, a certain amount of care for the people of the community, at least to the degree that merchants needed to pay their own debts to the parent firms in the capital city or overseas. Along these lines, Sean Cadigan, in his *Newfoundland and Labrador: A History*, describes the paternalistic politics of outport Newfoundland as somewhat more complicated than a simple characterization of the good fishing families and the bad merchants:

Paternalism was particularly important in defining the credit relationships between fish merchants and their clients. Many would doubtless have agreed with a Harbour Grace newspaper correspondent in 1847 who described the fishermen as being worse off than the “slaves and serfs of Russia” because of merchants’ truck [mercantilist] practices. Yet others suggested that truck insulated fishing people from the ups and downs of international fish markets. A merchant who provided credit in good years and bad thus acted as “a father towards his planters.” (119)

Although Crummey presents King-me Sellers and later Levi Sellers as ruthless in their dealings with the fishing families of the community, Absalom Sellers is presented in a much more sympathetic manner, along the lines of a benevolent paternal figure to the community. During his tenure as merchant, the fishery is said to go through a number of bad years, yet Absalom continues to extend credit and to sustain losses rather than see the community disintegrate. After King-me dies and Absalom takes over the business, he learns that, in fact, King-me was nearly bankrupt by the end of his life, even as the locals had always assumed him to be exceptionally wealthy. Absalom, however, is able to add some sealing vessels to the merchant enterprise, which “brought in just enough to offset the losses incurred in the cod fishery. It was a delicate balance that a single lean year [of seal harvesting] could sabotage. And there was no way to make more of the operation with most of what the shore produced going directly to Spurriers [the parent merchant company]” (180). Indeed, at a later point in the novel, “the Union and the Commercial Bank of Newfoundland collapsed under the burden of overextended credit to St. John’s merchants and the entire colony descended into bankruptcy” (251), an event which affected the merchants and the fishing families alike, though one can assume the merchants had

an easier time navigating the financial storm than the common people of the outports. Along with being a somewhat more benevolent paternal figure in his treatment of debtors, Absalom even attempts to mend the rift between the Sellers and the Devines, partly because he fathers an illegitimate child with his cousin, Mary Tryphena Devine. At the same time, it is worth noting that even though Absalom is somewhat more benevolent in his treatment of the people in the community, he is by no means a saint, and in fact he engages in insider trading when the parent company Spurriers is said to be going through financial hardships, which is how he is able to finally set up the family as a fully-fledged merchant operation in its own right, known as Sellers & Co. (180). As it is presented in *Galore*, this act of fraud is cast more as a shrewd business deal than as a crime, and in a general sense this is the same positive light in which most things about Absalom Sellers are cast, including to a certain extent his incestuous relationship with Mary Tryphena and their illegitimate son, Henley.

However, as Absalom is on his own deathbed he is shocked and ashamed to learn that his son Levi, who is about to take over the family business, has been treating the fishing families, and especially the Devines, with more callousness and ruthlessness than even King-me Sellers had (199). On his way to becoming the paternalistic leader of the community, Levi Sellers had “revoked credit to the most desperate debtors on the shore,” which his father never did, “and sent constables to repossess what little materials the bankrupts owned. There were altercations and bloodshed and half a dozen debtors were jailed . . . while they waited for the governor to appoint Levi the new district judge” (193). Levi is very obviously a different sort of paternalistic figure in the community than Absalom had been, and Levi’s mean and vengeful treatment of the fishing families is the main reason he is attacked and mutilated by the mummers. “There was no

shortage of people with a grudge” against Levi Sellers, we learn, “some of whom had threatened flesh and property” in retaliation for his ruthlessness (217).

But there is also some suspicion in the community that the attack on Levi is partly a result of his interference in a local election. During the election campaign, the barn of the man who runs for the Liberal Party is burned down as an act of intimidation. The Liberal Party is primarily supported by the Catholic population in the community, while the Protestant population supports the Conservative candidate. The novel is divided in two parts, and among the first things recounted as Part II opens is that there is now an elected member of the legislature for Paradise District, Barnaby Shambler (147). The transition that takes place in the time frame between Part I and Part II of the book is the transition from a British naval government to the system of Newfoundland representative government, which legislated from a seat of power in the capital city St. John’s.<sup>76</sup> The naval government meant that officers in charge of British vessels were the mobile administration on the high seas, whereas the beginnings of representative government meant that the Government of Newfoundland had been granted some powers of self-rule by Great Britain. Of course, as it is presented in *Galore* and with respect to the everyday lives of the people in Paradise Deep and the Gut, there is little immediate difference, and the Sellers merchant family is still the dominant power and paternalistic leader of the community. Nonetheless, the system of power and authority is somewhat modified, and this creates the conditions for different sorts of political arrangements and also for different sorts of resistance to the mercantilist establishment.

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<sup>76</sup> Newfoundland’s representative government lasted from 1832 to 1855. There was no secret ballot, and male citizens in good standing had to arrive at the polling station at a designated time to raise their hands and be counted. This system was replaced by a responsible government, which stood from 1855 to 1934, when the government collapsed and the Commission of Government was appointed by Great Britain. Women did not have the right to vote in Newfoundland until the 1920s. See Sean Cadigan’s *Newfoundland and Labrador: A History*, 109, 125, 200.

The other development that takes place at the beginning of Part II of *Galore* is that a medical doctor moves to the community, and quickly finds that his services are much in demand by the locals who have never benefited from visiting a doctor or a dentist in their lives. These sorts of changes in government and in health care contribute to a narrative of progress in *Galore*, in that the community now has formal political institutions and public services like health and education. Other aspects of the novel also contribute to this narrative of progress as well, with labour activism and unionism pushing back against the established mercantilist power structure, as will be discussed in more detail below. It is important to note that these markers of progress are significant to the community, but that this narrative of progress is eventually undercut by the way the merchant establishment is able to reassert its power and subvert the union and democratic movements as the novel closes – this is precisely why, I argue, *Galore* in fact offers a pessimistic perspective on the possibility of progressive social change.

The emergence of representative government in *Galore* is framed along the lines of what scholars of Newfoundland politics and history call the patronage political system. Perlin describes the patronage system as developing in “the last decade of the nineteenth century and the first decade of the twentieth century,” at a time when “a new element began to challenge this oligarchy [of the large merchant firms]” (192). This new element that challenged the old oligarchy was primarily the smaller outport merchant operations. In *Galore*, this is represented in the way that Absalom Sellers is able to create Sellers & Co. as a merchant operation in its own right, following the demise of the larger former parent company Spurriers. Perlin notes that “some of the lesser merchants and professionals used political careers or relationships with politicians to compel a broadening of economic leadership” (192). The elected officials in outport districts became the ‘patrons’ of the community. Sometimes the merchants themselves

stood in the role, and sometimes other prominent members of the community stood in the role, but nonetheless generally took their orders from the merchant and acted as the merchant's agent. If there were any jobs associated with public employment, such as civil servants or creating roads or other public works, the local patron could give them out to his friends and political allies, or in such a way as to curry favour. Describing the patronage system, Perlin continues:

The Assembly member dealt with a network of key men who occupied elite roles at the local level. Local elites were effectively brokers of blocs of votes who, from their strategic roles in the community, could bargain for personal material reward or for community benefits which would enhance their own personal prestige. (192)

Working for selfish ends and enhancing his own personal prestige is certainly an apt way to describe Crummey's caricature of a Member of the House of Assembly in *Barnaby Randle*. As with some of the other names in the novel that have connotative value, Randle and its association with 'shambles' is an appropriate name for this MHA in that he is far from perfect, and is generally an odious and corrupt politician. Along with his responsibilities as a politician, which he does not take seriously at all, he owns the local pub and there holds meetings with the local elites like Levi Sellers.

Crummey seems to take a certain delight in skewering the figure of the corrupt outpost politician via *Barnaby Randle*. Randle has lost most of his teeth, and so "imported a plate of Wellington [false] teeth from England to replace his own, the set scavenged from corpses on some European battlefield or from the mouths of executed criminals" (213). Randle is able to maintain his position through the sponsorship and sometimes the direct help of Levi Sellers, who at one point pays to have the barn of Randle's political opponent burned down (212). He also

uses a mob of Protestant loyalists to good effect to keep the local Catholic population from voting for their preferred candidate:

During the most recent election Shambler felt compelled to surround the polling stations with a mob, instructing them not to let Catholics pass unless they swore to vote Conservative. The mob was armed with staves and seal gaffs and Catholics carried the same to defend their right to suffrage. The brawling began in the morning and carried on until the polls closed, with Shambler holding his seat by the skin of his teeth. (211)

Along with his willingness to mobilize sectarianism to deny Catholics their right to vote, Shambler is also involved in negotiating or carrying out a few different incidents of fraud. Since he is an MHA, he has notary power and can witness the signing of wills and other such documents. He helps Levi Sellers in a deception to subvert the last wishes and will of Absalom Sellers, and on the direction of Levi Sellers also signs an affidavit “stating Judah Devine had threatened the life of His Majesty, the King of England, and claimed the throne as his birthright,” none of which Judah had actually done (230). This fraudulent affidavit is made in retaliation for the incident when the mummers cut off Levi’s ears, which Judah has allowed himself to be a scapegoat for. The doctor in the community, Dr. Newman, is enlisted by Shambler and Sellers to testify that Judah is insane, and eventually does so with some reservations, but not before calling Shambler a “disgrace to [public] office,” a charge to which Shambler’s only response is “without a doubt” (234). This is an important moment in the narrative with respect to resistance, not only because Judah accepts punishment for the transgressions of others and refuses to implicate anyone else, but also because he goes on hunger strike as a form of protest against a corrupt legal and political system that holds him prisoner. Word of his hunger strike spreads throughout the

island, and “letters had begun arriving from citizens as far away as St. John’s demanding Judah’s release” (227). Even Shambler, who is at least an astute politician if not an honourable one, notes the volatility of the situation and the potential for unrest. Speaking to Levi, he suggests that he does not want to “catch hell . . . when Judah starves himself to death in custody” (228). The only options they have, in his view, are to either “hang him or let him go” (228).

Shambler has no regard for what is legally or ethically correct, only what is politically and economically expedient for himself. He is officially the local MHA and patron for Paradise District, but at the same time he is really nothing more than a stooge for Levi Sellers and a political puppet. In this way, patronage within representative electoral politics as it is presented in *Galore* accentuates, more so than overturns, the paternalistic authority of the merchant family. Shambler does the bidding of the local elites, like the merchant family, and gives out free alcohol and other favours to the Protestants he expects to vote for him and to keep the Catholics from voting for anyone else. In this way he is able to maintain his political position for some forty years. Just as Crummey has made of Shambler something of a caricature of a corrupt outport Newfoundland politician through his actions, his name, and his grotesque looks, the way Crummey kills off Shambler has a certain poignancy as well:

Barnaby Shambler died during an afternoon debate at the Colonial Building in St. John’s. He’d gained a reputation as a napper in his latter years, snoring quietly through the business of government, and to all appearances the Legislature’s most senior member had simply fallen asleep. But he couldn’t be roused when it came time to vote on the tabled bill and was pronounced dead.

(249)



On the one hand, what Crummey is doing here is mocking Barnaby Shambler and further developing the caricature of the corrupt outport politician. But on the other hand, this section of the text also points in a subtle way to the potential irrelevancy of the “debate” carried out in the legislature. Shambler could simply be woken (when he was alive at least) and be expected to cast his vote in line with whatever his party had already decided in advance. It did not matter if he slept through all the various arguments put forward, and moreover it did not matter if any arguments were put forward at all, since the outcome of any given vote in the legislature was decided based on the interests of whichever political party had the most members present or elected.

To this point, it should be noted, the word “democracy” has not been used to describe the political system as it is represented in *Galore*. Paternalistic politics are quite clearly autocratic and potentially authoritarian in character, but the patronage arrangement and the system of representation embodied by Barnaby Shambler does, at least, rely on some form of popular participation. However, because this is a corrupt system, and because Shambler only maintains political power because of a campaign of dirty tricks, it would be a disservice to even the most generous conceptions of the term democracy to apply it here. Along with this, because it is presented as a legislature in which the popular opinions of the constituents of Paradise Deep do not matter in the way the MHA will vote, and the opinion of the constituents of the Gut have already been marginalized, it is an elected aristocracy at best. There are democratic movements represented in *Galore*, but before going on to look at how these movements shift the political terrain in the community, it is first important to point out that the way I am now using the term democracy has little to do with the system of representative government, or even with voting in elections. I am using the term democracy to refer to a counterpower, a form of resistance, to a

cynical and corrupt political system – it is people power against the old-guard elite, the grassroots mobilization of power from below against traditional hierarchy. Hardt and Negri discuss such a conception of grassroots, direct democracy in *Commonwealth*, pointing out that “freedom and equality also imply an affirmation of democracy in opposition to the political representation that forms the basis of hegemony” (304). As they theorize it, representation is a mechanism to both “link the represented to the government” but also to “separate them from it” (305). They continue:

This separation of the representatives from the represented is likewise a basis for hegemony. The logic of representation and hegemony in both these instances dictates that a people exists only with respect to its leadership and vice versa, and thus this arrangement determines an aristocratic, not a democratic, form of government, even if the people elect that aristocracy. (305)

This separation of the people from the government, and more specifically the inability of the people to have any significant impact on the running of the government, is on display in the political arrangement of representation in *Galore*. This is a hegemonic form of government, as well, because what is essentially a closed system has an absolute hold on power, even though the government by elected representatives is packaged as democratic and egalitarian.

There are democratic forces that oppose this hegemony of the establishment, an establishment composed of the paternalistic merchants and the patron-representative. These democratic forces are what will be described here as building out of genuinely democratic movements, such as a social movement in the community that eventually sees Eli Devine elected to the House of Assembly and a labour movement in the form of an emergent Fishermen’s Protective Union. These democratic movements are mutually reinforcing and are, at least

initially, grassroots and working class in character. As Hardt and Negri describe it, the contemporary democratic spirit is rooted in classical liberal-humanist principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity, and points toward a syndicalist organization of labour and a participatory decision-making process. They note that an authentic democratic system would involve “the establishment of mechanisms of participatory democracy at all levels of government to allow the multitude to learn social cooperation and self-rule. . . . Democracy is something you can learn only by doing” (310). This is, in *Galore*, the aspiration of democracy: explicitly a possible political model to change the debt relationship.

The first example of this democratic challenge to the establishment in *Galore* is the notable introduction of William Coaker, who brings the idea of organizing a fishing labour union to the community.<sup>77</sup> Coaker is presented as an agitator, an orator with a skill in stirring up the emotions and indignation of the crowd he addresses. When he first speaks in the community, he calls the fishermen “grovellers” and accuses them of “living the same miserable lives their fathers lived and their fathers’ fathers before them. The wealth of the nation made on their backs and every one of them content to beg at Levi Sellers’ door” (273). They are being robbed by the merchant establishment because they do not know “where their fish was sold or the price it sells for, not the cost of provisions they were paid with” (273). Coaker is, of course, entirely correct that part of the reason the fishing families are kept in such destitution is because of a lack of basic knowledge of the way the global trade in fish operates, and because they are indebted to a merchant for their provisions. And when he is part way through admonishing them for their

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<sup>77</sup> Coaker was the founder of the Fishermen’s Protective Union. Although he is fondly remembered as a progressive and as an important figure in the Newfoundland labour movement, there is some controversy around his legacy to do with his support for conscription in World War I, as well as his infatuation with Mussolini’s fascism and his support for the ending of responsible government in Newfoundland in 1933–34. See Sean Cadigan’s *Newfoundland and Labrador: A History*, 177, 204. See also, Gene Long, *Suspended State: Newfoundland before Canada* (1999), 129.

shortcomings and for allowing themselves to be taken advantage of, he asks what excuse they have to offer: “there’s no changing the way things are because they’ve always been this way,” is the response he is given (273). An enraged Coaker then launches into a further tirade, calling on the fishermen to stand up for themselves, and to fight for “their due from their labour” (273). The motto of the FPU, he tells them, is “let each man have his own” (274). Coaker’s incendiary language has an immediate appeal to the fishermen, and especially to Eli Devine, the latest in the lineage of Devine men in the novel. Coaker convinces Eli to become the union organizer in the community, and eventually convinces him to stand for election for the FPU Party. Eli is at first reluctant, saying that “Levi Sellers is a hard man. . . . He won’t just sit back and watch,” and telling Coaker of the way the merchant has used intimidation and other tactics to maintain his political and economic stranglehold on the community (277). As this part of the novel progresses, Eli and Coaker begin a romantic relationship, which colours their politics and their decisions in significant ways.

Eli proves himself to be politically astute by staging a deception to keep Levi Sellers from knowing the extent of the union’s plans for the community. Eli holds regular public union meetings at which nothing of any importance is discussed, knowing that Levi has an informant in their ranks. This informant reports back to the merchant on who attended and what was spoken of, and Levi is put at ease when he is told that the organization was in a quagmire and going nowhere:

[Levi] had Trass go along to Coaker’s initial gathering at the old church out of idle curiosity. Sent inquiries to acquaintances in Notre Dame Bay and St. John’s who reported that Coaker was a loner and a fool, possibly delusional. . . . The notion of him building a union was a joke, they said. . . . [Levi imagined] how

their faces would look when the union foundered and they came begging for credit. The spring promised to be as good as a concert. (282-83)

Eli is one step ahead of the merchant, and has in fact been holding secret meetings without Levi's informant present. Levi is so taken aback when Eli reveals the ruse that he actually has a stroke. Part of the union's strategy is to supply the provisions to the fishing families at cost and to cut the merchants out of the equation, and the first year the union is operating in the community "two hundred and seventy-six men" did not go into debt with Levi Sellers (285). Nonetheless, Eli is correct when he said that Levi would not just sit back and watch, and the merchant makes a number of further attempts to subvert the union in the community, even going so far as to have the union hall burned down (288). More broadly, the union is opposed throughout the island, even by the Catholic Church at one point, which functions in a reactionary manner by initially forbidding Catholics from joining, before eventually relenting in the face of massive popular support for the union movement. Along with selling the fishing families their provisions at a wholesale price, the union is able to give a much better price for fish at the end of the season, and at the end of its first year in the community "half the shore's population ordered their winter provisions through Coaker's wholesale outfit and Levi sold off a portion of his waterfront property . . . to keep the company afloat" (287).

This is quite a turn of events, and a stark contrast from earlier in the novel when King-me Sellers and Levi Sellers repossessed the properties of indebted fishing families. In this sense, unionism is being presented as a means of getting out from under the thumb of the merchant and escaping the merchant's debt trap; unionism is a form of political resistance that is expressed as community self-organization and social solidarity (epitomized in the way the people are able to even deceive the merchant and beat him at his own game). And of course, this strategy by the

union is in many ways all about debt. The democratic aspect of the union is precisely that it freed the fishing families from the exploitative debt relationship with the merchant, allowing them to enter a cooperative economic arrangement with a union they had a stake in and partly owned through their labour.<sup>78</sup> This notion of a reimagined democracy that functions as a force of resistance to the economic-social-political debt nexus makes good sense in relation to the way the FPU is presented in *Galore*, since the union is a form of social solidarity and mutual aid, is an economic model that opposes mercantilism, and functions through an egalitarian and participatory politics.<sup>79</sup>

Coaker's strategy, as it is presented in *Galore*, is to instill in the people of Paradise Deep and the Gut the belief that they are capable of more than being simply debtors, perpetually tied to the merchant for their livelihood. Through his rhetoric and through programs the FPU brings to the community, the fishing families are able to band together in solidarity, much as they had through their traditional customs like mummering, but this time in a manner that is highly effective (at least initially) in making significant changes in the social, political, and economic life of the community. A further measure of the democratic groundswell is that a common

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<sup>78</sup> Lazzarato discusses this democratic aspect of class struggle in relation to debt, noting that "one of the essential conditions for advancing the class struggle is the reinvention of 'democracy' as it traverses and reconfigures what even very sophisticated political theories continue to conceive of separately – the political, the social, and the economic – since debt has already united them within a single apparatus" (162).

<sup>79</sup> On the other hand, Lazzarato argues, the debt economy is characterized by "antidemocracy," because it centralizes power and authority over the economy while encouraging an individualistic rather than collective ethos, such that notions of common struggle and social solidarity are marginalized. Lazzarato continues: "The objectives of the debt economy are thoroughly political: the neutralization of collective attitudes (mutualization, solidarity, cooperation, rights for all, etc.) and the memory of the collective struggles, action, and organization of 'wage-earners' and the 'proletariat.' Growth gained on credit (finance) aims to diffuse the conflict. Having to confront subjectivities that consider public assistance, retirement, education, etc., as collective rights guaranteed by past struggle is not the same thing as governing 'debtors,' small business owners, and minor shareholders" (114).

person, Eli Devine, is elected as the MHA for Paradise District (291). Although he is sitting in the same legislature as Barnaby Shambler had, Eli is a much more democratic representative for the community and certainly not beholden to the merchant. Eli, along with thirteen other new FPU MHAs, enters government with a mandate from the community to better their lot in life, and his “first order of business was finagling government money to match funds raised by the union for the new hospital” (291-92). What Crummey is presenting here, in sharp contrast to Barnaby Shambler, is an honourable and forthright politician, and Eli is always shown to have the best interests of others in mind and is not in any sense self-interested.

Even with so much apparent progress, the novel closes on an extremely pessimistic note with respect to these democratic forces and escaping the debt trap. World War I breaks out, and Newfoundland is drawn in with the mother country, Great Britain. Newfoundland musters a regiment, which is thrown into battle with tragic results: “eight hundred and two members of the Newfoundland Regiment ordered out of their trenches. . . . Only sixty-eight men standing to answer the roll call the next morning” (302). News of the decimation of the regiment is devastating for morale. Nevertheless, the Newfoundland government indicates it will call for conscription. Coaker and the FPU feel they must support the war because it did them “no service in the House if the union looks like a crowd of shirkers” (309), meaning that the union and its leadership is now deciding its policy based on political expediency rather than on the desire of the people they represent. Coaker and the union representatives in the House of Assembly feel they “had so much to lose now,” such as “Coaker’s cabinet position in the coalition government, the new fisheries legislation” (314). Coaker is also being personally blackmailed with threats that his romantic relationship with Eli Devine and with other men will be revealed in the newspapers. In the face of a number of pressures, the union finally lends its full support to the legislation that

brings in conscription: “The sudden reversal of the union’s opposition to conscription was undertaken without warning, and local councils across the island passed resolutions condemning the act and Coaker’s high-handedness in imposing the change without consultations” (323). Eli Devine has foreknowledge that the union will support conscription and had also witnessed the shift in Coaker’s politics, from democratic to something more like the typical utilitarian attitudes of representative politics. Eli has in large part supported conscription, even encouraging his own son to enlist as a symbolic gesture. But before the conscription act is passed, Eli has already tendered his resignation, at least partly because of his personal falling-out with Coaker who begins a relationship with a much younger man (322). Neither Eli’s support for conscription nor his jealousy of Coaker’s new romance is in keeping with an authentic commitment to democratic principles, and one might argue that Eli, Coaker, and the FPU embody the very corruption and hypocrisy that the community has resisted for so long.

When news of the passage of the Conscription Act reaches the common people of Newfoundland, “in thousands of union homes the president’s portrait was turned to the wall or smashed on the floor. . . . It was as if half the country had woken from a collective dream to find the world much the same as when they’d drifted off” (323). It makes little difference to them precisely why the FPU supported the legislation – whether it was because of Coaker’s political ambitions and desire to remain in formal politics or whether it was because of a campaign of subversion and blackmail against the union’s leadership. Although a democratic politics makes some headway in pushing back against a merchant system dominated by debt, in the end the faith of the common people in unionism and democratic politics is dashed. Whether they are in debt to the merchant or to the union, they are all still held captive in a debt system they have no control over.



### **Conclusion: Pessimism and the Illusion of Progress in *Galore***

At the end of the cycle of *Galore*, everyone is basically right back where they started. As noted above, the novel is cyclical in form in that the character Abel Devine throws himself overboard a ship that is transporting him home at the end of the war, where he was wounded and shell-shocked. Abel sees a whale in the distance, and pitches himself up and over the rail into the sea. This ending is an apparent answer to the question that has been left hanging from the very beginning of the story: where did Judah Devine come from and how did he end up in the belly of the whale that washed up on the shore? But this is just one example of the cyclic, rather than strictly linear, nature of the narrative, another being the hopes of progress held by the fishing families of the community for their emancipation from the tyranny of the merchant. In the end, they are able to organize in a trade union and free themselves from the perpetual debt trap of Sellers & Co., but they come to find that the FPU, for all the promise of being a genuinely working-class organization, is just another self-interested political party. They also come to see that the union's leader, William Coaker, is not the working-class hero they hoped he would be, since he sides with the old establishment through his support for the war effort. This is partly because elements of the establishment carry out a subversive blackmail campaign, but also because Coaker has personal ambitions that do not line up with the wishes of those the FPU presumes to represent.

The common people of the community have sacrificed and struggled, have organized and supported one another, and have resisted the systems of oppression keeping them down in a number of different ways. Notably, as I explored above, some of these forms of resistance included folk traditions like mummering, mutual aid and solidarity in the form of communistic

economic relations, and grassroots participatory politics and unionism, among others.<sup>80</sup> Much of the resistance in the novel occurs as attempts to escape from debt. Democratic politics in the form of industrial unionism promises a reprieve from the forms of domination and hierarchy associated with economic debt when the common people elect one of their own, Eli Devine, as their MHA. Yet for all that, as the novel closes the political system itself and the dominant political ideals at its core revert back to the hierarchy and paternalism exemplified by King-me Sellers at the start of the novel. The community realizes that the unionism of the FPU, and the apparently democratic political arena they elected Eli Devine to represent them in, is no more than replacing the old masters with new masters. It is an irony that the retort made during Coaker's first speaking engagement in the community, that "there's no changing the way things are because they've always been this way" (274), turns out to be true, at least with regard to politics and ethics. But it is Coaker and the union itself that become the way things have always been.<sup>81</sup>

By setting up *Galore* this way, as a cyclic narrative with respect to the Jonah and the whale bookends and also the dashing of hopes in true emancipation for the fishing families, Crummey is doing several things. First of all, this is a pessimistic perspective on the possibility of social change. It does not matter, in this view, how long and hard people may struggle, they will always end up back where they started, and so resistance is generally futile from this perspective. All the times the people of the communities of Paradise Deep and the Gut stand up

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<sup>80</sup> As noted in an earlier footnote, there are other forms of resistance in *Galore* worthy of in-depth study and analysis, the most obvious of which is matriarchal forms of social organization.

<sup>81</sup> While it is true that in some ways the common people have seen that political change is at the very least possible, the defeat of unionism and democratic politics is a devastating blow, one that will be difficult to overcome. In some hypothetical future beyond the events in the novel there might be other democratic movements, but the novel itself represents the subversion and defeat of such politics rather than its actualization.

to King-me Sellers are essentially for nothing. Judah's sacrifices for the people of the community, through his corporal punishment, his imprisonment, his hunger strike, are for nothing. Nothing is accomplished by the vigilantism of the mummers attacking Levi Sellers. And nothing is accomplished by the union and democratic movements that eventually turn out to be complicit with the old established power structure. Although there is, in the novel, a beautiful moment when ideals of liberty, equality, and fraternity hold sway, a moment accompanied by a burgeoning sense in the common people that they could control their own destinies, that moment turns out to be nothing more than a "collective dream" (323). Thinking back once again to Chris Brookes's comments that the mummering tradition laid the groundwork for more effective forms of collective action, such as industrial unionism, it must be said that this is not the way it is presented in *Galore*. In Crummey's novel, in fact, the carnival spirit and symbolic violence associated with mummering is as effective a form of resistance – perhaps more effective – than the industrial unionism of the FPU. Of course, resistance in mummering is unable to overthrow the dominant economic, social, and political order, and there are examples in the novel of times when mummering is a means of reinforcing traditional values and reinforcing taboo – the mummers are not always presented as progressive forces. But it can at least be said that the anarchistic aspect of the mummering tradition made it such that it is entirely beyond the control of elites and figures of authority, whereas the industrial unionism and political party associated with the FPU are both ultimately managed and subverted by the establishment elites and traditional figures of authority.

Building on this idea of the failure of collective action in the union, the cyclic form of *Galore* is also a critique of the narrative of progress itself. John Gray, in his article "An Illusion with a Future" (2004), says that "the idea of progress embodies the faith—for it is a faith, not the

result of any kind of empirical inquiry—that the advance that has occurred in science can be replicated in ethics and politics” (10). In *Galore*, as I noted, at the same time that the second part of the novel begins and the idea of a potentially democratic politics is introduced into the text, we also see that scientific knowledge – specifically in the form of medicine – is also introduced. Of course, technological and scientific advances are an example of progress for the people of the community, and Dr. Newman has a full slate of appointments in his first weeks on the shore. Along with this, the character Tryphie Newman is also noted to be an inventor and a mechanically-minded engineer. The community eventually gets a hospital and a school, and so it is easy to see that the march of scientific progress is bringing some benefits to the common people. But as Gray continues, “the error in the dominant modern worldview is not that it affirms progress in science to be a reality when it is not. Rather, its mistake is to imagine that the progress that has occurred in science can be replicated in other areas of human life” (13). So, for example, in *Galore* there is really no progress with respect to political and ethical values. The human spirit, so to speak, does not change, and the common people of the community are still not, in any significant sense, free from the forms of domination and oppression that have always held them down. Gray argues that the idea of progress is at the centre of classical Marxism, and, thus, at the centre of various theories of syndicalism and worker self-organization. “The core of the idea of progress,” Gray points out, “is the illusion that knowledge enhances human freedom. The reality is that it merely increases human power” (15). For Gray, the grand proletarian revolution is not destined to happen, as Marx would have it, as the natural end result of history or as the path to universal freedom – there is no great march of progress toward higher and higher ideals in any Hegelian synthesis. Such a belief in social progress is a conflation of the advancement of science and technology with the advancement of human morality and ethics. In

the way that Crummey ends *Galore*, with the failure and corruption of the progressive values of Coaker and the FPU, this same linear narrative of progress is likewise called into question. In the Newfoundland presented in *Galore*, there is no guarantee of a better day, just more of the same over and over again, perhaps with small improvements at times, followed by an equal or greater movement in the opposite direction.

*Galore*'s presentation of resistance is pessimistic. Even though it is a story in which readers sympathize with the victims of oppression, with the common people of the community who are being exploited by the merchant and by a corrupt government, their attempts to gain their liberty and escape the debt trap are in vain. Not only do they fail and fall back into a pattern of subservience, but their hopes are cruelly dashed when they are betrayed by the supposedly democratic elements of unionism and participatory politics. It is not even so much that nothing is gained from joining the union – there is, and indeed the fishing families continue to get at least a fairer price for their product – but that the betrayal is a death knell for the collective attitudes and feelings of solidarity that made them believe they deserve better than their appointed lot in life. There are no heroes in *Galore*, at least not of the working-class type, and the most heroic gestures are those of the self-sacrificing Judah, the sin-eater and redeemer of debts for the community, and his self-sacrificing alter-ego Abel throwing himself into the sea.

## Chapter 2

### Revolt and Reaction in Wayne Johnston's *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams*

I am the people—the mob—the crowd—the mass. / Do you know  
that all the great work of the world is done through me?

—Carl Sandburg, “I Am the People, the Mob”

When the people are being beaten with a stick, they are not much  
happier if it is called “the People’s Stick.”

—Mikhail Bakunin, *Statism and Anarchy*

I am chained like the slaves of old. You think you are free. You too  
are chained. Get yourselves together and make history. Don’t let  
history make you.

—Pierce Power, Newfoundland Unemployed Committee

Crummey’s *Galore* is inherently pessimistic about the possibility of progress with respect to political, social, and economic justice, and a similar pessimism is found in Wayne Johnston’s *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams*. However, in Johnston’s novel this pessimism is even more pronounced, to the point that it becomes instead a strain of cynicism. Like Crummey’s novel, and like other novels to be examined in subsequent chapters, Johnston’s *Colony* depicts a number of significant moments of resistance, and again I focus on one specific flashpoint as my entry for critical engagement with the text: an anti-government riot. The riot is incited and unfolds in a particular way, and while it is a moment of destruction it also has a specific meaning and productive capacity in relation to the novel. For example, even though Smallwood presents himself as an authentic working-class hero, such as through his union organizing and his socialist political roots, he is on the wrong side of the barricades – on the side of traditional authority instead of with the common people – when this riotous moment of collective violence erupts. This is something Smallwood must reconcile, and is accomplished only by suppressing the

voices of those same common people on whose behalf he presumes to speak. The way Smallwood perceives and understands the riot, as an explosion of irrationality from an unruly mob, is typical of those narratives that present protest and resistance in naive terms. The discursive trend of characterizing riots and other forms of collective violence as irrational serves to delegitimize resistance and obfuscate grievances, something that is part of a reactionary mechanism. I argue that both Smallwood and, as we shall see, Sheilagh Fielding should be regarded as participating in, or at least complicit with, a reactionary mechanism that functions to maintain traditional hierarchies of power and authority. As such, the reactionary impulse obliges Smallwood and Fielding to disregard and cover over the revolutionary potential embodied in the Colonial Building riot.

As briefly noted in the introduction of this dissertation, reactionaries are those who, during revolutionary times, advocate for a return to the previous, or maintenance of the threatened, status quo. Reactionaries are generally described as politically conservative; however, the term is controversial, and political parties and movements seldom define themselves as reactionary. In *The Reactionary Mind: Conservatism from Edmund Burke to Sarah Palin* (2011), Corey Robin theorizes the reactionary tendency of thought and action as something that functions beyond just revolutionary moments and more broadly as part of a back-and-forth between people in subordinate positions of power and “their superiors in the state, church, workplace, and other hierarchical institutions” in the age-old “march and demarche of democracy” (3).<sup>82</sup> In his analysis, Robin does at times focus on specific revolutionary moments, including the French Revolution that precipitated the rise of conservatism as a school of thought,

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<sup>82</sup> The term democracy here, as with the use of the term in the last chapter, is not a reference simply to a system of representative government, but instead refers to forms of participatory politics and contentious politics whereby common people express political agency.

but he also takes the long view on revolution, reform, and social change. Revolutions and revolts are, in this long view, moments when the ongoing struggle between social classes come to a head and are most obvious. “Every once in a while,” Robin suggests, “the subordinates of this world contest their fates. They protest their conditions, write letters and petitions, join movements, and make demands” (5). Such demands by subordinate people are not always radical or revolutionary – they seldom are – and can be quite modest and minimal. In fact, as Robin argues, it is not so much the content of the demands that are important, but that in making demands those in subordinate positions “raise the spectre of a more fundamental change in power. They cease to be servants and supplicants and become agents, speaking and acting on their own behalf” (5). It is the expression of political agency that “vexes their superiors,” and when this happens those in positions of authority see their power threatened and try to suppress such newfound agency or try to win back any power or authority that has been lost (6).

The reactionary tendency of thought and action, as it is expressed in Johnston’s novel (and in other contemporary Newfoundland fiction as well, such as Riche’s *Rare Birds* as will be discussed in Chapter 3), is not something that those participating in it are necessarily self-reflexively aware of. Some of the reactionaries and pillars of conservatism Robin discusses in his study are self-reflexive of their role and are explicit in their methods and goal of subverting revolution, most famously Edmund Burke. However, the reactionary mentality is diffuse and can be expressed in subtle ways, sometimes even by the very people in subordinate positions of power whose interests it works against. For example, the way that Johnston represents the riot in *Colony* and the views the novel expresses regarding the capacity of common people to be political agents is conservative and reactionary; moreover, the Smallwood and Fielding characters likewise express reactionary views. But Johnston himself and the characters he creates



in his fiction, such as Smallwood and Fielding, likely or demonstrably do not think of themselves as subverting the political agency and desire for democracy of common people. The same is true with respect to contemporary political discourse and those pundits who respond to grassroots protest movements or expressions of resistance with pithy and condescending phrases like “Well, what’s your alternative?” or “They’re just bums in the park” or “There’s a logical inconsistency in your protest slogan” or any number of other such dismissive phrases. Such statements from political pundits bring to mind Milton’s famous line in *Apology for Smectymnuus* (1642): “they who have put out the people’s eyes, reproach them of their blindness” (874). Nonetheless, a great many of those who have put out the people’s eyes, or who come to the front and condescend attempts by common people to enact political agency, are not doing so in full knowledge of the reactionary role they play. Ironically, many reactionaries perceive themselves as the true champions of the people, as we will see specifically with respect to Johnston’s character Smallwood.

After looking at the scholarly criticism, I examine *Colony* as a prototypical reactionary narrative, demonstrating the way discourse is employed as subterfuge, masking the revolutionary potential embodied in the so-called riotous mob by recasting it in traditional moralistic and political terms. I will develop this argument in relation to a few different lines of discussion. After briefly contextualizing the novel in relation to some of the scholarly criticism in order to situate it in terms of debates on historiography, the first section of this chapter engages the supposedly irrational violence of the riot as a meaningless event by instead describing it in cultural terms, specifically in relation to Pierre Bourdieu’s notion of cultural capital. In the second section I examine the way Smallwood is positioned in the riot and how he is able to reconcile his defence of the status quo. I develop this line of argumentation in relation to crowd

theory and to Hardt and Negri's theorizing of "the people" and "the multitude."<sup>83</sup> In the third section I examine the way Fielding is positioned in the riot – as a cynical fence-sitter – and argue that Fielding's primary role in the novel is to set the parameters of acceptable discourse. This same function of framing the parameters of acceptable discourse is also reflected in the form of the novel, in that Fielding's journalism, her "Condensed History of Newfoundland," and her diary entries, frame and, in some cases, respond to or are juxtaposed with Smallwood's first-person narrative.

From the outset, I want to make clear the way I am working with the historical material Johnston draws upon for his novel, and specifically the recounted history of the 1932 riot. *Colony* is a work of historical fiction, and this has been a major focus for literary criticism on the novel. Although my engagement with Johnston's *Colony* works from a literary critical framework in which issues of historical accuracy are mostly moot, at times I make use of footnotes to give some background on the historical context of the 1932 riot and its aftermath, not so much to argue that Johnston has misrepresented the real history but rather to examine the ways a similarly reactionary rhetoric may function in historical discourse (some of the details of the history of early 1930s Newfoundland politics are instructive in this regard). The moment of collective violence represented in the text is of a historical riot that took place on April 5, 1932, when a massive demonstration of some 10,000 people marched on the Colonial Building in St. John's, the legislative assembly of the country's responsible government at the time. While my reading of *Colony* stays close to the text and is not immediately concerned with the question of

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<sup>83</sup> The multitude is an old political concept for a type of polis adapted and redeveloped by Hardt and Negri in their trilogy *Empire*, *Multitude*, and *Commonwealth*. The term is used as a formulation of a body politic that is different from concepts like "the people" or "the masses," in that it expresses a collective subjectivity and shared political project that does not subsume or dissolve differences.

historical accuracy, the period of Newfoundland history covered by the novel's time frame was one of significant social unrest and political upheaval.

