

THE PORTRAYAL OF OUTPORT WOMEN IN
SELECTED TWENTIETH CENTURY
NEWFOUNDLAND WRITINGS

CENTRE FOR NEWFOUNDLAND STUDIES

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SELECTED TWENTIETH CENTURY
NEWFOUNDLAND WRITINGS

BY

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FOR MY GUIDE

Those who sow in tears
will reap with songs of joy.

Psalm 126: 5-6

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ABSTRACT

Although there has been a dramatic upsurge in the amount of literary material regarding life in outport Newfoundland, little has been done in the area of comparison of fictional and non-fictional portrayals. This thesis proposes to examine the presentation of outport women in a selected group of fictional works and to assess the extent to which these portrayals accurately reflect the actual roles of women in the traditional Newfoundland outport.

Three writers have been selected to present a cross-section of views covering the period from 1900 to 1980. Norman Duncan, in The Way of The Sea, interprets Newfoundland outport life at the beginning of the twentieth century, presenting women in their traditional roles. By contrast, Margaret Duley, a Newfoundland woman writing about Newfoundland women, develops in her novels multi-dimensional, female protagonists who reflect a new sense of independence and struggle. The third writer to be examined is Michael Cook, whose play Theresa's Creed is chosen because the female protagonist is modelled on a real person, living in a specific location in Newfoundland. This woman, whose values and life patterns were set in the pre-Confederation era, finds herself caught in a tidal wave of change and upheaval of post-Confederation influences.

The above works are assessed with reference to a number of non-fictional studies of outport women covering the same time period. The main sources of reference are: Hilda Chaulk Murray's More Than 50%, which is an extensive study covering all phases of the outport woman's life; Doña Lee Davis' Blood and Nerves, focusing on the southwest coast and covering both pre- and post-confederation times up until the late 1970's; and Ellen Antler's study, "Women's Work in Newfoundland Fishing Families", which deals with the traditional role of women in the outport setting and traces it through the effects of cultural and economic change.

While all three imaginative writers to be examined reflect to some extent the patterns of life experienced by women in the traditional Newfoundland outport as outlined in these sociological studies, significant differences do occur. These variations can be attributed for the most part both to the attitudes towards women of the respective writers and to the unique personalities of these writers.

CHAPTER ONE

STUDIES ON THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE NEWFOUNDLAND OUTPORT

1.

By the beginning of the twentieth century, life for the Newfoundland woman was much the same as it had been for the previous three hundred years. In the outports especially, the pattern of existence remained virtually unchanged.

Women served two major roles: the nurturing of and caring for their families, combined with their contribution to the work of the man of the house. These women acquired certain skills as children, grew up, married, bore children of their own, while at the same time they helped in the production of fish and attended to the many other chores which an isolated existence and a subsistence economy required. Furthermore, the life of a woman differed hardly at all from one outport to another. Where differences existed, they were usually the result of a community being closer to the capital city of St. John's, the centre of education, commerce and culture.

The role of women in the traditional outport community has been receiving increased attention in recent years. Perhaps the best example of this type of research is More Than 50%, Hilda Chaulk Murray's account of outport women from nineteen hundred to nineteen fifty.¹ This 1979 publication,

one of Canada's Atlantic Folklore and Folklife series, is an extensive record of the outport woman's life. Using the community of Elliston, Bonavista Bay, Murray focuses on the female element from many points of view. She describes the learning years of childhood, through adolescence, to courtship and marriage, continuing with an examination of the life style and the nature of woman as a wife and mother in her community.

Childhood was the learning period, a time for indoctrination into the work ethic and the acquisition of necessary skills. Murray states that "girls were not long past babyhood before they began to learn women's work and make a very real contribution to the work for the household." Also, children at a young age knew the value of household goods and the labor required to make those items. As the young girl grew into womanhood, she assumed the many roles expected of her. However, not all of these responsibilities were related to household activities. In a fishing community, the fisherman generally needed a woman to contribute to the shore production of his catch. A single man depended on his mother or sister to provide this service, while the married man expected his wife to share in his labor. Yet, although most women viewed these shore duties as a necessary partnership with their husbands, the husbands did not as a rule reciprocate by assuming part of the wives' duties inside the home. In fact, most men took pride in the fact they "didn't know where

anything was" in the house. Meals were prepared and set before the man as required. "It was a rare man indeed who did any work for his wife in the house, even though women often did men's work outdoors."³ However, the male members of the outport society recognized the contribution made by a reliable and hard working woman. Older men especially felt that if a man married a lazy woman, "he was finished, he'd get nowhere."⁴

Murray gives the following account of the seasonal chores that made up the day for the average woman:

In summer her day could take her from house to garden, to stable, to meadow, to stage, to flake. In fall her days were taken up picking berries, harvesting crops, making preserves, cleaning house, preparing for Christmas and doing preliminary preparations for making wool. In winter, carding, spinning, knitting wool, sewing clothes, joining quilts and hooking mats, were all done indoors. The woman had little leisure time, for in addition to having to pull her own weight at a variety of jobs, she had to see that her family was properly fed and cared for.⁵

Nor was a woman excused from outdoors obligations if she had a young infant to care for. In such cases, the additional responsibility for child care was placed upon a young daughter or a neighbor's child.

In spite of the hard work, women enjoyed the companionship of other women in the performance of outside duties. However, work and recreation were hardly distinguishable. For example, as a woman socialized with other women she seldom allowed

her hands to be idle, for knitting, crochet or quilt patches were usually brought along. The "kitchen garden" was also the prerogative of women, who often did the weeding "while taking a spell." However, Hilda Chauk Murray concludes that the average woman felt that her life was satisfying. "She worked hard but she was not a slave. She was her husband's partner, more than fifty percent--the mainstay of the family."⁶

2.

The view of the outport woman as presented by Hilda Chauk Murray can be supported by reference to a number of other studies. All of these substantiate the accounts she gives of the various contributions made by the female member of the community as she progressed through childhood, adolescence, courtship, marriage and motherhood. Particularly relevant are the studies of Dona Lee Davis, Ellen Antler, and The Women's Unemployment Study Group.⁷

Dona Lee Davis's work, Blood and Nerves, is a 1983 publication of the Institute of Social and Economic Research Centre at Memorial University of Newfoundland. This revised, edited version of her Ph.D. dissertation focuses on women of the southwest coast of Newfoundland, from Hermitage to Port-aux-Basques, with Hermitage as the central area of concentration. Included in this intimate study are chapters on the physical and sociocultural aspects of menopause, the

history of the Newfoundland fishing industry, life cycles of women in the area, women's status and self image, and women's health.

According to Davis, the age of assuming adult responsibilities generally depended upon the size of the family and its degree of visibility within a marginal economy. "In larger families, where their labor was not needed, girls were encouraged to leave."⁸ Furthermore, it was not unusual for some girls as young as nine years of age to be self supporting. Under such circumstances, choice of work was severely limited; the majority worked as 'serving girls', while teaching school became the prerogative of the better educated. Davis's informants recalled their youth as a period of "hard work, hard times...and a lot of fun."⁹

However, this bleak picture is modified by frequent reference to the high degree of fellowship which marked group activities. As Murray's account also notes, there was no sharp distinction between work and play, as many of the duties performed by the group were regarded also as a form of recreation.