To some accounts, especially his own in his autobiography *I Chose Canada* (1973), it was the historical Joseph R. Smallwood who navigated the former country out of this period of unrest by facilitating Newfoundland's entry into Canadian federalism, and the emotionally charged, contentious history of that political transition is part of the reason scholars from Newfoundland and from Canada have taken up various positions in the historiographic debate surrounding Johnston's novel.<sup>84</sup> One of the more impassioned attacks on the novel from a perspective on historical accuracy is the review essay "Johnston's Smallwood" (1998) from the historian Stuart Pierson. Pierson is incensed by such things as the novel's inaccurately reflecting the amount of time necessary to dry and salt cod and depicting the south coast of the island as iced in (284). Along with these sorts of inaccuracies, Pierson is also specifically concerned with the way Johnston misrepresents the historical person of Joseph Smallwood, suggesting that the real Smallwood "remains too large a memory around here for anyone fully to suspend disbelief" (295). Pierson recognizes the imperative of the novelist to make of a story what they will, but nonetheless points out that the fictional protagonist found in *Colony* is one that has been drawn extensively from historical writings on and by the historical personage of J. R. Smallwood.

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<sup>84</sup> Of Johnston's novels, *Colony* has received the most critical acclaim. Other noteworthy texts from the author include his debut novel *The Story of Bobby O'Malley* (1985), *The Divine Ryans* (1990), the memoir *Baltimore's Mansion* (1999), *The Navigator of New York* (2002), and *The Custodian of Paradise* (2006), the latter of which picks up and expands in detail the Fielding narrative in *Colony*. *Colony* marked a turning point in Johnston's writing career, when he moved into historical fiction, and is still, arguably, the author's most ambitious work.

Specifically, the unfolding of many of the sections of the novel parallels exactly the unfolding of the work of the historian Richard Gwyn in *Smallwood: The Unlikely Revolutionary* (1968).<sup>85</sup>

Another scholar who has offered commentary on the issue of historical authenticity in Johnston's novel is Stan Dragland, in his Pratt Lecture titled "*The Colony of Unrequited Dreams: Romancing History?*" (2004). Dragland draws on a number of sources that describe the life and times of Joseph Smallwood, fictional or otherwise, and he sympathizes with the position developed by Pierson. However, Dragland's position is certainly not so dogmatic, as he notes, for example, that "no history is just to be swallowed. The truth is always tumbling somewhere between versions whose packaging can't help but give them a slant" (197). However, Dragland is in no way dismissing the historical record of Smallwood, and he suggests that a novel like *Colony* compels literary critics to delve into some of the history covered in the narrative:

The novel itself is the main field of exploration, but a responsible critic will want to understand the relationship between a historical novel such as *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams* and the historical record. Literary critics have to go to the historians. When we do so, of course, we find that no two historians have the

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<sup>85</sup> The critique of historical accuracy by Pierson is somewhat exaggerated, to be sure, though he qualifies his points by clearly noting that the novel is a work of fiction and furthermore that the study of history itself is fraught with inconsistencies. Pierson's review essay is quite eloquent with regard to the way it theorizes history and literature with respect to the postmodern turn, even if his conclusions will not be accepted by all contemporary historians and literary critics. However, in contrast to Pierson's views, what is also noteworthy about Johnston's *Colony* in terms of the "real" history is what it has omitted rather than what it has potentially misrepresented. To illustrate, Pierson, for all the points of historical inaccuracies his review brings up, does not notice (or neglects to mention) that *Colony* does not make a single direct reference to the hero of Smallwood's youth and one of the most important players in the politics of early twentieth century Newfoundland, William Ford Coaker. It is, of course, difficult (perhaps impossible) to qualify the reason Coaker has been omitted from a work of fiction like *Colony*. However, it is possible to surmise why, from a historical perspective, a version of Smallwood who gets to rewrite his own narrative might omit Coaker. There can be only one hero in Smallwood's heroic epic, and that hero is Smallwood. *Colony* is, after all, exactly this version of Smallwood who narrates himself, and so the charitable view must be that Johnston is being coy with such misrepresentations and omissions.

same perspective on Smallwood, that no two of them pattern the material in the same way. We notice a certain blurring as a result of comparing versions and realizing that it's not only argument that differentiates them, that each version is more or less artful in its composition. (192)

Dragland is describing a relationship between history and literature similar to the one theorized by Hayden White. In his book *Tropics of Discourse* (1978), White discusses historical writing as a literary genre, saying that "there has been a reluctance to consider historical narratives as what they most manifestly are: verbal fictions, the contents of which are as much *invented as found* and the forms of which have more in common with their counterparts in literature than they have with those in the sciences" (82). For White, "*how* a given historical situation is to be configured depends on the historian's subtlety in matching up a specific plot structure with the set of historical events that he wishes to endow with a meaning of a particular kind. This is essentially a literary, that is to say fiction-making, operation" (85). In this view, history is a construction, the distinction between fact and fiction is blurred, and the historical narrative can be analyzed in much the same way as any other fictional form. This fiction-making operation that is characteristic of a given "factual" historical narrative, as White would have it, is in many ways similar to the fiction-making operation Johnston undertakes with the historical facts of Smallwood's life, facts that are presented in such works as Gwyn's *Smallwood: The Unlikely Revolutionary*, Smallwood's autobiography *I Chose Canada*, as well as many other historical accounts. It is from this theoretical position that Dragland says, with regard to the question of historical accuracy in Johnston's *Colony*, "the facts of Smallwood are at least as fascinating as

any fiction could be, and a controversy that draws readers behind the scenes of Johnston's novel is a productive controversy" (190).<sup>86</sup>

Alexander MacLeod, in his essay "History versus Geography in Wayne Johnston's *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams*" (2006), also discusses *Colony* with respect to issues of historical representation, if only to then move beyond this issue. MacLeod notes that in *Colony*, "we are encouraged to read history as a subjective, infinitely re-workable narrative that can be accepted, rejected, or edited at any time" (71). In his essay, MacLeod is lining up in opposition to Pierson's demands for historical accuracy, tending instead to understand any supposed contradictions in the text as elements of a working historiographic metafiction. Moreover, MacLeod is not so much interested in the historical aspects of the novel – for him the question of historical accuracy is mostly a non-issue – but is, rather, concerned with the formal construction of the text and specifically the role of the novel's imagined geography in determining the unfolding of the narrative.<sup>87</sup> He points out that whenever the historiographic elements of the novel come to prominence, there is a corresponding movement in terms of the presentation of the natural environment:

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<sup>86</sup> Danielle Fuller's article "Strange Terrain: Reproducing and Resisting Place-Myths in Two Contemporary Fictions of Newfoundland" (2004) reads *Colony* in a similar way as Dragland, arguing that rather than attempting to reproduce some ideal of authentic Newfoundland, Johnston purposefully alerts readers to the slippage between the representation and the real.

<sup>87</sup> MacLeod's essay draws on, among work by other theorists, Edward Soja's *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* (1996). Soja defines the qualities of thirdspace as "[a] knowable and unknowable, real and imagined lifeworld of experiences, emotions, events, and political choices that is existentially shaped by the generative and problematic interplay between centers and peripheries, the abstract and the concrete, the impassioned spaces of the conceptual and the lived, marked out materially and metaphorically in spatial praxis" (31). It is in this thirdspace that MacLeod locates Johnston's *Colony* and its positioning of history.

[I]n *Colony*, postmodern readings of history and deterministic depictions of geography often seem interdependent: Whenever the power of history is challenged and/or questioned, the power of geography is reinforced and/or acknowledged. Although we are taught that the story of the past can be retold in multiple variations, we are also reminded that the story of space is literally set in stone. (72)

In this way, MacLeod's reading proceeds through (and at the same time against the grain) of theories of literary postmodernisms and geographic determinism, noting that *Colony* is a "definitively postmodern Canadian novel" in which "geographical determinism is endorsed rather than deconstructed" (80). MacLeod's criticism, in terms of the analysis of the way *Colony* relies on naturalistic tropes in the construction of the narrative, is more objective than Pierson's, for example, in its attention to the formal construction of the text. Rather than being simply in favour of or against Johnston's depiction of historical Newfoundland, he seeks to understand the novel in relation to an evolving discourse on Canadian literary regionalisms.

Fiona Polack, in her PhD dissertation *Littoral Fictions*, similarly notes the deterministic qualities of the novel's imaginative geography. Specifically, Polack examines one of the journeys Smallwood undertakes in the novel, walking across the island by following the rail tracks, as a controlling metaphor for the way the character understands the linear and orderly unfolding of Newfoundland history, a history with an essentially predetermined conclusion. This island-wide trek is a place-making activity in that Smallwood must undertake the metaphorical journey through history to realize (or bring into being) a new formulation of Newfoundland. However, Polack notes, in a similar line of argumentation as MacLeod, that by the end of the novel,

there is a retreat from the notion that people's actions in time – such as Smallwood's arduous trek down the rail-line, or his bringing about of Newfoundland's Confederation with Canada – make place. . . . Instead the physical landscape is seen as the eternal source of Newfoundland's intrinsic Newfoundland-ness. The landscape is seen as beyond historical time. It simply is.

(153)

In the face of this indomitable landscape, the political and historical events throughout the novel as well as the actions and adventures of individual Newfoundlanders, such as Smallwood, are basically irrelevant. It does not matter to the land whether Smallwood lived at all, just as it does not matter to the land whether the island is considered independent or a part of this country or that – it is still quintessentially Newfoundland.

Both MacLeod and Polack also make important arguments with regard to the positioning of *Colony* in relation to Newfoundland nationalism and cultural identity. Because the land and the imaginative geography of the text takes prominence, MacLeod suggests that the novel is not constructing Newfoundland as a “nationalist ideology, nor a cultural entity, nor an imagined community. Though the colony is free to transform itself into a province, it remains, resolutely, a Rock, a ‘hard’ Canadian place where the forces of environmental determinism continue to shape the subjectivities of inhabitants” (80). For MacLeod, the sense of Newfoundland cultural identity that springs directly from the topography overwhelms the potentially nationalistic history, politics, or social issues that are the focus of the novel's content. Polack takes a different view and notes the troubled and somewhat contradictory element of nationalism in *Colony*:

Johnston's project is indeed ‘nationalistic’ – he wishes to evoke a Newfoundland people – but his use of the epic *form* is complicated by his foregrounding of issues



of an epic nature at the level of *content*. . . . Ironically, though, the ultimate ‘epic’ act Smallwood achieves is the extinguishment of Newfoundland’s nation status through its Confederation with Canada. *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams* must, then, reconcile the tension between its epic form – with its implicit linkage with nation-building projects – and the problematic consequences of epic acts in its fictional narrative. (138-39)

At issue here is the question of what the nation-building project means in the Newfoundland context. *Colony* is written in an epic form, which Polack relates to other epics that participate in nationalistic discourse, yet the geography and landscape comes to dominate the unfolding of the novel. This is an island that is resilient to political and historical manipulation; however, this is, in a sense, a nationalistic move in and of itself. It is not so much that for the novel to be nationalistic Smallwood ought to succeed, but rather that he ought to fail (and both MacLeod’s and Polack’s analysis argue that he does fail, in many regards). It is because Newfoundland cultural identity is consistently linked to the landscape that the political transformations that Smallwood has brought, and which result in the loss of nationhood, are not catastrophic to the nationalist project; the novel presents, rather, a lost nation waiting to be reborn. Because *Colony* presents the cultural identity of Newfoundland as firmly rooted in the indomitable landscape, the nation is likewise indomitable even as it is subsumed in Canadian federalism.

Jennifer Bowering Delisle offers a reading of *Colony* in her book *The Newfoundland Diaspora: Mapping the Literature of Out-Migration*, focusing specifically on the way that Smallwood and Fielding travel outside of Newfoundland and interact with the diaspora, such as when the two characters are in New York. Delisle’s criticism gives some much due attention to the neglected and debased notion of nostalgia in Newfoundland literature, and specifically the

deeply felt connection, for the island and its culture, of those who have left. Delisle also notes that Johnston is himself part of the Newfoundland diaspora – the author lives in Toronto. As she sees it, these examples of the Newfoundland diasporic imaginary inform the construction of place and identity in *Colony*, and in other writing from Johnston as well. Further, Delisle looks at the ways history and geography function in the text, drawing from and building on other historiographic readings. She argues that *Colony* does not present a “single, deterministic geography,” but a “doubled geography” and “the fork between the road not taken and the road taken, the nation of Newfoundland and Confederation” (136). In this regard, Delisle acknowledges the importance of the geography and sense of history in *Colony* but sees Johnston’s project as complicating and multiplying (rather than simplifying) the possibilities of Newfoundland as place and identity.

These points of difference on Johnston’s novel – questions of authenticity and cultural identity, suspension of disbelief regarding well-known historical figures, self-reflexive metafictional elements, and nationalism – are some of the issues animating critical discussions of the historical novel generally. Jerome de Groot examines these issues, and more, in *The Historical Novel* (2010), a study of the development of historical fiction and its criticism. De Groot argues that the historical novel is inherently dissident, in that it departs from established history or engages with history in a way that challenges the legitimacy of any singular presentation of historical fact. He notes,

The historical novel fundamentally challenges subjectivities, offering multiple identities and historical story lines. Far from being a rigid, ordering structure, History seems to provide a set of potentialities and possibilities. From its

beginnings as a form the historical novel has queried, interrogated and complicated fixed ideas of selfhood, historical progression, and objectivity. (139)

The metafictional element of historical novels, and in Johnston's *Colony*, is at times accomplished through the use of a pastiche or collage form, incorporating quotations of historical documents, or by presenting entirely made up documents and historical texts as true. In *Colony*, this is most evident in the way Johnston includes Fielding's "Condensed History of Newfoundland," which is a sardonic take on established Newfoundland history, but which nonetheless draws on specific moments in history for material, if only to undercut or complicate the historical account. Johnston also incorporates letters, journalism, poetry, and other kinds of historical documents to construct a collage of documents alongside the main line of the first-person Smallwood narrative. The paratextual elements of *Colony*, such as the epigraph and major section breaks, use direct quotations from D. W. Prowse's *A History of Newfoundland* (1895), a foundational work of Newfoundland history, and Prowse's book also features prominently as a trope throughout the novel, as Smallwood's father is obsessed with the book and as D. W. Prowse is represented as a character in the story. Johnston pays specific tribute to Prowse's *History* and to Richard Gwyn's *Smallwood: The Unlikely Revolutionary* in the afterword of the novel. Having an acknowledgement like this at the beginning or the end of a novel is something that de Groot suggests is an extremely common paratextual move in historical fiction (8).

De Groot also notes that many historical novels are "interested in the discussion of nation creation" and in the creation of national identities (140). This is again something that is a central concern of Johnston's *Colony*. It is not so much the case that historical novels simply participate in established national mythologies, but rather that they often complicate the official narratives promoted by nations about their origin or the supposedly unified character of a given people.

This is something Paul Chafe discusses in his PhD dissertation, noting that the version of Newfoundland cultural identity in Johnston's novel is "neither right nor wrong but both" (59). Chafe argues that "while this move toward a hybrid 'Newfoundlandness' is a disconcerting leap from the comforting (though also limiting) certainty of Newfoundland identity, it is an act of liberation for Newfoundlanders" (59). Johnston's *Colony* intervenes in the national myth of Newfoundland in a somewhat paradoxical way, since the novel recounts the history of a formerly independent nation, Newfoundland, undoing itself and joining another country, Canada, which has its own complex national identity and mythology. Indeed, even after Confederation with Canada in 1949, subsequent Newfoundland provincial governments continued to promote a kind of distinct national identity in the now-province of Canada (as I discussed in greater detail in the introduction of this dissertation). The pertinent question here is precisely how this unmaking and remaking of Newfoundland is presented in *Colony*. Johnston is undermining aspects of the official historical narrative as it is presented by the historical J. R. Smallwood and other historians, and in this sense *Colony* is, as a work of historical fiction, an inherently dissident novel and demonstrates a specific kind of resistance to nationalist myths, which again is a type of resistance common to many historical novels.

The task of the remainder of this chapter is to describe how this resistance functions, and in the service of what. I argue that Johnston is promoting a form of Newfoundland nationalism – a nationalism rooted in a sense of loss – which is not without its own pitfalls with respect to covering over deeply rooted inequalities and injustice in contemporary Newfoundland society. *Colony*, just like the historical Confederation debate and just like the historical Smallwood himself, presents a limited set of political choices: a local ruling elite based in St. John's or a distant ruling elite based in Ottawa, one form of nationalism or another, one elite rule or another.

Even disregarding arguments about nationalism for a moment, the way that *Colony* presents the Confederation debate asks readers to take a position, pro-Canada or pro-Newfoundland independence, a set of political choices that are, thus, entrenched within a traditional elitist politics. There is no sense in the novel that the people of Newfoundland are capable of any directly democratic politics or that they are anything more than a lumpenproletariat mass requiring rule by the supposedly enlightened and responsible members of society. This is precisely the reason my analysis of the novel initially focuses on the way Johnston represents the riotous mob and other forms of resistance-from-below, and more generally the way *Colony* presents the everyday people of Newfoundland as basically inert (save for moments of supposedly irrational outbursts like the riot). De Groot gestures toward this potentially reactionary tendency in some historical novels, even as he is most interested in historical novels as inherently dissident and as a radical departure from monolithic notions of history. De Groot notes that “many historical novels have a conservative agenda . . . and that to read them as dissident is to read against the grain” (121). The view expressed in *Colony*, that everyday people are incapable of governing themselves and need some benevolent ruling class to make decisions on their behalf, is a typically conservative view, and in this sense Johnston’s novel, while dissident in its form and in its treatment of established history, is nonetheless reactionary. Moreover, I argue that this reactionary tendency in the novel is brought to the fore in the way the Smallwood and Fielding characters understand the riot, and more generally in the way they understand the everyday people of Newfoundland.

To clarify further how I will deal with *Colony* as a historical novel, I want to make plain that everything in the main body of my writing in the sections below is discussing specifically Johnston’s novel. *Any discussion of the historical J. R. Smallwood or historical Newfoundland is*

*in footnotes*. In this sense, there is no need to continue to say “Johnston’s Smallwood,” or “Johnston’s Newfoundland,” or “the riot in the novel,” or other such phrases. Unless it is in a footnote, and clearly stated at that, I am always discussing what is happening in the novel, in the context of Johnston’s imagined world, and in relation to the fictional characters in the novel. Recognizing the importance of the generic implications of the novel as a work of historical fiction, my own reading is focused more on what *Colony* contributes – or, better said, what it takes away – from a culture of resistance in Newfoundland.

### **The Cultural Meaning of a Riot**

Rioting, as a social and cultural phenomenon, can be understood as a form of collective violence, other forms of which include war, terrorism, gangland feuds, ethnic conflict, and economic sanctions. The definition of particular acts or phenomena as collective violence is often contentious. Even the term “riot,” which is often characterized in relation to things like mob mentality and wanton destruction, is a similarly contentious term. For example, Charles Tilly, in *The Politics of Collective Violence* (2003), purposefully omits the term riot from his typology of forms of collective violence “because it embodies a political judgment rather than an analytical distinction” (18). “Authorities and observers label as riots,” he continues, “the damage-doing gatherings of which they disapprove, but they use terms like demonstration, protest, resistance, or retaliation for essentially similar events of which they approve” (18). A key factor in the categorization of some events as riots and other events with the same characteristics as protests or demonstrations is who gets to define the event in particular terms.<sup>88</sup> Tilly notes that in the

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<sup>88</sup> There are a number of different kinds of riots. In *Languages of the Unheard* (2013), Stephen D’Arcy sets out a typology of rioting genres, including grievance rioting (such as in *Colony*), acquisitive rioting (looting), recreational rioting (soccer or hockey riots), and authoritarian rioting (Nazi Kristallnacht riot, police riots) (147-51).

broad-ranging study he undertakes of particular events of collective violence, he has never come across an example in which “participants called the event a riot or identified themselves as rioters” (19).<sup>89</sup> To those taking part in so-called riots, the events are more often understood as demonstrations of popular discontent, and specific elements of rioting such as property destruction are understood as legitimate expressions of outrage. It is in this light that even the reformist-oriented Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. suggested that “a riot is the language of the unheard.”<sup>90</sup> I use the term rioting in this chapter with an awareness of the politicized nature of defining events as riots, and also since this is the specific terminology used in Johnston’s novel.

With respect to the use of the term rioting to describe the events in *Colony*, it is further useful to remember that one of the primary characteristics of the state is that it holds, or attempts to hold, a monopoly on the legitimate use of force. States sanction and allow certain forms of violence, while censoring others. In general terms, it is from the perspective of the state and social hierarchy that acceptable and unacceptable forms of violence are defined. The notion of social hierarchy is central to Foucault’s discussion of disciplinary mechanisms, and his focus in *Discipline and Punish* (1977) on panoptic observation from above or from some strategic vantage point elaborates how statist hierarchy functions in an embodied, physical capacity (170-77). Eco-anarchist Derrick Jensen discusses a structural and social hierarchical perspective on power and violence in *Endgame Vol. 1: The Problem of Civilization* (2006) and sets out an understanding of violence in the basic premises of his thought:

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<sup>89</sup> Exceptions to this general rule may be found in the actions and performances of the feminist punk rock group Pussy Riot and in the anarchist subculture celebration of rioting in what is sometimes called riot porn, which is edited videos of confrontational demonstrations such as those produced by the Submedia collective.

<sup>90</sup> See Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., “Speech at Ohio Northern University,” January 11, 1968.

Our way of living—industrial civilization—is based on, requires, and would collapse very quickly without persistent and widespread violence. . . . Civilization is based on a clearly defined and widely accepted yet often unarticulated hierarchy. Violence done by those higher on the hierarchy to those lower is nearly always invisible, that is, unnoticed. When it is noticed, it is fully rationalized. Violence done by those lower on the hierarchy to those higher is unthinkable, and when it does occur is regarded with shock, horror, and fetishization of the victims.

(ix)

Many of the examples of violence that come down the hierarchy, as Jensen puts it, are visited upon average citizens by the state as forms of structural violence. Structural violence may include the kinds of inequalities and discrimination inherent in social structures that favour a particular gender ahead of another, one ethnicity ahead of another, or a particular social class ahead of another.<sup>91</sup> However, at times the violence coming down the hierarchy manifests in direct physical form, for example, in confrontations with police or in the guise of the penal system. Jensen argues that these forms of violence are rationalized in various ways and, most importantly, are seldom described as violence at all but are rather understood as necessary safeguards put in place to protect civil society. The covering over and making invisible of top-down hierarchical violence is also apparent in the use of particularly obfuscating language when describing war: collateral damage for civilian casualties; incendiary device for bomb; retaliation for aggression; liberation for occupation; and so on. In its many different and varied forms,

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<sup>91</sup> Johan Galtung, in “Violence, Peace, and Peace Research” (1969), suggests that, as opposed to direct violence, structural violence is often invisible because it does not have any clearly identifiable agent. Structural violence functions through unequal exchanges and unequal distributions of power that create the conditions for domination, poverty, and other kinds of suffering. Galtung argues that the most insidious forms of violence inherent in statism are structural.



violence, as Jensen understands it, has a single supposedly legitimate directionality: down the social hierarchy.<sup>92</sup>

As opposed to the opacity of top-down forms of violence, any violence going up the hierarchy, such as collective violence characterized as rioting, is made visible and denounced as wanton and irrational. This is precisely how the riot in *Colony* is presented. Irrationality is often implicitly assumed to be a root cause of rioting and other kinds of collective violence because, as Anton Blok explains in “The Enigma of Senseless Violence” (2000), there are not necessarily any “easily recognizable goals and obvious relationships between means and ends” (24). State-sanctioned violence, such as war and policing, are rationalized by having a clear connection between means and ends. Wars are said to be in the name of promoting stability or defending the nation; police violence is said to be in the name of serving and protecting the interests of the community. Collective violence in the form of rioting, on the other hand, is most often represented as inherently senseless and irrational because it does not connect with a readily identifiable end (or if it does, such ends can be purposefully obfuscated). A key point here, and similar to the insights on violence from Jensen, is that when violence has a clear goal it is seldom described as violence at all but instead cast in euphemistic terms. Conversely, anything that is called violence is implicitly assumed to be irrational. Blok wonders, along these lines, if it is contradictory to use qualifiers like senseless and irrational when describing violence, since to do so “implies that violence can also be ‘meaningful’” (24). As supposedly legitimate forms of violence are most often identified through euphemism and are seldom called violence to begin

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<sup>92</sup> Another poignant example Jensen describes are forms of hierarchical violence as they may manifest in the family, specifically violence that happened in his childhood: “The violence was rigidly one-way: my father beat his wife and children with impunity. I remember the only time my brother defended himself by returning a single blow: he received the worst beating of his miserable childhood. Why? Because he had broken a fundamental unstated rule of our family (and of civilization): Violence flows in only one direction” (60).

with, there is no need to label violence as irrational since that is always what is meant by the term: violence is irrational. However, Blok is most interested in examining the ways supposedly irrational outbursts of collective violence are meaningful, and specifically how certain forms of supposedly senseless violence have meaning as cultural acts:

Rather than defining violence *a priori* as senseless and irrational, we should consider it as a changing form of interaction and communication, as a historically developed cultural form of *meaningful* action. . . . Ironically, then, these qualifications [senseless and irrational] close off research precisely where it should start: with questions about form, meaning and context of violence. (24)

This positing of collective violence as a meaningful cultural act with a specific form and context is precisely how I am setting out to describe the riot in Johnston's *Colony*. Although Johnston frames this moment of collective violence as "a riot" (315), and even though his central characters specifically describe the riot as an irrational act, the narrative nonetheless represents a collective enactment of violence that has a specific form and meaning.

One way to conceive of riots as meaningful is to see the phenomenon as a cultural expression. In its basic form, a riot is a crowd of people who make use of a particular space and carry out a kind of unscripted performance. The way space is used and the actions that happen in that space can be understood as the form and content of the riot, and in the cases where this also involves the destruction of property it is instructive to note the particular kinds of property that are attacked. In the case of the anti-government riot recounted in *Colony*, the property attacked includes the legislative building as well as cultural artifacts, such as paintings, rugs, and musical instruments. As a riot is naively understood as an illegitimate or irrational form of violence, the people participating in the riot no longer recognize the legitimacy of the hierarchy that condemns

such acts of irrational violence, and this rejection of social norms manifests in the destruction of those things that represent hierarchy. Elias Canetti discusses the potential destructiveness of crowds in symbolic and cultural terms in his seminal text *Crowds and Power* (1960), in which he notes,

The destruction of representational images is the destruction of a hierarchy which is no longer recognized. It is the violation of generally established and universally visible and valid distances. The solidity of the images was the expression of their permanence. They seem to have existed forever, upright and immovable; never before had it been possible to approach them with hostile intent. Now they are hauled down and broken to pieces. (19)

Indeed, the destruction of representational images of hierarchy, as Canetti puts it, is just the way the narrators, whether it is Smallwood's or Fielding's recounting, describes the riot in *Colony*. The riot in *Colony* is an enactment of collective violence with a meaning and form; it is also an act situated in explicitly cultural terms, because as the riot unfolds it is the architecture, icons, and other symbolic objects of established hierarchical power that are attacked or destroyed:

[Smallwood] hung back at the edge of the crowd, which soon turned into a mob.

They no longer listened to Alderdice [the leader of the opposition]. They threw rocks and empty bottles at the front of the Colonial Building. A cheer went up each time a pane of one-hundred-year-old glass was broken. (314)

In the first instance, it is the Colonial Building that is attacked by the rioters.<sup>93</sup> The building houses and protects the focus of ire, embodied in Prime Minister Sir Richard Squires and other ministers and politicians gathered in the legislature. The building can be read as a protective shell for authority, and so damage to its exterior and windows indicates to the mob that authority is enshrined in nothing more than a veneer. The panes of glass are said to be one hundred years old, a reference to the construction of the building in the 1830s when representative government was granted to Newfoundland. The crowd cheers as the windows are broken, indicating a rejection of previously held allegiance to the tradition on which the government was founded.

The riot, as it is presented here, is a form of collective violence whereby the crowd demolishes symbols of authority. The riot embodies a radical decentralization of power, an undoing or reversal of dominant power relations of rioters to the institutionalized authority of law and property rights. Although the rejection of authority manifests as an upsurge of violence, such as destroying icons of authority, this reversal of power can be usefully understood as a re-appropriation of “cultural capital,” as Pierre Bourdieu used the term in “The Forms of Capital” (1986). Cultural capital can be objectified, such as in a work of art, in architecture, and many other sorts of objects that carry symbolic value. Cultural capital can also be embodied, such as through an institutional rank or mark of distinction. For Bourdieu, various kinds of cultural capital function and interact in a given field, and embodied cultural capital, for example, may

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<sup>93</sup> The description of the 1932 riot and way it unfolds in *Colony* draws from reports in the April 6<sup>th</sup> editions of *The Evening Telegram* and *The Daily News*. Both of these newspapers likewise use the terminology of mob violence and irrationality to describe the riot. However, a detail both papers note, and that Johnston omits, is that the demonstration was initially peaceful and only turned violent after a baton charge by the police. Even the title of the report in the *Daily News*, “Parliament wrecked by missiles: baton charge starts destructive riot,” indicates the provocation of the crowd by the police.

rely on the mobilization of other forms of cultural capital. Objectified cultural capital, such as Colonial Building,

exist as symbolically and materially active, effective capital only insofar as it is appropriated by agents and implemented and invested as a weapon and a stake in the struggles which go on in the field of cultural production and, beyond them, in the field of the social classes—struggles in which the agents wield strengths and obtain profits proportionate to their mastery of this objectified capital, and therefore to the extent of their embodied capital. (50)

In *Colony*, the building is significant as a legislature, and thus as a legitimate target for the rioters, only in that it has a particular use value and is implemented as a site of governance. Possession and use of the building by the various political actors legitimizes their role as rulers and also as those who have a monopoly on the use of force in the form of top-down violence. The riot flattens this hierarchy by taking hold of (and destroying) objectified cultural capital, something that is first expressed through the relatively benign act of throwing stones through the windows at Colonial Building.

However, before the demonstration turns into a full-scale riot, there is a moment when traditional statist forces deploy cultural means to attempt to pacify the crowd:

In a last-ditch attempt to restore order, the Guards Band came out and struck up a shaky rendition of “God Save the King.” Every man in the crowd stood rigidly to attention and took off their caps, some with rocks still clenched in their fists, and stayed that way until the anthem ended, at which point they put on their caps and went back to rioting. The Guards Band struck up “God Save the King” a second time, but they were pelted with rocks and forced to disperse (314).

Culture, in this instance, is used as a means of social control, since the anthem calls on patriotism to the figurehead of Newfoundland's dominion government, the British Crown. The crowd stands to attention for the anthem and then immediately returns to throwing stones, indicating that any dissonance between loyalties to the king and rioting is quickly overcome. In the second instance of the anthem being played, the band is pelted with rocks, indicating a rejection of cultural capital that only a few moments before was considered legitimate. The intensification of the rioting is expressed as a further rejection of cultural capital when the crowd "forced their way through a line of constabulary members on horseback . . . and proceeded to loot the lobby, dragging furniture out of it, rolling armchairs, sofas, flower-pots and vases down the steps. They piled them in a heap, threw some rugs and paintings on top and set fire to it all" (314). When the crowd pushes through the police on horseback, a further representation of authority is breached. The mob recognizes the police are powerless to enforce public order, and the rejection or re-appropriation of cultural capital continues with a ritual sacrifice of culturally significant property.

One other cultural icon of authority, the ceremonial mace used in the legislature, plays an interesting role in the riot scene when Smallwood and Fielding climb the drainpipe to gain access through a window to try to help the prime minister. In order to deny similar access to the rioters, they decide to pry the drainpipe from the building. Smallwood says that once inside they "looked about for something we could use as a lever and settled on the Speaker's mace, the narrow end of which barely fit between the building and the drainage pipe" (318). Even though Smallwood is not a rioter, the symbolic mace is now devoid of its ritualistic significance in the legislature.

Furthermore, as well as no longer having ceremonial value, the mace is not even used as a weapon against the attacking rioters, but rather as an improvised tool of simple utility.<sup>94</sup>

An example of what Bourdieu calls embodied cultural capital, and the focus of anger for the masses, is Prime Minister Sir Richard Squires, in whose noble personage is vested the trust for governing the Newfoundland people. As Bourdieu describes it, embodied cultural capital is something possessed by everyone, though to varying degrees. It is quantified by such things as institutional ranks (like the title “Sir” or “Prime Minister”) but also in terms of cultivation and sophistication, things that are allowed for by particular upbringings and not by others:

“[embodied cultural capital] always remains marked by its earliest conditions of acquisition which, through the more or less visible marks they leave (such as pronunciations characteristic of a class or region) help to determine its distinctive value” (49). Although Squires, as he is presented in *Colony*, had previously resigned because of his “corruption-ridden record” (264), he is nonetheless able to become prime minister of the country once again because he is of a particular class and embodies an abundance of cultural (and political) capital. For this same reason, he also embodies everything that the rioters see as contemptible, and his flight from office is recounted with a sense of levity:

He dodged the leading edge of the mob and lit out across Bannerman Park with the mob behind him, our prime minister surreally pursued by his constituency. Had there been only five or six in pursuit of him, they would have run him down in

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<sup>94</sup> A passage from the April 6, 1932, edition of *The Evening Telegram* concerns the regalia from the legislature and gives some sense of the carnival-like atmosphere during the riot: “One youth had seized the Mace and was running away with it, when a spectator grabbed him and compelled him to replace it, but another youth was successful in getting away with the sword of the Sergeant-At-Arms, and he advanced to the front of the building, holding it high in his hand.”

seconds, but as every man in the mob wanted to lay hands on him, they moved as one for a while, impeding each other's progress. (326)

One can imagine that had the crowd got their hands on Squires the scene may not have carried the same sense of jest, and a final symbolic act would have been the prime minister bobbing face down in the harbour or strung up by the neck in a tree in Bannerman Park.

Other examples of elite figures of embodied cultural capital in this section of the novel are the opposition politicians. The immediate outcome of the riot is the collapse of the government, and since Squires and his administration have been symbolically dressed down, their total defeat in the subsequent election is merely the *coup de grace*. The victors in that election are what Smallwood refers to as the "Tories," led by Alderdice. When some of these same Tories make an appearance during the riot, with the intention of rescuing Sir Richard and Lady Squires from the besieged Colonial Building, Lady Squires says to them, "You and your crowd put them up to this. You're no better than Guy Fawkes. You should all be shot as traitors" (322). Lady Squires's allusion to the 1605 Gunpowder Plot is a fairly apt observation, given that the riot and the foiled bombing of the British Parliament have symbolic revolutionary potential.<sup>95</sup> However, Lady Squires is also suggesting that the people themselves would not have been capable of carrying out such an act were it not for their manipulation by self-interested elites. Smallwood makes a similar suggestion of a conspiracy when he remembers having seen Tory "henchmen" walking through the crowd "handing out free bottles of rum" (313). Smallwood is suggesting, as did Lady Squires, that the crowd has been incited to riot by a conspiracy of self-interested elites; however, even the opposition politicians, such as Alderdice and Emerson, who

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<sup>95</sup> The 1605 Gunpowder Plot concerned the actions of Guy Fawkes, an English Catholic rebel, and his co-conspirators in their attempt to blow up part of the Palace of Westminster, specifically the House of Lords.



played some role in organizing the demonstration, are ignored by the rioters and their attempts to quell the emergent riot are rejected as these politicians also represent established, hierarchical authority. Emerson, for example, says at one point, “We didn’t think they would take it this far . . . it’s got out of hand; we can’t control it” (321). Similar to the way in which the people have rejected the legitimacy of government officials and cultural symbols of authority, any stock the people had in these opposition politicians has also been overturned.

By examining the riot with reference to its specific cultural aspects, it can be understood as a meaningful act, at least in the sense that it has an internal logic. The way the riot happens is not irrational but is instead very much an intentional and straightforward process of seizing and destroying cultural capital. The Colonial Building, which is damaged and partially destroyed, has items that imbue it with cultural capital as a site of authority taken from it and burned, such as the piano, the paintings, and the rugs, while other icons of authority like the speaker’s mace no longer function in the symbolic way they are intended. Even the anthem “God Save the King,” which briefly continued to have a functional cultural value, no longer holds sway with the crowd. These various symbols of authority are only functional if people believe they have a specific cultural value and only if they believe in their sanctity. Once the panes of glass are broken at the outset of the riot, it is as though the spell of authority is broken and the rules governing socially acceptable decorum break down. As it is presented in the text, there is a cascading effect in the breakdown of authority, in that the first act of throwing a stone emboldens further acts and crescendos with the swarm of rioters trying to get hold of the prime minister. Even though Johnston has presented the unfolding of the riot in a way that makes the cultural meaning and ritual of rioting quite clear, he nonetheless represents the crowd as a seething and irrational mob. Indeed, this scene where the crowd “moved as one, impeding each other’s progress” while trying

to catch Squires is a striking example of how violence, when its directionality is from below as Jensen puts it, is presented as irrational. In this case, the rioters are given a collective consciousness and even a collective body, as if they have devolved into a subspecies of human with qualities akin to a swarm of locusts.

Anthropomorphic metaphors for crowds are common in foundational texts of crowd psychology, such as in Canetti's *Crowds and Power*, which associates crowds with swarms of insects and birds (46).<sup>96</sup> Associations such as this have the effect of dehumanizing those involved in collective violence and also carry connotations of irrationality, at least in the sense that individuals taking part in riots or other kinds of destructive behaviour are deemed to be working through a hive mind and are assumed to no longer be in control of their actions as individuals. This is one way that riots, as examples of collective violence going in the wrong direction on the hierarchy, are naively cast as meaningless and dismissed as apolitical acts. This is also one of the initial characteristics of the reactionary mechanism to note in Johnston's *Colony*: the political agency expressed by common people through the act of rioting is dismissed as purely irrational, and, indeed, as proof that people in subordinate positions of power really do deserve to be subordinates. They are a mindless swarm and are best served with the steady hand of traditional authority at the helm of government. However, although the swarm metaphor for crowd behaviour certainly has pitfalls for those interested in theorizing meaningful structures in relation to rioting, it is not a metaphor that should necessarily be outright rejected. Swarm intelligence is something Hardt and Negri take up in *Multitude* as a particularly useful tactic of resistance:

When a distributed network attacks, it swarms its enemy: innumerable independent forces seem to strike from all directions at a particular point and then

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<sup>96</sup> Although not anthropomorphic *per se*, Canetti also compares crowd behaviour to the movement of sperm (47).

disappear back into the environment. From an external perspective, the network attack is described as a swarm because it appears formless. Since the network has no center that dictates order, those who can only think in terms of traditional models may assume it has no organization whatsoever—they see mere spontaneity and anarchy. The network attack appears as something like a swarm of birds or insects in a horror film, a multitude of mindless assailants, unknown, uncertain, unseen, and unexpected. If one looks inside the network, however, one can see that it is indeed organized, rational and creative. It has swarm intelligence.

(91)

In this formulation, the swarm is not irrational but, on the contrary, is a metaphor for a functional means of resisting domination and fighting back against various forms of authority. Traditional authority, such as the established power structure of the government and the police force in *Colony*, is unable to contend with the spontaneous, decentralized nature of a riot and has no means to quantify such collective violence – it can only understand the riot as irrational. In the example of the riot in the novel, the government, the opposition, and the police are unable to comprehend the swarm intelligence they face because they are only able to think according to traditional political models, in which people, for example, politely request that some politician or political entity present a petition that politely requests those in authority to comply. The riotous swarm, on the other hand, makes no demands or appeals to traditional authority; instead, it seizes and destroys that which it perceives to be its enemy or that which represents its enemy. Rather than being irrational, the riot is a decisive act, one that has specific characteristics akin to a cultural ritual or performance; the riot is irrational only to those who are unable (or unwilling) to understand its internal logic.

## **Smallwood and The People**

Smallwood appears in the riot scene as a hostile figure to the crowd. He is a mouthpiece for the current prime minister and pushes his way to the front of the demonstration and demands to be heard. Here, the opposition politician who has the stage puts Smallwood to good use by inviting him up to speak. “I thought he was being gracious,” Smallwood says, “but it was not long before I realized . . . that nothing would incite the crowd against Sir Richard like someone getting up to speak in his defense” (313). Smallwood defends his political master Sir Richard, both in his speech and in his actions throughout the riot, though this is at odds with Smallwood’s self-proclaimed socialist roots. What is Smallwood, a supposed socialist and closet revolutionary, doing on the wrong side of the barricades?

His path to becoming a reactionary originates in his sudden realization that “socialism in any form could not prevail in Newfoundland. The next best thing, it seemed to [him], or at any rate the closest thing to socialism that Newfoundlanders would accept, was Liberalism” (263). Smallwood’s eventual dismissal of socialism is echoed in an earlier section of *Colony* when he is in New York, having just quit working for Hynes and decides to return to Newfoundland: “Socialism. Better to find a cause that, though perhaps less just, had some hope of succeeding, the nearest thing to socialism that people would accept, than to revel all your life in the righteousness of your defeat” (204). Smallwood’s conversion to liberalism is reinforced when he joins the Liberal Party and begins discussions with the prime minister, who he discovers is well versed in socialist ideology, and the two agree that the main reasons socialism will fail is because it is “just another way of getting power” and because “there’s no such thing as selflessness” (270-71). Rubbing shoulders with the political elites like the prime minister and entering mansions and the halls of power has a profound impact on Smallwood; his conversion to

liberalism, as it is presented in the scene where he meets Squires, is better understood as a seduction.<sup>97</sup>

However, the conversion to liberalism and Smallwood's adherence to party discipline in defending Sir Richard at the riot does not entirely explain why he might not join or otherwise aid the emergent social uprising or why he characterizes it as an irrational mob. Notwithstanding the many significant differences between these complex and multifaceted ideologies, the socialist and liberal thought that condition Smallwood's perception of the world both rely on a specific form of hierarchy and state structure that unites "the people" as a political subject. Yet it is also this perceptual framework that prevents Smallwood from recognizing the riot as a meaningful expression and from recognizing "the mob" as a meaningful political subject. In the analysis of the riot developed in the previous section, I use terms like "the people," "the mob," and "the masses" unreflectively and, in some ways, interchangeably, following the manner in which these terms are used in *Colony*. However, just as defining an event as a riot entails ethical and political implications, so too does the way the body politic is described.

"The people" is one of the most often used terms to describe the body politic; in contemporary political discourse, governments represent the people and act on their behalf. Representative governments, for example, claim to speak on behalf of and thus represent the people of a given country, province, state, or territory. Governments draw legitimacy from the body politic they describe as the people, who through the act of voting or other forms of consent supposedly grant the government a mandate to rule. Smallwood specifically references the

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<sup>97</sup> The historical J. R. Smallwood wrote a series of editorials, "What Is Liberalism: A Restatement of Aims, Objects and Ideals, by J. R. Smallwood" (1926), in which he extols liberalism as the only solution to the problems facing the country. These editorials were published along with an edited introduction by Melvin Baker and James Overton, *Newfoundland Studies* 11.1 (1995): 75-126.

people as he recollects the riot: “I had often envisaged a scene like this . . . ‘the people’ storming the Colonial Building like the Bolsheviks storming the Winter Palace. I had not imagined a revolution led by businessmen, or that I would be fighting to preserve the status quo” (313). The ironic quotation marks on the term indicate that this is certainly not what Smallwood considers to be the political subject he understands as the people, the true people of Newfoundland, and neither is the riot their legitimate uprising but instead an irrational mob, manipulated by a cabal of Tories. It is as though he feels the starving and destitute mob, who he cannot recognize as the people, would be best served by going home and allowing those better informed (like Smallwood and Sir Richard) to solve the problems facing the country. This is, as Robin describes it in *The Reactionary Mind*, the basic component of the reactionary mentality: that submission is the “first duty” of the subordinated classes, while political agency is “the prerogative of the elite” (7). It is Smallwood’s rootedness in an established political discourse, an understanding of politics as an exclusive and elitist domain, bound by ideas of political subjectivity contained in socialist, liberal, and even conservative thought, that condition his perception of the body politic.

In *Multitude*, Hardt and Negri point out that in political discourse, “the people is one”: “The population, of course, is composed of numerous different individuals and classes, but the people synthesizes or reduces these social differences into one identity” (99). The people, as a concept, is a product of a particular understanding of sovereignty, one that finds its roots in the liberal-humanist tradition and writings from political philosophers such as Rousseau. Hardt and Negri discuss the evolution of the concept in *Empire*, noting its genesis in Enlightenment thinking and the development of the nation-state:

In the identity, that is, the spiritual essence, of the people and the nation, there is a territory embedded with cultural meanings, a shared history, and a linguistic

community. . . . In short, the construction of national identity guarantees a continually reinforced legitimation, and the right and power of a sacrosanct and irrepressible unity. (105)

The people, as a formulation of the body politic, appears natural, and as a fundamental concept is positioned as unchallengeable in its logic. A group of individuals live in a specific region or geographic space and, because of their shared history, language, and culture, those people form a nation. The nation-state carries out the will of the people, and rather than imposing on or dominating its subjects, the state is proclaimed legitimate as the direct manifestation of the will of the people. However, the point Hardt and Negri are making in their discussion of this concept is that it is not natural or preordained as it may seem, but is, on the contrary, a notion of the body politic that is consciously constructed, managed, and maintained in various ways. The people, as a political unity, is an abstraction, a concept that was “constructed on an imaginary plane that hid and/or eliminated differences . . . the construction of the people [was facilitated by] the eclipse of internal differences through the *representation* of the whole population by a hegemonic group” (*Empire* 103-04).

Throughout *Colony*, Smallwood draws support and political legitimacy from this abstract political subject, the people, who he presumes to represent. However, in order to do so he must delegitimize not only the riotous mob but also his political opponents, who also put forward a claim to popular legitimacy. Smallwood positions himself in opposition to the riotous mob and as someone who is protecting the legitimate authority of the democratically elected government, which is to say he considers himself in the right because he represents the interests of the people, just not those particular people who happen to assemble in great number at the legislature on the day of the riot and begin throwing stones. This same kind of legitimization via representation of

the people takes place in explicitly political terms, in that Smallwood characterizes the Tories that take power, led by Alderdice, as a coup regime, since they were apparently the prime motivators of the riotous uprising; they stirred up political unrest by spreading rumours of corruption, organized the demonstration, and handed out liquor to incite the crowd to riot, thus creating a political vacuum they then moved to fill.<sup>98</sup> Smallwood's narrative casts them as usurpers, and therefore without a legitimate claim to represent the will of the people.

In similar fashion, Smallwood also delegitimizes the Commission of Government, the authoritarian regime that takes over the country at the behest of the governing Tories and suspends the country's representative democracy.<sup>99</sup> At the head of this new system of government is Sir John Hope Simpson. When Smallwood meets the new government leader at a reception, Hope Simpson greets him by saying, "You're the Bolshie fellow who's been trying to unionize the fishermen, are you not?" (367). The exchange is less than cordial and Smallwood is eventually thrown out of Hope Simpson's official residence, Government House, but not before he tells the commissioner that he has "insulted the Newfoundland people by dividing their legislative chamber into offices . . . dismantled the Newfoundland Museum . . . and so scattered its exhibits that they will never be recovered" (367). Smallwood is angry in this instance not simply because Hope Simpson represents the end of responsible government in Newfoundland,

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<sup>98</sup> F. C. Alderdice won the 1932 election as leader of a coalition national unity political party called United Newfoundland. Newfoundland historians have noted that United Newfoundland was a local incarnation of fascism and, moreover, that many influential people of the day, such as Fishermen's Protective Union boss William Ford Coaker, felt that Mussolini's fascism was a viable way for Newfoundland to make its way out of poverty and corruption. In *Death on Two Fronts* Sean Cadigan notes, "Figures such as Nagle and Coaker, and institutions such as the major newspapers, could not claim that they did not know about the brutality and authoritarianism of the [Italian] Fascist regime, and they did not simply overlook it—they openly admired the political thuggery as long as it was aimed at people who were even moderately on the left" (254).

<sup>99</sup> The historical Commission of Government was a British-administered, non-elected government that ruled Newfoundland from 1934-1949. The Commission ended with Newfoundland's confederation with Canada.



and not just because his presence signifies that Newfoundland is now a country without its own politics, but because the commissioner does not believe Newfoundland to have any significant culture worth preserving. Because of Hope Simpson's disregard for the country's political and cultural life, Smallwood again takes up the position of the people's protector. As with the example of the Tory coup, Smallwood undercuts the legitimacy of government by commission, contributing once again to his heroic narrative of overcoming in spite of his many enemies.<sup>100</sup> Most importantly, by framing events in this manner, Smallwood is constructing a narrative in which he has saved the people of Newfoundland, with Confederation as the vehicle, protecting them from both the exploitation of an oligarchy of Water Street merchants and the authoritarian rule of the British Crown.

The way that he constructs this narrative of salvation and protection functions for Smallwood to establish his heroic position and allows him to draw legitimacy as the people's protector, while at the same time delegitimizing what he characterizes as the coup and authoritarian regimes. But even though this heroism is tied to his opposition to what he perceives as tyranny, it is paradoxically also rooted in his steadfast belief that the people are irrational and cannot manage their own affairs. He expresses this sentiment when he observes that Newfoundlanders "did not understand or even have a concept for government. Had never heard of Sir Richard Squires. Did not know there had been a change in the status of our country. Had only the most rudimentary understanding of what a country was" (355). Because he steps

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<sup>100</sup> Some of the letters of Sir John Hope Simpson were collected by Peter Neary in *White Tie and Decorations* (1996). In order to quell the continuing unrest in Newfoundland, Hope Simpson upgraded the police and reinforced the military presence. In one letter he says of the rioting and subsequent crackdown: "There was a riot in 1932 when the Inspector General of Police was confined to the parliament building . . . and the police did not know what to do and shut themselves into the office also. But we have a new chief of police, and the men have been properly trained and are proud of themselves. Now the whole of the mob has a very wholesome respect for the police, and the town generally feels much happier than it did" (152).

forward to represent the best interests of the people, his narrative essentially makes the case for Smallwood saving the people from their own political ineptitude. The riot at Colonial Building confirms for him that the people are irrational and in need of guidance, since the rioters were apparently duped into the act by Tory conspirators and were not acting of their own volition or with any sort of organization.

However, the concept of the unified people as political subject in need of governing is not the only way to conceive of the body politic, and other formulations are useful both with respect to understanding the riot and also understanding political agency in a way that is not rooted in a reactionary mentality. Hardt and Negri juxtapose the concept of the people with what they call “the multitude,” though these terms should not be understood to form a dichotomy. The people is a formulation of the body politic that is created out of the multitude, in that the multitude is understood to mean all of the people regardless of differences. The multitude is not a unity, as is the people, but is a collection of singularities, a conglomerate of many different kinds of groups and identities, and specifically a formulation of a political body that is not bound by national identity or any other singular cultural identity that can then be represented, however dubiously, by some elite:

The multitude is composed of innumerable internal differences that can never be reduced to a unity or a single identity—different cultures, races, ethnicities, genders, and sexual orientations; different forms of labor; different ways of living; different views of the world; and different desires. The multitude is a multiplicity of all these singular differences. (*Multitude* xiv)

Indeed, even the typical metaphor of the “body” politic as a conceptual framework for the multitude as a collective political subject is somewhat inappropriate, and along these lines Hardt

and Negri note that because the multitude is a “living social flesh that is not a body,” those who understand politics from the perspective of traditional state authority (through such concepts as the people) will find it “monstrous” (192). The people are a political body that is governed by a thinking mind or head (the government and traditional authority), whereas the multitude, a body without a head, is ungovernable. Just as the people is one, a unity that is subsumed by the state, the multitude is many, amorphous, and beyond the realm of comprehension by the state.

In the same sense that the term “riot” describes an event that is supposedly irrational, the terms “mob,” “masses,” and “crowd” have connotations of irrationality as well. These terms are often used to describe an apparently apolitical body that is unruly or that must be ruled – the kind of supposedly apolitical, monstrous body that engages in rioting. While having some common features with other concepts for the body politic, such as “the masses” or “the crowd,” Hardt and Negri also draw distinctions between these and the multitude:

*The masses* are also contrasted with the people because they too cannot be reduced to a unity or an identity. The masses certainly are composed of all types and sorts, but really one should not say that different social subjects make up the masses. The essence of the masses is indifference: all differences are submerged and drowned in the masses. All the colors of the population fade to gray. These masses are able to move in unison only because they form an indistinct, uniform conglomerate. In the multitude, social differences remain different. (*Multitude* xiv)

The multitude, like the masses, is composed of many different kinds of identities, but these identities remain intact and are not melted into a political unity as in the people. Hardt and Negri also draw distinctions between the multitude and the concept of “the working class,” suggesting

that the multitude “refers to more than only industrial workers, including also the poor, unpaid domestic labor, and all others who do not receive a wage. The multitude . . . is an open, inclusive concept” (*Multitude* xiv).

What Smallwood encounters in the riot and in his travels across Newfoundland, what he encounters when he meets the many, often nameless, characters that fill Johnston’s novel, is not the people as such, which he seems to intuit in some small way when he says that many Newfoundlanders had no concept of government. This collective subjectivity of men and women and children Smallwood encounters, with their own experiences and ways of living, having many different forms of labour and economic interaction, “destitute beyond anything [he] had imagined” (355), this is a form of the multitude. However, Smallwood is unable to perceive this multitude as a political subject because his only frame of reference is through concepts like “the people,” “the mob,” or “the masses,” political bodies amenable to the socialist or liberal thought he is familiar with. In the same way that he cannot recognize those who have no concept for government as political subjects, he cannot recognize the riot as a revolutionary moment because there are no well-ordered columns of Bolsheviks waving red flags, no definable revolutionary force or vanguard prepared to install themselves as the new government.

It is noteworthy as well that as the novel progresses Smallwood moves further and further from this multitude, and indeed even from the people he supposedly represents. Whereas his earlier experiences are of direct contact with a riotous mob and his travels among the destitute of the country, by the time he is working on the Confederation campaign he is travelling in the skies above:

I wished I could fly high enough so that I could see the island whole, all of it at once in its map-drawn shape, a single entity, no longer composed of many parts,

but one distinctive, discrete shape among the many that comprised the world. We  
drew a map of Newfoundland with the plane. (452)

In this quotation, Smallwood is expressing a desire to subsume the many in the one, with the geography acting as a metaphor of his nation-building project. It is a poetic expression of his inability to conceive of the amorphous character of the multitude, other than if he positions himself above it and compartmentalizes it as a recognizable and bound unity. However, from the perspective of the multitude, whether the riotous mob or the isolated and destitute communities of the island, Smallwood's victory in the Confederation vote and subsequent provincial elections is no more than another kind of coup, as neither Smallwood nor anyone else ever suggests there should be an option for "no government" on the ballot.

### **Fielding: Cornering Discourse**

Sheilagh Fielding is among the most compelling characters in Newfoundland literature. She is urbane, irreverent, and always gets the better of Smallwood, which makes her all the more likeable. With respect to my study on resistance, she appears to be a prototype of dissident subjectivity, in that she defies authority and flouts social rules; however, in the way that she perceives and understands the Colonial Building riot, Fielding, like Smallwood, expresses the view that the rabble has gotten out of line, thinking that the undercurrent of irrationality characteristic of the common people has come to the surface. Her attitude is that of a cynic and a fence-sitter, which is expressed in the scene of the riot at Colonial Building and also in her satirical and journalistic writing as it is presented throughout the novel. In this section, I examine, first of all, the way Fielding is positioned in the riot; I then discuss the way Fielding plays a part in creating the parameters for an acceptable public discourse, with reference to theories of discourse and media studies from Teun van Dijk, Chomsky, Foucault, and others.

Both Smallwood and Fielding are journalists and involved in publishing, and the media is shown to serve a propagandizing function in the novel. However, the function of the media is not only to propagandize for particular political views, but also to frame the acceptable boundaries of what can be said and the kinds of criticisms that can be made of the way economic and political systems operate. The way the institution of the media is portrayed in the novel ultimately conveys a pessimism about the possibility of its usefulness for enacting progressive social change, even as journalists like Fielding and Smallwood may see themselves as working in a profession that is crusading for justice.

Fielding first arrives at the scene of the riot in her capacity as a journalist. Smallwood sees her “on the Bannerman Park side of the fence, watching the riot through the iron bars, notebook in hand, frantically scribbling” (315). Smallwood thinks that this is a “tableau” of Fielding’s life, “the critic, aloofly watching a riot from the safe side of the fence” (315). When Smallwood asks her why she came to the demonstration, she says that she “just followed the crowd,” and when he requests that she help him gain access to the building so he may aid Sir Richard and Lady Squires, she accepts because she thinks “there’s a column in it” (316). In order to join Smallwood, she must climb over the tall wrought iron fence into the courtyard: “With one leg on either side, standing on top of the fence, she paused to look out over the crowd, shook her head. Then she climbed down . . . jumped the last few feet to the ground” (316). It is this image of Fielding, on top of the fence, as a fence-sitter, that seems to me the more appropriate tableau of her. She is someone who, at this point, has not thrown her lot in with anyone, neither the government nor the opposition political parties, neither the riotous multitude nor the police trying to keep them back from Colonial Building. She is aloof, as Smallwood says, but is coming to the aid of Squires and his wife – even as she says the purpose is to get material for a column, which

she does write about the incident, her statement about only getting involved for the sake of a column is made in a typically ironic fashion for Fielding. At the same time, the way she “paused to look out over the crowd, shook her head” is a dismissive and disapproving gesture. Like Smallwood, she sees the riot as an explosion of irrationality, indicating this with a subtle shake of the head.

Fielding and Smallwood gain access to Colonial Building via a drainpipe, as recounted in the previous section, and come face-to-face with Prime Minister and Lady Squires. Smallwood at this point observes, “She was here to help the Squireses if she could, had risked injuring herself to help them, showing no sign now of wanting to let them fend for themselves despite our situation” (319). This is, of course, merely Smallwood’s interpretation of the events as they happened, but nonetheless Fielding had taken a risk by climbing the drainpipe and by putting herself in a position of protecting authority; as the small group eventually attempts to flee from Colonial Building, Fielding “raised her cane above her head” in a threatening gesture to keep the rioters from getting at Sir Richard or his wife (325). By this point, one must say that Fielding is entirely in the service of the defence of traditional authority, acting as a loyal subject of the state in a desperate moment. The paradox of Fielding, as a character that on the one hand *seems* to be a dissident but on the other hand defends the status quo, is summed up by a statement she makes to Sir Richard and Lady Squires and the others barricaded in Colonial Building:

I hope no one will stoop so low . . . as to invoke that old cliché about how poverty, chronic unemployment, malnutrition and disease bring out the worst in people. As to what inscrutable impulse causes people to take out their frustrations on the very politicians they voted into office – ’ She shrugged.  
(321)

Fielding obviously recognizes, as even Sir Richard Squires apparently cannot, that social unrest did not occur in a vacuum, and that the riot was not simply the result of a conspiracy of self-interested opposition politicians. She astutely sees that social unrest is a symptom of a broken and corrupt political and economic system, a system in which the common people of the province are essentially victimized and cannot get relief.

The riot was precipitated by a corruption scandal, and the other underlying issues that Fielding mentions, like poverty and chronic unemployment, may not be immediately recognizable as the true source of the social unrest. Based on her statement, and on the naive statements of others in the riot scene, it is apparent that Fielding perceives the riot with a clarity that even the politicians and their political advisers cannot. At the same time, the second part of her statement essentially says that since the representative government was elected by the people, they really have no cause to be angry with anyone but themselves.<sup>101</sup> This idea betrays a belief that the representative government is responsive to the will of the people, and that if the people wanted to end corruption and to gain relief funds to ease their suffering that it is simply a matter of politely asking the government to do so – if the government will not comply, the people can then simply elect a new batch of representatives who will. Fielding is of the view that the

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<sup>101</sup> It is important, of course, to understand this sentence and Fielding's shrug through the lens of her unremitting irony. The first part of her statement of how she "hope[s] no one will stoop so low" is an ironic inversion. However, the second part of her statement is not the textbook form of irony that simply means the opposite of what is said. The ironic register is obvious, though the meaning, as I understand it in this case, is close to what is said at face value. It is still irony, but in the sense of an acerbic statement rather than an inversion. This notion of irony as more than simply meaning the opposite of what one says is elaborated in Linda Hutcheon's *Irony's Edge: The Theory and Politics of Irony* (1994), in which she defines irony as a "semantically complex process of relating, differentiating, and combining said and unsaid meanings - and doing so with an evaluative edge" (89). Even if one is to read this line from Fielding as verbal irony (meaning the opposite of what is said), the overall argument about her positioning in the riot still holds, since it is less what she says and more what she does that is significant: she physically protects authority. Fielding seems to recognize that she is certainly not a hero of the people when she says, as the group prepares to venture out of the legislature, "Don't worry about me . . . [t]hey won't want to murder me unless someone tells them who I am" (323).



political institution of the representative government is an expression of the will of the people, and so the corruption of the institution is a manifestation of the corruption of the people.

Fielding's views are in many ways similar to Smallwood's views, that the people are not fit to govern themselves, but her views also carry the implication that politics is a level playing field that anyone may enter, and that the common people might easily access and intervene in the legislature and the corridors of power. For Fielding, who once again is quite astute with respect to injustice and the plight of common people, such a belief in the egalitarianism of the political institution is not just paradoxical but somewhat absurd.

Nonetheless, similarly paradoxical attitudes are expressed in her satire and her journalism. Her "Condensed History of Newfoundland," which is a work whose chapters are peppered throughout the novel as part of the pastiche form, represents the long history of domination and exploitation endured by common people at the hands of self-interested elites. Some of the incidents recounted in Fielding's "History" include the burning of homes and entire communities as various European attempts to extract as much wealth from the island as possible while discouraging settlement (160-61); the summary justice meted out by fishing admirals (147-49); and raids by privateers and other mercenary forces, such as that commanded by Peter Easton (520-22). In many cases, the biting irony of Fielding's history is an expression of elitist disregard for the wellbeing and desires of the peoples that call the island home. For example, recounting a peace treaty conducted between England and France that saw England cede the northeast coast of the island to France, Fielding notes,

England recognizes France's historical right to part-ownership of Newfoundland by giving to France what it believes to be a worthless stretch of coastline, the northeast one-third of the Newfoundland shore. England can be excused for this

so-called blunder, for the only people who advise against it are the settlers who have lived on the shore for years and are to be supplanted by the French, and so can hardly be expected to give an honest estimation of its worth. (168-69)

In another section of the “History,” recounting an attempt by England to conduct a census in Newfoundland, the naval officers charged with conducting the census lose their original written orders with the message they were to convey to the settlers. They debate what the intent of the orders was that they were given: “(a) Those who wish to live in England or other colonies may do so; or (b) Those who wish to live may do so in England or other colonies” (160). Because they cannot come to an agreement, the officers decide the issue by flipping a coin. As such, Fielding’s “History” can be understood as an ironic take on dominator culture.<sup>102</sup> However, Fielding’s “History” is at the same time a history of popular resistance in its own right, as she also tells stories, albeit ironically, of how the original settlers opposed injustice and brutality. For example, one section of the “History,” called “The Winter of the Rowdies,” depicts the looting of merchants’ stores in response to famine conditions (248-49); another section playfully depicts an occasion of protest Fielding calls “Muddening the Governor,” in which angry crowds of Newfoundlanders throw “globes of mud” at the head of state (275-76); Fielding’s “History” also has a section called “The Isaac Mercer Mummer Murder,” depicting an incident of vigilantism when a band of mummers set upon and kill a local merchant (345-47). Fielding’s “History,” in this way, calls forth a hidden history of domination and resistance in Newfoundland.

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<sup>102</sup> Dominator culture is the expression of self-righteous authoritarianism; it often entails high levels of abuse and both direct and structural violence. The term was first used (at least in academic discourse) by Riane Eisler in *The Chalice and the Blade: Our History, Our Future* (1987). The term is used to refer not only to obviously authoritarian structures like autocratic states, but also to the patriarchal family, organized religion, and institutions of education. See, for example, bell hooks’s use of the term in *Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope* (2003).

In her journalistic writing, Fielding at times also displays a similar brazenness and flouts power and authority. She scandalizes the elites and the political class regularly, such as when she lambastes Smallwood for joining the Liberal Party and Sir Richard Squires, including the wonderful line with respect to allegations of corruption, “Where there’s smoke there’s Squires” (281). A testament to the effect her journalism had on elites, Smallwood recollects that the “first thing Sir Richard did every morning was read Fielding’s column, searching, never in vain, for some mention of himself. Not a day passed when Fielding did not make some sort of ‘dig’ at him or Lady Squires” (280). Even though she had protected Sir Richard during the riot, in her column she mercilessly mocked him, describing his panicked dash to keep out of reach of the crowd as though it were a sporting event: “If you could have seen, dear reader, the expression he wore as he went by me, his eyes fair popping with delight, on his face a smile of mischief so pronounced that a person not well acquainted with him might have mistaken it for a rictus of despair” (330). But even as she scandalizes the political class, Fielding does not have any allegiances to any principles, and is in some regards a provocateur, writing whatever will help fuel her reputation and sell papers. This is especially clear when Smallwood at one point hires Fielding to write for a socialist-oriented paper he publishes. Smallwood observes,

I was surprised how willingly she churned out the kind of propaganda I wanted. She wrote earnest socialist commentaries, scathingly criticizing whatever public official I deemed to be deserving of scathing criticism. The mysterious Ray Joy was quite popular among left-leaners of all kinds. . . . I put her willingness to be a pen-for-hire down to her cynicism, her skepticism, knowing she did not believe in the end for which the propaganda was the means, let alone the propaganda itself. (255)

However, Smallwood soon discovers that Fielding is also “writing for an opposing propaganda sheet, the arch-conservative *Gazette*,” under another pseudonym, “attacking in one paper the opinions she had expressed in the other” (255-56). It is because she has no clear principles and supports no cause that it is difficult to see Fielding as a dissident figure, as I elaborate in subsequent paragraphs. She does ridicule those in power and authority, and her “History” does critique a history of oppression in Newfoundland, but her relentless irony and cynicism makes it essentially impossible to take her critique at face value. Moreover, as a journalist she is also involved in shaping and framing the political discourse.

A discourse, according to Sara Mills in her book *Discourse* (2004), is “a set of sanctioned statements which have some institutionalised force, which means they have a profound influence on the way that individuals act and think” (55). Various discourses may function in concert, reaffirming one another in some productive manner. There may be “groupings of statements” that, according to Mills, “have similar force . . . and act in a similar way” (56). For example, this may be true when examining a colonial discourse alongside a discourse of manifest destiny, generative of something like imperialism. A discourse may function in the service of power and may be mobilized or used to accomplish political ends. A particular discourse, such as the political discourse Fielding participates in, also has a specific set of actors that may create or contribute to it, with some voices or ideas being privileged and others excluded. For example, Teun van Dijk, in his article “Structures of Discourse and Structures of Power” (1989), notes that “power is directly exercised and expressed through differential access to various genres, contents, and styles of discourse” (22). He continues:

The voice of the elite [by which he means elected officials, media personalities, academics, and other representatives of public and private institutions] is often the

voice of the corporate or institutional master. The interests and ideologies of the elites are usually not fundamentally different from those who pay or support them. Only a few groups (e.g., novelists and some academics) have the possibility to exercise counterpower, which still must be expressed within the constraints of publication. The dependence of the elite is typically ideologically concealed by various professional norms, values, or codes, for instance, by the widespread belief in “freedom of expression” in the mass media. (23)

It is worth remembering, along these lines, that there is an imbalance of discursive power and that the general public and interested individuals are not on a level playing field, in terms of access to (or ownership of) media and the distribution of statements into the public sphere. Fielding is in a privileged position because of her background, her education, and her family connections. The political discourse she takes part in perceives the world in a particular way. One of the assumptions of the elite world view in *Colony*, as shown above, is a belief that common people require the enlightened leadership of an elite class.

This idea of discourse as reflective of power and access to the opportunity to speak or propagate a message is precisely the sort of discourse analysis elaborated by Michel Foucault in various forms throughout his theoretical writings, such as in “Truth and Power” when he suggests,

Each society has its regime of truth, its ‘general politics’ of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the

acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true. (131)

On the one hand, this formulation of truth or true statements sounds relativistic, as though Foucault is saying there is no such thing as truth. For my purpose, it is enough to say that there is nothing like absolute truth as Foucault understands it; however, more important for the present discussion is the notion that truths and falsehoods are created or sanctioned, that particular epistemologies and institutions of knowledge condition the sorts of statements that may count as true, and that the act of making truth falls to certain segments of society which van Dijk refers to as the “elite.”

As the current analysis is examining media, it is also worth noting work by some of the many theorists who have made similar sorts of claims about the creation of truth and the exercise of power specifically through mass media. Noam Chomsky and Edward Hermann’s *Manufacturing Consent* is an example, especially in the way it describes the “propaganda model” as essential to the functioning of contemporary society. Part of the propagandistic function of contemporary media is due to its principles and professional standards, such as the requirement for journalistic objectivity, which can be understood to mean presenting “both sides” of the story or the perceived need for “balance.” Along with this more benign sort of institutionalized propagation of potential untruths, Chomsky and Hermann point out that the media has an effective means of marginalizing dissenting voices or of censoring journalists whose investigations go against prevailing truths and orthodoxy:

In the media, as in other major institutions, those who do not display the requisite values and perspectives will be regarded as “irresponsible,” “ideological,” or otherwise aberrant, and will tend to fall by the wayside. While there may be a

small number of exceptions, the pattern is pervasive, and expected. Those who adapt, perhaps quite honestly, will then be free to express themselves with little managerial control, and they will be able to assert, accurately, that they perceive no pressures to conform. The media are indeed free – for those who adopt the principles required for their “societal purpose.” (304)

Following from this, it is not the case that individual journalists, or the profession as a whole, is somehow wilfully distorting the facts or setting out to deceive the public – it is not a conspiracy. Rather, by the very nature of the principles and institutional culture of journalism, the mass media serves a propagandistic function. Similar to other examples of “elite” voices in the public discourse – academics, politicians, etc. – journalists can unknowingly enable particular kinds of truths and untruths to be created.<sup>103</sup> In this sense, the media has a propagandizing function, even as many of those working for media outlets may not recognize it as such. Smallwood is actually reflective and generally forthright about the propagandizing function of the media, such as when he says that “newspaper publishing was little more than a branch of politics” (244). He says that the “fortunes of papers” were tied to the fortunes of the political parties “for which they were propaganda sheets, papers folding when parties did or vice versa” (244).

In *Mass Media, Politics and Democracy* (2001), John Street develops a similar line of argumentation on the role of the media as Chomsky and Hermann, expanding the analysis to describe how the media is responsible for creating a polity, which is to say that the media plays a role in creating “the People.” Street argues that “contained in every news story is an implied

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<sup>103</sup> Note, here, as in the point made above about discursive counterpower, it does not seem that journalists *must* necessarily participate in manufacturing consent through propaganda, and a distinction must be made between those journalists who are on some level reflective of their potentially compromised position and the possibility they may be enabling the propagation of blatant untruths or acting as agents of subterfuge. Moreover, there are various journalistic approaches that do not necessarily rely on objectivity and balance, gonzo journalism for example.

audience or readership. Stories are written for a particular group, and the way they are written assumes a particular set of responses or values” (53). At the same time, Street contends, audiences, and thus citizens, are themselves “constructed through the stories they see or read or hear. . . . Journalists and editors may think of themselves as reflecting their audience, but actually they are imagining and constituting them” (53). Street continues,

All forms of communication involve creating audiences and making certain assumptions. The ‘people’ are constituted in the process, and their existence is confirmed through the artifice of public opinion polls and market research. . . . The creation of this phenomenon [i.e. the people] then becomes a tool for legitimating partisan opinion or media agendas. The media’s definition of the people (through the use of news values, editorials and interviews) and representation of them (through opinion polls and phone-ins) construct a particular version of the people. (55)

Fielding and Smallwood, as working journalists, propagate a particular image of the world through the stories they tell. It is a world in which political parties and people with wealth and power make decisions on behalf of everyone else, and even as there are occasional scandals and some of these powerful people may fall out of favour, the social and political order itself is never questioned.

It needs to be said, as well, that Fielding works in a few different roles as a journalist and does different kinds of journalistic writing. At times, she does standard reporting, such as when she works as a court reporter. However, her satirical writing, which still appears in columns in the daily papers, needs to be understood as having a somewhat different function in the public



discourse, but not one that is necessarily dissident.<sup>104</sup> Street notes that “despite the vitriol and mockery, the satirists belong to the established order” (68). Political satire, Street argues, ridicules with abandon, and may see “attempts to improve society as deluded folly. This is a perspective which is necessarily anti-democratic and reactionary” (67). As Street understands it, political satire is also nihilistic with respect to the possibility of progressive social change. Much political satire, he says, has at its heart “a deep suspicion of the underlying assumptions of politics: the idea that there are ways of changing the course of events” (67). This is an apt definition of Fielding’s satire and her whole world view. Even as she laments the poverty and hardships of the common people of Newfoundland, she thinks that there is no way to overcome the oppression that they endure. Fielding is a political satirist and journalist who, in Smallwood’s estimation, “was anti-everything” (286). She is even anti-politics, in many ways, which is nicely encapsulated near the end of the novel when she reflects – one of the few times her journalistic writing is not in an ironic register – on the decision to join Canada:

It doesn’t matter to the mountains that we joined Confederation, nor to the bogs, the barrens, the rivers or the rocks. Or the Brow or Mundy Pond, or the land on which St. John’s and all the cities, towns and settlements of Newfoundland are built. It wouldn’t have mattered to them if we hadn’t joined. (560)

The view expressed here is that no matter the decisions made by the government or the decisions voted on by the people, such as the referendum on Confederation, it is of no consequence in the grand scheme of things. The world goes on, and nothing can be done to radically alter the course of history, so one is better off not trying to begin with. Political movements and popular forms of resistance, likewise, are meaningless, even those which strive to improve the lot of the common

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<sup>104</sup> Conservative-oriented satire is examined at greater length in Chapter 3.

people. Fielding's attitude is the opposite of the ethical commitment and need to act that is at the core of an anarchic metapolitics, as Critchley writes of it and as I discussed in the Introduction. It is a passive nihilism, an attitude of resignation.<sup>105</sup> This attitude is conveyed in Fielding's appraisal of the Colonial Building riot, in her condescending shake of the head, and also through her journalism, even as her satire appears to be a dissenting voice.

Fielding is, in the end, not a figure of resistance, but is, rather, and as Smallwood observes at one point, a misanthrope and a cynic (288). Her particular world view is summed up by Peter Sloterdijk in *Critique of Cynical Reason* (1987) when he notes,

Cynicism is enlightened false consciousness. It is that modernized, unhappy consciousness, on which enlightenment has labored both successfully and in vain. It has learned its lessons in enlightenment, but it has not, and probably was not able to, put them into practice. Well-off and miserable at the same time, this consciousness no longer feels affected by any critique of ideology; its falseness is already reflexively buffered. (5)

Fielding expresses precisely this kind of cynicism in her views on progressive social change, and specifically her views on Smallwood's faith in socialism. She knows and has first-hand experience of the injustice and inequalities inherent in the economic and political systems that dominate Newfoundland, but she is resigned to them. She knows that social movements and social revolution ought to happen, but she declines to participate and instead actively defends traditional authority at the critical moment. There are arguably a number of sources for

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<sup>105</sup> Fielding's resignation is also expressed in Johnston's *The Custodian of Paradise*, a novel that picks up the Fielding narrative from *Colony*. In this novel, Fielding retreats to an isolated and abandoned island off the Newfoundland coast, where she lives alone (for the most part). Her isolation is an embodied representation of her abstention from political and social life.

Fielding's cynicism in her personal life, such as the loss of her children, her feelings of abandonment by her own mother, and the distance at which her father holds their relationship (Fielding's background is explored at greater length in *The Custodian of Paradise*). All of these issues need to be seen alongside the cynicism that develops out of her work as a journalist involved in the political sphere. Nonetheless, seeing in the world lamentable conditions, inequality, poverty, corruption, and all the sorts of social ills that Fielding sees, the appropriate response is not cynicism. The appropriate response for someone like Fielding, someone with so much privilege and so many abilities, is to work to change those things.

### **Conclusion: Here Come the Reactionaries**

The way that the Colonial Building riot is presented in Johnston's *Colony* is patronizing and dismissive of the supposedly irrational mob. One of the ways this happens is through framing the collective violence of the riot as reversing the "legitimate" directionality of violence, that is, violence that is coming down the social hierarchy. Since the riot at Colonial Building is violence coming from below, directed at those on the top of the hierarchy, that violence is shown to be necessarily irrational. Nonetheless, even as the riot is presented as an irrational outburst of collective violence, the way the riot happens – its form and content – corresponds to a meaningful act. The rioters re-appropriate and destroy representations of cultural capital, which is embodied in the building as a work of architecture, in the various items that imbue the building with cultural significance like the paintings and other works of art, as well as the regalia from the legislature. A further embodiment of cultural capital, the prime minister himself, escapes the crowd, but has already been symbolically dressed down and made illegitimate in the eyes of the people.

Although Smallwood often touts his socialist political roots and considers himself from and of the common people, he chooses the side of traditional authority rather than siding with the people in the critical moment of the riot. Part of the reason for this is that Smallwood cannot recognize in the riotous mob any kind of unified political subject – the mob is not what he considers “the People,” but is, rather, simply a fraction of the population that has lost its agency and capability of being a political actor. In many ways, Smallwood has taken on the typically elitist attitudes of his political masters in the Liberal Party, thinking that the common people are incapable of making good decisions and are therefore justifiably subordinate to their betters, the political elite, of which Smallwood considers himself a part. Chafe picks up on Smallwood’s dismissive views of common people in the novel when he notes,

It is as if characters such as Charlie, the man with whom Smallwood shares a dory, the sealers, and the shifty and eccentric families working and living along the railway turn both their heads and their eyes downward in the face of those they perceive to be their social betters for fear of meeting their eyes and finding themselves lacking. Rather than face that continuous reminder of their supposed inadequacy, these characters avoid interaction and accept their failings. The people Smallwood meets during his voyages across Newfoundland all seem to suffer from a form of island paranoia – they all view outsiders [i.e. Smallwood] as dangerous harbingers of changes beyond their scope of understanding. (56)

It is important to remember that this is Smallwood recollecting his interactions with the common people of Newfoundland, the way he perceives them, and also the way Johnston presents the common people. They are a lumpenproletariat mass, apolitical, and, as Smallwood observes, without even a concept of what the Newfoundland government is or how it functions (355). This

is an incredibly patronizing view of the common people of Newfoundland, but a view that is functional for Smallwood as it legitimizes his own role in bringing Newfoundland into Confederation, and thus also legitimizes Smallwood's heroic narrative as the saviour of the grovelling masses.