Davis also draws attention to the network of the extended family system, which fostered compatibility and co-operation in private life as well as in the production of fish for market. Many young couples began married life sharing the home of parents and other members of the family. As the younger family grew and eventually set up separate living

quarters, the eldest child frequently remained as a member of the grandparents' home. When older members of a family were no longer able to care for themselves, they were usually 'taken in' by relatives. Then too, a child from a large family could be unofficially 'adopted' by relatives who were more financially secure. And a woman who either lived alone, or was left with small children for extended periods of time, generally asked a female relative or friend to sleep at her house. In this way, loneliness was avoided and greater group solidarity promoted.¹⁰

Davis also records that the role of women as non-paid contributors to household enterprise did not allow them economic independence. And since there was no difference in the work roles for single and married women, the majority felt it was more satisfying to contribute to their own households through marriage. Consequently, women were prepared for matrimony at an early age. Weddings, of course, were community affairs with everyone welcome.¹¹ Both Davis and Murray concur that male/female work roles were considered complementary, with the performance of some "biologically linked."

In all subsistence activities the woman's contribution was a necessity. The garden plot, which involved the growing of vegetables rather than flowers, was the sole responsibility of the woman. Davis also concurs with Murray in the catalogue of seasonal work cycles. A mature helpmate clearly made a rugged existence more tolerable: "A good wife was a woman

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who was easy to get along with, handled finances well, kept a good house and raised her children well. Few women failed on any of these counts."¹³

Ellen Antler's 1976 study, Women's Work in Newfoundland Fishing Families, is also compatible with the previously mentioned works. This research concentrates on the outport woman in relation to her duties connected with the production of a commodity (fish) for market. In addition, Antler traces the changes that have evolved over the years from the position of "co-producer in a producer owned and controlled fishery, to that of wage labourer in capitalist owned fish plants and non-wage labourers in the privacy of their homes."¹⁴

Antler also traces women's life cycles from the traditional to the modern as well as the ensuing advantages and disadvantages of both. For women in the traditional fishing community, summer was a time of frenzied activity, as the men depended on the labor of wives and daughters for the shore processing of the catch. Men would bring the fish ashore and with the help of the women would head, split and gut the fish. However, the responsibility of curing the fish was assigned mainly to the women and girls.¹⁵

Women did not get paid when their labor was applied to the work of their own 'crowd', but the value of their work made a significant difference to the household. This value in a co-operative, labor intensive enterprise can be understood in relation to the standard of payment made to the male

members of the crew. For example, a man who had no wife, mother, or sister to contribute to the shore effort, received half a share of the catch. When he married, he received a full share, with the additional sum representing his wife's contribution in curing the fish as well as her duties in feeding and caring for the crew.¹⁶

The changes that have taken place in recent years have permeated all aspects of life for the Newfoundland woman in general, and for the outport woman in particular. In this regard, Newfoundland is no different from other areas which have gone through traumatic and dramatic changes. Antler says:

They have been proletarianized. It has been a coercive process in Newfoundland just as it has been elsewhere, and not all the changes have been in the condition of work... Outport women now find themselves suffering the same isolation, alienation and sense of powerlessness, that plague women in urban, industrial centres.¹⁷

Nevertheless, Antler also believes that the modern, post-industrial outport women are "not confused by competing social science explanations of their conditions and remain by far the most keen analysts of recent events."¹⁸

Also relevant to the topic under discussion is a report published in 1983, the result of a three year study on the lives of unemployed and working women in the province. Not For Nothing was researched by a panel of eight women and funded by the Office of Secretary of State¹⁹. It covers such

topics as "The Women who Work in Fish Plants," "Women and Crafts," "Women and Welfare," "Non Unionized Working Women and the Law," "Unemployed Women in Newfoundland and Labrador." This study also substantiates those by Murray, Davis and Antler in such areas as the early induction into the work force, the necessity of co-operative effort, the value of non-wage labor of women, as well as the need for a multiplicity of skills in providing for the needs of a family. The seasonal dictates of survival in a natural environment along with the importance of the extended family network are observed. Not For Nothing, like the Antler study, also focuses on the modern woman as well as the woman who is in transition from the traditional to the present life style. Differences also result from a gradual trend towards the dissolution of extended family ties.

In conclusion, the traditional role of women in the Newfoundland outport appears to have been that of hard worker and helpmate. The woman was recognized as the 'main-stay' of the family. She was the catalyst in a tightly knit, co-operative and isolated community. "She was her husband's partner, more than fifty percent."²⁰

3.

Norman Duncan, Margaret Duley and Michael Cook are three writers in whose literary works women play a significant role. While most of Duncan's fiction centres on male characters,

with the emphasis being on adventure stories for boys, the stories that comprise the collection The Way of the Sea provide several interesting perspectives on outport women. Of even greater importance to this present study are the three novels of Margaret Duley, The Eyes of the Gull, Cold Pastoral, and Highway to Valour, all of which have female characters as their protagonists. In the field of drama, the most interesting analysis of an outport woman is provided by Michael Cook in Theresa's Creed. While women are prominent in many other works of fiction and drama, the above mentioned works will form the focus of this study.

Over the past few years, some attention has begun to be paid to these writers by critics. While a couple of studies have been done on Duncan, notably a short analysis by Patrick O'Flaherty and a thesis by Thomas Moore,²¹ neither of these deals to any extent with the function of women in that writer's works. More detailed analysis has been done, however, in the case of Margaret Duley. Dr. Alison Feder has written a comprehensive account of Duley's life and works, paying particular attention to the writer's perceptions of outport women.²² The women in Duley's novels form the subject of an article by Patricia Donnelly as well as two pieces by Linda Whelan.²³

While many reviews of Michael Cook's plays, including Theresa's Creed, have appeared in print, the most definitive statements about the perceptions of women in this particular

play, come from the author himself. A detailed discussion of outport women as presented in Theresa's Creed will be alluded to during the course of this present study. Also of note are the comments of Roberta Buchanan, who calls Theresa's Creed "the ultimate depiction of the outport woman,"²⁴ drawing attention to the narrowness of choice and the hardships faced by these women. Buchanan also refers to an increasingly graphic presentation of women in recent theatrical productions in Newfoundland, many of which reveal the presence of a "strong feminine orientation."²⁵ Cook himself seems to hold a similar position, noting in an article entitled "Culture as Caricature," the prominence in recent politically-oriented satirical drama, of the strong willed, "sometimes angry woman".²⁶

CHAPTER TWO

WOMEN IN NORMAN DUNCAN'S THE WAY OF THE SEA

1.

The first twentieth century writer to include outport-Newfoundland women in his fiction was Norman Duncan. Born in 1871 in North Norwich Township, Oxford County, Ontario, Duncan also lived in other Ontario towns. From 1891-1895 he attended the University of Toronto. He did not graduate, however, and began a career in journalism in the United States.

In the summer of 1900, Duncan made his first visit to Newfoundland, that 'frayed edge' of North America which was to be a well-spring of inspiration for him. Subsequently, he made several other visits during which time he developed a deep bond of friendship with the Manuel family of Exploits Island in Notre Dame Bay. He also visited Sir Wilfred Grenfell on the coast of Labrador in 1903. During his lifetime, Duncan was to travel to the Near East and Australia; but no impressions were greater than those he formed as a result of his Newfoundland visits. In all, he wrote eleven books on Newfoundland, one of which was a collection of short stories entitled The Way of the Sea, which provides the best indication of his portrayal of Newfoundland women and presents

"an unwitting epic of outport life in stories showing the stamp of genius." 1

2.