Fielding, likewise, sees the riot as an explosion of irrationality, and like Smallwood she also comes to the defence of traditional authority. Her defence of the status quo is paradoxical, at first sight, and difficult to reconcile with the dissident persona she presents in her journalistic writing and her satire. However, on closer examination, her journalism and satire are not necessarily as radical or dissident as they may seem. At the heart of Fielding's critique is not an ethical commitment to improving the lot of the common people – even as she recognizes the various forms of injustice that the common people endure – but rather a cynicism and a sense of apathy that lead Fielding to nihilism and to withdraw into isolation. Chafe suggests that “[f]aced with a people who have declared themselves not fit for self-government, Fielding tries to bolster their spirits (and hers) by waxing poetic about Newfoundlanders' mystical connection to the land” (71). In that she consistently lambastes Newfoundland's political elite, Fielding does, indeed, provide at least some comic relief. However, her criticisms of figures of traditional authority like Sir Richard Squires are not at all about upsetting the social order, but rather, calling for a more moral set of elites to take over running the system. There is no sense in her writing that the common people are either capable of a revolutionary project or that they are capable of making any informed decisions about how their lives ought to be governed. Taken a step further, in that her satire strikes out with abandon, it is as likely that her concern with the politics of Newfoundland is merely an intellectual exercise, a self-aggrandizement, a way to further her own celebrity as a writer and sell papers. Both Fielding and Smallwood, as working

journalists and publishers, play a part in producing the collective political subjectivity of the people, and so are also playing a part in creating sovereignty and bolstering the dominant political system. It is not that their journalism and the newspapers they work for must necessarily participate in this project – their journalism and their papers could promote radical or revolutionary views – but their reactionary mentalities, encapsulated by the belief that the subordinates of the world need the enlightened leadership of some elite, means their journalism functions within the frame of traditional authority and hierarchical politics. In this sense, Fielding's journalism and satire are not dissident but instead help establish the boundaries of an acceptable public discourse and, thus, the kinds of political possibilities that exist.

Smallwood and Fielding display a reactionary mentality. Such a mentality is most apparent in the way they perceive the mob at the Colonial Building riot. They are unable to perceive a political subject in this mob. They cannot see the multitude, even as it acts in a rational manner and its collective violence does have a clear connection between means and ends. The multitude re-appropriates and destroys artifacts of cultural capital, employing a swarm intelligence, and threatens to overturn the hierarchy of traditional authority. It is against this threat to traditional authority that Smallwood and Fielding swoop in and play a part in rehabilitating the status quo. Sir Richard Squires is swept from office, but his government is simply replaced by another set of elites. These elites are, in turn, replaced by the Commission of Government, which is then replaced by Smallwood's government after Confederation. The mantle of traditional authority is, in this manner, passed from one group of elites to another, and the multitude continues its long trek to self-realization, unseen and unknowable to those in power.

### Chapter 3

#### Anatomy of a Standoff in Edward Riche's *Rare Birds*

From the saintly and single-minded idealist to the fanatic is often but a step.

–Friedrich Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom*

There's no way to rule innocent men. The only power any government has is the power to crack down on criminals. Well, when there aren't enough criminals, one makes them.

–Ayn Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*

In the previous chapter I briefly discuss satire as a potentially conservative mode, specifically with respect to Fielding's journalistic writing. In this chapter I pick up this thread of discussion, since Edward Riche's satire likewise has a potentially conservative orientation. The climactic moment of Riche's *Rare Birds* features an outlandish armed standoff between the novel's central characters and agents of the Canadian government. The standoff is the result of a botched sting operation against libertarian-minded Alphonse (Phonse) Murphy by the Canadian Secret Intelligence Service (CSIS), which the restaurateur Dave Purcell unwittingly becomes embroiled in.<sup>106</sup> Dave and Phonse capture one of the CSIS agents as a hostage and take refuge in Phonse's

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<sup>106</sup> I am using the term "libertarian" in the sense that it is currently used in the United States and Canada, which is quite different from its original usage. Classical libertarianism, as it was developed by, among others, the British political philosopher William Godwin, was a radical left-wing ideology. Godwin, who literary scholars will know best as Mary Shelley's father, adapted British libertarianism to anarchism in his *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice and Its Influence on Morals and Happiness* (1793). As the term is currently used in many European countries, libertarianism is synonymous with anarchism. In the United States and Canada, libertarian political parties use the term in a different manner to indicate an extreme form of laissez-faire capitalist economics, an absolute minimum government bureaucracy, and a highly individualistic social order emphasizing the relentless pursuit of self-interest. This version of libertarianism is described in such works as *Libertarianism: A Primer* (1997) by David Boaz, the former executive vice president of the Cato Institute. Libertarian ideology, as the term is used here, is epitomized by the novelistic writings of Ayn Rand, such as her novel *Atlas Shrugged* (1957).

shed. The agent reveals, under duress, that there are numerous other armed agents hidden in the woods surrounding Phonse's property. Learning this, Phonse goes to the shed door and "fired three rounds in the air," alerting the agents that the situation has escalated and initiating the standoff (232). The government agents then set up a security perimeter and begin negotiations, eventually convincing Dave to come out of the shed and give himself up. In the confusion, Phonse escapes but is presumably killed in an explosion. However, the novel closes with the insinuation that Phonse has actually faked his own death.

Like the analysis of moments of resistance in other chapters of this dissertation, the standoff in *Rare Birds* functions as my entry point to a reading of the novel, a means of locating the ideological underpinnings and political impetus of the text. Published in the mid-1990s, *Rare Birds* was written at a time when the right-wing militia movement had attracted widespread attention in the United States and Canada, due in no small part to the Oklahoma City bombing carried out by Timothy McVeigh; however, the precursor for this and other instances of libertarian political violence, the catalyzing events that fuelled the militia movement, were the armed standoffs commonly referred to as Ruby Ridge and Waco. Both of these standoffs involved dissident figures linked to extreme right-wing groups, and both of these standoffs involved federal agencies, such as the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (ATF) and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), that were woefully ineffective at de-escalating and peacefully resolving the incidents. *Rare Birds* draws upon these well-publicized standoffs for creative fodder, but also taps into the general ideological current of right-wing libertarianism, which will be discussed below in relation to the Freemen-on-the-land movement and other right-wing groups. Yet it is not only that these characters are enmeshed within (or, in Dave's case, become indoctrinated into) the libertarian mentality, but that the forces working



against them, be they the “Winnebagos,” CSIS, the government bureaucracy, or the broader socio-economic system, play a significant, arguably clichéd, role in reinforcing their paranoia and conspiratorial fears. Phonse is certainly the kind of obsessive and highly suspicious character that would derisively be called a conspiracy theorist. He is a cartoon-like caricature of an American gun-toting wingnut transplanted to Newfoundland. He has a military background and is presented as part McGyver, part bayman. His paranoia is most profoundly expressed by the delusional persecution he experiences of the unseen (and never to materialize) conspiracy, referred to in the novel as the Winnebagos (i.e. agents of the Winnebago Corporation, the manufacturers of recreational vehicles). But even as Riche skewers aspects of the libertarian mentality through the characterization of Phonse, the satirical knife cuts both ways, and Riche is equally merciless with the representatives of the status quo establishment, be they federal agents, bureaucrats, or political spin doctors.

Because of the double edge of the critique, it is difficult, at first reading, to place the novel with respect to its political orientation. This is partially a consequence of the satirical register Riche writes in, which is similar to the satirical style of Fielding in many ways. On closer examination, the generic conventions further inform the ideological underpinnings of the novel. Indeed, the way the standoff is represented, and the way the novel situates power and resistance more generally, works with and through Riche’s acerbic satire. In the end, I argue, *Rare Birds* is pessimistic about the efficacy of resistance and about the possibility of political, social, and economic justice. In this light, the novel is best characterized as a reactionary text according to the reading methodology developed in this dissertation, similar to Johnston’s *Colony*; Riche’s novel is also pessimistic about the possibility of resistance in effecting social change, similar to Crummey’s *Galore*.

Along with *Rare Birds*, Riche has published three other novels. *The Nine Planets* (2004) focuses on a protagonist who is the vice principal of a private school in St. John's, and whose aspirations of becoming a businessman and member of the Newfoundland upper class are dashed. Riche's third novel, *Easy to Like* (2011), is a sardonic take on the management and business practices of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. *Today I Learned It Was You* (2016), Riche's most recent novelistic effort, takes a step into the surreal, as it focuses on a character who is transitioning into a deer. Riche has also written screenplays, such as the Newfoundland cult classic *Secret Nation* (1992), which was produced by the National Film Board of Canada and recounts the supposed conspiracy of letters surrounding the 1949 Newfoundland Confederation debate and subsequent vote to join Canada. Riche wrote a screenplay of *Rare Birds* (2001), which was turned into a feature-length film starring William Hurt, Molly Parker, and the Newfoundlander Andy Jones in the role of Phonse. Along with his fiction writing and screenplays, Riche is a regular contributor to a number of prominent Canadian media outlets, including the *Globe and Mail* and *Maclean's Magazine*. He also worked for a time as a writer for the CBC.

Riche's work has been fairly well represented and discussed in literary criticism. For example, Paul Chafe, in his article "Living the Authentic Life at 'The Far East of the Western World': Edward Riche's *Rare Birds*" (2008), explores the novel in relation to Baudrillard's notions of simulacra and simulation, arguing that Riche is parodying attempts by the Newfoundland culture industry to create a romanticized version of the island and its people, an illusion that is ultimately confused with the real. Chafe reads *Rare Birds* as a novel that resists "the artifice of the culture industry," and in doing so critiques the commodification of Newfoundland culture (175). The novel as a whole is a "microcosm of Newfoundland's culture

and tourism industry,” and Chafe shows the ways the actions of the two central characters, Dave and Phonse, unravel the myths on which this industry is based (176). For example, Dave, who runs a high-end restaurant catering to an exclusive clientele, is nothing like the stereotype of the resourceful, nature-loving Newfoundlander: he is an urbanite; he does not hunt or fish; he has no sense of being of or on the land, as he manages to get lost even on the short trip through the woods from his own home to Phonse’s; and his business is a failure (at least initially). Phonse, who is certainly much more resourceful than Dave, also breaks with the stereotype. Chafe argues that Phonse is not so much of the land or “interested in nature as he is in the vehicle that propels himself through it” (177). Here, Chafe is referring to the mini submarine Phonse is designing, suggesting that “the modern Newfoundlander’s attachment to the machine overwhelms his supposed attachment to nature” (177). “For Phonse and Dave,” Chafe continues, “the supposed inherent kinship with nature possessed by every Newfoundlander is a laughable hoax,” which is symbolically re-enacted in Riche’s novel through the duck deception perpetuated by Phonse and Dave (180). For Chafe, the novel is a warning that the “real is being lost while the re-enacted is being fetishized” and this “points toward a future Newfoundland void of meaning” (188). In this sense, *Rare Birds* is for Chafe both a clarion call and a critique of a commodified Newfoundland culture. This echoes similar points of the commodification of the mummering tradition discussed above, and the commodification of Newfoundland culture is, indeed, an important aspect of Riche’s novel.

Herb Wylie, in his article “Going Out of Their Way: Tourism, Authenticity, and Resistance in Contemporary Atlantic-Canadian Literature” (2008), discusses Riche’s *Rare Birds* in relation to theories of economic development and neoliberalism. Specifically, Wylie is interested in the ways Riche’s novels present tourism, and the Newfoundland government’s

promotion of the culture industries, as a misguided economic development strategy, a strategy that is a central tenet of the application of neoliberalism in Atlantic Canada: “The preoccupation with tourism in Atlantic-Canadian literature,” Wyile argues, “tells us much about current economic, political, social, and cultural conditions in the region but also tells us much about tourism as an extension of an ambivalent and often imperializing globalization” (161). In *Rare Birds*, the character Dave “contemplates tourism as literally the last resort for a desperate province,” a means through which, for Wyile, “Riche underscores how Newfoundland culture is reduced to a humiliating pantomime” (173). This humiliating pantomime has implications other than just the hollowing out of Newfoundland culture and heritage highlighted by Chafe. As Wyile sees, “tourism expands to fill a vacuum—that is, the economic void left by the collapse of the fisheries,” and as such is characteristic of a failed economy of a region that then cannibalizes its own culture (174). In a globalized neoliberal economic order, a region like Newfoundland cannot be without a saleable product, whether typical commodities or cultural products like tourism.

Wyile, along with his critical contributions to the study of Riche’s work, also conducted a highly informative interview with the author, titled “An Equal-Opportunity Satirist: An Interview with Edward Riche” (2008). Wyile specifically asks Riche about some of the prominent themes critics note in his novelistic writing, and the two also speak about Newfoundland culture and arts more generally. Riche laments that the Newfoundland tourism industry is essentially creating a Newfoundland culture that is backwards looking, an orientation that does not bode well with respect to artistic innovation. Furthermore, Riche suggests that an economy based on tourism and the service industry, a Newfoundland that survives only by looking to the past, literally has no future:

Newfoundland's survival is doubtful at this point. The demographics are against us: we are depopulating, we are shrinking, our birth rate is very low, our population is aging. If you keep extending things, we are going to cease to exist. Really, we are. So we say that we can use tourism to help the economy, help us survive, but that stops us from looking forward. This may be changing just recently [because of the oil industry], but for the last while Newfoundlanders were completely preoccupied with their past: Confederation, past political injustices, everything. (213-14)

Indeed, it is this specific historical intermezzo, the period between the cod moratorium and the emergence of the oil industry, in which *Rare Birds* was written and in which the narrative time frame is set. The kind of self-destructive nihilism Riche intuitively feels as being implicit with the Newfoundland tourism industry infuses the character Dave at the opening of the novel. The promise of the culture industry and of tourism as saviour has shown itself to be false, and Dave is left with nothing but the wine stocks of the almost-bankrupt restaurant for solace.

Sandra Gwyn is another critic to take up Riche's work, and in her review of *Rare Birds* for *Maclean's Magazine* (6 Oct. 1997) she characterizes the book as a work of "urban social comedy" (77). She notes that Riche is doing something quite different from other Newfoundland novels published around the same time, such as Patrick Kavanagh's *Gaff Topsails* (1996) and Kevin Major's *Gaffer* (1998), which feature more immediately recognizable rural or bygone Newfoundland characters and settings. Unlike these novels, Gwyn suggests *Rare Birds* has a "raunchy comic energy endemic to Newfoundland in the '90s" (77). Like Wyile and other critics, Gwyn also points to the economic backdrop against which Riche's novel is set, and says that Dave is a representation of the "post-moratorium Newfoundlander [whose] first job, as a fisheries department policy analyst, vanished when the cod did"; Dave's response to this

economic crisis, which is again illustrative of the attempt by the tourism and culture industry to fill the void, is to “eat and drink his revenge on the bank” (77). But while Gwyn appreciates the setup of the novel and its satiric and comedic playfulness, she suggests the novel falls apart, specifically in the “last part of the book, in which St. John’s author Riche loses his way amid a convoluted conspiratorial plot involving cocaine, CSIS spooks and mysterious Russians” (77). To my reading, it is the last part of the book where Riche hits his stride, and following Chafe’s arguments about the parody of the overblown artifice of the culture industries, a surreal situation like a cocaine-fuelled conspiracy plot makes good sense. Indeed, as I describe in greater detail below, Riche’s use of satire and comedy are an important element of the political orientation of the novel.

The reading of *Rare Birds* to follow is interested mainly in the novel’s politics and its framing of resistance and dissent, and is not immediately concerned with questions of Newfoundland culture, tourism, or identity. Nonetheless, the lines of scholarly criticism examined by the critics mentioned above are a necessary starting point. Like the other novels examined in this dissertation, *Rare Birds* is still quintessentially of and about Newfoundland. Along with understanding the text as a work of Newfoundland fiction, in order to develop a line of argumentation around resistance studies and specifically examining the standoff at the close of the novel, it is also necessary for me to situate *Rare Birds* as a work of satire, since it is difficult to make any further claims, or even discuss the novel generally, without first discussing its form and rhetorical register. The section to follow discusses *Rare Birds* as a work of satire, and specifically a strain of conservative-oriented satire, picking up the threads of this argument from the previous chapter on Johnston’s *Colony*. A subsequent section then analyzes the standoff and how it relates to other aspects of the text. A third section describes the libertarian, Freeman-on-

the-land mentality that is the ideological ground of the novel, and also the ways forces that seem to oppose that mentality (i.e. the security apparatus and government) actually grant legitimacy to its claims and, thus, foster its replication and growth.

Before continuing, I want to pause for a moment to note that the discussion of political positions characterized below as extreme right wing is at odds with the (mostly) left-leaning theory that has been developed in other chapters of this dissertation. My point here is not to either support or dispel such extreme right-wing positions, but instead to read Riche's novel as a site where such positions can be examined and thought through. The discussion and analysis presented here attempts to understand these extreme right-wing positions on their own terms and not dismiss them out of hand as simply misguided, conspiratorial, or fundamentalist. In light of the apparent resurgence of extreme right-wing politics and the electoral successes of parties and politicians expressing extreme right-wing views, it is ever more necessary to try to understand the ideologies of the Freeman-on-the-land, the Christian Identity movement, the militia movement, and a host of other groups that form the base of this renewed movement of the far right.<sup>107</sup> An all-too-common mistake of those who oppose such views is to simply write off those involved in extreme right-wing politics as amoral or as dupes. And indeed, while it is the clearly identifiable groups like the libertarians, the Freeman, or the militias that get the lion's share of the attention, these are best considered the loudest and flashiest aspects of the movement of the

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<sup>107</sup> In the United States and in Canada, a prominent wing of this movement in recent years is the so-called "alt-right," which encapsulates a toxic blend of misogyny, racism, classism, and proto-fascism. A particularly virulent and fundamentalist faction within the alt-right, which calls itself Identity Europa, rearticulates the long-dispelled tenets of eugenics and other aspects of racist narratives of the master race. The identity politics that is the core of the group's recruitment and outreach campaign is clearly bigoted and dangerous. While I do think it is important to understand such groups and their appeal, I am not making excuses for them or for any other extreme right-wing groups. For more on the alt-right and its place in contemporary politics, see Matthew Lyons's *Insurgent Supremacists: The U.S. Far Right's Challenge to State and Empire* (2017).

far right, something like its vanguard. My point of departure and rationale for engaging with this subject matter is the belief that extreme right-wing politics flourish because they speak to a certain kind of disaffection and because they offer what are perceived (rightly or wrongly) as viable solutions to everyday problems. Building on what critics like Chafe and Wyile note about *Rare Birds* – that the novel springs from a context of disaffection over the loss of the cod fishery and the vacuousness of tourism as an attempt to fill the void – it makes sense that such extreme right-wing views would resonate with Dave and Phonse. The point, then, is to see the way such ideologies offer themselves as viable solutions to deeply rooted and complex problems, and not simply as aberrations. From this point of view, it is necessary to attempt to understand the extreme right, if only to be better able to undermine its arguments and rhetoric, and to offer viable alternatives.

### **Satire and Conservatism**

All of Riche's novelistic writing takes the form of satire. Riche's satire has the tendency to resist straightforward interpretation: it can seem that his novels do not have a clear message since satiric writing like Riche's can be unsparing and seemingly ridicule everyone and everything, like Fielding in Johnston's *Colony*, in some ways. Because Riche's satire often cuts both ways and criticizes or attacks with abandon, it rests on and reinforces normative values, and in this sense Riche's satire is fundamentally conservative. To elaborate this point it is useful to examine, briefly, some of the critical theory on satire and then specifically how satire functions in Riche's work.

Satire, as a literary genre, at once ridicules and investigates the absurdities of humanity, often through the use of humour, irony, paradox, and allegory. Matthew Hodgart, in *Satire*:



*Origins and Principles* (1969), among the most referenced contemporary theoretical works on satire, points out that,

satire demands a high degree both of commitment to and involvement with the painful problems of the world, and simultaneously a high degree of abstraction from the world. The criticism of the world is abstracted from its ordinary setting, the setting of, say, political oratory and journalism, and transformed into a high form of ‘play’, which gives us both the recognition of our responsibilities and the irresponsible joy of make-believe. (11)

Certainly, this broad definition applies to Riche’s novelistic writing, especially so when considering the playfulness and humour that are the author’s trademarks.<sup>108</sup>

Along with being obviously funny, satire in Riche’s novels is heavily laden with irony. It is not the sort of satire that Northrop Frye discusses in *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957) as “sheer invective,” but is instead a kind of satire in which readers are “not sure what the author’s attitude is” (223). For example, *Rare Birds* takes the opportunity to satirize characters of all social classes. Upper-class characters in the text, such as those who dine at the Auk, are mocked for their pretensions and vanity, but lower-class characters, such as the tinkers inhabiting the Upper Road of the fictional community Push Through, are also held up for ridicule:

It was populated by various branches of bad cousins from Push Through, exiled to the bog over generations. Their scattered bungalows and mobile homes, grouped in

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<sup>108</sup> Riche’s novels typically employ various kinds of comedic play to good effect. Specifically, his novels have moments of slapstick and black comedy: in *Rare Birds* when Dave and Phonse launch the R.S.V. in the middle of the night, the brake lever on the transport cart gives out and the two are catapulted into the bay; in *Easy to Like* the character Elliot falls head-over-heels into a ravine and a CBC executive falls off a balcony to his death; in *The Nine Planets*, it is arguably a form of gallows humour in the way that Riche kills off the central character Marty at the end.

irrational clusters were ramshackle . . . they bought perfectly good vehicles and disassembled them to display their skeletons in their yards. It was a holdover from their recent hunter-gatherer phase. “Wilf is great hunter, he have many wrecks.” (23)

However, middle-class characters do not escape derision either. The inhabitants of Push Through, described as “brown baggers,” commute to the urban centre of St. John’s for work, and it is noted that there is a degree of “animosity in the city toward the brown baggers, who enjoyed less-expensive housing, paid little property tax, got the cable and loudly claimed to be examples of Newfoundland’s vanishing yet proud rural way of life” (23). The unsparing nature of Riche’s satire is further demonstrated in his second novel *The Nine Planets*. The two central characters in the novel, Marty and Hank, are co-owners of a private school and long-time friends; however, they are complete opposites in terms of their political beliefs, Marty being a self-involved, aspiring capitalist, and Hank being an environmentalist and social justice activist. Both of these characters are ridiculed and the close of the novel sees both of them experience bitter disappointment. Similar arguments can be made about Riche’s treatment of characters of different social class and political orientation in his third novel, *Easy to Like*. To say that Riche’s use of satire, and specifically the use of an unremitting ironic tone, leaves readers in a position of uncertainty about the author’s attitude or the message of the narrative is to simply point out that because everyone and everything is subject to ridicule and mockery his novels do not take any obvious political, moral, or ethical stand.

While satire like Riche’s appears apolitical, it can still be understood to take a political stand – namely, supporting the status quo, an inherently conservative political stance. For example, in *Rare Birds* Phonse’s libertarian mentality (as will be discussed in greater detail below) is satirized, suggesting that ideas of absolute liberty without state institutions are naive.

However, state institutions, such as CSIS, are also satirized in the novel, suggesting that the security and surveillance apparatus is intrusive and threatens the fundamental liberties of citizens. This is, to speak metaphorically, satire that cuts both ways on the issues of liberty and security, but in doing so the satire is also serving a normalizing function, pushing aside opposing views from both sides of a spectrum and, thus, solidifying the supposedly moderate position in the centre. In the working example of liberty and state surveillance in *Rare Birds*, this would be to say something like, “we ought to have some liberty, but not absolutely” and “the state ought to have some power to surveil, but not go too far and infringe on liberty.” In effect, Riche’s satire makes the case for the world to remain just as it is.

This kind of conservative-oriented satire is discussed by Amber Day in her book *Satire and Dissent* (2011). Day points out that “satirists ridicule non-normative behaviour, thereby reinforcing existing attitudes. . . . Satirists typically ridicule particular personalities, going after character flaws and other weaknesses, but they rarely critique the more crucial economic and political structures of their societies” (11). For this reason, satire is often theorized as being an inherently conservative mode, “serving to assure us that, while particular individuals are fallible, the system itself works as it should. Many theorists take it as a given that satire, in all its forms and in all cultures, functions conservatively” (11). However, part of Day’s project is to dispel the notion that satire is necessarily conservative, and, indeed, it seems obvious that many well-known satirists, Kurt Vonnegut for example, are pushing progressive agendas.<sup>109</sup> Day’s study also examines the importance of political satire in television, noting shows such as *The Colbert Report*, *Late Night with Conan O’Brien*, and *This Hour Has 22 Minutes* as examples of popular

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<sup>109</sup> Vonnegut’s *Breakfast of Champions* (1973), for example, satirized racism, classism, and homophobia. Vonnegut was an active long-time member of the American Civil Liberties Union.

satire that “draw attention to the hypocrisies and ironies in the supposedly serious world of political discourse and to advocate for alternative formulations of the issues of the day” (6). Specifically, with respect to Newfoundland satirists on television, she notes that “Rick Mercer and the entire original cast of *22 Minutes* are from Newfoundland, a poor and culturally marginalized province of Canada that is frequently the butt of national jokes,” and in her view they deploy satire as a means to push back against reductive or stereotypical notions of Newfoundland and Newfoundlanders (10). Along with arguing that satire does not necessarily have to be conservative in orientation, Day is also critiquing the notion that satire can have no real political impact other than to strengthen the status quo. She readily admits that the expectation of any text to “unilaterally start a revolution is absurd,” and instead of expecting monumental change she sees satire making “incremental shifts in influencing public debate and in creating or mobilizing political communities” (22). Once again, to my reading Riche’s *Rare Birds* is indeed conservative in its orientation, but all the same it seems to me an important distinction to note that satire does not always have to be conservative or reactionary.

Also instructive with respect to theorizing conservative forms of satire, and for understanding Riche’s use of irony, is Linda Hutcheon’s analysis in *Irony’s Edge: The Theory and Politics of Irony* (1994). Hutcheon focuses primarily on eighteenth-century British literature, and notes that a great deal of the literary criticism on this period sees satire, such as from Jonathan Swift, as “siding with authority” and inherently conservative (28). But just as Day points out that satire does not need to be conservative, Hutcheon says that some of the literary criticism on eighteenth-century satire likewise takes this perspective: “the opposite to the ‘conservative’ view—in other words, the theory that irony is really subversive and oppositional—also has a long (and parallel) history in which satire’s deployment of it [irony]

plays an important part as well” (28). Even as this question of whether satire and irony are conservative is not central to her analysis, Hutcheon does seem to lean more with those seeing a conservative bent. For example, many of the texts she examines are offering moralistic arguments or speaking against sin, often from a Christian point of view. Hutcheon suggests that such satire seeks to prevent or to reverse ethical decay:

Since satire is, by most definitions, ameliorative in intent, it is satire in particular that frequently turns to irony as a means of ridiculing—and implicitly correcting—the vices and follies of humankind. There is, however, a very wide tonal range possible within this corrective function, from the playfully teasing to the scornful and disdainful. (50)

On the one hand, satire that functions as a corrective and that calls on Christian values, such as Swift’s *A Modest Proposal* (1729), highlights the plight of indentured servants, children, and specifically the Irish in the Britain of the time. However, while Swift does lampoon elements of British society and (underhandedly) calls for reforms and increased taxation, he does not necessarily critique the underlying class structure that contributed to the massive inequalities of the day. This is at once a humanitarian gesture but one that is also conservative in that it harkens back to traditional Christian charity that Swift sees as having decayed and in need of rehabilitation. In the sense that it is backwards looking and calls for a renewal of Christian traditional values, this is satire that is conservative even as it expresses admirable values.

The main purpose of this brief overview on satire as a literary mode is just to say that there is nothing inherently progressive about satire. Satire can work in the service of progressive politics, but does not always do so. Riche’s satire, as I have highlighted in part and will discuss more below, ridicules ideologies on the political left and the political right, but in so doing makes

a case for the conservative centre ground. The way this plays out in *Rare Birds* can be seen in the standoff at the close of the novel, which at once ridicules the right-wing positions espoused by libertarians and by other extreme right-wing movements and groups. At the same time, Riche also ridicules the Canadian federal government and its law enforcement agencies, specifically CSIS. By satirizing with abandon, Riche takes no clear position; however, the effect of the satire is to reinforce normative values – not too far to the right or to the left, not too anti or pro government, nothing extreme or radical in any regard, but only the well-trodden and safe middle ground. Such a position is elaborated further below, as I now turn to a discussion of the form and function of the standoff in *Rare Birds*.

### **Standoffs, Form, and Function**

The standoff in *Rare Birds* occurs at the close of the novel, in the penultimate chapter. It is Dave, who has slowly come around to seeing the world from a similar perspective as Phonse, who sets the standoff into motion by discovering a CSIS operative who has concealed himself in the woods between the Auk – Dave’s restaurant – and Phonse’s property. Dave wanders outside with a shotgun in his hands, a gift from Phonse, with the intention of blasting to smithereens the imitation duck that Phonse carved to further the duck hoax, and which was floating around the bay and attracting unwanted attention in Dave’s opinion. On the trail to the cove, Dave stumbles upon a dark figure lurking in the woods: “With three short silent steps he was almost on top of the man. It was an intoxicating thrill, standing there, hovering, unseen. He was a ghost. His shotgun raised, Dave stepped into the path. ‘What the fuck are you doing, Jack?’ . . . The figure convulsed with fright. . . . [Dave saw] clasped in the man’s hand, the distinct outline of a pistol” (229-30). Dave asks the man if he is with the Winnebagos, the manufacturer of recreational

vehicles that Phonse is convinced are after his design for a recreational submarine vehicle (R.S.V.). When the man responds that he is with “orange unit,” Dave is confused and decides the best course of action is to march the man at gunpoint to Phonse’s house. When Phonse sees the man, he congratulates Dave for capturing the “hostage,” and they take him to Phonse’s shed, which is to be the setting for the remainder of the standoff.

Phonse interrogates the hostage and discovers there are fifteen more armed men in the woods around the property. Learning this, Phonse goes to the door of the shed and fires a burst of shots in the air: “‘Well, now they know we mean business. Who the fuck are you with?’ . . . ‘I’m with CSIS,’ the man whimpered” (232-33). The hostage also reveals that CSIS is not, in fact, interested in the R.S.V., but is after the high-tech Svetkov lamps, which were gifted to Phonse by a shadowy Bulgarian named Uri Svetkov who was formerly in the employ of the Russian military. Phonse proceeds to bind the hostage to a sawhorse in the shed, which, paradoxically, “seemed to settle the hostage . . . as if being tied down gave him an excuse for his powerlessness, completing the formal theatre of having been captured” (237). At the same time, Dave begins to realize the gravity of the situation, which he now sees as impossible, a “maze” he is unable to find his way out of (238). But Dave also entertains visions of heroism and grandeur, imagining that “dying at the hands of the Canadian government was the only way [he] could square things up with Newfoundland. It would be a grand gesture of resistance, a former collaborator going over to the other side, betraying the colonial master” (238).<sup>110</sup> Phonse, who had “covered his face and hair with black motor grease” for camouflage, says he has to leave the shed (presumably to secure the R.S.V. and the Svetkov lamps) and suggests that Dave should stall the CSIS agents

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<sup>110</sup> Dave here facetiously considers his previous work for the Canadian Government Department of Fisheries and Oceans as having worked for an enemy of Newfoundland, as a collaborator may work as a scout or informant for an occupying army in their home territory.

(240). It is at this point in the narrative, when Dave is alone with the hostage in the shed, that the standoff begins in earnest, as the other CSIS agents make themselves known, first by switching on spotlights to illuminate the area around the shed: “thin beams of intense white light made a pincushion of the shed, enveloping [Dave] in a cat’s cradle of sizzling rays. A crackling amplified voice came over the megaphone” (241). All these details and specific diction bring a sense of intensity into this scene, as the standoff is initiated in earnest.

It is worth pausing at this point to try to understand something of the form and function of standoffs in a general sense. From the perspective of law enforcement, there are many different sorts of standoffs, the most common of which are brief and centre on domestic disputes that police are called to resolve – more specifically, in these cases it is those disputes that are not immediately resolved by the presence of police but that then may escalate into standoffs. The more sensational kinds of standoffs, like the one depicted in *Rare Birds*, are extremely uncommon, but do garner a great deal of attention. The phenomenon of the standoff has been the subject of studies in sociology and criminology, most significant among them Robin Wagner-Pacifici’s *Theorizing the Standoff: Contingency in Action* (2000). Wagner-Pacifici analyzes standoffs in terms of the physical space and temporal unfolding of a particular event, but also as a kind of existential category. She notes,

The standoff may be viewed as a frozen moment, where the mechanisms and processes of social interaction have ceased to function in their usual predictable and elastic way. . . . Participants in standoffs usually spend a good deal of time just waiting, waiting to see what the “enemy” will do. (5-6)

Regardless of the different contexts and locations of standoffs, be they armed standoffs between extremists and forces of the security establishment or the more common standoffs that may



happen between individuals and the police as the result of domestic disputes, “the image of antagonists frozen in their opposition to each other is a first approximation of an adequate description of the situation” (6). Granted that, as discussed above, Riche’s novel is a work of satirical fiction, the depiction of the standoff nonetheless conforms to the characteristics described by Wagner-Pacifici. Even though time technically continues to pass, the situation in the novel during the time frame of the standoff may be considered frozen, as something like an atemporal interval. These are indeed “antagonists frozen in their opposition to each other,” with Dave and the CSIS agents at a seemingly unresolvable impasse, as Dave understands when he sees the situation as a “maze” with no way out. Each side of the standoff waits to see what the other will do, strategizing possible avenues for resolution and seeking whatever advantages may be presented by the physical and psychological terrain.

Moreover, it is a situation in which, as Wagner-Pacifici suggests, “everything is placed in high relief – actions and reactions, language, gestures, behaviours. The moment is framed, often literally, in that a space of the standoff is, if possible, located and cordoned off” (7). This sense of high relief, of a cordoned off space, is conveyed in the novel both by the spotlights illuminating the scene of the standoff and by the physical presence of the CSIS agents who have surrounded the shed, essentially creating a border between the space of the standoff and the regular world. It is, from the perspective of the security forces, a controlled space, which is according to Wagner-Pacifici exactly the kind of space of the standoff: “spatial referents are usually reconfigured and renamed as a strict grid of inside and outside the perimeter; safe zones, demilitarized zones, and zones of danger replace the normal contours of street names, business districts, residential areas, farms, and wilderness” (23). Phonse’s property, and specifically the illuminated area around the shed, becomes a zone of danger, and this is something indicated not

only by the presence of the CSIS agents on the perimeter of that danger zone, but also by Dave's changing impressions of the shed during the standoff; Dave thinks to himself, after they had taken their hostage inside the shed, that he "had been so impressed by Phonse's shed, had so admired his neighbour's ingenuity, his command of lathes and drills, of calipers and meters. They were now the workings of a torture chamber" (236).<sup>111</sup> Aside from the fact that the security forces cordon off the shed and surrounding areas, Phonse also fortifies the shed against a potential assault by "bolting windows shut" and by "digging through boxes and crates in search of ammunition" (237). In this way, both parties engaged in the standoff have created safe zones and established their particular space.

The space of the standoff is also a hostile and contentious space where there is, as Wagner-Pacifici puts it, a "mutual and symmetrical threat, wherein the central parties face each other, literally and figuratively, across some key divide" (7). The mutual and symmetrical threat, in the novel, is the threat of physical violence, either against the hostage by Dave, or against Dave and Phonse by the CSIS agents. Related to the threat of physical violence, and in a typical moment of humour from Riche, Phonse admits to the squeamish Dave that he is "not planning on shooting" the hostage, but that "it would help matters if [the hostage] at least imagines it's in the cards" (234). Their CSIS hostage clearly does think there is a significant threat to his life, because as Phonse and Dave notice from the scent filling the shed that, in his extreme fear, the "prisoner had clearly soiled himself" (233). The threat the two parties pose to each other may in this way be seen as symmetrical, and thus as part of the reason for the frozen nature of the situation, because either side may theoretically use force, but to do so would risk mutual loss: if

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<sup>111</sup> Incidentally, this is perhaps a point in the novel when the typical aspects of the standoff clash with the description, as one would presume that, since the shed is theoretically a safe space for Dave and Phonse, Dave would not conceive of it as a torture chamber.

the CSIS agents assault the shed, the hostage may die; if Dave and Phonse kill the hostage, the agents may assault the shed and kill them. The standoff is, in this sense, a kind of zero-sum game.

Wagner-Pacifici also points out that, to be considered as such, “standoffs must be set off categorically from other situations. Participants must find themselves or declare themselves to be in an emergency. Such an existentially diacritical moment foregrounds the difference between *normal* time and space and *emergency* time and space” (19). From the perspective of the CSIS agents in the novel, the situation escalates to an emergency because their sting operation was foiled when Dave stumbled on their operative in the woods. It is worth noting that the standoff only materializes because something has gone wrong, as the result of an operation being botched and uncovered, and not at all because the security forces want to be in such a situation.

Something of this important point about the existential quality of the standoff as emergency and as abnormal is indicated above, when noting that the parties in a standoff face each other both literally and figuratively. It is not just that a standoff is a particular use of space and a particular conception of time, but that those involved in the standoff have moved outside of the “normal” realm of experience. The standoff in *Rare Birds* is an emergency situation because of the charged nature of the threat of physical violence, but also because the antagonists are at odds over an issue that cannot be immediately resolved. But this emergency situation, this figurative standoff over an issue, is actually caused by the antagonists holding different interpretations of the situation, because they are operating with incompatible understanding and divergent frames of reference. For example, Phonse and Dave immediately assume the operatives lurking in the woods are from the Winnebago Corporation and are after the R.S.V., while the CSIS agents are

in fact after the Svetkov lamps. Until he learns that the lamps are the object of desire for CSIS, Phonse considers the lamps little more than a novelty.

Indeed, this notion that the standoff is actually a question of competing narratives or opposing perspectives is a central point of Wagner-Pacifici's argument. She notes,

A paradox of the standoff is that while all participants have committed themselves to the situation (with highly variable degrees of freedom), they have, in a profound sense, committed themselves to *different* situations. They have taken their "stands," that is positioned themselves around some set of issues. And their definitions of the situation are usually diametrically opposed. Institutions of law and politics and organizations of law enforcement attempt to appropriate the standoff with preferred categories of assessment and control. . . . Thus the standoff is often as much about clashes of categorical imperatives as they are clashes of individuals and groups. (7-8)

With regard to some of the more sensational standoffs in recent memory, this notion of competing narratives and of antagonists having committed themselves to different situations is worth elaborating. The Waco standoff, between the Branch Davidians and various agencies of the US federal government, was just such a case, since the authorities viewed the situation as a hostage incident, whereas the Davidians viewed the situation through the lens of religion and prophecy, essentially seeing the assault on the ranch as corresponding with an end of days,

millennial, or apocalyptic narrative.<sup>112</sup> The standoff was as much to do with a clash of interpretation and differing understandings as it was to do with any kind of fundamental antagonism over right and wrong, legality and illegality.

Not only do the participants in a standoff understand the situation differently and according to their own frame of reference, but the opposing forces understand each other in idiosyncratic ways as well. Wagner-Pacifici points out that security forces generally define and see themselves opposed to an antagonist who is “alternately terrorist, cultist, fanatic, fundamentalist, or . . . just plain serial killer”; for their part, those opposing the security forces “have their own rigid and reified categories of identity and reality with which they operate” (7). It is a case, then, in which the participants of a standoff not only differ on the basis of what is happening, but see their opposition and even themselves in a fundamentally different manner. These dynamics of competing narratives and competing identifications play out in *Rare Birds* as the CSIS agents ultimately admit that “it’s all been a big mistake” and that there was really no reason there should have been any antagonism in the first place. The CSIS agents think of Phonse and Dave as implicated in a criminal enterprise to steal and sell state secrets, whereas Phone and Dave absurdly imagine the CSIS agents (at least initially) to be working on behalf of the Winnebago Corporation. A further point, with regard to the notion of the standoff as a set of competing or divergent narratives, is when Dave informs the lead agent, Partington, of the

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<sup>112</sup> The Davidians were a fundamentalist Christian sect led by David Koresh. Their compound at Mount Carmel, Texas, became the scene of a standoff in 1993 when ATF agents, who were investigating Koresh and the Davidians because of their stockpiling of guns and explosives, botched a sting operation. The initial failed attempt to breach the compound resulted in the deaths of a number of Davidians and federal agents, and then escalated into a standoff situation. The standoff ended in tragedy when a fire started in the compound (according to different accounts either lit by the Davidians or lit by federal agents) and 80 people, including 22 children, died in the flames. For more on the Davidians and the Waco standoff, see Stewart Wright’s informative edited collection, *Armageddon in Waco: Critical Perspectives on the Branch Davidian Conflict* (1996).

existence of the R.S.V. Even though CSIS has had Dave and Phonse under surveillance for months, they are unaware of the R.S.V., and Dave intuitively feels that this is a failure of understanding on their part: “Dave could tell that he had taken something very precious from Partington, the privileged and protected knowledge of what was happening, the narrative, the trajectory and meaning of events. Dave was probably the only person in the world who now knew what was going on” (248). Partington shows himself to be fairly level-headed by not reacting in a petulant or aggressive manner to being embarrassed like this, but one can imagine that such a misunderstanding could easily be taken as an affront to his professionalism and ego. Dave recognizes this of the hostage as well, reflecting that he would “construct a very different tale of his capture to save face. . . . Everyone did this, Dave realized, changed their story to account for decisions that were cowardly or misguided” (241). In the delicate and charged situation of the standoff, personality clashes, ego, and a desire to control the story of what is happening (or did happen) may be all that are needed to precipitate a dramatic escalation of the confrontation.

As Dave observes the scene of the standoff, he at first has no idea how long it may last. He sees Phonse tying the hostage to a sawhorse and thinks that Phonse was “evidently planning on keeping his hostage for some time” (237). Phonse also tries to fortify the shed, bolting the windows shut and gathering ammunition (237). However, as the two assess the situation, Phonse decides that he must make his way to the R.S.V., through the special-built tunnel connecting the shed to his house and which the CSIS agents know nothing of. He leaves Dave with instructions to stall the agents, to give him time to reach, and scuttle, the R.S.V. When Phonse leaves, Partington speaks to Dave over a megaphone, and tries to de-escalate the situation and bring the standoff to a close. Dave thinks that even though the voice on the megaphone is trying to comfort him, “the words, surrounded by electronic noise, bouncing through the trees lost their meaning in

transit. No one had ever needed a megaphone to tell the truth” (244). Although Dave recognizes the lack of sincerity on the part of the CSIS agents and their offer to negotiate, he also learns that his estranged wife, Claire, is also with the agents on the blockade. They have Claire speak to Dave, as another tactic to try and talk him out of the shed. Eventually, Dave and Agent Partington do speak face-to-face, and each conveys something of the narrative of what created the standoff situation as they understand it. Dave tells Partington about the R.S.V. and Phonse’s fears of the Winnebago Corporation, while Partington tells Dave that the Svetkov lights had been stolen (presumably by the man who gave them to Phonse). This follows Wagner-Pacifci’s analysis of how standoffs potentially come to an end, often through the opposing parties coming to something of a mutual agreement, or at least coming to a shared understanding of the other’s perspective:

This conflict of meanings, at the levels of both cognition and experience of the participants, is what freezes the action. What needs to happen, at its most basic, is a restructuring of the situation so that there is some, however small, place of overlap between the definitions of the situation on the parts of the adversaries – to get a wedge into the frozen moment. (8)

The CSIS agents use Claire as a wedge of sorts, but also share some knowledge of why they are after Phonse. Dave also shares information and his perspective, actually giving Partington information that the agent ought to have known.

Ultimately, as Partington admits, the entire situation had been a mistake, and the realization of this is as much about coming to see a different point of view as it is about prosecuting a crime. Indeed, as Wagner-Pacifci points out, “the action driving the parties of a standoff to the standoff state and out through the other side of it is primarily a project of

interpretation” (19). Once Dave and the CSIS agents are able to interpret the other’s side of things, the standoff is ended. However, Dave is still taken into custody, and once he is under control the agents immediately start looking for Phonse. The situation is fully ended when a huge explosion echoes through the woods, and the agents, Dave, and Phonse’s wife reach the beach to discover that Phonse has apparently blown up the R.S.V. and is nowhere to be found. The CSIS operation is a total failure, since the months of surveillance and the sting had been exorbitantly expensive and resulted in the arrest of “an eccentric restaurateur, having one man taken hostage, another two [agents] hospitalized and a civilian [Phonse] killed. And they still didn’t have the precious Svetkov lamps” (254). CSIS also goes to lengths after the fact to not let news of the botched operation become public, making Dave and everyone else involved sign legal undertakings to never discuss the events (255). In this way, the standoff is resolved without any violence (except the presumption of Phonse’s death, which readers are prompted to disbelieve at the close of the novel), though one would have to say that Phonse and Dave got the better of the situation, since CSIS never got anything they wanted and could not even publicly acknowledge what had happened.

The standoff is also a central metaphor for other aspects of the novel, in that it represents a broader society that is in a standoff, and characters that are standoffish. For example, as critics like Wyile and Gwyn note, the novel was written and is set in the time shortly after the collapse of the cod fishery, and a popular notion at the time and even today is that it was the federal government that ought to take the lion’s share of the blame for overfishing and for allowing foreign fishing on the Grand Banks off of Newfoundland’s east coast. This is represented in the novel most explicitly in that the Newfoundlanders Dave and Phonse oppose the Canadian state. Their opposition is also a united front of urban and rural Newfoundland, if Dave is understood to



represent the urban middle class and Phonse is understood to represent a more typically rural and working-class character. However, any victory over the Canadian state – exemplified by Phonse and Dave pulling the wool over the eyes of the federal agents – is no real compensation for the loss of the island’s primary industry, a loss which has arguably given rise to Phonse’s libertarian and conspiratorial impulses and also obliged Dave to make the ill-fated journey into the hospitality industry.

The standoff with the CSIS agents also gestures to Dave’s personality. Wagner-Pacifici discusses this social aspect of being standoffish in her book, noting that “most of social life can be understood as avoidance of standoffs . . . there’s something of the standoff lurking, contingently, behind every social situation.” (6) In the novel, Dave is in a sort of standoff with his wife and even with Phonse. He knows that Claire, his wife, has lost interest in him and wants a divorce, but he is unable to speak to her about it in a direct manner (40). Dave at times patronizes Phonse, assuming him to be paranoid and simplistic. Even though Dave is extremely fond of Phonse, he finds it difficult to speak to the man about anything of substance, at least not until Dave becomes embroiled in the duck hoax and eventually the standoff itself. Dave is mired in ennui, sees his life as a failure, and is self-reflexively sinking into alcoholism and drug abuse – he even derisively calls himself “Fuck Up Man” (69). A good indication of Dave’s true state of body and mind is a morning when he is working through a terrible hangover:

His head was pounding, the skull likely filled to bursting with vomit. In the mirror he noted two flaky trails of dried blood leading from his nostrils to his upper lip, giving him a rusty little Hitler mustache. His eyes, all frayed red strands and yellow spots, sat deep in puffy purple nests. Dave looked like he had taken a good beating.  
(67)

In short, Dave is even in something of a standoff with himself. He is nihilistic and self-destructive, and it is only, to my reading, that the book is a work infused with humour and satire that the text does not end with Dave's suicide.

The standoff at the close of the novel adheres to the pattern of form and function of standoffs between security forces and so-called outlaws of all kinds. In the novel, this is a frozen moment. The moment is frozen because there is a time in which there is no movement between the two sides toward resolving the unnatural situation of the standoff. The standoff is not only the climax of the story but a functional metaphor for other aspects of the text, specifically the broader social context of the novel and the protagonist's character traits. But the standoff also indicates something about the political orientation of *Rare Birds*. It is a work of satire, granted, which I have discussed above as a potentially conservative genre, depending on how it is deployed. This conservative impulse of satire is epitomized in that the two opposing sides in the standoff go at one another in a heated conflict, while leaving the rest of the world – the status quo – as it is. Looking at some of the real standoffs that took place around the time Riche was writing the novel, it is possible to draw comparisons to the standoff in the text. Specifically, looking at some of the standoffs with right-wing extreme groups and individuals is especially productive for locating the novel's politics and the way it understands power and resistance.

### **Right-Wing *Rare Birds***

In this section, I discuss how aspects of right-wing politics and right-wing movements are represented in Riche's novel. Examining the standoff in *Rare Birds* simply with respect to its form and function does not on its own say much about the political orientation of the novel, since standoffs can occur involving all sorts of political actors, whether radicals, extremists,

moderates, and from the left or the right of the political spectrum.<sup>113</sup> My purpose in this section is to tease out some of the explicit and implicit influences or representations of right-wing and extreme right-wing politics in the novel. Specifically, I look at how well-known standoffs between federal agents and extreme right-wing groups provide creative fodder for the standoff in *Rare Birds*, and then argue that these kinds of extremist politics are expressed throughout the novel. In this way, extreme right-wing politics becomes one of the targets of Riche's satire. Some of the main right-wing groups and ideologies I focus on include the militia movement and the Freeman-on-the-land movement, both of which have a continuing presence in Canada and the United States. Although I draw from theoretical writing on the American right wing, there are many similarities in the way extremism functions in the United States and in Canada. The Freeman-on-the-land movement, for example, is largely Canadian-centred, while the sovereign citizen movement, which has almost identical characteristics, is largely American-centred. Likewise, unsanctioned militias are active in both the United States and in Canada. Riche's novel also specifically deals with American right-wing politics as Dave's estranged wife works for a libertarian think tank in Washington. This is not to suggest there are no differences between Canadian and American right-wing politics, but rather that there are significant similarities and

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<sup>113</sup> A well-known standoff that happened in Canada, which did not have the same political orientation as the forms of right-wing extremism I discuss below, was the 1990 Oka standoff between the Mohawk community of Kanehsatake and Quebec police forces, the RCMP, and the Canadian Armed Forces. For more on the Oka standoff, see the National Film Board-produced documentary *Kanehsatake: 270 Years of Resistance* (1993). Although it happened years after the publication of *Rare Birds*, I would be remiss in not mentioning a high-profile 2010 standoff in Newfoundland between the RCMP and Leo Crockwell. This standoff was the subject of a book by Chris Ryan, *The Bay Bulls Standoff* (2014). Ryan camped out across the road from the Crockwell house for the duration of the standoff, observing the events as they transpired. In the introduction, Ryan says he is telling the story of how "Leo Crockwell took on one of the most revered police forces in the world, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, and walked away unscathed. . . . He held off members of the RCMP for a week. On the eighth day of the standoff, police realized they had been guarding an empty house overnight: Leo Crockwell had escaped" (xiii). In the aftermath of the standoff, Crockwell became something of a local folk legend, and the RCMP was embarrassed in the local press for allowing Crockwell to simply slip away.

that Riche's novel itself suggests some cross-pollination of theoretical writing on the American right makes sense for the discussion to follow.

The way that Phonse thinks and acts makes him an obviously libertarian character. Dave at one point characterizes Phonse as one of the "enterprising brigands of the bay," as though he is someone who exists outside the law and makes his living by exploiting the loopholes of the system (53). Phonse tries to live off the land as much as possible and is "anxious not to be without a freezer full of moose" (46). He has a "pantry full of bottled moose, rabbit, caribou and partridge" and also has a vegetable garden which provides enough food that in the middle of winter he still has an ample supply (47). When Dave learns that Phonse has a bale of 26 pounds of cocaine, which he salvaged in the bay near his home, Phonse tells Dave that because the locals "can't fish" that there is "all measure of funny business going on these days," indicating that many of the people in the community are willing to go beyond the law to make a living (53). The attitude is, to extend Phonse's and his neighbour's thinking, that the people are justified in doing whatever needs to be done to make ends meet for their families, even if that means doing what is by definition illegal activity, since their formerly legal means of earning a living from fishing has been taken from them. Phonse is also anti-government and rejects the notion that any corporation, such as the Winnebago Corporation, should be able to monopolize the market through copyright on products or services. These traits, and a number of other subtle and not-so-subtle points in the novel which I will discuss in further detail below, make Phonse into a Newfoundland version of a libertarian, and line up with the traits that Boaz, in *Libertarianism: A Primer*, suggests are at the core of libertarianism: namely, that "each person has the right to live his life in any way he chooses, so long as he respects the equal rights of others" and a person's rights to life, liberty, and property are "rights that people possess naturally, before governments

are created” (2). Libertarians also believe that government bureaucracy and regulation should be kept to a minimum, and that contemporary forms of government have grown far too large and have encroached on personal liberty. Boaz continues, “Governments should exist to protect rights, to protect us from others who might use force against us. When governments use force against people who have not violated the rights of others, then governments themselves become rights violators” (3). These views on the government and its encroachment on liberty have played a part in creating conflict between law enforcement agencies and extreme right-wing groups and individuals. There were a number of high-profile standoffs between libertarian-minded groups or individuals that captured the popular imagination in the years leading up to the publication of Riche’s novel. A few such standoffs, including the 1992 Ruby Ridge standoff, are especially informative.

The 1992 Ruby Ridge standoff occurred when federal agents from the ATF and FBI botched a sting operation against Randy Weaver and his family in a remote area of Idaho, which resulted in an eleven-day confrontation between the Weavers and government agents. There are many similarities between the specifics of the standoff at Ruby Ridge and the standoff in *Rare Birds*. The events leading up to the standoff and the standoff itself are the subject of many books, reports, and documentaries, including the journalist Jess Walter’s creative nonfiction *Every Knee Shall Bow: The Truth and Tragedy of Ruby Ridge and the Randy Weaver Family* (1995), which dramatizes the events of the standoff based on court documents, public inquiries, and first-hand accounts. Walter notes that Weaver was for a number of years under investigation for tax evasion and for stockpiling weapons, and was generally part of a growing extreme right-wing fringe of

the libertarian movement (28).<sup>114</sup> An informative scholarly analysis of the events is Betty Dobratz et al. “What Happened on Ruby Ridge: Terrorism or Tyranny?” (2003). This article is especially pertinent with respect to Wagner-Pacifci’s notion that a standoff is as much about opposing understandings and interpretations of the same event, as the authors compare the way law enforcement agencies and the political and religious groups that supported Weaver variously constructed the reasons for and resolution of the standoff. Dobratz et al. also note that Weaver and his wife had affiliations with fundamentalist Christian groups and with white- supremacist organizations (316). On a summer day in August 1992, Weaver happened by chance upon FBI agents while he and his son were walking in the woods. The armed parties exchanged fire, leaving Weaver’s son and one FBI agent dead. Weaver retreated to his cabin, where he and the rest of his family barricaded themselves inside. Weaver’s wife was also killed by sniper fire in the early days of the standoff. During the standoff, a huge taskforce of federal agents surrounded the area, and members of various right-wing extremist groups and other supporters of Weaver flocked to the area. Weaver eventually gave himself up to arrest, and at trial was acquitted of all serious charges he was facing, including for the death of the federal agent. In the estimation of the courts, the FBI and ATF had broken protocol and Weaver was able to plausibly deny knowing the agents were not merely trespassers intent on assaulting his family.

There are, of course, several important differences between the Ruby Ridge standoff and the standoff in *Rare Birds*, not the least of which is that the standoff in the novel is ironically

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<sup>114</sup> As I am discussing it, libertarianism is more of a tendency of thought and a way of living that is common to a lot of extreme right-wing groups. However, there are strains of libertarianism that are quite moderate, and some of the underlying tenets of libertarianism derive from classical liberalism and Enlightenment values – a desire for liberty is certainly not something exclusive to right-wing politics. The point, rather, is that libertarianism is so often part of a complex of intersecting (and sometimes competing) ideologies espoused by many different extreme right-wing groups, including white supremacists, fundamentalist Christians, and the militia movement.

framed and quite funny in its own way. Phonse and his family are also not religious fundamentalists or white supremacists. But there are striking similarities as well. For one, the way that Dave happens on one of the CSIS agents in the woods is evocative of the way the Weavers happened upon federal agents in the woods near their property. The two standoffs also share the same form and function, as it is described in Wagner-Pacifici's analysis of standoffs as frozen time. However, the most striking similarity between the two is the ineptness of law enforcement agencies. In both cases, enforcement botches their sting operations because of short-sighted or inadequate preparation and planning. In the standoff in *Rare Birds*, Riche takes a particular delight in dressing down the CSIS agents. As the standoff is coming to a close and Dave is in the process of surrendering, a few of the agents manage to hurt themselves and even to set off a tear gas canister out of sheer clumsiness:

A man in a jumpsuit went charging out of the bushes toward the Auk, a canister in his belt gushing clouds of gas or smoke. The man was trying desperately to remove it when he collapsed, succumbing to the gas. Fellow agents ran to his assistance but were driven back by the acrid smoke. . . . As he turned away a body fell from the sky. It was the man from the roof, landing on his shoulder with a loud crack of bones and crumpling like a puppet. (250)

The only agents who end up hurt, at least the only ones who are physically hurt beyond their pride, are these agents who manage to injure themselves. It is a measure of their ineptness that the CSIS agents are completely unaware of what is happening at Phonse's house despite having him under observation for months, that they are unable to recover the Svetkov lights or to arrest Phonse, and finally that they manage to gas themselves and break their own bones. The standoff at Ruby Ridge, which resulted in needless loss of life, does not have any of the sense of levity as

Riche's novel does, but nonetheless it was similar ineptness of law enforcement that caused the situation to unfold as it did.

The Ruby Ridge standoff and the standoff at Waco involving David Koresh and the Davidians (which I described briefly above) are noted in a number of scholarly studies as having been catalyzing events that fuelled the militia movement and resurgent right-wing extremism in the United States, and also as having inspired Timothy McVeigh to carry out the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing. The militia movement, broadly speaking, is composed of men, often with military backgrounds, who meet and train in weapons and tactics. The ideological underpinnings of the movement are based on notions of protection of constitutional rights and opposition to encroachments on individual rights by the US federal government, which are typically libertarian views. Not all members of the militias are extremists, and many of the people involved prefer to describe themselves as patriots; however, the prominent standoffs at Ruby Ridge and Waco radicalized greater numbers within the libertarian right and more moderate members of the militia movements. D. J. Mulloy discusses this process of radicalization in his book *American Extremism: History, Politics and the Militia Movement* (2004). Mulloy argues that it was precisely the heavy-handed and obtuse approach of federal agencies in the standoffs at Ruby Ridge and at Waco that convinced large numbers of otherwise moderate conservatives to join locally organized militias, which made the moderate conservatives more amenable to ideas from the Christian Identity movement, white supremacists, and other extremist groups. Mulloy describes the process of radicalization as essentially caused by the security forces:

In general, though, militia members found – and continue to find – the events at Ruby Ridge and Waco significant, not because they are committed supporters of the Branch Davidians or Christian Identity adherents. For them, the significance is



that, in both cases, these groups appeared to have been targeted because of their minority views. If the government was prepared to violate the rights of these groups, the militias' reasoning went, what of those of other "minorities"? Where would it all end? Who would be next? (16)

It is somewhat absurd, of course, that white, military-age men would feel such insecurity about being considered a minority in the United States, but nonetheless this is a good summary of how they perceive their position in American society and how they perceive the US federal government. The militias, and right-wing extremism more generally, are fuelled by feelings of exclusion and disillusionment with mainstream American society. Part of the reason for such feelings of exclusion, Mulloy argues, is the largely rural make-up of the movement. For militia members, the government is not only "metaphorically remote" but is also "physically remote," which can create difficult situations for law enforcement agencies "who can find themselves outnumbered and inadequately resourced when they have to deal with problems caused by militias and related groups" (6). The militias are quite often armed with up-to-date weapons and well trained. For this reason, law enforcement approaches confrontations with right-wing extremist groups with extreme caution.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Robert Churchill notes in *To Shake Their Guns in the Tyrant's Face: Libertarian Political Violence and the Origins of the Militia Movement* (2009) that elements within the militia movement "issued explicit warnings to the government that any repeat of Waco would result in widespread violence. This message was conveyed with particular intensity during the siege of the Freeman compound in Montana in 1996 and the standoff with militants from the Republic of Texas in 1997" (253). The creation and growth of the militia movement can thus be understood as a response to the standoffs at Ruby Ridge and Waco. Security services have tried to adapt their strategy and tactics in response to the movement. In *Rage on the Right: The American Militia Movement from Ruby Ridge to Homeland Security* (2003), Lane Crothers argues that the change in strategy by agencies of the federal government has been effective not only in successfully de-escalating specific conflicts, but that it has also undermined the basis of the militias themselves (152). Law enforcement agencies have tried to better understand the origins and grievances at the heart of the militia movement, and because of this have been somewhat more effective in combating them.

Again, in *Rare Birds* there is no simple one-to-one comparison to be made with the militia movement. However, Phonse does have a military background, in the Canadian Navy, which Dave only learns about at Phonse's funeral when a number of "officers in white uniforms with high collars" show up (256). Not only has Phonse trained and served in the military, but he has also been decorated for valour (256). Even though he has aged from his military days and is now middle-aged, Phonse is in prime physical condition, with a "lean but fiercely muscled frame" (42). Phonse also has a particularly regimented way of living that draws on his military background. He calls his home "Central Ops," which is a term to describe a military command centre (13); he does not go for walks in the morning as some may, but instead goes out to "survey the perimeter" (36); and he also has a specially-built tunnel connecting his house and the shed, which is accessible through a "door disguised as a wall panel" (49-50). Phonse maintains a security culture, with everything about his many ongoing projects and schemes being on a "need-to-know basis" (16). He also listens to a police scanner radio daily, monitoring the airwaves to pick up intelligence on anything happening in the area, and at one point hears someone who he assumes to be the agents of the Winnebago Corporation as they spy on him (34). Phonse is also well armed, and a number of times throughout the novel Dave encounters Phonse holding a gun in his hands. As one would expect of a stereotype of a gun nut, "Phonse walked about the kitchen in circles, frequently going to the window to survey the woods outside. He kept his rifle close" (33). There is no indication that Phonse is in league with anyone else, as one might be in a more formally organized militia group. In fact, Phonse is something of a loner in the community, having cut ties with other locals from Push Through. Nonetheless, in the way that he has a military background and maintains a security culture, tightly guarding his affairs from prying

eyes and actively trying to gain intelligence on who he perceives as his adversaries, Phonse seems as though he would be a good potential recruit for the militia movement.

With respect to the way that Phonse draws Dave into his circle of trust and into his security culture, it is more correct to argue that Phonse is creating a militia of his own, even as it only has two members. Dave's process of indoctrination into Phonse's world is through a slow progression, with each gradual step imbricating Dave deeper and deeper into Phonse's plots. Dave at one point recalls that soon after he moved to the community Phonse taught him to shoot a rifle and gave him a gift of a "12-gauge shotgun" (44). Phonse also offers Dave cocaine, in essentially unlimited quantities (54-57). Of course, Dave gets drawn deeper into league with Phonse when the two undertake the duck hoax, in the hopes of giving Dave's restaurant a financial boost. Dave recognizes at one point that "Phonse would someday come and ask for Dave's help in another, far more diabolical scheme. It was like striking a deal with the Mafia, once you were in, you were in for life" (115). When Phonse does finally ask Dave for a favour in return it is help with his plan to launch and sea-test the clandestine R.S.V., during which Dave actually reflects on the process of his initiation into Phonse's world of intrigue:

This was a hazing, another step in a rough amateur brainwashing. All the elements were in place: the drugs, the sleep deprivation, the shared secrets. The R.S.V. would surface miles from Push Cove at Phonse's island headquarters where Dave would join the bayman's unholy army of zombies. (182)

This part of the novel is heavily laden with irony and is one of the funniest scenes. At the same time, Dave has undergone a slow, step-by-step process of radicalization. At the opening of the novel, Dave dismissed Phonse's ravings about the agents of the Winnebago Corporation out of hand, and merely humoured his neighbour when he spoke in code about the R.S.V. At the close

of the novel, on the other hand, Dave is standing shoulder-to-shoulder with Phonse in a standoff with federal agents.

In the discussion so far, I have been using the terms libertarian, extreme right wing, and militias loosely. There is a great deal of synergy between those who identify with these various right-wing ideologies; however, there are some specific subgroups within the extreme right wing that are especially informative with respect to the analysis of the politics of *Rare Birds*. As Mulloy notes in *American Extremism*, “the far right in the United States is not to be treated as a monolithic and homogenous entity” and includes a wide range of groups such as “constitutionalists, sovereign citizens, tax protesters, radical anti-abortion activists, common law advocates, Second Amendment advocates, militia members, Christian Identity believers, Klan members, and neo-Nazis” (9). Mulloy cautions that “these groups and their members are not all the same” and “do not all believe in the same things or act in the same way,” even as they collectively constitute the extreme fringe of the right wing (9). Clearly there is nothing of the Ku Klux Klan or of the neo-Nazis in Riche’s novel, and there is furthermore no indication that Phonse or any other characters in the novel have any interest in fundamentalist Christianity. But Phonse is, in many ways, quite similar to adherents of the sovereign citizen movement, which has a significant following in the United States and in Canada. Mulloy says that this is a movement made up of “anarcho-libertarians who consider virtually all government as repressive and overbearing. They refer to themselves as ‘freemen’ or ‘sovereigns’” (4). In the United States, the movement is more likely to use the term sovereign, whereas in Canada the term often used is the Freeman-on-the-land movement.<sup>116</sup> Crothers notes that the Freeman and sovereign citizens

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<sup>116</sup> One of the so-called gurus of the Freeman-on-the-land movement is a Canadian from Alberta named Robert Menard. The movement is most prominent in Alberta, though there are significant numbers of Freeman in every province and territory.

are “followers of the common law movement, a variant of the militia movement,” and do not see themselves as subject to the laws of the federal government either in Canada or in the United States (152). They may avoid paying taxes and avoid having any interactions with the state, preferring to live as much as possible off the land or through barter arrangements. Freeman ideology and beliefs are discussed in a much-cited and wide-ranging legal decision by Alberta Associate Chief Justice J. D. Rooke, *Meads v. Meads* (2012). Rooke notes that Freeman, along with looking for every loophole in statute law, are also especially interested in “money for nothing schemes” (117-20). Freeman also believe that at birth the state creates a legal fiction for every citizen, which is a strawman or legal persona. It is this legal person, indicated by the individual’s name in all capital letters, that the state and its corporate entities interact with, not the natural living human being, that is, the free man (92). When signing legal documents of any type, followers of the Freeman-on-the-land movement will use specific punctuation to distinguish the natural living human being from the legal person: whereas the legal person is represented in all capitals, the natural human being is represented with punctuation, often a colon or semi-colon between the first and last name, such as Edward; Riche.

Phonse is most like the Freeman-on-the-land in that he is eager to exploit any give or any loopholes in the system if he can. Dave thinks of Phonse as someone who always had a “scheme on the go and though they always seemed utterly ridiculous to Dave, Phonse seemed prosperous enough” (15). Although many aspects of his way of living are simply to do with self-reliance and frugality, such as foraging, hunting, and growing his own food, Phonse’s sister-in-law Alice at one point observes that he is often “beside himself” and “thinks they’re coming to get him,” by which she means that he is afraid the “tax man” is coming after him (217). Along with Phonse and Dave engaging in the duck hoax, a fraud that the birdwatchers fall for entirely and which

ends up being a windfall for Dave's restaurant, Phonse also cooks up a scheme to bury what look like dinosaur bones on his property, thinking there may be money in claiming the royalties or property rights on the discovery (172). Phonse also tells Dave that the locals of Push Through are involved in all manner of fraudulent activities and take advantage of the legal system in whatever ways they can. He recalls for Dave one such example, which is similar to the kinds of legal frauds the Freeman-on-the-land are known for:

The fortuitous friction fire (the mortgage rubbing vigorously against the insurance policy) that had consumed Dewey Mercer's store, of the costly lumber reportedly destroyed in the voracious blaze and of fat Dewey's fine new cabin on Sullivan's Pond; of the curious nocturnal comings and goings of the supposedly idle fishing boats in the community. (17)

Phonse at another point in the novel also displays a decent knowledge of how the legal system works and how they may plead ignorance and otherwise shrug responsibility for kidnapping the CSIS agent during the standoff. He tells Dave that they could argue their way out of it because "this fellow was on your property in the middle of the night with a gun" and because they cannot "believe anything he says" about being a CSIS agent (234). Phonse reasons that he could simply say that they wanted to call the police but that the phone lines were down (incidentally, it was CSIS that cut the lines) and so he "was just holding him [the hostage] until I could get help" (235). Along with the various frauds he is engaged in, it is also this willingness to twist the facts and to manipulate the legal system that displays Phonse's Freeman characteristics.

Along with various formulations of libertarian ideology, a further aspect discussed in many scholarly works on right-wing extremism is a tendency toward conspiracy theories. Some extremist groups, such as adherents of the Christian Identity movement for example, believe that

state governments throughout the world are what they call “ZOGs,” an abbreviation for Zionist Occupied Governments. Such views are also shared by white-supremacist groups and by some militia groups, and indeed there is a good deal of crosspollination of ideas between the various groups and ideologies that form the far right of the political spectrum.<sup>117</sup> The conspiracy of the ZOGs draws on a long history of anti-Semitism, and feeds into many other conspiracy theories that are less obviously racist, such as the conspiracy of the so-called Illuminati, a cabal of powerful men with interests in Satanism who secretly pull the strings of global politics and finance. One of the foundational notions for some in the sovereign citizens and the Freemen-on-the-land movements, as a further example of this belief in conspiracy, is a belief that the American and Canadian governments are actually agents of the British Crown, illegally enforcing British Admiralty Law in occupied territories. Such conspiracies are, of course, outlandish, and there are many other examples of such conspiracy theories within right-wing extremism.

As Mulloy points out in *American Extremism*, “a belief in conspiracy theories is generally accepted as one of the distinguishing features of political extremism, a belief epitomizing the users’ rejection of the normal pluralist process of bargaining and compromise” (172). However, one problem is that for moderate or mainstream observers of extremist groups, and for the law enforcement agencies that come into conflict with them, “as soon as conspiratorial beliefs are discovered any attempt at further understanding tends to stop. There is little incentive to look beyond such obvious ‘marks of extremism,’ no need to go deeper into what groups like the militias believe, or why. The movement is already discredited” (172).

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<sup>117</sup> On a code level, movement insiders in recent years may indicate in writing the belief that a person or institution is Zionist controlled by enclosing the name in (((triple parenthesis))). Alternatively, the code for allies and for those inside the movement opposed to ZOGs is to enclose a name with inverted )))triple parenthesis(((.

Furthermore, as Richard Curry and Thomas Brown argue in *Conspiracy: The Fear of Subversion in American History* (1972), there is good reason to think that conspiracy theories are at the core of mainstream American political parties and American political institutions generally, and so it should not be surprising at all that groups and individuals across the political spectrum are enamoured with conspiracy theories:

The passage of the Alien and Sedition Acts during the 1790s, the enactment of the Espionage Act during World War I, the Palmer raids during the Red Scare of 1919-1920, and the evacuation of Japanese Americans from the West Coast during World War II clearly show that fears of conspiracy have had their greatest impact in American society at the level of national politics. From George Washington to Richard Nixon, American presidents have uttered grim warnings against conspiracies. Fears of subversion are very much part of the mainstream of politics. (x)

This is not, of course, to make excuses for obviously racist and obviously absurd conspiracies espoused by extreme right-wing groups. There is no excusing such ideas, and they must be opposed directly and stringently. The point, though, is that it is difficult to oppose such extremist groups and their ideas without taking seriously the roots of the conspiracies common to them, and that, moreover, conspiracism is not simply a fringe set of beliefs to be dismissed out of hand but a part of mainstream, status quo politics.

It is certainly not difficult to find evidence of the impact of conspiracy theories in *Rare Birds*. Phonse is obsessed throughout the novel with the unseen agents of the Winnebago Corporation, which sounds at first to readers as a truly far-fetched conspiracy. However, as it turns out Phonse is correct that there are operatives watching him, just not from Winnebago but



from the Canadian government. His obsession with the conspiracy leads to Phonse being prone to paranoia, and one night he mistakenly thinks Dave is an agent from Winnebago in the pitch black outside the shed: “Dave was feeling his way along the side of the building when he felt the touch of cold metal, sensed the gun blue, against his neck” (168). Even though on this particular day there has not been anything to peak Phonse’s paranoia, he tells Dave that he “is always more worried when things seem fine” (168). Dave also has a tendency toward paranoia and indulges in conspiracism himself. Even before he becomes involved in the duck hoax or gets drawn deeper into Phonse’s intrigues, Dave imagines that he sees an armed gunman in his friend Larry’s backyard in residential St. John’s on an evening he is there for a dinner party. This figure is dressed “in what appeared to be combat fatigues” and “was carrying something, something against his shoulder,” which Dave interprets to be a gun (29). He yells out for his hosts to duck for cover, though it turns out that it was a birdwatcher in the yard with a camera with a long lens (30). Along with this first example of paranoia, Dave is later suspicious of three diners at his restaurant, who it turns out are in fact three CSIS agents. He wonders if they are “narcs” who are wise to the enormous amount of cocaine at Phonse’s house (159). He also absurdly wonders whether they were part of a plot to frame him initiated by his kitchen helper, Bet, “part of some kind of intense deep-cover police operation. Perhaps Bet was in a hypnotic trance, only activated as an agent by a coded message, coming suddenly to her senses” (159). The conspiracy reference here is to the stories of brainwashed assassins or of the supposed patsies involved in political assassinations. However, even though some of his paranoia is unfounded, Dave does learn that some of Phonse’s conspiratorial views are true, such as the story about getting the plans for the submarine from a shadowy former spy. Dave begins to wonder what else that Phonse is telling him may be true:

But if Dave came to believe in the existence of agents from the Winnebago Corporation lurking in the woods around the Auk, he would have to accept so much more, all the crackpot conspiracy theories would have credence, he would become a member of the Cult of Risk, the Cult of Phonse. He would become a believer, obediently studying the sacred text of happenstance. (189)

As with the tendency toward conspiracy that is part of the extreme right-wing groups discussed above, the conspiracy theories that Phonse and Dave see woven around them are, on the one hand, patently nonsensical. However, on the other hand, there are conspiracies at work in the novel, specifically the government agents plotting to capture Phonse and recover the Svetkov lamps. In this sense, it is not that Phonse's and Dave's belief in conspiracy is totally unfounded, but that the conspiracies are simply not what they imagine them to be.

Part of the point of examining the way right-wing ideas are represented in *Rare Birds* is to show just how everyday such ideas may look in practice, and that those who may subscribe to such beliefs are not necessarily bogeymen or sinister characters. Phonse is certainly not a sinister character, but is, rather, one of the more amiable and likeable characters in contemporary Newfoundland fiction. Likewise, Dave, who gets drawn into Phonse's world of deception and conspiracy, is not a sinister character either but is someone readers sympathize with. However, Phonse especially, and Dave to a lesser degree, exhibit traits that line up with extremist groups and ideology. Moreover, there is arguably a good reason for such extremist notions to gain traction and proliferate, since the economic basis of the community and of the fictional Newfoundland in the novel as a whole has been hollowed out by the collapse of the fishery. There is also a perception that the government, as it is represented in the novel, is fundamentally corrupt. At one point the provincial Minister of Tourism visits Dave's restaurant and he

ironically thinks of the government official as a shadow of the corrupt government officials of the formerly prosperous days: “With the Island’s economy in free fall, there now seemed little benefit in holding [elected] office. There were scarce goodies left to dish out for the foreign industrialists and thus few opportunities to harvest a plump kickback of payoff” (149). Faced with a broken and corrupt system, it makes sense that Phonse and Dave would look for ways to get in on the action for themselves, even if that means going beyond the law. In this view, it is a consequence of the system itself that extremism gains a toehold.

With respect to the origin and the proliferation of far-right ideology, Dave’s wife also works for “a prestigious and rather right-leaning think tank in Washington, D.C.” called the “Palmer Institute” (3). The Palmer Institute is a fictional think tank that likely has inspiration in some of the many real-world right-wing libertarian think tanks like the Cato Institute or the Heritage Foundation. Throughout the novel, though usually only in snippets, Dave’s wife Claire appears on TV, espousing libertarian dogma. For example, at one point she is on TV talking about “why the Mexican peso should be radically devalued, why interest rates should be lower and why it was a good thing, a *stability* thing or a *confidence* thing, that most of the world’s wealth was in the hands of only twelve families” (4). At another point in the novel, Claire is on TV talking about homelessness and suggests that “Liberals are overstating the case. Those in the media, or with an influence over those institutions, are confined to the urban centres and they’re tripping over the homeless every day. Realistically, it’s not a problem for most Americans” (81). However, later in the novel it becomes apparent that Claire is not herself an ideologue, but merely a spokesperson and not actually invested in the libertarianism she promotes. Her agent is encouraging her to “soften her image” and move away from being a public relations flack for the right wing because there’s “a feeling in Washington that the pendulum is due to swing back to

the left” (122). Claire at one point says, “I mean, really, how many people can they put in prison? I was starting to get uncomfortable with these right-to-lifers anyway” (122). All this indicates that Claire does not necessarily even believe the right-wing libertarian ideologies she promotes. Notions of pure laissez-faire capitalism, inequality, and homelessness are only abstract concepts to be deployed to the advantage of the Institute and its backers. Likewise, for Claire, the conservative Christian values she promotes that limit women’s reproductive rights are just an abstract concept or a demographic of voter.

This characterization of Claire throughout the novel is subtle, as is the overall presentation of extreme right-wing ideology, and shows the vacuousness of the political right. The think tank she works for generates and promotes these right-wing libertarian ideas, and transmits them in the mainstream media to people who may otherwise be considered moderates. At the same time, Claire’s established libertarian think tank also speaks to the further afield extreme right wing through a form of dog-whistle politics. Dog-whistle politics involves the use of a code level of communication, such that a political message may speak in a particular way to a mainstream audience but carry a different meaning to an audience on the extreme right.<sup>118</sup> For example, in the statements from Claire above, speaking of devaluing the Mexican peso may speak on a code level to mean devaluing Mexicans; the statement about how homelessness is not a problem for most Americans but is only being hyped up by “Liberals” and “the media” may speak on a code level to blame the media and political institutions (the supposedly Zionist-occupied media and political institutions) for the country’s problems.

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<sup>118</sup> For more on dog-whistle politics, see Ian Haney López, *Dog Whistle Politics: How Coded Racial Appeals have Reinvented Racism and Wrecked the Middle Class* (2014).

## **Conclusion: Libertarian Resistance**

Riche's *Rare Birds* offers itself as a case study of the extreme fringe of right-wing politics. The standoff with federal agents, which has been the anchor for my critical engagement with the text, points in the direction of an analysis of extreme right-wing politics because of its similarity with widely publicized standoffs involving groups and individuals involved in the libertarian movement, the militia movement, and other fundamentalist and fringe right-wing politics.