Norman Duncan shows both depth of perception and empathy in his presentation of the Newfoundland culture by depicting certain prevalent characteristics in a realistic manner. His writing indicates an awareness of the centrality of the work ethic in the outport, as well as the existence of a distinct division of labor along sexual lines. He notes in his very first story, thus setting the tone for the whole collection, that women do not go out to catch fish, but do just about everything else. They "milk goats, make boots, spin wool, split wood, tend babies, spread fish, gather soil for the gardens, keep stages clean and cook." 2

The Way of the Sea is a book mainly about men with the women on the periphery, drawing their identity from their relationship with the male characters. Boys, like men, have active first person roles, while girls are spoken of in the third person, and many women are identified solely in terms of their relationship with certain male characters. Of the ten stories, only three deal with women to any significant extent. Those exceptions are, "The Love of the Maid," "Concerning Billy Luff and Master Goodchild," and "The Fruits of Toil."

The women in The Way of the Sea fall into two major categories -- wives and mothers. Duncan gives a realistic portrayal of woman, traditionally on the periphery of male endeavours, as the helpmate, companion, wife and mother. Yet it is not a demeaning picture, as these women are in their own right, strong and enduring survivors. They are part of the cycle of women and comfort, caught up in the process of daily living. Even though Duncan does not place them on a romantic and idealistic pedestal, we are continually aware of their pervasive presence in several of the stories. The women in Duncan may be outside the male domain of sea struggles, but they nourish, protect and hold fast.

Duncan's characterization of wives, and young women deciding to be wives, follows an interesting pattern. The woman in "The Love of The Maid" is not named at first, although a most graphic description is given. 'The maid' is all that a man could desire: she is strong, healthy (she can lift a barrel of flour), wilfull, and able to keep the young admirers at a distance. She is a Newfoundland version of the huntress Diana, with a sense of humour and good biceps. This is no fainting, swooning heroine, but one who inspires awe in the hearts of men. Still, only two dare approach her: the young, boisterous Jim Rideout who "was sinful mad for the maids"; andairy, gaunt, weatherbeaten Elihu Gale. "One was rich in punts and nets, the other in brawn and laughter." Both loved "adorable 'Melia Mary.'"³

A maid with such a "barb'rous appetite" suffers terribly during a famine, and she is painfully hungry as Elihu tempts her with salmon, potatoes, flour and tea, while Jim Rideout can only offer two capelin. 'Melia Mary, a practical, thrifty maid who will not waste an inch of thread, can readily appreciate Elihu's proposal. And he knows that a "ragged, lean salt god may assume a value high above love and all other delights."⁴ 'Melia Mary's determination for survival wins out. To sit, sob and bemoan her fate is not for "this handsome maid, sound of wind and limb." She becomes coyly inviting. There is no affectation but merely an outward sign of mutual understanding.

Here Duncan also shows the basic tension between Romanticism and Darwinism by illustrating a drama of the struggle for survival, against a background of the usually accepted ideas of love, youth and passion. To balance this dichotomy, 'Melia Mary in accepting Elihu Gale's proposal of marriage, becomes the agent of his transformation into a more generous, compatible human being.

As a portrayal of a wife in "The Fruits of Toil," Priscilla is not physically described. She and her husband, Solomon Stride, are seen sitting on a bench at the door of their house at various intervals of their lives. Solomon is the optimist, the dreamer, and at first Priscilla echoes this optimism. Being essentially a practical woman, she has as her ambition the possession of a sewing machine. "Sure

girl," says Solomon. After years of failure, Priscilla is the one who voices apprehension in the face of the oncoming season. Solomon is renewed with fresh confidence while she is only sure of the fact that her husband is a great worker. As he rambles on she smiles, but says nothing to reinforce his optimism. After a lifetime of hard work and failure, he still has dreams of better times ahead, but by now Priscilla is not listening. She is concerned with a greater mystery -- the utterances of the Seven Thunders. She is trying to uncover ancient, prophetic meanings; to lift the veil of mystical experience. Perhaps in this way Duncan reflects his own skepticism regarding the "muscular Christianity" of the Newfoundlander, as he tries to decipher this psyche and culture.

While Priscilla is totally absorbed in profound mysteries, Solomon prepares for death. He also reaches an agreement with the merchant, Luke Dart, in providing the necessities of life for Priscilla after his departure. Here the author also seems to inject a deep sense of misgiving as Priscilla develops into a combination of the contemplative Old Testament woman, and Martha, the mistress of her own house. Like Martha, she needs a sign of reinforcement from the Lord, and hopes for a sign at the death of Billy Luff, "a holy child." But unlike the aged, Biblical Anna, there is no sign for Priscilla, and Solomon's death does not provide any illumination. She is left to her own inner resources and

faith, with her quest unfulfilled, and her life story ended with the death of her husband.

Duncan sees the wife as nurturer, all-giving and sometimes self-effacing. Eleazer Manuel's wife is waiting for him at the door. Supper is ready and the home is snug and warm, a refuge from the storm. The existence of the family rests on the central images of house, table, bed, food giving and food transforming, combined with a fecundity of life. These are the foundations for female domination inside the family.

In "The Healer From Far Away Cove," Ezra Westerly's wife, aptly named 'Mary', is self effacing and totally giving from ever depleting stores. She is the antithesis of Eve-quiet, loving and perceptive; she is willing to sacrifice all for the health of her husband. Duncan (in the manner of many Newfoundland men), universalizes the wifely role by referring to her as "the wife, Mary."⁵ Only one reference is made to the child of Mary and Ezra, for her role as mother has been superceded by her constant attendance to her dying husband; Mary also becomes comforter to Ishmael when he suffers from self-doubt; although Mary herself is left destitute.

This overlapping of the roles of wife and mother with its accompaniment of total caring, both physically and emotionally, decentralizes the image of the woman herself. Mary is shown in the multiple, supportive roles of wife, good mother and neighbourly woman. However, she is not seen as a fully developed person in her own right. She, like

most of the wife images, seems to be a pervasive presence, a symbolic Martha/Mary figure, rather than a fully depicted character. When Duncan depicts the outport woman as mother, he shows her as the comforter and nurturer, although she remains a supplement to the male characterizations and activities. Even where the woman's role is important, the degree of her prominence is ambiguous. For example, throughout the story "Concerning Billy Luff and Master Goodchild," Billy's mother remains nameless, her characterization unfolding in relation to the representation of her ten year old son. Again, we see the anonymity in such phrases as "Nazareth Lute's mother," "Job Luff's Wife," and Eleazer's "wife" and "woman." One must also consider that Ezekiel's calling on his mother in his dying moments, defines his puerile fears and the lack of substance in his religion even more than the importance of his mother, despite the fact she was "real and nearer."⁶

Duncan shows the mother in another dimension as well, in that she gives a certain respite from the struggles against cruel, natural forces. The heart of the family and the source of sustaining love, Janet Crew, in "Beat t' Harbour" is an example. The click of her knitting needles combined with the tick of the clock gives an aura of impending doom, which time eventually brings. Yet her calm, wise presence is reinforced by her large, round eyeglasses. Significantly, her husband calls her "mother," and her hands are never

idle. But time is continually passing and the small clock continues to mark time long after the knitting needles have ceased and 'Aunt Janet' has turned meditatively towards the coals of the fire. She is no longer a mother. Her hands lie idle on her lap.