Phonse is a prototypical libertarian character, in that he is so self-reliant and chooses to live as much as possible outside the prevailing economic and social systems. He also has characteristics that make him something like a Newfoundland version of a militia member, in that he has a military background, is well armed, and keeps up a security culture. Although at the beginning of the novel Dave is skeptical of Phonse's claims of persecution by unseen enemies and patronizes his neighbour, by the end of the novel Dave has been indoctrinated and partly radicalized into Phonse's way of thinking. This is, of course, most evident in the fact that Dave is the principal actor in the standoff, having discovered the CSIS agent in the woods and having marched him at gunpoint to Phonse's shed. Dave also comes to perceive the same shadowy conspiracies that Phonse believes are after the R.S.V., and also begins to question his core beliefs about how the world works. His indoctrination is cut short by the standoff with the CSIS agents and with Phonse's disappearance, and by the very end of the novel Dave's radicalization has been undone, at least in the sense that he is trying to move on with his life. Nonetheless, his indoctrination into a libertarian and conspiracist frame of reference is arguably a liberating experience for Dave, since at the close of the novel he seems to have overcome his ennui and is looking forward to pursuing a relationship with his girlfriend, Alice.

The standoff in the novel follows closely the form and function of standoffs theorized by Wagner-Pacifici, specifically with respect to understanding the standoff as a moment of frozen time and as being essentially about different interpretations of different perspectives on the same situation. In the case of *Rare Birds*, the two parties involved in the standoff think it is happening for different reasons: Phonse and Dave initially think the standoff is happening because of the R.S.V. and that the villains opposing them are from the Winnebago Corporation; the CSIS agents fumble into the standoff accidentally, because they are uncovered as they spy on Phonse in hopes of recovering the Svetkov lamps. The standoff is ultimately resolved when the two parties come to understand more fully each other's point of view, though of course Phonse never submits to the government agents and presumably fakes his own death, the last of the many hoaxes he pulls off in the novel.

*Rare Birds* is a biting satire that ridicules with abandon. Riche mocks the extreme right-wing sensibilities of Phonse and the conspiracy of the Winnebagos; the act of building his own submarine is so far-fetched that it is difficult to take anything about Phonse seriously. Along with satirizing and critiquing notions of a libertarian world such as the one Phonse tries to inhabit, the novel also satirizes the more mainstream libertarian world that Dave's wife Claire promotes in her role as a propagandist for a right-wing think tank. However, even as Riche may be setting up Claire and her brand of libertarianism as another subject of ridicule, her statement about inequality, race relations, and women's rights are arguably less flippant than the characterization of Phonse. It is as though Phonse is the slapstick caricature of a libertarian gun nut, whereas Claire is a deadpan impersonation of the spokespeople of contemporary right-wing think tanks. Along with taking up libertarian and other right-wing movements for material, Riche also satirizes law enforcement agencies and their ineptness at dealing with extremist groups. As they

are presented in the novel, the CSIS agents are laughably ineffective, since Phonse is aware of their presence all along (even though he thinks they are agents of a private company and not of the government), since one of their agents gets captured (and soils himself in fear), and also because of the hilariously embarrassing way that the law enforcement agents manage to gas themselves and break their own limbs even after the standoff is resolved. In the way that the government agents are made the subject of ridicule, the novel also critiques the government forces that libertarians and others on the extreme right wing claim are infringing on their liberty. Along the way, Riche is also able to satirize bourgeois sensibilities – in the way he presents the bird watchers and the moneyed class that eat at Dave’s restaurant – and to satirize middle-class liberal sensibilities as well in the way he presents Dave’s disillusionment and fall into ruin in the opening chapters of the novel.

Granted that *Rare Birds* is a work of satire, the novel nonetheless has a political orientation and a position on resistance. While it is not entirely dismissive of the libertarian and militia movements, since it obviously takes up such subject matter, the novel does not attempt to think through any possible justification for the existence or proliferation of these movements (even as the novel offers itself as a site where such movements can be analyzed). This is not to say that everyone needs to accept the premises of libertarianism, and certainly not that everyone needs to accept the odious and dangerous forms of politics that it may enable or act as a gateway into, such as the politics of various white-supremacist groups. However, simply ridiculing the extreme right wing does little to counteract its appeal. Likewise, in the way that the novel ridicules the security apparatus in its ineptitude dealing with such right-wing extremists does little to address the fact that such groups are a legitimate threat, and especially so if they are not understood in a more robust manner and if law enforcement responds with a naive perspective on

the motivations of the extreme right wing. What *Rare Birds* is saying, essentially, is that the extreme right (and presumably any challenge to the legitimacy of the status quo) needs to be excluded, but also that the government agencies that respond to the threat of the extreme right wing have gone too far in the way that they conduct surveillance and monitor citizens. In effect, this argues that the world should be precisely as it is, that what is familiar is best, and that nothing really needs to change. Phonse is a character of resistance, and by the end of the novel so too is Dave. While I may not agree with his libertarian mindset, and while I certainly do not agree with the extremist and fundamentalist groups that draw from the same waters as libertarianism, what must be said of Phonse is that he embodies a desire for a world in which government corruption and corporate greed are a thing of the past. *Rare Birds* takes such views to be a subject of mockery, opting to favour the status quo, and so must be understood as a fundamentally conservative text.



## Chapter 4

### Lisa Moore's *Alligator*: Sabotage and Consumer Capitalism

The likelihood that your acts of resistance cannot stop the injustice does not exempt you from acting in what you sincerely and reflectively hold to be the best interests of your community.

–Susan Sontag, *At the Same Time: Essays and Speeches*

Trying to be happy by accumulating possessions is like trying to satisfy hunger by taping sandwiches all over my body.

–Roger Corless, *Vision of Buddhism*

In each of the last three chapters, I take up a form of resistance or protest as an entry point for critical engagement with a novel: in Chapter 1, I examine the vigilantism of a band of mummers in Crummey's *Galore*; in Chapter 2, I focus on a riot in Johnston's *Colony*; and in Chapter 3, I look at the form and function of a standoff in Riche's *Rare Birds*. As with Riche's novel, *Alligator* is set in the present day and has similar concerns with issues prevalent in the contemporary world. In this chapter, my analysis of Lisa Moore's *Alligator* begins as a meditation on an act of ecologically-motivated sabotage carried out by the character Colleen. This initial engagement with a moment of resistance moves to a broader reading of the novel with respect to the way it represents a pervasive system of consumer capitalism and its effects. The characters in *Alligator* are all, in their own ways, victimized by a predatory system of conspicuous consumption; some of the characters in Moore's novel find ways to resist consumer capitalism, while others simply find ways to cope or to escape, sometimes through self-medicating with drugs and alcohol, and at the extreme through suicide.

*Alligator*, Moore's first novel, is set in the urban community of contemporary St. John's, Newfoundland. The characters in the novel are all living and competing in the free market and trying to get by in an unequal society. *February* (2009), Moore's second novel, is also set in St. John's and is centred on a real-life maritime disaster that occurred off the coast of Newfoundland – the sinking of the oil rig *Ocean Ranger* on Valentine's Day, February 14, 1982. *February* looks at the long-term effects of the tragedy on the families of the victims and on Newfoundland society as a whole. *Caught* (2013), Moore's third novel, is about a duo of pot-smuggling Newfoundlanders and is set in the 1970s. One of the duo, Dave Slaney, makes a daring escape from federal prison, and the remainder of the novel follows Slaney as he essentially re-enacts the very same crime that landed him in jail in the first place. Moore's most recent novel, *Flannery* (2016), is about an adolescent girl learning about relationships and love, and who begins a small business selling quack remedy potions that ends up being wildly successful. Moore published two collections of short stories, *Degrees of Nakedness* (1995) and *Open* (2002), and occasionally writes for magazines and other media outlets, notably her columns in *The Walrus*. She also edited and introduced *The Penguin Book of Contemporary Canadian Women's Short Stories* (2009).

While the subject matter of Moore's work is disparate, her writing is unified from the point of view of resistance studies in that each novel puts under the microscope particular aspects of domination and control. This tendency to interrogate domination in Moore's work is at times subtle and is perhaps best understood as a by-product of the author's aesthetic. Her characters' concerns are in the realm of the everyday: they worry about their children; they deal with grief; they have money troubles; they are insecure, deceitful, and seldom heroic in any epic sense. The imaginative worlds of Moore's novels are fiction, to be sure, but fiction that is oddly reflective of

the contradictory nature of everyday life. Moreover, it is the representations of these contradictions of everyday life that make Moore's fiction so real. In *Alligator*, one such contradiction is the vast inequalities inherent in contemporary capitalism that are apparently accepted and often go unquestioned (as will be explored at greater length in this chapter). In *February*, one such everyday contradiction is the acquisitive rationalism at the heart of resource extraction and the human toll, in terms of the loss of life from industrial accidents and the enduring psychological trauma experienced by the families of those killed.<sup>119</sup> In *Caught*, similar kinds of everyday contradiction and forms of oppression, though certainly less subtle than in her other work, are the representations of a vast and intrusive surveillance apparatus, ostensibly put in place to provide security, and the prison system. The characters in Moore's novels resist, in their own ways, these various forms of domination and control. Some of these acts of resistance are overt, while others are better understood as what de Certeau discusses as the resistance of the everyday.

But even though Moore is interested in depicting domination and oppression, and even though her characters do find means to resist, there is at times a futility to acts of resistance. One could say that Moore's work is not particularly uplifting in this regard, reflecting instead the total reach of systems of domination that have already made allowances for resistance and have

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<sup>119</sup> Herb Wyile discusses aspects of this acquisitive rationalism in his essay "February is the Cruellest Month: Neoliberalism and the Economy of Mourning in Lisa Moore's *February*" (2010). Wyile notes, "Moore's novel, in its preoccupation with the emotional reverberations of loss, does not efface this crucial element of the political economy of the disaster. Instead, the corporate hubris and failure of safety regulations that contributed to the disaster, as well as the imagined distress of the men tossed into the frigid ocean, is woven into the narrative along with Helen's agonizing over her capability to raise a family single-handed and her memories of life with Cal before the disaster" (65). Wyile's analysis, in this way, demonstrates the kind of subtle critique of capitalist systems of production, consumption, and control, which are evident in Moore's novels. Wyile's article examines *February* through the lens of neoliberal capitalism, and in a somewhat similar fashion this chapter analyzes *Alligator* through the lens of consumer capitalism. There are a number of similarities and intersections between these two theories of political economy; however, in a general sense, neoliberalism is more concerned with the financialization and corporatization of the social, political, economic, and cultural spheres, whereas consumer capitalism is more concerned with consumer behaviour, advertising, and consumerist subjectivity.

already put in place mechanisms to incorporate or mitigate resistance. An example of the futility of resistance is depicted in *Caught*, in which the protagonist Slaney has escaped from prison with plans to once again try to import a massive quantity of pot. The story traces Slaney's frantic run from the law from Nova Scotia to British Columbia, to Mexico, Colombia, Panama, and back to Canadian soil. All the while he is pursued by agents of the law who have at their disposal a newly expanded surveillance apparatus, complete with tracking devices and satellite imaging. It is nothing of a stretch to say that surveillance, exemplified by the eye, is the central motif of the text. Whether it is many direct references to eyes, spotlights, or satellites, the panoptic gaze is everywhere and there is a constant sense of watchfulness. It seems as though Slaney is successfully resisting the authorities' attempts to apprehend him and is able to stay a step ahead of the police and their surveillance apparatus; however, it is revealed that the security service has in fact facilitated Slaney's escape from prison as part of a sting operation against his partner in crime, and could bring Slaney back in at any time. Even though it seems that Slaney is free, he is actually still in a cage, albeit a somewhat bigger one than his prison cell. Slaney, in this sense, is always caught, and near the end of the narrative the authorities simply take him back to jail. This is the kind of futility of resistance characteristic of Moore's novels. Her characters imagine themselves to be free and to have agency, yet they are ultimately trapped by systems too large for them to comprehend and that make acts of resistance mostly redundant.

Moore's novels also intersect with a discourse on Newfoundland culture, and *Alligator* resists a particular formulation of nostalgic Newfoundland cultural identity as it is expressed by the tourism industry. *February* is primarily set in Newfoundland and does offer itself as a potential site for a discussion of Newfoundland identity. Even though *Caught* has only a few scenes set on the island, it is likewise a potential site for discussion of Newfoundland identity in

that the protagonist and a number of minor characters are Newfoundlanders. However, of Moore's three novels, *Alligator* is the one that most explicitly comments on Newfoundland cultural identity, if only to dispel the romanticism and nostalgia surrounding it. *Alligator* is set primarily in metropolitan St. John's, offering a vision of a culture and society that has fallen prey to an ideology of consumption, highlighting the malaise and discontent of a globalized capitalist society. Capitalism has its own icons and brands, and consumer products contribute more to the cultural landscape of *Alligator* than any sense of Newfoundland identity. The novel peels away one layer of Newfoundland identity put forward by the province's marketers, only to reveal an already-branded consumerist culture and the social ills that come with it.

Other critiques and commentaries have discussed similar aspects of Moore's writing. For example, Will Smith says that Moore has two concerns in *Alligator*, "the preconceptions of authenticity in response to outward ideas of Atlantic Canada and the construction of identity enacted through coming of age" (58). In his thesis *Re-Placing Regionalisms: Atlantic Canada in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Narratives* (2007), Smith discusses the "duality of being Canadian and exploring a regional social identity, in context with an evolving global community" while looking specifically at "tropes of regional identity" (i). He writes that Moore's novel is a reflection of regional identity as informed by mass media and that "the attempt at constructing an authentic place-voice must acknowledge characters' access to global influences" (40). Lawrence Mathews, in his "Report from the Country of No Country" (2004), notes this same globalized characteristic of Moore's work, suggesting that while Moore's stories are set in Newfoundland their subject matter concerns more than specifically local issues; the characters in her stories "[do not] look to the collective past for the cause of or solutions to their current predicaments" (14). In *Alligator* the characters are connected to the world through media and St. John's is not depicted as an

isolated place. Moore's characters are cosmopolitan and travel outside Newfoundland for work and holidays, reflecting a Newfoundland identity that is permeated and informed by global interaction.

In an interview with Herb Wylie for the *Antigonish Review*, titled "All Over the Canvas: An Interview with Lisa Moore" (2008), the author says, "all of my characters travel a lot, and I'm interested in the way that people from a place like Newfoundland do go all over the world. For many Newfoundlanders, that is really what it means to be a Newfoundlander" (113). In *Alligator*, Madeleine and Beverly both reminisce about holidays in Europe (127, 144), Isobel travels from Toronto to act in a local film (174), Valentin arrives on a Russian cargo vessel (108), and Colleen steals Frank's money and jumps on a plane, arriving "in the Toronto airport with a connecting flight to Louisiana" (230). Local and non-local allusions in *Alligator* work on a literal level to accentuate the dynamic nature of identity in Newfoundland, but one that operates in a global system, and not only a regional one. In her interview with Wylie, Moore also discusses the impact of the provincial government's marketing campaign on Newfoundland culture: "It has been branded. I think the commodification of that culture is an anaesthetizing impulse. As soon as you put fake lamps on George Street, you're destroying that culture. There is no way to produce a culture self-consciously" (111). Moore goes on to say the province's brand is an "easy strawman" because "once the Department of Tourism has pinned culture down it has already morphed into something else" (112). She is also critical of cultural productions that present romanticized characterizations of Newfoundlanders and is scathing in her review of Proulx's *The Shipping News* (1993). In her article in *The Walrus*, titled "The Ends of the Earth" (2006), Moore says that Proulx "mined the Dictionary of Newfoundland English and stuffed the novel with Newfoundlandisms that somehow don't come off sounding quite right" (4). Proulx's

nostalgic vision of Newfoundland was turned into a major motion picture in 2001, shot on location in Newfoundland, starring Kevin Spacey, Julianne Moore, and Judi Dench. In both the book and the film the Newfoundland setting is restricted to the fictional outport community of Quoyale's Point, and the characterizations are, to Moore, romanticized and oversimplistic.

Tracy Whelan, in her article "An Aesthetic of Intensity: Lisa Moore's Sublime Worlds" (2008), examines Moore's work by considering her technical use of language. Whelan provides an in-depth analysis of *Alligator* as a hyper-realistic text: "Moore offers a hyper-realistic style," says Whelan, "a prose technique acknowledged by the author herself. Hers is a high-fidelity verisimilitude that does not simply reproduce approximations of the real, but attempts to improve upon the real, making it brighter and sharper" (3). Though Whelan's essay is most interested in the style of writing, the form of *Alligator* is also significant in that each chapter focuses on a single character, whose name is the chapter title. The novel picks up and develops the narratives of each character as a series of vignettes, and a few chapters move out of the third-person narrative voice to the first-person. In the way that *Alligator* is structured, the effect is of isolated characters moving in orbit relative to one another and whose lives collide at times. Whelan also shows how Moore's characters are at odds with themselves, constantly vulnerable to intense feelings of extreme experiential displacement (vertigo, stroke, heart attack, and jealousy) and argues that these embodied experiences are happened upon unexpectedly, similar to the way Newfoundland is encountered unexpectedly in the novel. The version of lived experience in *Alligator* is one that is formed differently for different characters, more by chance or by accident, as at one point in the novel when a van collides with a moose on the highway: "the windshield made a fist of itself . . . a fist of glass lined with silver wrinkles and cracks, and the fist punched Colleen in the face" (149). The contemporary St. John's in the novel is a place with all the

features one would expect to find in the modern city: industrialization, tourism, disintegration of social norms and values, crime, drugs, suicide, to name but a few, and these are the factors that shape the experience of the characters as much as or more than any pristine Newfoundland cultural identity.

The remainder of this chapter is subdivided into two major sections and a conclusion. First, I examine the act of sabotage that, I argue, is central to understanding the political impetus of the novel and points towards a broader critique. I theorize this act of sabotage as a form of radical ecological activism and dissent by drawing on theoretical writings from the ecology movement and from green anarchism. In the subsequent section, I discuss the reptilian, consumerist element of capitalism as central to the cultural fabric of *Alligator*. Specifically, I look at the way brands and branding function in the novel, with reference to various theories of consumer capitalism such as from Naomi Klein and from Marcel Danesi. I also draw on Foucault's work on power, social relations, and docile bodies to theorize the way consumer capitalism functions as a system of domination. In the concluding section, I attempt to synthesize the way resistance is presented in Moore's *Alligator*. I argue that even though many of the acts of resistance in the novel amount to little, that *Alligator* is, of all the novels I focus on in this dissertation, the one that is most rooted in an ethical commitment to resistance and the most interested in the possibility of liberation.

### **Sabotage as Ecology in Action**

The act of sabotage in *Alligator* takes place at a clear-cut, a space that is being converted into a residential subdivision as part of urban sprawl. But Colleen sees this forest as being home to an endangered species, the Newfoundland pine marten, and she is worried that the "whole species"



may be “wiped off the face of the earth” (25). One night in early July, Colleen sets out on her mission, hitchhiking out of the city and to the forest. She is, on the one hand, “aware of how audacious the vandalism would appear,” but she also felt “the adrenalin rush through her and she was exhilarated” and she knew that “nothing could compel her to turn back” (65). At first, as she is approaching the clearing with the bulldozers just before dawn, she does not notice the guard shack. Upon noticing it, she remains hidden, waiting and watching what the man on duty will do. When he finally goes back into the shack, “she took a zip-lock bag of sugar from her knapsack and found her way to the top of the machine where the lid to the diesel tank was” (67). She pours in the sugar and goes to the other machines, repeating the process. As she goes about her act of sabotage, she is hyperaware of her surroundings, partly from fear of being caught, and distinctly hears “the noise of the pouring sugar, a loud erotic gushing” that “caused the hair to stand up on her arms” (67). After she has poured sugar into the tanks and engines of the machines, she is trying to make her escape, sneaking past the shed, and accidentally knocks over a cup that has carelessly been left on the ground: “The man yelled at her. But she was running and she heard him running after her. She got over a hump in the path and she ducked into the woods and he ran past her” (67). She waits out in the forest for some time, until the coast is clear, and then escapes out along the highway, hitchhiking home. Colleen thinks she has been successful and gotten away clean, but she later learns, to her dismay, that she left her knapsack at the scene, and the police “found her address in there” (56). She is eventually made to appear in court, but since she is a juvenile offender she is merely sentenced to community service and to participate in a youth diversion program.

Colleen’s act is characterized in the novel as “vandalism,” and from a strictly legalistic point of view this is the correct term. However, from the point of view of resistance, where even

acts that break the law are not necessarily delegitimized without consideration, Colleen's act is better understood as an act of sabotage. The classic study and promotion of sabotage as a tactic of struggle is the French anarchist Emile Pouget's *Sabotage* (1912). Pouget was an important figure in the anarcho-syndicalist movement, which saw industrial workers as the most important actors for revolutionary movements, and he was an intellectual leader in the French umbrella union, the General Confederation of Labour (best known as the CGT, and which is still active today). Pouget calls sabotage "a new form of social warfare" in the context of a revolutionary wave that was sweeping through Europe in the early twentieth century and that culminated in the 1917 Russian Revolution, but at the same time also notes that "sabotage as a form of revolt is as old as human exploitation" (34). In Pouget's time, sabotage was primarily described in relation to industrial labour activism, and especially to tactics such as work slowdowns, tampering with machines in a factory, or otherwise negatively affecting productivity on a shop floor. Pouget does, however, offer definitions that are helpful beyond only the labour movement, and he broadly understands sabotage as "a reprisal of victims" (36). The victims of various sorts of exploitation take any available opportunities to wreak revenge on those they perceive as oppressors, and so sabotage ought to be considered the "consequence of a suffered wrong" (37). Sabotage is a step that workers take when other remedies do not work, when arbitration and negotiation stall, or when it is not possible or advisable for the workers to go on strike (40). However, Pouget notes that the leadership of a number of unions in his day disapproved of the tactic, even as their memberships may have been in favour of sabotage, since the union leadership felt the tactic gave an advantage to the managers and the capitalists, who could justly say that the workforce was lazy and did not deserve a raise or any other concessions (58). Pouget and the CGT, being organized on anarcho-syndicalist principles, encouraged sabotage and any

other tactics available to aid in the struggle, which was a boon for the CGT at the time and helped it grow.

A recent essay by Evan Calder Williams, “Manual Override” (2016), brings Pouget’s analysis of sabotage up to date. Williams says that in its most abstract sense, sabotage is “a technique, or activation of a capacity, at odds with the apparatus, system, or order within which it is situated and for which it was developed,” and in a more concrete sense it is simply “putting vinegar on the loom, doubt in the smile, glass in the motor, milk in the bearings, shit on the spikes, sand in the soup, and worms in the code” (n.p.). Williams understands sabotage as a general tendency of resistance against capitalism, “an act and a process, the point of which is to work badly and, above all, to not be fully subsumed to the process of labor” (n.p.). Furthermore, Williams also discusses sabotage as a militant tactic used by resistance movements in a specific geography. For example, resistance fighters may sabotage roads and other infrastructure, and so military forces and, more broadly, governments have come to see the geographical terrain and the infrastructure on it as an extension of the state and of power, as something that needs to be protected if possible from saboteurs:

Martial sabotage reveals how everything is potentially, if not functionally, in the service of a ruling power, whether embodied or abstract. Everything that is functional is complicit, and we can’t separate landscape from “threatscape” the term given in the wake of military affairs’ infrastructural turn to designate the extension of theaters of war to include all elements of the built world. In that regard, the literal weaponization of the landscape, like diverting heavy rains to wash away a supply road, is only the most visible limit of an overall blurring that erases any clear division between the technical, the social, and the openly

hostile, a situation wherein effects come undone and cannot be traced back to any one source, let alone one side. (n.p.)

This notion of sabotage as the conduct of guerilla and invisible war on and against the built, human terrain speaks to the act Colleen undertakes in *Alligator*. The landscape of the clear-cut is understood to be a “threatscape,” as Williams puts it, since the development company has even felt the need to have a night watch to guard the equipment. Indeed, Colleen also sees the terrain in quasi-military terms, as she has the wherewithal to travel under cover of darkness, to remain still and quiet to avoid detection, and to let her pursuer pass by her and double back to make her escape. She also sees the terrain in quasi-militaristic terms since it is land she has decided to defend against what she perceives as the occupying forces of industrial machinery and work crews. In this sense, sabotage is not at all to be understood as something confined to the workplace or as only a tactic for organized labour, but as a tactic employed by resistance movements engaged in all sorts of struggles.<sup>120</sup>

The particular struggle Colleen is involved in is ecological in orientation. Ecology is, on the one hand, a field in biology that tries to understand the connections or interrelations between things and the way they form ecosystems. On the other hand, ecology also informed a movement of thought and action that inspired activists to reconsider the distinctions between the human

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<sup>120</sup> There is a line of reasoning in the theoretical writing on sabotage that suggests that the tactic is employed by states and by capitalism broadly speaking, not only by those resisting such forces. For example, Pouget quotes a speaker at one of the labour conferences as saying, “the reductions of wages that the bosses from time to time impose on their employees [is] a sabotage on the stomachs of the workers” (55). One might even say that capitalism and statism are systems of organized sabotage of emergent social revolution. All the same, I am most interested in sabotage from the point of view of resistance movements, and I think it is important to keep in mind that sabotage is often used as a weapon by those in an asymmetrical power relation with whatever foe. Furthermore, to say that capitalism or statism is an act of sabotage on social revolution is only to say that capitalism is capitalism and statism is statism, while assuming there is a naturally existing collectivist ethos that these aberrant forces constrain. Such arguments are interesting as thought experiments and do offer different avenues for understanding power and resistance, but relying on concepts of an essential human nature seems dubious at best.

world and the natural environment. Instead of seeing these things as separate, the ecology movement sees the human and the non-human as necessarily connected, even as the relationship between the human and the non-human is an exploitative one. In this sense, the ecology movement is somewhat different than the environmental movement, in that ecology does not see nature or the environment as something outside of the human world that is in need of saving, but instead that the human and the non-human are ecologically connected, and so working to preserve one is working to preserve the other.<sup>121</sup> A foundational text of the ecology movement is Aldo Leopold's *A Sand County Almanac* (1949), which is a collection of essays and meditations on conservation and the non-human world. Leopold's writing is by turns philosophical and poetic, and often he expresses ecological consciousness metaphorically, such as in the essay "Thinking Like a Mountain," in which he imagines the sorrow a mountain feels witnessing the destruction of forests and the death of wolves and other animals, as rapidly expanding industrial projects encroach on the wild frontier lands (137-45). In one of his more philosophical essays, "The Land Ethic," Leopold sets out his understanding of an ecological consciousness, which is "the existence of an obligation over and above self-interest" to the non-human world, and which he finds sorely lacking in the United States of his day (243). He argues that this ecological consciousness needs to be fostered by education, and moreover that it needs to be approached as a new ethics to be instilled:

No important change in ethics was ever accomplished without an internal change in our intellectual emphasis, localities, affections, and convictions. The proof that conservation has not yet touched these foundations of conduct lies in the

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<sup>121</sup> Note, however, that not all forms of ecologically-motivated activism necessarily imagine the human world as worthy of preserving – such as anti-civilization groups and activists.

fact that philosophy and religion have not yet heard of it. In our attempt to make conservation easy, we have made it trivial. (246)

For Leopold, the philosophical and religious schools of thought were highly instrumental in perceiving the non-human world as simply resources and there for unlimited use. Conservation of the wilds and the frontier lands is made trivial, in Leopold's view, because it is merely a matter of using the land in a way that maximizes profit, such as farming practices that think of conservation only as a way to get the best possible yield from cleared forests or soil. Instead, Leopold calls for an ecological consciousness that sees the land and the animals as valuable and important in and of themselves, aside from any utilitarian value for human consumption.

Leopold's land ethic and ecological consciousness were further developed by other writers and thinkers, and the ecology movement expanded rapidly in the 1960s as part of a broader counterculture movement. One iconic text from this era is Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962), which focuses on the use of herbicides, pesticides, and other chemicals, which Carson argues have thrown out of balance a number of fragile ecosystems and could lead to the extinction of many species, precipitating a spring of the year with no insects chirping or birdsong, i.e. a silent spring. Like Leopold, Carson also calls for an ecological consciousness, for a new awareness of the intimate connections between the supposedly distinct human and the non-human world. She wonders, "How could intelligent beings seek to control a few unwanted species by a method that contaminated the entire environment and brought the threat of disease and death even to their own kind? Yet this is precisely what we have done" (8). For Carson, an ecological consciousness is one that sees the survival of insect species – even those insect species humans may naively perceive as pests – as bound up with the survival of humanity.

A more contemporary development of Leopold's ideas and of the ecology movement is the work of J. Baird Callicott, such as in his book *Beyond the Land Ethic: More Essays in Environmental Philosophy* (1999). Part of Callicott's project is a meditation on the emergence of the land ethic and of ecological consciousness, a process that he sees as ongoing:

We live today in a culture undergoing a profound paradigm shift. Like the anthropologist confronting the strange cognitive orientation of people in another, very foreign culture, we are also keenly aware that our compatriots have a worldview—whether they know it or not—because the waxing new set of ideas [i.e. ecological consciousness] uncomfortably coexists with the waning old set.

(36)

However, the waxing of the ecological consciousness is by no means a linear march of progress for Callicott, but something that is the result of much work and struggle. In this regard, he sees the philosophical approach to the land ethic as a vital part of the broader ecological movement – ecological philosophy as radical activism – and encourages scholars in a wide range of fields to think through what an ecological consciousness means in their specific disciplines.

Even as Callicott's approach to philosophy expands into an important terrain of struggle for the ecology movement, on-the-ground direct action has always been an important aspect of the movement as well. Indeed, a specific school of sabotage has evolved in the ecology movement that informs Colleen's act in *Alligator*, and the sabotage of industrial machinery is a central tactic for radical groups in eco-resistance movements. The specific term often used in militant circles of the ecology movement for this type of sabotage is "monkeywrenching," and the seminal book on the topic is *Ecodefense: A Field Guide to Monkeywrenching* (1985), which

was edited by Dave Foreman.<sup>122</sup> The book has sections on how to disrupt industrial activity using a wide array of tactics, and even offers tips on effective security culture and propaganda techniques. Colleen would likely have benefited from reading the section on sabotage of heavy equipment to make her act more effective:

Pour sand in the crankcase — Sugar and syrup are ineffective in gasoline or diesel fuel tanks and oil reservoirs. At best, they will merely clog the filter. A handful or more of sand in the fuel tank or oil is much more effective and much easier. Also, with sand you need not carry incriminating items like sugar or a bottle of Karo syrup. (118)

Along with this practical advice about using sand instead of sugar, Colleen may also have taken further precautions to make sure she did not leave incriminating evidence at the scene, and to plan her escape route more thoroughly, topics covered in the section on security culture. In his forward to the 3rd edition of *Ecodefense*, Edward Abbey likens the industrial encroachment on the non-human environment to a situation in which “a stranger batters down your door with an axe, threatens your family and yourself with deadly weapons, and proceeds to loot your home of whatever he wants” (3). In a situation like this, someone of course has not only a right but a responsibility to defend themselves, and for Abbey “self defense against attack is one of the basic laws . . . of all life” (3). This echoes the notion of sabotage as “reprisal of the victims” suggested by Pouget, and has embedded within its practice an ecological consciousness as theorized by Leopold and others. The militant ecology movement extends this thinking of sabotage as defense to suggest that because the non-human world has less capacity to defend

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<sup>122</sup> Foreman was one of the founders of the militant ecological organization EarthFirst! *Ecodefense* originally appeared as a series of advice columns for eco-activists in the EarthFirst! newsletter. The columns were written by many different authors, often anonymously, and were later compiled by Foreman in the now-famous book.



itself, and since the distinction between the built and the natural world is an artificial distinction, it is the responsibility of ecologically-oriented activists to take a stand. “If the wilderness is our true home,” says Abbey, “and if it is threatened by invasion, pillage and destruction – as it certainly is – then we have the right to defend that home, as we would our private rooms, by any means necessary” (4).

There is a distinction to be made between the moderate and more radical aspects of the ecology movement. Groups like EarthFirst! and the Animal Liberation Front, which is famous for breaking into or burning down research labs involved in animal testing, are the more radical parts of the movement, and are sometimes called “eco-anarchist” or “deep green resistance.” Often these groups are made up of those who outright refuse to consider any kind of glib idealized future in discussions of the ecological crisis and instead take an uncompromisingly stark view. Eco-anarchism is sometimes associated with the deep ecology movement, with primitivism, and with anti-civilizational theory and practices. One central text of the movement is Aric McBay, Lierre Keith, and Derrick Jensen’s *Deep Green Resistance: Strategy to Save the Planet* (2011). In some respects, the entire book is a justification for sabotage, not only because of the ethical underpinnings of the ecology movement but because it is expedient. As Jensen notes, “direct action against infrastructure is a basic tactic of both militaries and insurgents the world over for the simple reason that it works” (16). An important criticism offered by eco-anarchism and other radical strains to the more mainstream elements in the ecology movement is that the mainstream elements tend to assume the maintenance of the contemporary way of life in the visions they present for the future – for example, imagining that a world that did not rely on large-scale industrial use of land could somehow look mostly the same as contemporary mass civilization. Lierre Keith offers a number of criticisms of moderate and mainstream elements in

the ecology movement in a chapter in *Deep Green Resistance* called “Liberals and Radicals.” Although Keith is not entirely dismissive of the moderate elements (which she calls liberals in the American context) and thinks that moderate tactics certainly have a place in the movement, she nonetheless urges moderates to consider approaches that go beyond institutional remedies, and specifically, echoing Jensen, encourages targeting the infrastructure of industrial civilization (110). Moreover, eco-anarchism critiques the more mainstream ecology movement for potentially doing more harm than good, since it allows people to believe that merely recycling and using energy-efficient lightbulbs is enough to avert ecological catastrophe. In this sense, eco-anarchists may view the mainstream ecology movement as part of a reactionary mechanism, essentially propping up the very industrial system it pretends to oppose. Civilization itself, which is to say the organization of human society based on cities, is a significant part of the problem for eco-anarchists, as the maintenance of such a civilized way of life requires ever greater use of resources and ever greater strain on the environment, which, if left unchecked, will doom our species and many other forms of life on the planet.

Some recent insurrectionary anarchist texts, and most famously *The Coming Insurrection* (2008) by the Invisible Committee, specifically talk about the ecological crisis, and also about the role of mainstream environmentalism, reiterating some of the criticisms of eco-anarchism but with a characteristically insurrectionary anarchist twist:

Everything about the environmentalist’s discourse must be turned upside-down.

Where they talk of “catastrophes” to label the present system’s mismanagement of beings and things, we only see the catastrophe of its all too perfect operations. . . .

Let the petroleum reserves run out earlier than expected; let the international flows that regulate the tempo of the metropolis be interrupted, let us suffer some

great social disruption . . . Either way, any loss of control would be preferable to all the crisis management they envision. (81)

The perspective on civilizational collapse offered here is in some respects bleak. Nonetheless, it illustrates the diversity of thinking on the ecological crisis and the consequences it may bring. For some insurrectionary anarchists, the kind of catastrophes that may occur with the ecological crisis and with climate change, such as the collapse of mass industrialized civilization, are not only desirable but should, if possible, be helped along. Industrial civilization and its associated institutions are certainly not something that can be reformed, since the functioning of the system is no more than the playing out of precisely what the system was designed to do, and so destruction and collapse is preferable since at least the possibility of even fleeting freedom might then exist. Those who subscribe to some strains of eco and insurrectionary anarchism argue that civilization needs to be brought down through whatever means necessary – sabotage, disruption, and blockades, as well as any other methods available – regardless of whether a significant portion of the population agrees, and the sooner the better.<sup>123</sup>

Colleen cares deeply about non-human animals and the ecosystems they inhabit, and certainly she has an ecological orientation. Beverly, Colleen's mother, remembers that her daughter had always been concerned for the plight of animals and the non-human world. She could "never stand the immense unfairness to animals, the chicken factories, cows led to slaughter, even fish. As a four-year-old she had worked herself into an inconsolable rage when Beverly flushed a dead goldfish" (55). Before undertaking her act of sabotage against the bulldozers, Colleen sought out others with similar concerns, and even attended meetings with

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<sup>123</sup> Such arguments are made by anarcho-primitivists and anti-civ anarchists in a collection of essays edited by John Zerzan, *Against Civilization: Readings and Reflections* (2005). The Invisible Committee also discuss sabotage in their text *To Our Friends* (2014), with the section "Power is Logistic. Block Everything!" being especially pertinent.

local environmentalists “who had come together to protest the clear-cut that was endangering the pine marten” (65). Colleen remembers that the meeting had a “definite sense of urgency” and that the group came up with ideas for a “bake sale and a letter to the premier. They were dressed mostly in Polarfleece, and hiking boots; they were studying biology or literature or geography” (65). While the others in the group talk about bake sales and writing letters, Colleen researches militant and radical ecodefence tactics, such as “people who had handcuffed themselves around the trunks of trees and people who had gone without food or set themselves on fire. She had photographs of Julia Butterfly Hill, who had climbed a tree and refused to come down for two years” (66). Colleen wants to speak about these radical tactics and wants to engage the group in a frank discussion about what will be most effective for achieving their goals, but is unable to. The group is something of a clique, as everyone other than Colleen “seemed to know each other” and they are all older than her (66). Although Colleen has lots of materials on radical ecology and militant tactics, she “sat in a desk at the back and her cheeks burned red and her blood thumped in her temples and finally she drew her material from her knapsack and flicked at the edge of the folder with her thumb, but she couldn’t bring herself to open it” (66). Her frustration with the group is obvious here, since she is keen for action and to do whatever it takes to stop the destruction of the forest, and she perceives the others as ineffective. Nonetheless, she continues to go to the meetings until she is again disappointed and finds herself alone when the group, that at first had such a sense of urgency, fizzles out and disappears. After the group’s initial enthusiasm, a subsequent meeting had “only two other people” than Colleen (66). When she attends the regularly scheduled meeting after that, “no one had shown up but her. She’d sat with her back against the locked door of the seminar room and waited for a half-hour. She felt oddly humiliated” (66). One can only speculate about the reasons the others did not show up, but her

dedication sets Colleen apart from them. She is deeply concerned about the pine marten and is deeply concerned about deforestation, but her desire to work with a group of people, who she presumed knew a lot more than she did about activism and about resistance, turns out to be a false start in actually bringing the industrial activity to a halt. She feels there is no other choice and decides to “act by herself” (66).

I am not suggesting that Colleen is acting out of a fully developed theoretical understanding of ecology or of eco-anarchism, and nor do I think she is a good example of an anti-civilization anarchist. But where the others in the group thought to try to effect change in non-transgressive ways, Colleen instead thought to sabotage the machinery that allowed the destruction to happen in the first place. The act of sabotage is arguably a futile act, as Colleen’s victim, “Mr. Duffy of the destroyed bulldozers” (170), decides after meeting her at the courthouse that “he had no intention of giving Colleen Clark’s vandalism another thought” and the logging machinery would simply be repaired (171). Along with this, as the *Ecodefense* manual would have told her and as her mother Beverly recollects, “sugar doesn’t do much harm to an engine” (35). The biggest problem for Mr. Duffy when Colleen sabotages the bulldozers is that “it would take a few days to replace the machines [and] there would be men who would be paid to sit around and do nothing” (68). Even after sabotaging the bulldozers, Colleen is reflective of the fact that if the forest had only “fifty pine martens” left in it, that putting the machinery out of commission for a few days had “not saved the pine marten of course” (68). But by enacting her protest, by sabotaging the bulldozers, Colleen resists what she sees as an ethically corrupt system that puts the non-human world at risk. As she sees things, her action needs no further justification; it is an expression of her “trembling, towering empathy, her insistence that the world play fair” (55). Because she has an ecological consciousness Colleen

cannot help but act, and does so from a deeply rooted commitment, even if it is one she cannot clearly articulate. Moreover, she does not regret her actions, and thinks that even though there have been personally negative consequences that “if she was given the chance, she would do it again” (84).

Even though Colleen is acting from an ethical commitment and from an ecological consciousness, this is not apparent to anyone else and no one supports her – presumably not even her former allies in the environmental group had heard of her actions, since they are never mentioned again. Mr. Duffy goes out of his way to make sure Colleen is put through the legal system and has as a goal that she “remembered him every time she saw a sugar dispenser for the rest of her life” (119). The judge who hears her case tells Colleen that “if you were one of mine [my children] I’d have the snot beat out of you. . . . I knew your father, young lady, he said. And let me tell you he’s turning over in his grave” (34). Along with his comment about having Colleen beaten being totally inappropriate, the man the judge is referring to is in fact Colleen’s deceased step-father David – she does not know her biological father – and she carries a deep wound over David’s death. Even Colleen’s mother makes little effort to understand her daughter’s actions, seeing what she did as driven by “self-righteousness” and a “dull-witted act” (48). In a somewhat melodramatic fashion Beverly thinks,

Eco-terrorists had kidnapped her daughter and turned her from her mother and everything she’d ever been taught, such as being polite at all costs, using cloth napkins, wiping the sink if there’s toothpaste crusted on it, achieving excellent marks at school, avoiding sexual intercourse, and oral sex in the back of the school buses, which is the rage, recycling, and eating what’s on your plate — all of this had been erased. (48)

Beverly is obviously being somewhat facetious, and likely Moore is having a dig at Beverly in this instance. However, from Beverly's perspective it does appear that Colleen has been radicalized into the militant fringe of the ecology movement. The use of the term "eco-terrorist" is significant as well, as opposed to any of the other terms that might be used to describe Colleen's act. The term is certainly loaded with potentially negative connotations – radical ecology as a form of terrorism – but it is a term that Colleen apparently uses herself to describe some acts of the radicals in the movement. Another instance of the word is more telling of its implications:

Colleen had been saying eco-terrorism, but Beverly had not been listening.

Colleen had been saying change the world, the plight of animals, the environment, radioactive waste, the World Trade Organization. She had said Seattle, she had said Quebec City. She had been going on, but Beverly had not listened.

Are you listening? Colleen kept asking.

Beverly had said about new shoes.

We should get you a nice pair of shoes, Beverly had said. (54)

There are two important points to make here. First, even as many in the ecology movement may dislike the term "terrorism," it is appropriate from the perspective of power and authority. It is legitimately terrifying to governments, to industry, and to those who profit from the development and sale of resources that eco-activists may engage in widespread sabotage, because as Williams points out "history does not point to an effective countermeasure to sabotage" (n.p.). Second, and related to this first point, the back-and-forth between Colleen and Beverly is a good example of the collision of the old and the new sets of ideas, the paradigm shift, that Callicott sees unfolding through and around the ecology movement. More specifically, in that Colleen also names entities

like the World Trade Organization and alludes to the mass protests against it in Seattle in 1999, she is also pointing to a larger structural system that might be understood as that which the ecological consciousness opposes, the rationalism that sees the world as a standing reserve of resources to be extracted and turned into products, namely capitalism.

When Colleen voices her concerns about the state of world affairs, about the movements that oppose a rich-versus-poor world, about the ecology movement, and about injustice of all kinds, Beverly's answer to her daughter is "we should get you a new pair of shoes." Beverly ignores her daughter just as the environmentalist group had ignored her, not taking her seriously or giving her a chance to talk about the things that matter to her. Moreover, when Colleen points to the problems she sees in the world, Beverly encourages her to engage in consumerism, to buy things, which is arguably precisely the world that Colleen is opposed to. In recent years, the clash between the old (capitalism) and new (ecological) ideas about the world has come to something of a crescendo with the issue of climate change, as is elaborated in, among others, Naomi Klein's *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate* (2014). Klein's basic argument in the book is that contemporary forms of capitalism cannot coexist with a livable world for humans and non-human species, and that the relentless drive for growth and the attendant exploitation of natural resources is quickly pushing the entire planetary ecosystem to the brink of collapse. Building on some of what the ecology movement has been saying for more than fifty years, Klein argues that any attempt to rise to the challenge of the ecological crisis is as much about "a much broader battle of world-views," and that every aspect of economic, social, and political institutions will need to be re-evaluated with respect to the ending of a pervasive capitalist system that is about much more than just economics (460). Colleen's attack against what she perceives as the engines of ecocide is also and necessarily an attack on capitalism and



the entire world view it presupposes. The model of capitalism best expressed in *Alligator* is consumer capitalism, and this is encapsulated in Moore's novel not only through the obvious pillaging of the land and the consumption of natural resources that Colleen's act of sabotage highlights, but also through the way major capitalist brands and conspicuous consumption are positioned throughout the text. In the next section, I examine the way various aspects of consumer capitalism are represented in *Alligator*, and how consumer capitalism both drives and destroys the characters and the world they inhabit. I draw on theories of consumer capitalism, branding, and advertising, as well as writings from Foucault in order to understand how power relations and social class in the consumerist-oriented society are represented in the novel.

### **Consumer Capitalism in *Alligator***

The targets of Colleen's sabotage, the bulldozers, are mentioned numerous times throughout the novel, and not only in the context of Colleen's act. There are numerous references to them, often quite innocuous, such as when Madeleine, Colleen's aunt, reminisces about a vacation in Germany's Black Forest (147) and when Valentin, a Russian living in St. John's, goes to the Robin Hood Bay dump to scavenge for metal (107). The proliferation of references to bulldozers is a reminder that there is heavy machinery at work behind the scenes while the events of the novel play out. Bulldozers are a symbol of consumerism as they are iconic of production; however, they are also a destructive force, signifying the rampage of consumerism against the non-human world. Another symbol of consumption that figures prominently in the novel is an insect, the Elm Spanworm, which is seen as a pest by the locals. At one point, Valentin and Isobel hear the insects at night: "They had stood beneath her mature maples and listened to the worms. . . . It was a clicking noise, like the inner workings of a combination lock, all the wheels

and dials and tumblers falling into place. Tiny jaws munching persistently, killing everything” (76). In this snippet, the insects are likened to a mechanical engine of consumption, as they eat the leaves of the trees. Like the bulldozers, the worms are mentioned numerous times throughout the novel, again often in innocuous ways, such as when Frank is watching Carol, a woman who lives in his building, taking in her laundry from the clothesline and “absent-mindedly picking the worms out of her underwear” (179). The title, *Alligator*, is another symbol of voracious consumption (more on this below), and is the consumer *par excellence* in the novel, other than the human of course.

Colleen’s act of sabotage is directed against one of the many engines of consumption in *Alligator*. Her act of resistance, and the presence of numerous other symbols of consumption, point in the direction of further analysis of the text with respect to a discourse on consumerism, and specifically with respect to theories of consumer capitalism. Consumer capitalism is a theory of political economy that focuses on consumption and consumer behaviour as drivers of capitalism. This theory does not take as primary the relation of the worker with the means of production, but rather the role of the worker (and everyone else in society) as consumer. In *Consumer Capitalism* (2007), Anastasios Korkotsides argues that consumer capitalism implies a new understanding of the alienation inherent in capitalist society: “The product of alienated labour cannot be an object of non-alienated discretion by workers as consumers, since alienated workers cannot be transformed, as they move from the factory floor to the shopping centre, into emancipated consumers. . . . It is alienated consumption that drives capitalism” (33). Capitalism not only relies on the exploitation of the worker’s labour, but also, and necessarily, requires the worker’s participation in the consumer economy. Consumer capitalism, ideally viewed, creates the conditions for a self-propelling consumerist culture; but Korkotsides notes that it is also a

culture that has “evolved into a global culture of acquisitive rationalism that masses made into their own cause and way of life” (77). But Korkotsides also argues that consumer behaviour is a form of support, knowingly or not, for capitalism by the masses. “Their only disgruntlement is for failing” to consume as much as they can, “not for realizing its [capitalism’s] baseness” (10). He continues,

People seem eager to ‘seize the opportunity’ and ‘make it big’, through consumption, if all else fails. There is little awareness among workers that their relative affluence may be at some others’ expense, or temporary. Under normal circumstances they have little fear of any grim prospects and little zest to create the history of their own and everyone else’s emancipation. (10)

In the sense that it is as much a way of being as it is a functioning form of economics, Korkotsides suggests that consumer capitalism is a culture that has infiltrated contemporary life and contemporary subjectivity (at least in the wealthy global West).

The way one can make it big, as Korkotsides puts it, through consumption is not by simply owning a piece of property, but by owning the right piece of property, the piece of property with the highest value attached. The value of a product in the consumer economy is not just conditioned by the relative cost of the materials that go into it, but also by the company that made the product and the perception of its brand. In consumerist culture, a brand is not just a company name or logo on a product, and a brand is not the same as, and seldom fully realized in, a single advertisement. A brand is, rather, a cultural significance attached to a product. In *Brands* (2006), Marcel Danesi suggests that “brands are no longer perceived to be just ‘things’ for consumption, but mainly as vehicles for securing a better job . . . attaining popularity and personal prestige, obtaining praise from others, increasing pleasure, and maintaining health”

(19). Not just a product is sold, but an entire myth and culture as well, so brand identity is both the selling point and the qualities supposedly bestowed upon the consumer. Various theories of consumer capitalism take up different positions on the degree to which branding and advertising are a force of coercion and domination. Dissident perspectives, such as Naomi Klein's *No Logo: Taking Aim at the Brand Bullies* (1999), see consumer capitalism as an attack on cultural diversity, because despite the promises of self-realization and self-expression central to the branding myth, "market-driven globalization doesn't want diversity; quite the opposite. Its enemies are national habits, local brands and distinctive regional tastes" (130). Somewhat more conservative perspectives, such as that of Conrad Lodziak in *The Myth of Consumerism* (2002), suggest that theories of consumer capitalism go too far and risk oversimplifying if they take advertising and branding as an entirely coercive exercise. Nonetheless, Lodziak qualifies his arguments by noting, "advertisers do *attempt to manipulate and deceive* and these attempts *may be effective* on the most vulnerable. Among the most vulnerable I include pre-teens, youth . . . and those with a fragile self-identity" (64). An analysis of branding and consumer capitalism in *Alligator* does not necessitate a dogmatic view on this issue, but it is worth noting, nonetheless, because this question of branding and subjectivity is raised by the treatment of branding in the novel. The characters in *Alligator* are enmeshed in an intensely branded consumer culture. They are categorized and classed by the places they shop and the brands they wear, and as a result of living in a branded society they experience a general sense of disillusionment and alienation. The novel presents moments of protest and resistance; however, many of the characters are victimized by a society that perceives people as commodities.

Brands and other signs of consumer capitalism dominate the cultural landscape in *Alligator*. Moore's particular use of language, her textual strategy, depicts an intensely branded

society, one in which the very identity of the characters is a function of consumer products. In terms of narrative construction, this is achieved through the sheer number of brands named. Textual allusions to branding, to products and large companies in *Alligator*, include Cosmo (3), Aqua Velva (23), Tim Hortons (27), Wal-Mart (32), Comet (34), Dumpster (172), Pledge (172), and Jaguar (228), to name only a few. Of these many references to brands, Wal-Mart (more recently rebranded as “Walmart” by this US-based retail giant) is perhaps most often mentioned, and *Alligator* presents two specific instances of this brand. One instance is when Colleen remembers a time she and her mother had gone to Wal-Mart on Christmas Eve to buy a gift for her stepfather. She decided on a bottle of Aqua Velva, which ultimately ends up “in the cupboard under the sink in the guest bathroom” (34). It was the first gift “Colleen had ever picked out by herself” (23), but it was a poor choice in some respects, since as far as Colleen knew “he had never used cologne of any sort in his life” (31). When Colleen and Beverly first entered Wal-Mart, they were “greeted by a woman in a white plastic apron” (23). This greeter could have been another character in the novel, Frank’s mother. In a later segment of the novel, Frank recollects a tap-dance recital at Christmas and how his mother, in order to see him perform, swapped shifts at the Wal-Mart where she worked. The narrator says that Wal-Mart workers “were mostly single mothers or teenagers or older men who had suffered some version of emotional collapse that made them incompetent at their previous jobs. They were working at Wal-Mart because other options hadn’t panned out” (130). Frank remembers that his mother came home after her shift and soaked her feet in a tub of hot water and Epsom salts because “she was on her feet all the time and she had varicose veins, zigzagging veins . . . lumpy and blue as ink” (130). These presentations of Wal-Mart destabilize and make ambivalent the happy-face logo. The consumerist vortex Colleen encounters, with “giant Christmas bulbs hanging from the

rafters, carols bubbling wordlessly through the overhead speakers, shoppers in bright coats rushing forward and away” (23), is placed alongside the physical damage etched on Frank’s mother’s body. *Alligator* recasts this iconic brand as vacant, since Colleen buys a frivolous gift (that no one will ever use) while workers like Frank’s mother are struggling to make ends meet and paying a physical toll.

Wal-Mart is linked not only with convenience and cheap prices for consumers, not only with consumerism and consumption, but also with notions of a class divide. Classism, as Terry Eagleton defines the term in *The Illusions of Postmodernism* (1996), refers to “the sin of stereotyping people in terms of social class” (57). Eagleton says that “to belong to a social class is to be oppressed, or to be an oppressor” and “class is in this sense a whole social category” (57). Class is signified in the novel through brands and through the places that characters shop, accentuating the inequality in the city. There are the many references to shopping malls, department stores, and other businesses, and the narrative shows the implications of what wearing a certain brand means in social terms. When Colleen shows up for the first day of her court-ordered youth diversion program, she finds that the other young people there “slouched, stank of body odour, and cigarettes, and they all wore velour pants from Zellers . . . they had the look of low intelligence, which was the nicest way she could think to put it” (219). Zellers, in *Alligator*, is where the working class buys clothes, and Colleen recognizes that there are “class differences and flares of temper and social injustice that had created the divide between her and them” (219). This segment of the narrative shows how Colleen identifies and classifies those around her through brands and products, but also indicates a class conflict, one that is exacerbated by consumer capitalism.

Class distinctions are perhaps best expressed in *Alligator* through the character Frank, who seems destined to become an independent hotdog salesman until his illusion of class mobility is shattered and his dream falls apart. He has worked towards becoming a member of the petite bourgeoisie (a small business owner), but by the close of the novel he has rejoined the proletariat (working class). Frank is classified, like other characters in the novel, by products and by shopping at particular businesses. One example is when Frank remembers looking for dishes at the Salvation Army, trying to find a lid for his sugar bowl and not willing to accept one that was only close to matching: “He never wanted close again. He had been living with close his whole life” (207).<sup>124</sup> His mother had brought him to this Salvation Army store “since he was born,” and so Frank has always been of working-class background. Selling hotdogs is not what he envisions as the ideal job, but since he has a juvenile record and no formal education, he has few options in his quest for upward mobility in a free-market economy; he must try to better himself by his own guile and effort. However, Colleen, at one point in the narrative, steals money from Frank, and the narrative provides Frank’s resentful internal monologue:

She has never been in a welfare office. She had never had to get a brown paper bag from the breakfast program at school. She’d never been evicted from an apartment because her mother was three months behind on the rent. She had never eaten Kraft Dinner for supper unless she wanted to. She had never worn a windbreaker, one of three hundred, donated by a sports store to a shelter for battered women and distributed throughout the city to needy families, a windbreaker that became an immediately identifiable mark of poverty. (228)

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<sup>124</sup> Valentin, upon arriving in Newfoundland as a refugee and without legal status, arguably at the lowest end of the class divide, also goes to Salvation Army on his first days in St. John’s (113).

Frank and Colleen may inhabit the same city, but their experiences are strikingly different. Colleen is from a relatively wealthy family, while Frank has grown up in poverty. His one indulgence among his meagre possessions, his waterbed purchased at Sears, “the most expensive bed you could buy” (17), is turned into a weakness when Valentin destroys it as a threat to extort money from Frank: “He pulled the covers off the waterbed and saw it had been slashed from the headboard to the footboard. One long gash” (216). Valentin, to add to the devastation, overturned the urn holding Frank’s mother’s ashes, the most important of his few “luxury” items in the room, so that “the ashes were soaking wet”; Frank remembers that “the urn had cost \$700. He doubted his mother had spent that much money on a luxury item ever in her life” (217). Having all of his few possessions in his one small room, anything of value would make an easy target, and Frank is “aware of the bald simplicity of the act” (217). Because he has invested so much of his sense of self in these consumer products, this destruction of property is a devastating blow and compels Frank to submit to Valentin, who exploits Frank’s vulnerability, poverty, and working-class background.

The desecration of the urn and the destruction of the waterbed – the luxury items Frank thinks will make him part of the status quo – demonstrate to him that his social position has not improved, and that he is not the same as those he aspires to be. For Frank, the waterbed is a sign of status, though “the waterbed he saw, now that it had been slashed, was nothing more than a vanity” (217). The urn is, in a way, a final symbol of status for his mother and a way of validating her life and work. Frank keeps his mother’s remains not only as a memorial, but also because “for whatever reason he felt the urn was company.” The urn and the waterbed, as consumer products, are significant to Frank, and in this way the luxury items and products he owns come to form his subjectivity. This theme is reprised when Frank contemplates the



purchase of a “wet bar” at Sears (141). Though he realizes he has no use for a wet bar, “he had to admit it was an impressive piece of furniture” (142). Ultimately, he decides it is an impractical luxury item for him to own and tells the Sears employee simply, “I don’t want a wet bar.” The salesperson’s reply, one that is telling of the influence of consumerism on subjectivity, is that Frank has “potential,” indicating that his potential will be realized by purchasing this item. The salesperson says that she and her fiancé “had been buying furniture for three years always with the same plan in mind, when they had enough to furnish a small apartment they’d get married” (142). Even the institution of marriage is shaped by material possessions and consumerism. Frank knows that he has no need for a wet bar, as he knew he had no reason to own a waterbed. However, he has, even if only unconsciously, already bought into a branded consumerist culture and it permeates his subjectivity.<sup>125</sup>

It is an acceptance of, and playing within, the ideological constructs of consumer capitalism that produces the breakdown of social ties and the many failed relationships in the novel. Echoing Korkotsides’s arguments about the enthusiastic mass participation in consumer capitalism, Foucault’s analysis of power relations in *The History of Sexuality* is instructive in this regard, when reflecting on the diffuse nature of power as well as the silent acquiescence and mass participation that is necessary for a system like consumer capitalism to function:

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<sup>125</sup> There is a body of scholarly work on the commodification of dissident subjectivity as an aspect of consumer capitalism. This is the topic, for example, of a collection of articles published in *The Baffler*, titled *Commodify Your Dissent: The Business of Culture in the New Gilded Age* (1997). An article by Thomas Frank, “Why Johnny Can’t Dissent,” examines the slogans and branding of major corporations that appeal to dissident subjectivity as a selling point, such as a Burger King slogan, “Sometimes you have to break the rules,” or an Arby’s slogan “This is different. Different is good” (41). Such marketing is directed toward what the collection defines as the “rebel consumer.” Furthermore, as other essays in the collection point out, subcultures that may begin as dissident, such as grunge or punk, may be commodified and made into saleable products. Frank discusses this commodification of dissent in his article on “Alternative to What?” examining music and albums from Nirvana, Pearl Jam, and other alternative or indie bands.

Power comes from below; that is, there is no binary and all-encompassing opposition between rulers and the ruled . . . the manifold relationships of force that take shape and come into play in the machinery of production, of families, limited groups, and institutions, are the basis for wide-ranging effects of cleavage that run through the social body as a whole. These then form a general line of force that traverses the local oppositions and links them together; to be sure, they also bring about the redistributions, realignments, homogenizations, serial arrangements, and convergences of force relations. Major dominations are the hegemonic effects that are sustained by all these confrontations. (93)

In *Alligator*, these local oppositions are specifically apparent in terms of class, most notable in the way Frank is victimized by various other characters but also with regard to class divisions operating on a society-wide scale. Class in the novel is a kind of cleavage, as Foucault puts it, which cuts various characters off from one another, for example, the unnamed Inuk who commits suicide from Frank and what separates Mr. Harvey from Beverly and Colleen in the scene at Atlantic Place. The character Mr. John Harvey is a “downtown vagrant” (81) who “wore an army surplus parka done up to the chin” on a hot summer day. He is having a coffee in the food court of Atlantic Place, where Colleen and her mother are waiting for her court appointment. Harvey approaches the table where Colleen and Beverly are seated and a few police officers, who are also in the food court having coffee, respond to his approaching the mother and daughter. One officer says, as they shuffle him away, “he’s had his coffee and now he has to have a nice stroll in the sunshine. Let me walk you to the door, Mr. Harvey, the policeman said. There’s a cruise ship in the harbour” (86). Atlantic Place is home to the provincial courts where Colleen appears to answer for her crime. She and Beverly are in the

downstairs food court waiting, looking out the big picture windows onto St. John's harbour, as a cruise ship slides into port. Harvey is out of place with respect to the social class that is allowed to spend time in the building, and he is quickly ushered out of the scene by the police, and also out of the story. Harvey is a symbol showing the diverse and unequal realities in the city.

Another such cleavage, though this time in terms of power relations in the family, is that which separates Beverly and Colleen, specifically regarding Beverly's inability to empathize with her daughter's angst about the state of the world. These various cleavages, as they are expressed in the many failed or abortive social relations throughout the novel, are what allow the ideological superstructure of consumer capitalism to hold sway, maintaining a system that is predatory and unjust but which encounters no significant opposition from a fragmented society of self-interested individuals.

One of the vilest scenes of conspicuous consumption in the novel, and a further example of the disjointed and dysfunctional society, is the depiction of George Street.<sup>126</sup> George Street is a car-free road "with bars on both sides and is famous now for the festival, which is just drinking all night long" (133). The street in *Alligator* has been renovated to look quaint and historic: "George Street was full of crowds, there was a band outdoors, people had plastic cups of beer. . . . The city had done up George Street to look like drinking was a Newfoundland tradition. But the old-fashioned street lights were brand new" (138-39). Frank, who works selling hotdogs, "has a permit for the corner of George Street, which is the best spot in the city" (133). And though Frank "didn't like to drink" (137) and is not one to frequent the bars on the street, he holds a constant vigil over this cultural nexus at his hotdog stand. The version of George Street

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<sup>126</sup> Located in downtown St. John's near the harbour, George Street is entirely bars, restaurants, and nightclubs and is a popular destination for tourists and locals alike. Until the 1970s the street was filled with mechanic shops and tinsmiths.

that Frank witnesses is filthy, vile, and repulsive, “covered in garbage, drunks lurching” (133). This is a street where taxi drivers are “dragging vomiting drunks in and out of cars” (134). Once when Colleen goes to a bar on George Street, it is to enter a wet T-shirt contest, even though she is not of legal age. Colleen and the other girls in the contest get on stage, and the bouncer uses a “gigantic pump-action water gun” to soak the girl’s shirts; the bar is “packed tight, maybe a hundred and fifty young men” (203). As the event continues, the crowd of men call for “Colleen to take her shirt off. . . . The chanting gets more insistent, louder, faster, and then, out of nowhere, it has a slightly nasty edge. There’s a definite whiff of menace” (204). The few references to George Street throughout the novel are all about conspicuous consumption, for example, of consuming so much alcohol that the people are vomiting drunk, and the street is a filthy place because of this consumption. But Colleen’s body and the bodies of other women are seen as objects for consumption as well, such as for the gaze of the men and their sexual desires as it is expressed at the wet T-shirt contest. Even Frank, when he sees Colleen at the downtown bars in St. John’s, observes her as something to have and to possess, to consume in a manner (128). Although the street is a place that different sorts of people mix, and where presumably social relations take place, George Street is the epitome of a breakdown of social relations, and in fact it only exists in order for people to fulfill their role to consume and to spend their money.

The desired result of capitalism, whether speaking of branded products, companies, or clearcutting trees for urban development, is to make money. Money is what drives capitalism and what further divides, identifies, and classifies the characters in *Alligator*. The title creature of the novel symbolizes money and consumer capitalism; the book, otherwise, has very little to do with alligators. Even when Colleen meets the alligator farmer, Loyola, he does not reveal very

much to Colleen or to the readers about alligators. However, Loyola has a lot to say about another dominant force in the narrative:

There is in the making of money a propelling forward. Energy is exerted and boardrooms come into being. They form themselves seconds before you open the door and if they are in Houston the walls are glass and there are seven or eight men in suits and a blast of sun that eradicates history. (250)

Loyola has a picture on his wall of himself and President Bush, from a time when he gave the president a tour of the reserve, and says “he liked the man and he found himself agreeing with his decisions on Iraq” (245). Loyola is a businessman and is compelled to make money even though he “had no need for money other than the action of making it” (250). He believes that “money moves by instinct. . . . It will lie still and then it will move” (250), which describes the alligators and his sordid experience with their species. Money is likened to the movements of alligators – it has killer instincts – and aside from Loyola’s observations on the reptilian characteristics of capital, there are numerous references to money or to commerce more generally in the text. Some of these allusions include: “25¢ written in ballpoint pen” (206); “he was a person worth \$27 million” (200); and “the cash register tings and the drawer flies open and the coins in the slot slap against each other. . . . The ordinary noise of money changing hands” (205). The characters are all involved – even consumed – with the accumulation of wealth, such as when Beverly is reminiscing on her past, “thinking about how close [she and her husband] had come to extravagant wealth” (98). Before David’s death, “the two and a half years of wealth had been the best years of her life,” and sometimes when she remembers how close they had come to extravagance, “the exercise gave Beverly pre-migraine symptoms [and] she vaguely associated the condition with the supernatural. When she felt a migraine coming she almost always bought

a lottery ticket” (98). In this particular example, Beverly grieves not so much the memory of her dead husband as her loss of the accompanying wealth; furthermore, this segment of the text indicates the impact consumerism has on Beverly, as she uses lottery tickets to sublimate her headaches. The many specific references to money throughout *Alligator* further highlight the pervasiveness of economic systems, and specifically capitalism, in the formation of subjectivity, but money is also shown to be a destructive force, something that reinforces inequalities and promotes materialism and greed.

*Alligator* also depicts a number of negative social consequences of this consumerist culture, one of which is that there must be victims, or, as Paul Chafe notes in his dissertation, “the characters can be placed in either of two categories – predator or prey” (301). The biggest victims in the narrative are those of poor or working-class backgrounds, yet even as characters prey on each other there seem to be no outright winners in *Alligator*, as little comes to fruition for any of them. Madeleine, for example, dies of a heart attack before completing her film. Ironically, the final section of the narrative depicts her “dying in a chair she bought at the Salvation Army” (306), waiting for a phone call to tell her “they’ve completed the winter shoot” (305). Valentin is incarcerated, and he knows that “wherever he was going he would never come back; he would never get out” (298). Colleen, while having come to some kind of acceptance of her stepfather’s death, is wracked with guilt over having stolen a significant amount of money from Frank, though he is not at all receptive to her attempts to apologize. Isobel, who is the recipient of an \$82,000 insurance settlement when her house burns to the ground, is still “off-kilter and afraid” and is still on the “pills she’d been taking” (293). However, it is Frank who most obviously falls prey to other characters’ avarice as the victim of Colleen’s theft and the victim of both extortion and a more sinister plot by Valentin. He quite literally gets burned.

Frank does not overcome these assaults in the narrative; and by the end of the novel Frank's situation has not improved markedly, except that he is staying well clear of Colleen. He is working at a minimum-wage job, no longer selling hotdogs but "cutting business cards at the photocopy shop" (294). Frank has become totally disillusioned; indeed, it might be said that one commonality between the characters in the novel is a general sense of disillusionment and alienated subjectivity.

Perhaps the most tragic victim in the narrative is the unnamed "Inuit guy" (14) who lived in the same building as Frank. He was a drinker, and "they'd seen him with his cases of beer" (14). Frank and Carol realized that "he was in trouble, but they'd tried to mind their own business. They'd listened to him shouting and crying in the middle of the night. . . . Then there had been no sign of him" (14). The police show up and gain access to the room only to find his dead body. He has taken his own life. One of the police officers says to the other, "he's after hanging himself in here" (16). His suicide, his silencing in the narrative, speaks of the legacy of domination under which disempowered people struggle to live. This violently negative representation of Indigenous people reinforces the tragic hypocrisy of the consumer society in the novel. As with Mr. Harvey's disappearance, the unnamed Inuk's suicide is less a case of *Alligator* giving voice to liminal characters as to bearing witness to the silenced voices of liminal characters. Like Mr. Harvey, the Inuk is unable to enact a functional identity and is not able to conform to the structures of capitalist society. Because he is not productive, he suffers the ultimate marginalization, and his dead body is removed by the police. He embodies disillusionment and alienation taken to their extreme ends: the literal loss of subjectivity.

*Alligator* is also replete with references to the legal system and law enforcement. There are a number of allusions to the police, courts, prisons, and other such institutions of social

control. It is these social institutions and their employees that are responsible in *Alligator* for maintaining the conditions necessary for the smooth functioning of consumer capitalism. Many of the characters in *Alligator* have a brush with the law. Aside from Colleen, who is embroiled in the court case over her sabotage, Frank has spent time in the Whitbourne Juvenile Corrections Facility for “putting two T-bone steaks down the front of his jeans” (140). The police hustle Mr. Harvey away, remove the unnamed Inuit character’s body, and are present near the end of the novel to arrest Valentin, whom Frank sees in a picture on the front of the newspaper, “his hands in cuffs” (290). The police can be seen in *Alligator* as the blue barrier between the unproductive and productive elements of society, and are a part of a system designed to uphold the image of the city as a viable place for investment and for spending money. The law, and other structures of institutional social and political power, play a part in determining the subjectivity of the various characters in the novel, specifically because of the way the bodies of the characters are arrested or detained or imprisoned. In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault says that the body is “directly involved in a political field” (25) and that “the body becomes a useful force only if it is both a productive body and a subjected body” (26). Foucault’s point here addresses the combination of productivity and subjectedness, and in his collection *Power/Knowledge* he says further to this point that “the individual is not a pre-given entity which is seized on by the exercise of power. The individual, with his identity and characteristics, is the product of a relation of power exercised over bodies, multiplicities, movements, desires, forces” (74). Characters in *Alligator* are punished for not conforming to societal norms and imposed patterns of behaviour, and one of the most apparent ways that they are kept in line is by the institutions of the law. The consumer capitalist society in the novel empowers officials of the law to punish deviance from norms, and this is shown in *Alligator* as being more concerned with the



maintenance of the system itself rather than as a project of rehabilitation or social justice.

Officials of the law maintain the system so that the city can continue to generate revenue, but this revenue generation only serves to reinforce inequality and injustice.

Some of the characters in *Alligator* are able to act out against the injustices of capitalist society, while others find no outlet and submit to docility. As Foucault describes it in *Discipline and Punish*, “a body is docile that may be subjected, used, transformed, and improved” (136). A docile body is not a body that is resistant, but a body that is pliable, that follows directions, or at the very least does not get in the way of those paradigm citizens going about their duty as producers and consumers. Not only are characters in the novel pacified and made docile by a dominant cultural ethos, but many of the characters actively subdue themselves: there are numerous references to self-medicating with drugs or alcohol. Valentin sells drugs, among other criminal enterprises, and is shown at one point waiting in a bar for an “OxyContin addict” (79). When the police finally raid his apartment, they find “two beef buckets full of tiny bottles with rubber stoppers that were some sort of prescription drug” (287). Isobel is self-medicating and Valentin at one time observes that “her cupboards were full of pharmaceuticals” (75). Colleen’s stepfather, David, in a phone call just before his aneurism, said that “he’d taken some kind of pill, something a woman had dropped in his drink” (103). Frank’s mother is also anaesthetized near the end of her illness when she is given morphine (87), though this medication is institutionally administered rather than a self-medication. Aside from drugs, there are also many references to alcohol and to characters drinking liquor. Colleen steals a bottle of vodka from the “liquor store at the mall” (120); Beverly drinks bottles of “homemade wine” (53); Valentin, while waiting to make a drug deal, “drank the last shot and ordered five more” (79); and the unnamed Inuk is a heavy drinker. These many references to drugs and alcohol demonstrate the

pervasive effects of disillusionment and alienation triggered by consumerist influence on the imagined St. John's of the novel.

With so much inequality and victimization associated with systems of consumer capitalism, it comes as a surprise that some characters are not completely subdued and are able to act out. Even Frank, who is generally more reserved, has an outburst on the day Colleen steals his life savings: "He gouged his key into the side of the landlord's Jaguar and dragged it from the taillight all the way to the headlight feeling the paint crust against the tip of his key" (229). His act of resistance is one that inflicts an economic injury against the landlord, who is branded by the luxury car he is able to afford. Frank's keying the car is also, in some respects, a futile act of resistance, as the Jaguar will be repainted and the incident will not have any real impact on the victim. Even though this outburst is relatively small, it still constitutes a move away from societal norms and could be framed as a crime (vandalism or destruction of property). Valentin, a self-titled "thug" (72), is the epitome of the criminal element of society. His greed and his desire to get ahead at all costs are deeply rooted in his disillusionment with society, and his rationale for theft and extortion is that he "was convinced that the way to escape a dark fate was never to stand still . . . when the signs advised action" (79). Valentin's protest against capitalist society is expressed as crime, and though he is in no sense heroic, his viciousness is a pragmatic response to a society from which he is marginalized and shunned. After asking for a "loan" of \$1,000, Valentin shares some advice with Frank that brings to light his *modus operandi*: "I like you because you are a businessman. You are like me. This is what we have to understand: there is a system but it is like a suspension bridge, it has give. People like us must exploit the give" (227). The climax of his thread in the narrative occurs when Valentin decides the time is right to burn down Isobel's house in order to gain access to the insurance money. Valentin drugs Frank and

leaves him unconscious in the living room of the burning house, with the idea that “if his body was found after the fire, the police would think he had started it” (271). Frank is a disposable subject, similar to the unnamed Inuk and Mr. Harvey. He is supposed to be Valentin’s cover; however, Frank foils the plot when he comes to in the burning house, “made a ball of himself and he flung that ball at the window” (280). If not for this miraculous escape, Valentin’s crime would have been the only “successful” act of protest in the narrative. However, as he is arrested and jailed, like Frank’s act of keying the car, his protest is a futile one.

Even as there are such moments of protest and resistance throughout the novel, the most obvious of which is Colleen’s act of sabotage, none of these protests seem to have any major effect. Indeed, Colleen’s protest successfully puts the bulldozers out of commission for a few days, but her kleptomaniacal impulses (whether stealing from Frank or stealing a bottle from the liquor store) show how materialism has infused her subjectivity. Other characters also act out against domination by capitalist systems, such as Frank keying the Jaguar, but, once again, these acts of resistance are largely ineffective and futile – certainly they have essentially no impact on the overall system of consumer capitalism. In this sense, there is a pervasive nihilism at the heart of *Alligator*, at least in terms of the efficacy of making a stand. One possible counterclaim to this position is to point out the kinds of everyday resistance enacted by characters when they show empathy for others or when they flout established social codes and norms. However, this theoretical position does not line up so well with the specifics of the novel. For example, even though Frank and Carol take notice that the unnamed Inuk is clearly experiencing duress, screaming and thrashing about his bedsitting room, they are unable to do anything to prevent his suicide. Even though Beverly cares for Colleen and wants for her the best things in life, she does not recognize that the very materialism and consumption she associates with happiness are at the

root of Colleen's problems and inability to adjust. Rather than these characters being empathetic or socially oriented, these characters are very often self-absorbed, cynical, and manipulating. This is not to say that Frank and Carol are necessarily even capable of doing anything to help the unnamed Inuk or that Beverly is capable of understanding Colleen's reasons for her act of sabotage. All of these characters are similarly victimized by capitalist systems of domination and control. Rather, the novel presents a particularly perverse set of failed relationships, a general breakdown of social ties, and *Alligator* links this to a particularly perverse formulation of consumer capitalism. There is a lot of blame to be spread around, but none of the characters are quintessentially bad people (with the possible exception of Valentin, though even he is a sympathetic character at times), just self-interested actors playing within and against the rules of a system in which they find themselves but did not so much choose. Nonetheless, they accept this system in large part, as Korkotsides suggests is the pattern of consumer capitalism, even if they occasionally find ways to resist or subvert it. The oppressions and forms of domination of consumer capitalism function mostly on the level of something invisible and undefined.

However, it is for this same reason – because of these various cleavages and the way a lack of social solidarity functions to prop up hegemony – that Colleen's overt act of resistance is so significant. Even as there is a sense of nihilism about the effectiveness of resistance, and even as Colleen is self-reflexively aware that the act of sabotage may have little real impact, she acts from of an ethical need to do so, just as Critchley discusses in his anarchic metapolitics in *Infinitely Demanding*. Colleen demands a better world, of justice and fairness, even as she knows that it is a demand that cannot realistically or presently be met. And she decides that she would do the same thing over, that she would continue to resist, because that is what is ethical and right, not because it will be successful in any conventional sense. Her so-called eco-terrorism is further

significant in that it is an act of solidarity with larger social movements and with oppressed and marginalized people, both in her community and abroad. Colleen's strike against the bulldozers is carried out in support of the resurgent anti-globalization and ecology movement referenced in the novel, and she has specifically voiced concerns to her mother in relation to "Seattle" and "Quebec City."<sup>127</sup>

Colleen learned about these various protest movements and flashpoints of resistance by consuming a variety of mass media, from the Internet and TV, a different kind of media from the newspaper business both Smallwood and Fielding are involved with in *Colony*. Her exposure to distant acts of resistance through media is an inspiration for her own act of sabotage. In that she is consuming media, Colleen is, indeed, participating in the culture of consumer capitalism, but in a way that subverts that system, in a within-against form of resistance. Colleen's aunt Madeleine at one point also recognizes that Colleen's act of rebellion, sabotaging bulldozers, is influenced by media: "There was a blast of flame in every news box along Water Street. Was it Iraq or Sudan? Why wouldn't the girl rebel. Who could walk past these boxes and do nothing?" (303). This propagation of resistance movements through media is something Rachel Neumann discusses in her article "A Place for Rage" (2000), which offers an analysis of images from the

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<sup>127</sup> Seattle, in this instance, is shorthand for the 1999 Seattle World Trade Organization protests, which are often euphemistically called "The Battle of Seattle." The Seattle protests took place over three days and were effective in disrupting some of the WTO meetings, with the associated rioting and police crackdown garnering widespread media attention. The reference to Quebec City refers to anti-globalization protests in that city in 2001 during the 3rd Summit of the Americas, which were a series of negotiations on a pact called the Free Trade Area of the Americas. These protests, like those in Seattle, garnered a good deal of media attention, with images of black bloc tactics and police crackdowns beamed around Canada and the globe.