The amplification of the maternal role is also apparent in the story of Billy Luff. Because the mother is carefully grooming Billy to become a preacher and thereby escape the toil of a fisherman, the boy lives an anomalous existence in the community. Billy's mother is the dominant personality in his life. During his illness she carefully attends to his needs. She is the comforting presence whose wrist scar gives testimony to the fact that in this culture, women are also the products of toil and struggle. The hardships of her childhood make her ambitious for her son, who becomes an outlet for her reserves of love and affection. She is the partner in the death watch and is transformed by Duncan into a Mary figure, sharing in the sufferings of her son, and as such, remains a sorrowing figure. Duncan universalizes the scene in his closing prose:

They waited for a long time, the sunset failed and gave way to the dusk. Night covered the harbour waters and clothed all the hills with black. The shadows trooped in... Then a flood of anguish broke from the mother's heart.⁷

Duncan also makes frequent use of Biblical imagery, juxtaposing opposing patterns of the caring, positive,

giving images of living women, with the harsh, abstract representation of God the Father, taskmaster and judge. The Old Testament role of Eve, whose fall became the cause of sweat and toil, can be seen in "The Breath of the North." "Eleazer Manuel couldn't bide Eve," the evil one, the vessel of sin. But Rideout excuses Eve's fall on the grounds that "she were but a woman,"⁸ illustrating quite emphatically the view of women as the weaker sex.

The use of Biblical stereotypes is not limited to Eve. There are echoes of other early, Biblical women; for example, in Priscilla, one can see not only the guiding figure of Naomi and the faithful Ruth, but also resemblance to the old prophetess Anna, who prayed for, and received (unlike Priscilla) a final moment of illumination at the circumcision of the Christ child. As well, there are resonances of Rachael weeping for her children. In "The Chase of the Tide," the rough, angry sea is referred to as "he" and the drowning boy fears the unknown as well as the final element of death.

Duncan clearly defines the functions of women in terms of a stereotypical presentation of family roles in general. Each family member has a distinct part to play, as can be observed in the following description of a scene of domestic bliss which follows a manly struggle with the elements:

The old man drew a long sigh of content.
 Eleazer's wife put more wood in the
 stove. The flames roared up the chimney.
 Supper was now cleared away. Granny

Manual's spinning wheel buzzed. Jim snored lustily.⁹

This tendency of Duncan toward the male/female stereotyping can be further seen in his description of Elihu Gale, a tough old fisherman:

a man fashioned through generations by those forces which stripped the headlands of Ragged Harbour of all graces... His body was hairy, gaunt and weather worn and it was clothed in goatskin boots and greasy home spun which he had sewn with his own clumsy hands... Wind and frost and driven rain, in a conflict of fifty years, had worn his heart to the likeness of some grey old crag of the Newfoundland coast.¹⁰

Duncan also dwells on the value of sons as opposed to daughters, and portrays the birth of a son as cause for celebration. Historically in the Newfoundland outport, the birth of the seventh son of a seventh son was a special sign of good favour. Such a child held the power of healing. Amanda, wife of Thomas Bow, in "The Healer from Far-away Cove," gives birth to such a child. "Great is the favour of the Lord," but the cost is high -- the life of Amanda Bow herself. Still, the woman's role is clearly that of service.

Even fathers who have ambitions for their daughters cannot see beyond this stereotyped image. In "The Strength of Men," Matthew sees his daughter being provided for by his son, John. Again, his daughter is unnamed, and referred to as "a girl," "a bright one," "that wee girlie," and "lass."

Matthew sees his daughter eventually in St. John's, where she can learn to use forks and knives properly, study music, and finally return to the cove to play the organ in church, "when they gets one."¹²

Duncan does not refer specifically to girls even as babies. Matthew's youngest child is simply "the baby." Amanda Bow gave birth to the seventh son of a seventh son and Ezra Westerly, hoping to be cured, is overjoyed. "'Tis a son Mary," he said again and again, hysterically repeating it.¹³ Billy Luff is an only child; Eleazer Manuel's baby, Eli, plays on the floor after supper is cleared away; Skipper Tommy Crew is thrilled when he hears, "'tis a son zur," and names the child after the Biblical Daniel, "the bravest man in the world."¹⁴ The "infant son of Solomon Stride"¹⁵ was a victim of starvation when the fishery failed, while Ezra Westerly leaves behind his wife and a "wee babe."¹⁶ There is little doubt that while Duncan admires the "strength of men," his portrayals of the female sex remain, to a larger extent, stereotyped and less essential in the overall pattern of his work.

The only other Newfoundland work by Duncan that contains any significant treatment of women is Dr. Luke of the Labrador, published in 1904. In the early chapters of this novel, Duncan delineates in considerable detail the relationship between his protagonist, a young Labrador boy named Davy, and his mother. However, the mother is a former Bostonian

who has never lost her sense of who she is and her origins. Consequently, her characterization does little to shed new light on any understanding on the part of Duncan, of Newfoundland women. Indeed, she has much more in common with Millie Slade, the central character in a novel that Duncan was to publish in 1905, entitled The Mother. This novel, set in New York, examines in detail the warm relationship between a mother and son, a subject that seems to have fascinated Duncan around that time, probably due to the death of his own mother in 1904. There is nothing unique to the Newfoundland outport in Duncan's mother figure in Dr. Luke of the Labrador.

That novel does present another interesting female character who is somewhat different from the more stereotypical portrayals found in The Way of the Sea. The "woman from Wolf Cove" is a stark contrast to the mother figure of Mrs. Roth. A lustful devourer, the woman is described as being "dressed somewhat in the fashion of men," and with "grizzled hair ... cut short, in the manner of men."¹⁷ This extraordinary woman who boasts that she is "the equal of men" is a notable exception to Duncan's rather stereotypical presentation of outport women.

When one looks at Duncan's work in the light of the non-fictional accounts of outport life for Newfoundland

women, one becomes aware of certain areas of verisimilitude. The fact that children were required to work at an early age is supported by Murray, whose informants recall performing certain duties as early as four years of age.¹⁷ Girls had a multiplicity of duties both inside and outside the house, so that by the time girls were ten years old, most were contributing to a regimen of duties.¹⁸ Davis's research concurs, adding that "the poorer you were and the larger your family the harder you worked."¹⁹ Also, in certain circumstances, especially after losing a parent, children inherited the work roles of adults. The child might be permitted to attend school during the winter months, but had to be available for shore duties during the fishing season. Murray notes one such young girl of ten, who worked with her aunt in the fishing stage, and while helping to carry a heavy load of "washed out" fish from stage to flake, fell and broke her wrist. A neighbour bandaged the injury, using a piece of sail-cloth along with hoops from a fish tub for splints. The researcher also comments that, although this was a particularly difficult childhood, "there were undoubtedly others."²⁰ This incident has a parallel in the case of Billy Luff's mother who bore the scar of a childhood injury to her wrist, though Duncan, the creative artist, adds a metaphorical dimension to the incident.

Duncan was also aware of the fact that in a fishing community, a fisherman had to have a woman who was physically

able to contribute to the shore production of salt codfish. A woman who "could pull her own weight" was clearly an asset. And due largely to the demands of survival in this environment, "sensible girls looked for a good provider, one who could make a living for the family."²¹ Therefore, marriage did not usually have the romantic overtones it has today. Rather, it meant a total commitment to live together and raise a family. Unless one of the partners failed completely at this duty, the marriage was "considered a good one."²² Melia Mary's acceptance of "whizzened" Elihu Gale as a marriage partner becomes more understandable when viewed from this cultural perspective. Davis continues by saying that "a good spouse is a kindly person, one doesn't expect more."²³

The necessity for thrift was imposed constantly upon the consciousness of children:

Even the very young ... knew the value of everything in the household, knew the time it took to produce for they had laboured themselves and they grew to take care of the small things, not to squander and waste what they had been so long at work on.²⁴

Melia Mary fits this pattern also, for she would not waste "so much as an inch of thread;" a practical maid, her type is often referred to as "a sensible girl."

In describing the work roles, Duncan holds to the strict division of labour along biological lines, the roots of

which also went back to childhood. Both boys and girls did outside chores but housework was clearly defined as girl's work.²⁵ Duncan portrays boys as adventurers in small boats who are toughened and burdened by hard, physical toil. The exception of course is Billy Luff, who is an anomaly. The woman is usually house-centered, preparing food, waiting for her men with her "brood hanging to her fluttering skirts."²⁶ In Newfoundland culture there existed a strict division of work roles, and to some extent, even today, "outport men and women identify strongly with their own sex group and have a separate system of evaluation for each."²⁷

As the sea is clearly a male dominated sphere, the home is female territory. The women never go out to fish; the men don't know where anything is, in their own house. "It is within the household, the core unit of village life that women find their most meaningful and status conferring roles."²⁸ In her duty as nurturer and food transformer, a woman spent much of her time in the preparation and serving of food. In summer especially, a hard working family must be fed well and often. Combined with the outdoor chores, the pace of activity must have been hectic indeed, for no one had less than four meals a day in winter and twice as many in summer.²⁹ Duncan's fictional accounts certainly do not deviate from this norm.

During periods of illness or death in the community, the women were especially involved, as they were during

times of childbirth and at weddings. Funerals and weddings were social functions and on such occasions the woman's role was an extension of her family task of personal caring and sharing. In this context too, both men and women did their respective jobs according to tradition.³⁰ The depiction of the death of Billy Luff, for example, is based more on verisimilitude than fiction.

While the term "good worker" can be applied positively to either the male or the female, the woman generally felt that to be a good wife and mother took precedence above all else. Childbirth was viewed as a necessity for emotional fulfillment, as well as a sign of full, adult status.³¹ Since The Way of the Sea is a book about men, not surprisingly the author omits the drama and trauma of birth. There are graphic depictions of death in a toil-centered world of men and sea, while a birth is covered (after the fact) with a simple, factual sentence. In reality, "giving birth, especially in the old days was a frequent topic of conversation."³² And not infrequently, a trip by either boat or horse and carriage, to fetch the midwife, was often a drama in itself. However, Duncan does not deal with this aspect of outport life. For him, it was the excitement of the sea and man's struggle to wrest a living from it that invigorated his imagination.

The fact that the women in Duncan reflect so accurately these traditional roles is not necessarily an indication of

the writer's own attitude toward the female sex. Rather, his depiction is an accurate representation of the reality of women's existence in the Newfoundland outport at the turn of the century.

CHAPTER THREE

WOMEN IN THE NEWFOUNDLAND NOVELS OF MARGARET DULEY

1.

The first writer of fiction to present Newfoundland outport women as fully developed and multi-dimensional characters was Margaret Duley (1894-1968). The women in her three Newfoundland novels, The Eyes of the Gull (1936), Cold Pastoral (1939), and Highway to Valour (1941), reach a complexity not found in Duncan's work and, indeed, far exceeding the accounts given in the non-fictional studies referred to in Chapter One. Much of the reason behind this complexity lies in the character of Margaret Duley herself.

Duley was born at a time when Newfoundland was an outpost of the British Empire, Queen Victoria was both the respected matriarch and the ideal feminine role model, and the vast Empire was at its zenith. In her life span, Duley saw the crumbling of Imperial social structures and the birth of the Commonwealth of Nations, lived through two major world conflicts, and on the local scene, witnessed the entry of Newfoundland into the Dominion of Canada. The face of the earth, politically, socially and intellectually had changed irrevocably.

Margaret Duley was the daughter of a well-to-do mercantile family in St. John's, where from early childhood she was set apart by her precociousness and determination. In her youth, she loved to act out the fictitious roles of moralistic heroines who had high ideals and who could overcome trying circumstances. A popular characterization came from a novel of Elizabeth Wetherell called Queechy, in which the heroine was both a paragon of virtue, as well as a witty and self-sacrificing personality. Bored with school and nurtured on fantasy and dreams, Duley took refuge in escapism, which in turn was fanned by a vivid imagination and a strong desire to be the center of attention.

As a young woman, Duley attended the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art, where she studied elocution under the Shakespearian reciter, Sir Christopher Fry. Here she acquired an English accent (which she retained for the remainder of her life) but little in the way of viable career skills. However, in an age when marriage was considered a prerequisite for female self fulfillment, this deficiency may be understood. A young woman of her status was groomed and educated for a life of married gentility and catered domesticity.

When Duley grew to maturity, she became paradoxically both a socialite and a solitary intellectual. Outwardly she projected a dramatic image of herself, while inwardly she was a thinker and dreamer, with a measure of romanticism added.

She became prominent in the Suffragette Movement in St. John's. This group of women demanded, and won, not only the municipal vote in 1920, but the parliamentary vote as well in 1925. She thereby helped raise women's awareness of the mechanics and effectiveness of the political system.¹

Her thinking was far in advance of her time in that she openly discussed such topics as abortion and divorce. Her actions, however, were seldom in pace with her thoughts. Dr. Alison Feder, in her biography of Duley, observes that Margaret was noted for her forward ideas but lacked the drive to create a less mannered existence."²

It seems that her ambivalent personality worked against her, both socially and professionally. Essentially a shy person, she also exhibited behaviour designed to attract attention. On occasion she could be overbearing, arrogant, flamboyant, spontaneous, 'great fun,' and secretive. Clearly, so many contradictions in one personality could not have been easily managed, even by Duley herself.

She travelled widely. Especially notable are her frequent trips to North Carolina, Montreal and Toronto. As for her familiarity with the Newfoundland outport of which she was to write extensively, her knowledge was somewhat limited. She did have more than a passing acquaintance with Calvert and Ferryland on the Southern Shore; she knew the Carbonear area of Conception Bay, and possibly Fortune Bay on the Burin Peninsula, and in 1928 she visited coastal

Labrador on the S.S. Kyle, a trip that was to have a direct influence in her depiction of Magella Michelet's visit to Labrador in her later novel, Highway to Valour.³

Duley also displayed (at her own discretion) tremendous intellectual ability. Both Ellen Elliott of Macmillan and Marguerite Lovat Dickson, who read for that company, held her in high esteem.⁴ Margaret Duley was also intensely interested in the occult and the Eastern philosophies. Her questioning mind could not be satisfied with platitudes. Her attitude towards those around her, as well as to the natural environment, was one of ambivalence. She experienced within herself contradictory responses to many aspects of her life: her mother, her writing, the climate, men, Newfoundland in general, and British aristocracy. She enjoyed the privilege of status while rejecting pettiness; she admired the tenacity of the people while hating blind acceptance; and she loved to write but was unable to cope with rejection.