Seattle protests, linking the effectiveness of the imagery of the protests to the tactical use of property destruction and the “broken windows theory”<sup>128</sup>:

One crucial element of change (and a necessity for building larger movements) is the visible sign of resistance. Property destruction allows for a change in landscape, a visual punctuation. The institutional response to protest in the United States in recent years has been to clean things up. Once people are arrested and silenced, there’s no evidence that resistance took place. The broken window theory implies that if you can’t see the smashed glass, it isn’t a problem. You can’t see homeless people? They must have found homes. You don’t see graffiti? Must be the anger and boredom (and creativity) behind it is gone. (90)

Visible signs of resistance, such as imagery from the Seattle and Quebec City protests, inform Colleen of the tactics and strategies of the anti-globalization movement, including the use of property damage as a means of putting a wrench in the gears of the machine, of the effectiveness of radical forms of protest like sabotage. The imagery of these protests communicates not only that the resistance exists and what it opposes, but also the kinds of actions that are possible within the realm of the resistance to consumer capitalism she is plugged into. Colleen’s interest in the ecology movement is influenced by non-destructive acts of civil disobedience carried out by the California environmental activist Julia Butterfly Hill, though she takes things one step further by not merely setting up a tree-sit but by damaging industrial equipment involved in forestry operations, transposing the property destruction typical of the summit protests in Seattle

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<sup>128</sup> The broken windows theory is a concept in criminology and community policing, first developed by James Wilson and George Kelling, that suggests maintaining urban environments through replacing broken windows and removing graffiti reduces further vandalism and property damage. See George Keeling and Catherine Coles’s *Fixing Broken Windows: Restoring Order and Reducing Crime in Our Communities* (1996).

and Quebec City into her own specific context. However, the legal response to Colleen's act of resistance is a kind of silencing, as Neumann puts it, in that it threatens much harsher penalties than a diversion program and community service if she is caught for the same crime again. Similarly, visible signs of other forms of social decay, such as the presence of a homeless man, Mr. Harvey, in Atlantic Place, are ushered out of view. In this way, both the visual signs of resistance and the visual representations of potential reasons to resist are kept from gaining prominence in the visual landscape of the city as it is depicted in the novel. For these reasons, Colleen's act of property destruction is significant not only in that it demonstrates solidarity with a broader movement but also in that it highlights mechanisms that mitigate and cover over resistance. In the way that it is positioned in the text, as an act that is not simply regarded cynically or dismissed out of hand, Colleen's sabotage is, thus, unique from the other acts of resistance portrayed in the novel.

### **Conclusion: By Any Means Necessary**

*Alligator* offers a detailed model of the mechanisms and effects of consumer capitalism. The text highlights the effects of selling out a society and the stark realities of a consumerist social order. By showing the price paid by those who live in a supposedly self-propelling consumerist society, *Alligator* takes a critical stance on the effects of consumer capitalism and suggests it is a destructive force. With respect to the characters' lives, it leads to materialism, inequality, disillusionment, and social decay. Consumer capitalism, metaphorically, feeds on its own children, as the characters in *Alligator* are essentially consumers, and none are involved with primary or secondary modes of production. One wonders if there is economic life in this fictional

St. John's at all, as the most apparent depiction of production is the omnipresence of bulldozers knocking down trees, presumably to make way for subdivisions.

Money is at the heart of the book. Money, and the relentless pursuit of it, are represented by the title animal, the alligator, and it is the desire for money and what it allows that drives the most disturbing and dishonest acts of the characters. It is money that motivates Valentin to leave Frank in a burning house, so that Frank may appear to have been responsible for the fire himself, as a cover for Valentin's act of fraud. Colleen is motivated to steal Frank's money, his meagre life savings, in an act that she comes to regret. She tries to track down Frank at the close of the novel, visiting the building he lived in and speaking to Carol. Colleen at first says, "I owe him [Frank] some money," but quickly corrects herself and says "I stole some money from him and I want to pay it back" (288). Colleen later discovers that Frank has a new job at a printing and photocopy store, and calls to speak with him. However, even though Frank "wanted his money back" he refuses to take Colleen's calls (296). This is somewhat unfortunate, because in the scene where Colleen visits Frank's empty room and talks to Carol, there is some indication that her recent experiences have transformed her, something that is metaphorically represented by the elm spanworms having at this same moment "transformed" into moths (288).

Even as Colleen seems to have experienced a transformation of sorts, the other characters remain mired in their alienation and remain docile. They also self-medicate into docility through drugs and alcohol. Any of the characters that can simply find no way to either conform or remain docile are subject to disciplinary mechanisms. Colleen is brought before a judge and punished. Mr. Harvey is escorted away by the police. Valentin is incarcerated, likely for the rest of his days. The suicide of the unnamed Inuk is the starkest representation of a character unable to conform, and he takes his own life in desperation and is removed by the police. These specific



negative consequences of the society in the St. John's of the novel are a function of the broader class system and the inequalities and injustices that go with it. There is little indication of class mobility in the novel, and generally any of the characters that attempt to improve their lot in life, such as Frank or Valentin, end up in a worse place than where they were to begin with.<sup>129</sup> Frank loses his small business and is badly scarred for life. Valentin ends up back in prison, which he remembers as the low point of his younger life when he had served ten years in a Russian jail and had considered suicide (112). In this tragic manner, the overarching social order is maintained. Those on the top of the social ladder, like Mr. Duffy and Frank's landlord who owned the Jaguar he keyed, remain in their lofty place, isolated from any possible harm from below.

Characters in the novel do act out and do protest against the injustices of an unequal and fundamentally flawed consumer capitalist system, though most of these acts of dissent do not amount to much. It is, once again, Colleen's act of sabotage that has the biggest impact, and even in this case Mr. Duffy makes up his mind, after seeing Colleen squirm and feel insignificant in front of a court-appointed mediator, that "he had no intention of giving Colleen Clark's vandalism another thought. He'd had his fun" (171). Moreover, although her act of sabotage is rooted in an ethical commitment and a burgeoning ecological consciousness, Colleen is also a deeply flawed character. Her flaws are most obviously shown when she steals from Frank – her other thefts are less reprehensible, though certainly not admirable, because her targets are often large corporations. For example, when she is at one point waiting in the Toronto airport she eats

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<sup>129</sup> A notable exception to this point on class mobility is Mr. Duffy, who at "fifteen was peddling salt fish on the harbourfront . . . [and] supporting his widowed mother" (117). He has also worked as a cleaner and construction worker, before becoming a developer. A subtle indication of downward class movement is Beverly's reminiscence of how close she and her now-deceased husband had come to "extravagant wealth" (98).

at Swiss Chalet, and skips the check. She thinks, “Swiss Chalet is a big chain, like probably part of some multinational,” and so she reasons that it is akin to an act of protest to not pay. However, it is as likely that her waitress, Veronica, who Colleen recognizes has “probably been on for hours already” and is “probably exhausted” will be held responsible for the lost check by her manager (231). At the same time, Colleen does seem to go through a transformation as a result of her trip to Louisiana, on a pilgrimage of sorts, to visit an alligator farmer she saw in a film. She comes back and begins to try to mend the relationships with her mother and with Frank.

Although it must be said that not all of Colleen’s actions are admirable, what is most admirable about Colleen is that she acts. When she decides to sabotage the bulldozers, she makes a plan, however flawed, and carries it out. Unlike the others in the environmental group that met at the university, she is a radical at heart, not concerned with playing within the rules of polite society by writing pleading letters to the government or gathering signatures on petitions, and not concerned about the possible personal consequences of her actions. She is influenced by the militant forms of protest and dissent she sees carried out by other activists, such as those involved in the radical ecology movement and the anti/alter-globalization movement, such as it was expressed and evident at the demonstrations in Seattle and Quebec City. Colleen is the kind of activist that lives by the motto “by any means necessary,” willing to do what it takes in the name of justice and fairness. Moore presents Colleen as a complicated and flawed character, but a character with the heart of a warrior, not a cynic or someone resigned to her fate at all. In this way, Colleen is an authentic dissident character, and Moore’s presentation of her as such, with no derision or condescension, makes *Alligator* a novel that shows resistance to be worthwhile, correct, a matter of ethical commitment and justice, and so then no act of resistance in the novel is truly in vain.

## Conclusion

### Liberated Newfoundland Literature

Those who do not move, do not notice their chains.

–Rosa Luxemburg, *The Letters of Rosa Luxemburg*

Only those who can distinguish their real desires from those that have been manufactured for them are able to make the revolution.

–Penelope Rosemont, “Revolution by Chance”

Leaders who do not act dialogically, but insist on imposing their decisions, do not organize the people—they manipulate them.

They do not liberate, nor are they liberated: they oppress.

–Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*

The way Moore presents Colleen’s act of sabotage sets *Alligator* apart from the other Newfoundland novels in this study. Even though Colleen’s protest is not entirely successful, there is no hint of derision about the efficacy of resistance (as could be read in *Rare Birds* and *Colony*). Colleen, while flawed, is a character the narrative presents as an ethical warrior who is willing to act and to do so “by any means necessary.” Even as *Alligator* stands apart in this regard, there are some connections among all four of the main novels in the study. First of all, none of the central acts of resistance – the mummer vigilantism, the riot, the standoff, and the sabotage – have a major or long-lasting impact on overarching systems of power or authority (although I suggest that the impact of resistance on Colleen’s life is the most transformative). There is always some immediate impact: the pain felt by Levi Sellers as his ears are cut off; the damage to Colonial Building and to the prestige and legitimacy of the government; the embarrassment of the CSIS agents as their sting operation is foiled; and the bulldozers being taken out of commission. But in each case the impact is temporary and the bigger systems at play

quickly get back on track. For example, the mercantile system represented in *Galore* (a system that is personified by the Sellers family) adapts and maintains itself; in the aftermath of the riot in *Colony*, an authoritarian form of government replaces the delegitimized representative government; the result of the standoff in *Rare Birds* is that Phonse's resistance is forced underground, and Dave is rehabilitated back into mainstream society; the bulldozers in *Alligator* are quickly repaired, and the broader system of rampant consumption they represent continues on, indifferent to Colleen's actions.

While there are some similarities across the four novels in the sense that resistance has little long-term impact, this detail is accented and complicated in a number of ways. For example, the overall perspective on resistance tracks across the four novels from the futility of fail and fall back in *Galore* (as the democratic aspirations of the community are dashed), to protest is naive in *Colony* (the irrational mob that needs to be managed by a strong central state), to ridicule of resistance in *Rare Birds* (the satirical caricature of libertarianism), to the apparent inevitability of victimization by predatory systems in *Alligator*. *Alligator* and *Galore* are both about predatory financial systems, consumer capitalism in one and the debt economy in the other, and both novels show the ways everyday people are victimized by such predatory systems. *Colony* and *Rare Birds* are more obviously about a struggle against state systems. The movement of the four chapters in this dissertation goes from the mythic past to an arguably more historical past, to fairly modern, to contemporary, and with the movement through time different forms of resistance function and make sense. It would be difficult to imagine, for example, a band of mummers mutilating Mr. Duffy in *Alligator*. *Colony* and *Galore* represent what may be characterized as more collectively-oriented acts of resistance, carried out by a crowd of people in one and a band of mummers in the other, whereas *Rare Birds* and *Alligator* present more single-

actor examples of resistance. The distinction between these collective and more individual forms of resistance only holds together to a point, however, as all the characters in *Alligator* engage in some form of resistance, even though they do not act together or in a coordinated matter. Resistance, then, is arguably a collective act even if individual acts of resistance appear isolated or disparate.

A collectivist orientation is certainly part of the ecological consciousness motivating Colleen's act of resistance. Novelistic writing is arguably not well equipped to convey such collective attitudes, and so again Moore's novel is exceptional. In *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable* (2016), Amitav Ghosh argues that novels, as a literary form, do not encourage the kinds of collectivist ethos necessary for dealing with large-scale issues, of which climate change is Ghosh's primary concern. In this sense, some of the ecological concerns that motivated Colleen's act of sabotage in *Alligator* are a focus of Ghosh's musings, even as the prism he approaches the ecological crisis through is literature and the humanities rather than Colleen's approach through direct action. As Ghosh sees it, the novel is particularly suited to the scale of intimate human stories, and many novels that are commercially successful are about individuals on some adventure or stories of individuals overcoming adversity. It is not that novelistic writing is incapable of representing collective struggle – indeed Ghosh calls for the production of more novels that through their form or content figure it – but that contemporary novels so often portray individuals struggling against some foe. Ghosh wonders,

Is it possible that the arts and literature of this time will one day be remembered not for their daring, nor for their championing of freedom, but rather because of their complicity in the Great Derangement? Could it be said that the 'stance of unyielding rage against the official order' that the artists and

writers of this period adopted was actually, from the perspective of the Anthropocene, a form of collusion? (121)

*The Great Derangement* is something of an apology, on behalf of Ghosh and other writers, theorists, and philosophers, for being so late to the game with respect to the ecological crisis (124). His apology would be well received by Murray Bookchin and the early eco-anarchists, as well as by the foundational writers and thinkers of the ecology movement who critiqued anthropocentrism and the highly individualized, self-interested, and vapid lifestyles of Western elites that became the model for aspirations the world over. Ghosh finds the roots of this shunning of the non-human world and the atomization of human communities into supposedly disparate individuals in the liberal-humanist Enlightenment. The humanist ethos, the ethos propagated by the writers and thinkers of the humanities, novelists, philosophers, theorists, and critics of all kinds, is the cultural basis of what Ghosh sees as the great derangement of our time.

With respect to resistance or the possibility of collective action to overcome various forms of crisis, Ghosh is pessimistic and resigned. He despondently notes that one of the largest collective expressions of dissent in recent memory, the massive mobilizations against the Iraq War, had little or no effect. This is evidence, for Ghosh, that “the public sphere’s ability to influence the security and policy establishment had eroded drastically” (130). Not only does he see such collective dissent as ineffective, but he also argues that traditional political structures are incapable of confronting large-scale crises because “the basic building block of these structures is the nation-state, inherent to the nature of which is the pursuit of the interests of a particular group of people” (159). As Ghosh sees it, this concern with the narrow interests of a geographically or ethnically defined group is mirrored in novelistic writing that asserts the agency or identity of a specific group of people. It is not that such novelistic writing is

unimportant or unnecessary, but that such writing is then not encouraging the kind of collectivist attitudes or fostering the kind of social imaginary necessary to deal with broader issues, like climate change or global empire. In this way, Ghosh sees traditional political structures as ineffective and likewise sees mass movements as ineffective as well. He suggests the “collapse of political alternatives” and the “accompanying disempowerment” have produced “nihilistic forms of extremism that employ methods of spectacular violence” (132). Although Ghosh does not go into specifics, his meaning here is to point to large-scale acts of terrorism or to the emergence of fundamentalist and extremist militant organizations.

Ghosh’s analysis in *The Great Derangement* is thoughtful and challenges authors and scholars to re-think the project of the humanities. Yet it is just where his analysis leaves off that my own work on resistance in literature begins. Part of Ghosh’s challenge is for writers and critics to re-think the novel, as a literary form, to address the fact that it is not as progressive or dissident as it may seem, at least in the sense that so many commercially successful novels focus on individual struggle or on ethnically or geographically-specific communities, and in this regard his project and my own are in agreement. He does point to a few writers, including Barbara Kingsolver and Abdelrahman Munif, whose work he believes moves beyond a politically stultifying fixation on “individual moral adventure,”<sup>130</sup> and is capable of considering the non-human and human worlds simultaneously. There are also, of course, many novels that represent collective struggle, and even novels that are rooted in the immediacy of individual lives may be punctuated by moments of collective resistance (or of individuals resisting an anthropocentric

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<sup>130</sup> Ghosh borrows this phrase and way of characterizing popular novels from John Updike.

ethos).<sup>131</sup> However, our projects most obviously diverge in that Ghosh does not think through any ideas on resistance and dissent other than, on the one hand, those forms common to moderate, liberal-humanist approaches such as the mass mobilization against the Iraq War, and, on the other hand, the briefest mention of the most extreme forms of mass violence of terrorist organizations. At the close of his book, Ghosh essentially resigns himself to inaction, putting his hopes for a resolution to the ecological crisis in organized religion and in some unspecified future generation that will somehow overcome all the obstacles the present world is unable to face or even understand in a serious manner (159-62). Granted, it is not Ghosh's project to offer an in-depth examination of forms of resistance or the way resistance is represented in literature – that has been one of the purposes of my study – though it is nonetheless an avenue of discussion that more moderate and liberal-minded humanists like Ghosh should consider.

I set out at the beginning of this study to examine the way resistance is represented in contemporary Newfoundland fiction. I focused on clear examples of protest and dissent, and used an analysis of such flashpoints of resistance to develop a broader reading of specific novels. It was not difficult to find examples of resistance in any of the texts in my study, and in each case examining one instance of resistance made other examples of resistance in the texts apparent. However, I have not been interested simply in the fact that Newfoundland novels do

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<sup>131</sup> A few well-known novels that depict collective struggle include Jack London's *The Iron Heel* (1908), John Steinbeck's *In Dubious Battle* (1936), and E. L. Doctorow's *The Book of Daniel* (1971), among many others. That said, these three novels, and many other such novels depicting obvious forms of collective struggle, are extremely pessimistic about the efficacy of resistance. Novels in the socialist realism tradition often represent collective struggle, such as Nikolai Orlovsky's *How the Steel Was Tempered* (1934). Far from being pessimistic about the efficacy of resistance, such novels are at times best considered Soviet revolutionary propaganda. A further significant novel that specifically deals with the tension between the individual and crowds, between the isolated creator and between the mass mind, is Don DeLillo's *Mao II* (1991), which asserts in its opening pages that "the future belongs to crowds" (16). DeLillo does not, however, simply lionize crowds, but shows the capacity of mass psychology to subsume individual agency. At the same time, DeLillo also does not simply make a typecast hero of the individual, but rather likens the creative individual protagonist to a terrorist.



represent resistance, but rather how resistance is depicted in specific novels and the attitudes about the value, necessity, or efficacy of resistance implicit in such depictions. None of the authors whose work I have taken up necessarily set out to write novels about resistance movements and did not necessarily consider precisely how protest and dissent is depicted in their work. Nonetheless, all the novels I examined convey a particular understanding of resistance that draws from and also informs the contemporary cultural milieu. The attitudes about resistance embedded in these novels mirror many of the attitudes about resistance expressed in the public sphere, such as is evident most any time there is a public protest or act of dissent. Such attitudes range from the cynical, to the pessimistic, to the cautiously optimistic, to the revolutionary.

For example, in Michael Crummey's *Galore*, I examined an act of vigilantism carried out by a band of mummers. The band of mummers, which was made up of members of the Devine family, who are of the common fishing folk of the community, mutilated the local merchant Levi Sellers who had done them a series of injustices. Their act of vigilantism is a response to the ongoing cruelty of the merchant, though the merchant's subsequent revenge for their act comes in the form of further cruelty toward the Devines. The Devines and the rest of the common people of the community begin to organize through unionism and through formal politics in order to counteract the oppression of the merchant. However, even as they are successfully able to establish a strong union presence in the community and are able to elect one of their own to the Newfoundland House of Assembly, the novel is, in the end, pessimistic about the possibility of social justice or positive social change. This pessimism is reflected in the way that the democratic and progressive forces in the novel, such as the FPU and the community-based political mobilizations, end up becoming corrupt and aloof from the common people they set out to represent, a situation that is similar in many ways to the oppressive and exploitative system of

mercantilism and patronage politics the community sought to escape. The underlying pessimism about the efficacy of resistance is further represented by the form of the novel, in that it has a cyclic narrative structure – the closing scene of the novel, with Abel throwing himself overboard of the ship, informs the start of the novel and the fantastical arrival of Judah from the belly of the whale. The way the novel closes by returning to the beginning indicates that all the hard work that has been done, the struggle of attempting to liberate the community from the tyranny of the merchant's debt trap and the corruption of status quo politics, has been for nothing. The most effective acts of resistance in the novel are those militant actions that happen outside formal politics, such as the act of vigilantism carried out by the band of mummers and other folk traditions that have an inherently dissident characteristic, but the novel does not highlight these as effective forms of resistance as much as they are desperate acts of revenge or quaint cultural practices. *Galore* suggests that formal politics is the natural evolution of these disorganized acts of protest, but that formal politics is destined to fail, at least as an avenue to collective liberation. Nonetheless, these militant and grassroots examples of resistance, such as through mummering, are arguably the most effective in the novel, due in large part to their anarchic quality.

Johnston's *Colony* goes further than to simply express pessimism about the efficacy of resistance and the possibility of social justice; it expresses reactionary views and offers a patronizing perspective on the common people of Newfoundland. The moment of resistance I initially focused on in my criticism of Johnston's novel is the representation of the Colonial Building riot. The way the riot is described and the way the so-called riotous mob acts initially characterize this act of collective violence as irrational. The rioters are, in fact, said to have been duped into committing riotous acts like throwing stones and destroying property by a conspiracy of self-interested elites. The people themselves are cast as a malleable mass, easily swayed to

outbursts of senseless violence, as though they could never have decided on their own to carry out such an act. However, looking closely at the form and function of the riot, there is, indeed, an internal logic, in that the crowd seizes upon and destroys representations of cultural capital, such as architecture, art, and even attempts to get hold of the prime minister himself. The riot is an expression of the multitude, a political subject that appears monstrous to those such as Smallwood who can only see political struggle from the point of view of traditional authority, that is, politics as a contest between political parties and formal civil organizations. Smallwood's view of the riot, and his views of the common people of Newfoundland more generally, are typically elitist and reactionary. He sees the people of Newfoundland as essentially politically illiterate, without agency, and certainly not capable of any directly democratic politics. The bumbling people need the enlightened leadership of people such as Smallwood and others of the elite political class, and Smallwood positions himself as the people's saviour, a truly selfless politician, in the way that he brings Newfoundland into Confederation. Fielding likewise perceives in the riot an apolitical mob, even as she is more reflective than Smallwood of the underlying social causes of unrest, such as poverty and unemployment. Fielding plays a part in protecting figures of traditional authority during the scene of the riot, and also plays a part in rehabilitating the status quo through her journalism. Both Fielding and Smallwood work as journalists, and the specific kinds of journalism they write and the assumptions implicit in their journalism help constitute "the people" as a political subject, a subject that can then be ruled. As I argued, in this manner, *Colony* can be regarded as a fundamentally reactionary text.

Edward Riche's *Rare Birds* takes a conservative view on the efficacy of resistance and the possibility of social justice. The moment of resistance I focused on in Riche's novel was the standoff between the novel's protagonist, Dave, and his libertarian-minded neighbour, Phonse,

against the agents of the Canadian Secret Intelligence Service (CSIS). The way the standoff unfolds, with respect to its form and function, mimics several well-publicized standoffs that happened in the United States in the years preceding the publication of *Rare Birds*. The standoff is a moment of frozen time, in which a difference of understanding and interpretation of why the standoff is taking place is a central issue in its resolution. In this case, Phonse and Dave believe, at least at first, that the agents are representatives of a corporate interest, specifically the Winnebago Corporation, and not of the federal government. They also believe the agents are after Phonse's design for a submarine, whereas in fact the CSIS agents have Phonse under observation because they want to get their hands on a set of high-tech lights. Phonse considers the lights little more than a novelty, whereas the CSIS agents are not even aware of the existence of the submarine. In the way that Riche's novel draws on a number of right-wing standoffs that took place in the early 1990s, my analysis of the standoff points to a further analysis of the novel's portrayal of other facets of extreme right-wing politics. For example, the novel has allusions, some subtle and some not so subtle, to the militia movement, to the Freemen-on-the-land movement, and to more mainstream forms of right-wing libertarianism. The novel also draws on a widespread belief in conspiracy theories among the extreme right of the political spectrum, such as through the way the previously level-headed Dave is drawn into Phonse's world of intrigue and eventually comes to believe in the conspiracy of the Winnebagos. The way that the novel portrays Dave's estranged wife, Claire, who is a pundit for an American right-wing think tank, is a further indication of the novel's satirical take on everything right wing. *Rare Birds* is, of course, a work of satire, but nonetheless it is a work of satire with a conservative agenda. It does skewer extreme right-wing politics, just as it similarly skewers the ineptness of the law enforcement agencies that attempt to combat extreme right-wing groups and

individuals. In the way that Riche's satire ridicules with abandon, it essentially makes the argument that the world should remain much as it is – this is a conservative view, and one that is dismissive of the value of resistance, whether on the political right or the political left.

Moore's *Alligator*, of all the novels in my study, is the one that most values resistance and depicts protest and dissent as worthwhile. It is not that the novel shows specific acts of resistance to be highly effective or as having any dramatic impact on the functioning of power and authority, but instead that acts of resistance are shown to be justified because they are enacted from an ethical commitment to social and ecological justice. The central act of resistance I focused on in Moore's novel is an act of sabotage carried out by Colleen, who pours sugar in the tanks of some bulldozers. Colleen sabotages the bulldozers in an attempt to stop the clearcutting of a patch of forest, and by extension to try to protect an endangered species, the Newfoundland pine marten. Colleen learns about radical ecology and about the tactics employed by activists in the movement through media reports and documents she finds online. Although she is part of a small group, mainly composed of university students who are older than her, the environmental group proves to be ineffective, mostly because its members lack commitment. The group also considers only mainstream tactics to oppose the clearcutting, such as letter writing and fundraising through bake sales. Colleen, however, decides to work on her own when the group collapses; she uses direct action and puts the clearcutting operation out of commission for a few days, but gets caught in the process. Her act of sabotaging the bulldozers points to a broader critique in the book of the functioning and effects of consumer capitalism, with respect to its destruction of the non-human world for raw materials and also the destructive social relations it makes possible. The version of St. John's presented in Moore's novel is awash in brands and consumer products, and all the characters in the novel are materialistic and self-

interested. The consumerist social order victimizes the characters, and they in turn victimize one another in the relentless pursuit of more. Some of these characters, such as Frank, end up permanently scarred, both physically and psychologically, as a result of the avarice of others. In the most extreme circumstances, those who are unable to conform to a highly unequal consumerist society are made abject, such as the vagrant Mr. Harvey and the unnamed Inuk who commits suicide. But even as the world she inhabits breeds alienation and docility, and even as it disposes of those it has no use for, Colleen refuses to submit and lashes out against the injustices she perceives. The bulldozers are easily repaired, the forest is clear-cut, and Colleen is punished for her act; still, she says that given the opportunity, she would do precisely the same thing again. Colleen is, in this way, a dissident character. She acts out of a deeply held ethical commitment to creating a better and more just world. So while *Alligator* does not have any clear examples of successful resistance – that is, resistance that has a significant impact on the business-as-usual of consumer capitalism – it is the one novel in my study that represents resistance as inherently worthwhile.

That said, because these novels are generally pessimistic about the efficacy of resistance, and because even the one novel that does value resistance is actually a story of an act of dissent that has no significant impact, one has to say, based on this study, that these novels are the product of a deeply reactionary culture. There is little sense of revolutionary energy in these novels, as though the idea of revolution or social uprising against injustice simply does not make sense in the Newfoundland context.<sup>132</sup> Even those stories that present Newfoundland society on the brink of revolt, such as Johnston's *Colony*, nonetheless convey the belief that rebellious

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<sup>132</sup> Other genres of Newfoundland writing and other forms of Newfoundland creative production may not necessarily have a similar reactionary character. Newfoundland drama seems an especially fruitful avenue for further research in this regard.

populations ought to just go home and let the politicians and technocrats sort things out. Of course, none of this is a true representation of the many grassroots resistance movements in Newfoundland history or in contemporary Newfoundland; for example, as Sean Cadigan notes in his *Newfoundland and Labrador: A History*, there were socialist and other radical-oriented groups active in St. John's around the time of the Colonial Building riot, such as the Unemployed Committee and its famous firebrand Pierce Power (214). Such movements were broken up and actively suppressed by the government and its security forces, and there was a real fear among the ruling class of the time that a revolution could break out. In present-day Newfoundland, there are numerous social justice and environmental organizations, some more formal and some more grassroots, that have varying degrees of success in highlighting and addressing inequalities, injustices, and ecological concerns. I am not prescribing that Newfoundland authors need to write heroic epics about these kinds of resistance movements; rather, I am suggesting that the sorts of stories told by Newfoundland authors play a part in creating the context for a culture of resistance in Newfoundland. As it stands, at least with respect to the works I have examined, Newfoundland does not have a robust culture of resistance, and if it does then the way it is reflected in the literature is damaging the prospects of that culture of resistance growing stronger. This diminutive or dismissed culture of resistance in Newfoundland is only disconcerting if one believes that grassroots resistance movements and people power are an important factor in bringing about social and ecological justice. If one believes that status quo politics and incremental reform are blazing a continuous path of progress, or that things are just fine as they are, then there is no need to be concerned at all.

Along with examining the way contemporary Newfoundland fiction depicts resistance, and the attitudes about resistance embedded in these works of fiction in my study, an

undercurrent running through my dissertation has also been the question of Newfoundland identity politics, and specifically about the possibility of a turn to a revolutionary concept of Newfoundland literature and Newfoundland culture more generally. Although I have not discussed at length the creation and reproduction of Newfoundland identity with respect to each novel taken up in the main chapters of this study, I have selected secondary criticism of these novels that generally comments on Newfoundland identity. Indeed, a great deal of scholarly criticism of Newfoundland literature works with or through this issue of Newfoundland identity, if only because a critic is compelled, in some ways, to say what it is about a novel that makes it of or about Newfoundland. With respect to the central arguments of my study, I see the inherent pessimism and the cynicism about the value of resistance and about the possibility of social justice that is expressed in Newfoundland culture as being bound up with issues of Newfoundland identity politics. Furthermore, if one is interested, as I am, in the expression and representations of resistance to domination in various forms, then as Ghosh suggests in *The Great Derangement* there is a need to reformulate or work through identity politics (swiftly, as far as he is concerned) in order to encourage a more collectivist and ecological ethos (126).<sup>133</sup> Building upon Ghosh's insights, identity politics, though important and necessary in some ways, may become a harmful aspect of the great derangement if they serve to constantly postpone the

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<sup>133</sup> This call for a more collectivist ethos is not a call for outright collectivism as such, where collectivism is defined as the privileging of the group over the individual, and certainly not a call for anything like an authoritarian socialism. Implicit in the anarchist orientation of my study, autonomy and notions of individual freedom are important alongside, or in tension with, collective struggle and social solidarity. Rather, my interest in calling for a more collectivist ethos is to encourage a break with the overwhelmingly individualist and vacuous ethos that is dominant in contemporary consumer capitalism and neoliberalism, epitomized by the phrase "everything for me and nothing for anyone else." The kinds of autonomy, voluntary association, and mutual aid that are the individualist elements of anarchism are at once also a call for social solidarity, encapsulated in the wonderful Zapatista slogan "everything for everyone and nothing for ourselves." See Subcomandante Insurgente Moisés and Subcomandante Insurgente Galeano, "A New Year's Message from the Zapatistas" (2016).



emergence of a revolutionary politics that may be helpful in addressing domination in various forms.

The postponement of this project of a revolutionary politics, and how studies of Newfoundland literature are implicated in the project of maintaining a calcified identity politics, is evident in the manner that literary criticism and novelistic writing functions to create and reinforce sovereign political power. Sovereignty is the notion that a sovereign functions as the basic unit of political practice, whether that sovereign is a divine king, the government of a republic, a nation, or the people. Sovereignty is created in specific ways, and does not exist as such except as a concept that is imbued with vitality by those who wield or are subject to a sovereign power. Cultural production, such as literature and scholarship, participates in the construction of sovereignty in the way it helps generate a national consciousness or a polity. Indeed, a body of literature is among the most functional ways to create a polity and, thus, to create sovereignty. As Hardt and Negri note in *Multitude*,

The concept of sovereignty dominates the tradition of political philosophy and serves as the foundation of all that is political precisely because it requires that one [some unity or political subject in which sovereignty resides] must always rule and decide. Only the one can be sovereign. This is espoused by theories of dictatorship and Jacobinism as well as by all the versions of liberalism as a kind of blackmail that one cannot avoid. The choice is absolute: either sovereignty or anarchy! Liberalism, we should emphasize, for all its insistence on plurality and the division of powers, always concedes in the final instance to the necessities of sovereignty. Someone must rule, someone must decide. (329)

Of course (and excusing the pejorative use of the term anarchy), there are other choices than only sovereignty or anarchy. This is precisely what Hardt and Negri's concept of the multitude is: a collective political subject that is not subsumed in a unity and does not create a sovereign power. But part of the problem of realizing a revolutionary politics, a politics that has worked through identity politics, is that there are so few formulations of such a politics in the social imaginary – if they are not available in the fictive landscape, it is difficult to experiment with such new formulations in political activity or to even imagine they are possible.

The standard formulation of political subjectivity and sovereignty was most pronounced in this dissertation in my analysis of the way collective subjectivity is understood in Johnston's *Colony*, and specifically the way neither Smallwood or Fielding or any of the other elites in the novel are able to perceive in the riotous mob a political subjectivity, since it did not correspond to a unity such as "the People." Because this monstrous multitude does not appear as a typical political unity, they are unable to see it as legitimate. Moreover, the way that Smallwood and Fielding work as journalists and frame the public discourse also plays a part in creating the collective political subjectivity of the People. Although there are various formulations of political power in the novel, such as the Newfoundland representative government, the Commission of Government, and the provincial government led by Smallwood after Confederation, all of these are based in the political unity of the people. Each of these governments is a form of sovereign authority that draws legitimacy from the people by the pretense of carrying out their will.

In *Commonwealth*, Hardt and Negri provocatively argue that all identity politics are based on the self-same concept of sovereignty. Once again, Hardt and Negri are not disavowing identity politics absolutely – they readily admit that there is usually no other place for many

revolutionary struggles to start out other than in identity politics. However, they point out that some forms of identity politics foreclose any attempt at creating a revolutionary politics. For example, they suggest that one such “version of identity politics that brings the [revolutionary] process to a halt in this way is characterized by nationalism, understood in a rather broad way as the effort to render identity sovereign” (330-31). Setting aside for a moment the largely negative connotations of extreme forms of nationalistic fervour, nationalism can potentially be a useful tool for a liberatory movement, at least in the sense that a collective identity can help mobilize a population and create a sense of social solidarity. But once nationalism becomes merely about preserving the nation itself or about policing that identity, it can quickly turn into the ugly aberrations that have become infamous in history. Hardt and Negri elaborate on this point:

Identity politics based on the concept of a nation can be an important tool for a struggle and a necessary point of starting out. Identity politics can be combative formations that constantly rebel against structures of subordination. Such nationalisms do, however, end up reinforcing the fixity of identity. Every nationalism is a disciplinary formation that enforces obedience to the rules of identity, policing the behavior of members of the community and their separation from others. . . . The key to carrying through the first two tasks of identity toward a revolutionary politics is to make sure that rendering violence and subordination visible, rebelling against them, and struggling for freedom do not merely come back to identity and stop there. To become revolutionary, the politics of identity has to find a means to keep moving forward. (331)

Here, Hardt and Negri are pointing to a serious challenge for any identity politics, including Newfoundland identity politics. The mobilization of a collective identity, such as through a form

of nationalism, can create resistance and a socially cohesive population, one that can withstand and perhaps even shake off various forms of oppression. However, the great obstacle to moving toward a revolutionary politics is the temptation to confuse the identity politics with the revolutionary project itself, or for that identity politics to become concerned only with its own protection and maintenance.

This caution about not getting stuck in an identity politics gestures to the sort of re-evaluation I am calling for with respect to Newfoundland literature and literary criticism. Any movement in a liberatory direction, as I see it, necessarily means re-evaluating the very idea of being a Newfoundlander, and more specifically the ways that Newfoundland cultural identity is fostered and reinforced through novelistic writing and literary criticism, as well as other fields of study in the social sciences and humanities. Literary artists and literary critics play a part in constructing ideas about what it means to be a Newfoundlander and sketch the shape of Newfoundland culture broadly speaking. But the creation and reproduction of Newfoundland identity is never done in a politically neutral way; there is always something that is at stake, and some formulations of Newfoundland culture and identity open up avenues and opportunities that other formulations foreclose. To clarify, it is not that I think every literary critic needs to exclusively work from theoretical positions on revolutionary politics, but rather that it seems to me important that critics have some awareness that the way they understand and theorize Newfoundland literature and Newfoundland culture is always already participating in a political project, one way or another.

Making such a call for a revolutionary politics and revolutionary understandings of literature may seem trite. However, I am not setting out here to conclude this study with a flourish of hope for some utopian future or to suggest that simply by re-thinking formulations of

Newfoundland identity that the injustices of our world will wither away. I am deeply wary of having a blind faith in the inevitability of a more just and equitable world, since such faith may prevent the kinds of actions necessary to secure any sort of livable future at all – certainly, the insights from the contemporary ecology movement and the best scientific data on climate change are bleak at best. Such misplaced (and potentially harmful) faith is discussed by Lauren Berlant in her book *Cruel Optimism* (2011), in which she links this common recourse to hope and optimism with what she calls the myth of the “good life” (3). This myth assures people that things are somehow always going to be okay and that the world is getting better and better through progress and reform. However, the thrust of Berlant’s work is that the belief in the myth of the good life is misplaced and is a kind of “cruel optimism,” since believing in the myth prevents people from taking action to actually address their frustrations. However, Berlant also suggests that it is becoming ever more difficult to have such blind hope and optimism, and that the fantasies of the good life are quickly fading. Some of these optimistic fantasies that are fraying, Berlant says, include “upward mobility, job security, political and social equality, and lively, durable intimacy. The set of dissolving assurances also includes meritocracy, the sense that liberal-capitalist society will reliably provide opportunities for individuals to carve out relations of reciprocity that seem fair and foster life as a project of adding up to something” (3). Calling for a turn to, or at least an awareness of the necessity for, a revolutionary politics in Newfoundland is not to suggest at all that optimism alone is enough. Indeed, part of the point of making such a call for a revolutionary politics, and in a field like literature that may seem peripheral to the political sphere, is to suggest that the possibility of a revolutionary politics is a project that will require a great deal of work. A turn to a revolutionary politics will not happen on its own but will require activists and teachers and writers of all kinds to recognize the

importance of such a project. Moreover, the long time required for experiment and growth of a revolutionary politics based on directly democratic principles, a politics that requires the emergence of a new political subject whose shape and appearance is now only glimpsed, flies in the face of the urgency and the need to act that is implied by the ecological crisis. That these two temporalities of struggle – the long struggle for a revolutionary politics and the immediate struggle for a habitable world – need to be kept in mind moving forward multiplies the complexities and makes the revolutionary project all the more difficult.

I have tried to demonstrate some aspects of revolutionary politics as an approach to literary criticism in this study. For example, I have tried to prioritize the way that common people and collective struggle are represented, and more specifically to frame my criticism around the way that particular formulations of resistance empower or diminish those with the will to resist. I am not prescribing, once again, that novelists take up radical subject matter or that they present only stories of successful revolts and revolutions. I am also not suggesting that novelists need to write stories that do not represent Newfoundland identity or Newfoundland culture, however that is to be understood, as their subject matter. What I am saying, though, is that the stories novelists tell and the way literary critics interpret these stories matter. A novel, just like the criticism that engages with that novel and places it within the orbit of other novels and discourses, is always political. The literary discourse informs the political discourse, and vice versa. Not all novels are pushing a revolutionary politics, to be sure, and, quite the opposite, can be highly reactionary. However, novelistic writing is capable of encouraging a revolutionary politics along. In that sense, I have tried to conduct a literary critical analysis that informs the kind of literary and political discourses that I feel empower collectivist, democratic, and ecological attitudes. I have tried to embed in this study at least the potential for such a

revolutionary politics by holding as a basic premise of my engagement with each novel the idea that resistance is worthwhile and valuable in its own right, even if it does not bear fruit, and that the common people of Newfoundland are capable of and deserve to be considered active agents in their own destiny. Again, it is because the common people are the ones who must shape their own destiny that it is not within the parameters of my project to say precisely what may come out of that revolutionary politics. Nonetheless, literary critics and scholars in other fields may still participate in this project of creating a revolutionary politics by developing an understanding of the ways resistance is represented in cultural fields and creating scholarly works that promote the becoming common of politics, a politics of equal and open access, a politics of real and enduring democracy.

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