The paradoxical nature of Duley's personality is projected on to her protagonists. Unlike the women in Duncan's stories, Duley's heroines are, like herself, atypical and anomalous. In this context, both the novelist and her fictional characters share a number of attitudes and similarities: they react strongly against the economic and imaginative poverty of Newfoundland, intellectual isolation, stereotyping of women, and ignorance of Newfoundland on the part of the English;

and most important of all, they reveal to varying extents, a love/hate response to their island home.

2.

While Magella Michelet in Highway to Vaibour is indeed the most complete expression of Duley's portrayal of women, the two forerunners in The Eyes of the Gull and Cold Pastoral are worth close examination.

Isabel, protagonist of The Eyes of the Gull, is a thirty year old woman who lives in a small Newfoundland community. Emotionally starved and oppressed by an overbearing mother who treats her as a servant, she is a lonely woman with no experience of life outside the village. Therefore, in many ways Isabel is still an adolescent, and dreams romantic fantasies of grand, passionate love in warmer climates. Spain is her Utopia. Financially independent through a small pension left by her father, she saves and plans her escape.

She is, however, secluded and isolated, even in her own community where she lives in spiritual rebellion against her incarceration in the hard, cold land she calls Helluland. Isabel feels a prisoner whose only freedom is the freedom to dream, and for whom there is no place of privacy but the bleak, windswept Headland. Here she finds solitude and escape from her morbid existence.

This young woman's relationship with her mother is not a positive one, but is plagued by antagonism and mutual resentment. A master/servant situation exists in her household. Mrs. Pyke conjures up dark, ugly images. She consistently finds fault, overreaches and is domineering. Isabel is tied by emotional fetters of oppression and captivity. Even her mother's physical weight oppresses her. Isabel Pyke had only been exposed to sporadic incidents of tenderness from a kind father who spent most of his short life at sea. Here Duley shows a dark side of motherhood balanced against a positive, although absent, paternal presence. Isabel sees only the physical results of toil: "the false teeth, being fat and ugly and working from daylight to dark."⁵ She does not have the awareness possessed by the kind Aunt Dorcas, of the redeeming power of love. "Man cannot live by bread alone," Aunt Dorcas intones. She knows that Isabel was raised without affection, that she grew up aware only of the sexual act in animalistic forms. Yet, Isabel remains aloof from Aunt Dorcas and never confides in her, as she turns away from this type of sexuality in disgust. Meanwhile she continues to dream of the sensual passion she has read about in the beautiful Song of Solomon: Isabel has difficulty reaching out and shies away from meaningful relationships with others. Her impediment in communicating is mechanical as well as emotional, as occasionally her voice went "sibylline."⁶

Isabel's relationship with herself is self conscious and demeaning. She sees herself as one dimensional, a "creature of food and drink."⁷ Perceptive, intelligent, and at times almost prophetic, she does not journey away, or outward, from her self-concept. Consequently, Isabel does not achieve enlightenment or self fulfillment. She keeps everything 'inside.' Isabel, the tragic female, resists stereotyping and personal oppression but does not channel this energy into practical alternatives. Her habit of hiding her true feelings and her submissiveness to her lover, Peter, are seen in her compliance with her desire to avoid shadows in their relationship. The girl said, "Yes, yes Peter, I'll be what you want." Daily she kept her promise to him ... she smiled all week."⁸

Bound by her personal restraints, Isabel is an elemental creature close to the natural environment, yet her ambiguous feelings do not permit concessions. Keen sees at once she is a person of "lonely thoughts and disharmony with her native land."⁹ She rebels against the harshness of life and the toll paid, especially by the women. The human effort to eke out a living in such an environment is overpowering for Isabel. Even the young women she knows have no flame of animation in their faces. The austerity of nature has claimed all that and has replaced it with drudgery and acceptance.

Duley's physical portrayal of the outpost is very realistic for the time in question. One road would lead through a settlement, with many lanes and houses facing all directions. Both the houses and the fences which enclose them are white-washed. Kitchen floors are covered with heavy sail canvas and painted "Chinese Red." Winds from the Bay bring in the smell of fish.

Duley shows outpost life from a number of viewpoints, each different and largely one-sided. For Mrs. Pyke, a devouring, consuming, proud woman, life revolves around family visits. Her negative attitude towards anything other than herself, is known but accepted. From Isabel she expects complete servitude, as though she must be rewarded for the mere fact of survival. She makes life miserable for her daughter. Her motto is "Let the young wait on the old."¹⁰

Aunt Dorcas Penney, a big, slow, placid woman, "bovine," yet almost Buddha-like in her serene pose, exudes a different type of bigness. For her, life is a journey softened by the peace and love of God. Her strength is her faith while her bulk is sheltering rather than oppressive. Her smooth voice oils agitation, and proves to be kind and understanding, the positive thread of continuity to the end.

Isabel's experience of outpost life is totally pessimistic. Marriage for her means endless toil, child rearing, premature aging, and disfigurement. The girl's life is as ambiguous as Duley's own. She hates Helluland, "the land of naked rocks,"

yet cannot reach out and become part of the social network of the community. She cannot separate herself from "her rock" on the Headland. Dr. Alison Feder sees Isabel as "a symbol of hundreds of women who must have chafed against a stereotyped life."¹¹

3.

The tension of opposites between the sea and the land, between the inner person and the roles assumed, between daily routine and escapism, is once again evident in Duley's characterization of Mary Immaculate, the heroine of Cold Pastoral. This dichotomy is introduced at the very beginning of the novel: "The sea was different from the land! There romance ended and realism began."¹² Romance and reality, green fields and cold snows are pertinent factors which affect Mary Immaculate all her life. Her home is situated in a small Newfoundland cove that is synonymous with hard work. Physically it is a "cosy circle of sea and sky and a cleft in the heads for a valley."¹³ However, the child sees it from a different viewpoint:

Fish from the traps and the trawls, fish from the hook and the line. Bait to follow the seasons... Fish drying on the flakes and flies buzzing in a hoard. Smell wafting to the land, smell penetrating to the groves of spruce and fir!¹⁴

Like Venus, Mary Immaculate was born from the sea. The local people believe she was delivered by the Blessed Virgin herself, when labor overtook her mother as she and her husband were returning home in a skiff. Because of her unusual birth, Mary Immaculate receives special consideration in the cove. But Mary Immaculate is not of the cove. She loves to run and play in the woods, away from the sea. She likes to watch the lazy flight of clouds across the sky. Unlike the other children who congregate at stage head and beach, she dislikes the fish, the smell, the blood and the gore of the place. She is independent, a solitary child, a dryad who loves the woods and avoids the unpleasantness of the sea shore; yet she loves to watch the sea from a distance and has a potent awareness that the sea gives and the sea takes away.

By contrast, her brothers are wild and rough; she is lodged, very much her mother's child. Her father is in awe of her perfect beauty; the smoothness of her skin, compared to his rough, work-worn hands intimidates him. The angel child continues to live in this manner, until she is twelve years old at which time she wanders into the woods and becomes lost for three days and nights. After being found, she is brought to St. John's for treatment of frost bite. Here she is adopted by the family of her attending physician, Phillip Fitz-Henry, and moulded into an acceptable though snobbish young lady. Never again does she return to the cove.

Mary Immaculate Keilly has a deep relationship with her natural environment. She has almost an elfish quality combined with a vivid imagination, which reinforces and justifies her behavior. The child retreats from reality as she loves to steal away into the woods, alone. "Over the hills and away from the sound of the sea the fairies seemed friendly and real."¹⁵

While Josephine, her mother, builds barricades against evil by placing statues in windows and erecting an altar by the door, Mary Immaculate does not want to be blessed against the fairies. Those are her friends, as are the sun, the wind and the sea. They are very real to a sensitive child who firmly believes that if one blends with the forces of nature, the environment would cease to be hostile. "Going with the current was the only way she knew."¹⁶ Later, in her hospital bed, she feels that she is a wave washing up on the beach.

Mary Immaculate has a finely tuned sense for the vibrations of nature:

By placing her ear to the ground she heard the Little People. By easing into silence she could tell they were friendly. By finding the mute voice of Molly Conway in her eyes she had found a rescuer.¹⁷

When Father Melchoir tells Mary Immaculate of her similarity to Venus -- her birth and the circumstances which made her leave Olympus -- the child's imagination flares again. She

darts away "over the woodhorse and over the hills to climb Olympus."¹⁸ The beautiful wood child, whose bright hair gives her a nimbus appearance, is fascinated by the forest as she sees it 'held' in the frozen crystal of silver thaw. The woods is her domain, her private world.

Of particular interest is Mary Immaculate's relationship with her mother. Josephine Keilly is no less amazed than others in the cove at the beauty of her daughter. Also, Josephine's life is profoundly influenced by her religious beliefs, which are heavily interspersed with superstitions. A hard working woman and expert knitter, she keeps her child well dressed, and particularly loves to have her wear blue, the colour of the Virgin's mantle. Mary Immaculate indeed dazzles her mother's eyes.

Mary Immaculate is respectful towards her mother but is not excessively obedient. Duley shows her deep insights into a child's feelings and attitudes in this area. At home Mary Immaculate is a normal if solitary person. She frustrates her mother by constant questions and ever present skepticism. When Josephine gives her usual replies to difficult situations ("Tis the will of God"), the child shows her dissatisfaction. As she becomes old enough to help around the kitchen, she is also old enough to go to school.

There is something of Josephine in Mary Immaculate, also. The mother is independent and has an appreciation of the world around her. "It's a grand world for them with

eyes to see," Josephine observes. Necessity forces the woman into a narrow existence. Her daughter feels that Josephine is a captive, as the cove was captive. "They were all held and clamped to the ground."¹⁹

When Josephine sees her wasted, frost-bitten child after her ordeal in the woods, she believes her dead. She thinks that it is the will of God and feels that her daughter has been lent to her "as a lovely plaything."²⁰ As she follows the broop carrying the child through the snow, she feels that "the distance between herself and her daughter was widening and she couldn't catch up."²¹ She never does. Later, when Mary Immaculate meets her mother at the Fitz-Henry home, she too is "held." She "couldn't go to either family but stood between them like a hostage and anxiety for the situation made her taut and tall."²²

However, Mary Immaculate defends her mother to her school mates, when one of them tries to humiliate the girl. "What was there in this world to make her deny her own mother? ... Yes, my mother was a cook, a very good cook. Now she cooks and does all the work besides."²³ But the tie is broken when Mary Immaculate leaves the cove. In the Fitz-Henry home, she is specifically guided away from her roots and the ensuing results are permanent.

This sensitive, intelligent child does not have close relationships in her community, although she does form a bond of sorts with Molly Conway, the deaf mute. In the

opinion of the majority, in the cove, Molly is a changeling, someone to be avoided. She lives in a pink house, and is strange in appearance and manner. She is particularly marked by partial baldness, and wanders sadly about the community in summer. Upon seeing her, the children run in terror. Adults regard Molly with a mixture of fear and distaste. Poorly dressed and making low noises in her throat, she is believed to have been spirited away by the fairies as an infant.

Mary Immaculate is not afraid of her, however, and feels that she is treated badly. The girl does not run away when Molly approaches, but looks into her eyes, which are clear and blue. In an attitude of gratitude, Molly reverently touches the child's head as Mary Immaculate offers her a bouquet of wild flowers. She is curious about Molly, as well as hurt over the way a human being can be so cruelly ignored. Neither does she believe she is a changeling for anything touched by fairies must be beautiful. Later, Mary Immaculate confides to her mother:

"Mom, I felt as good as if I had been blessed. Like it must be when you're absolved. Her eyes are like the blue iris and as gentle as a picture of the Saints in Heaven."²⁴

On the fourth day of the child's disappearance, Molly Conway is released from her home, where she has been confined for making a nuisance of herself. She finally manages to

convince the sergeant to follow her lead, and Josephine remembers the bond between the two: "'tis the will of God. I might have known! I should have guessed."²⁵

When Molly finds the child hidden behind a mound of snow, "she knelt in the snow, raising her hands in habitual hovering."²⁶ As Mary Immaculate is being carried away, Molly Conway follows "without a backward glance."²⁷ And later, whenever Mary thinks of the cove, Molly Conway always comes to mind:

People born to the assault of the wind and the slap of the sea had a "Y" quality of endurance. It was impossible to be defeated by the accident of birth in a skiff.²⁸

In this very pertinent statement, Duley casts deep reflections on the character of Mary Immaculate as she relates to the "Y" symbol of androgyne, the good and bad road that can be taken by free will,²⁹ and can be readily applied to Duley's heroine.

Insular Mary Immaculate, dryad of the woods, hates reality if it is unpleasant and finds enchantment in the frozen crystal world of the forest held in silver thaw. Since her temperament leans in the direction of floating or combining with circumstances, after her adoption she hides behind an aura of confidence. To Phillip she becomes a sacred trust, while to Mary (the 'Immaculate' was dropped) he is the symbol of St. Joseph, the guardian of virgins.

But the 'St. Joseph' in Phillip is exacting and demanding. Mary learns and practices what pleases him and the Mater, while she longs silently for the freedom of the cove. Again, Mary has to transcend the triadic "Y" quality in her triple identity. In the cove she was Mary Immaculate Kelly, the beautiful, mystical child with a nimbus surrounding her presence. As Mary Fitz-Henry, she is guarded both literally and symbolically by Phillip. Tutored by the elderly Mater who is her only companion, she also attends school where she is treated as a social outcast. She survives by becoming aloof. As Gretel (Vincent) she is once more in her world of fantasy, the wood nymph who delighted in her retreat from reality as well as in Tim's unconditional acceptance of her. As reality and fantasy merge, she becomes uncertain and says at one point to Felice, "I was just wondering what I really was."³⁰

Mary is now caught in a cycle of social and moral conventions. Like Isabel, she is unable to take definitive action on her own behalf, partly because she cannot and partly because she will not. Mary echoes Isabel's sentiments when she says: "I felt more held than I had ever been in my life ... I had to go then, and I couldn't go."³¹

Duley leaves the reader jarred at the end as Mary quickly assures herself that her place is with Phillip. Still she needs reassurance from outside herself;

Then she whirled back to the cove to tell Josephine she was minding what they said! She whirled to the Place to tell the mater she was doing what Phillip said... and the wingspread of her spirit craving infinite future.³²

She may carve the future but can she carve that future for herself? Duley's choice of words suggests a degree of uncertainty.

By far the most complex of Duley's protagonists is Mageila Michelet, in Highway to Valour. Like her counterparts, she was born in a Newfoundland community, this time an outport euphemistically called Feather-the-Nest: "pinched between land and sea," in constant torment from a hungry ocean and an intolerable land. Feather-the-Nest was imprisoned between both of these natural forces.

From the very beginning Mageila was a special child, though lonely and remote. A number of factors contribute to her uniqueness and emotional isolation. As seventh daughter of a seventh daughter, she has the power to heal. As a member of the mercantile class, a powerful minority group, she is not required to contribute to the family work force. Consequently, she is left largely to her own pursuits.

As Mageila is called upon to use her powers to heal the toothache of a small boy, a tidal wave sweeps over the land taking people, buildings and cattle out to sea. Mageila is

the lone survivor of her family. The girl becomes haunted by the last moments of her relatives: her mother standing at the window of her house, with her two daughters at her side, moving outward on the tide.

Magella's mind is both her prison and escape. She keeps her feelings inside, and her thoughts seldom escape their prison. A child of deep silence, she often lays her hands on the animals and feels their life energy. For Magella, healing is a sense of wholeness, an unbroken circle.

Magella is the product of contrasting parents. Her mother, daughter of a prosperous captain/merchant, is rigid, demanding, hard working and proud. In Feather-the-Nest she is a "big frog in a little pool." On the other hand, her father, who came originally from the island of St. Pierre, is of a different personality. Affectionate, kind and outgoing, he is the "incalculable, the unweighed touch,"³³ in contrast to her mother's heavy handed approach. Nevertheless, her parents do love each other in their individual way. Sheila Magella, a devout Methodist, holds sway on Sunday, while Pierre, a lapsed Roman Catholic, takes charge of his daughter on Monday. When Magella sings "Au Clair de la Lune," her mother sees that same elusive quality of the father. Pierre also notes a remote quality in his daughter: "She has a face no one can get behind unless she likes ... she can cure because she is sheer, like grey chiffon."³⁴

The young girl respects her mother and because of Sheila Mageila's definitive air, is in awe of her. But it is her father who represents compassion, sensitivity and deep, personal attachment. Temperate, strong and wholesome, he believes in "little celebrations." But, although her father makes her feel "round and gracious," she cannot confide in either parent. It is interesting to note that in the depiction of Mageila's parents, Duley reverses the normally accepted roles. The mother is presented as the authoritative figure, with the father characterized as the gentle, supportive person. The similarity of this portrayal with Duley's own life cannot be ignored. Thomas Duley was tall, good looking and well liked. In her later years Margaret Duley wrote: "I know very well that he was an angel of a father."³⁵ Her mother, Tryphena Soper Duley, was a puritanical congregationalist with a regal presence. Dedicated in her church activities, she was also the organist for Sunday service. Yet she was tempered in her family relations with a certain degree of kindness, and the Duley marriage generally seemed to be a happy one.³⁶ Both parents were strongly influential in Duley's search for self-fulfillment.

In Highway to Valour, Mageila is deeply aware of the constant struggle between humanity and the harsh, largely alien environment. This tension she perceives as relentless, consuming and remarkably defeating. Burdened by premonitions of doom and required oblations to the elements, she is not a

carefree child, but is fettered by a sensitivity to the violent, impersonal power of natural forces. She is also bound by her subconscious insight.

Mageila discovers that life in such an environment as Newfoundland is elemental, with an ever present image of the cycles of life and death. The girl sees the elements as animals of prey, especially the sea which she regards as a living entity, ready to consume the land, constantly lying in wait for opportunities to reap grim harvests of human sacrifice. Duley reinforces this idea with her use of vivid imagery. On the evening of the tidal wave, Mageila observes that the sea is "upright, glossy taut and curved at the top like a reaping tool."³⁷ After the disaster, Mageila retreats into herself where she undergoes a "fusing of personal sorrow with the sorrows of the savage world."³⁸ She can recall sharply the great levelling process of nature, which leaves her spirit chilled, and she identifies with:

the lonely gull with flesh as cold as winter feathers. The wings of life spreading to carry her with grave ecstasy, became weighted; and as long as she lived, she would go on remembering that the bird must fall, the beast must be felled, warm blood must chill, and living people who seemed greatest would be least because of the earth that shook them and the sea that drank them in.³⁹

She must learn to accept the wholeness of life; she cannot accept the pleasant and ignore the hardships. One must see the "whole horizon"; it cannot be sectioned. Gradually, as

her awareness matures, she becomes conscious of the fact that redemption is only achieved through suffering. The images of "Redemption through blood, Blood and the Lamb, ... blood,"⁴⁰ for a time, are dominant terrors. Her journey of self awareness takes her back finally to her elemental relationship with nature. The circle is at last completed.

In Feather-the-Nest, Mageila is called "the little doctor," a title which brings her a certain degree of respect. In one way or another she touches the lives of others but is seldom touched by others. When the tidal wave sweeps inland, Mageila at the Butler house sees Mrs. Butler pelted with the few dishes she has accumulated. The force of the wave collapses the woman against her house "like a wall crucifixion."⁴¹ In Mrs. Butler, we see an image of one who has no control over her destiny. Quiet, complacent, with rows of false teeth like rows of pearl buttons, she is seen by Mageila in the context of "leashed maternity."⁴²

In Duley's depiction of Mrs. Waddleton, we see a very different personality. This member of the community is fascinating in that she is pompous and secretive with shades of dark immorality. Her Sunday testimony is censored by Sheila Mageila, and their ordinarily indulgent father forbids his daughters to speak to the woman unless absolutely necessary. There are whispers of sweetmeats being offered to girls and Mageila feels "tainted when she fixed her eyes on the Michelet girls as if she liked them better than the others."⁴³ In

this characterization of Mrs. Waddleton, Duley skilfully alludes to the presence of a woman who is also a non-conformist in sexual behaviour. The author brings out this awareness by using an elusive choice of language. Nevertheless, in a few sentences Duley also shows how Mrs. Waddleton affects others and how the situation is handled by members of the community.

The strongest of the female characters in Feather-the-Nest with whom Magella comes in contact after the loss of her family is Mrs. Slater. A widow, bent from work and age, she leaves a lasting impression on Magella. The old woman lives on a hill, in "height and solitude," though not in loneliness. She projects an eagle quality of strength and freedom from the mundane shackles of life. She is solid, sheltering bulk who is also the lone survivor of a husband and sons who were taken suddenly and tragically. Her bent back is also a symbol of her independence, caused by "stooping for her own maintenance."⁴⁴ Mrs. Slater, who testifies on Sunday with profound dignity and reads her Bible by lamplight, is the only person who Magella believes has a truly close relationship with God. She sustains body and soul after the disaster, sees things 'all round' and accepts what she is powerless to change. Religion is her refuge. She has become fused with the elements, in harmony with the destruction and renewal of natural cycles; the here and hereafter have blended and sharp edged distinctions have faded. Natural elements are

fused with humanity "mixing the salt of the sea with the salt of blood and human dust with the dust of the earth."⁴⁵ Eternity is part of her earthly experience. "I find it hard to separate the two worlds," she says.⁴⁶

Mrs. Slater contains many of those strengths that Mageila is to acquire over a period of time. She represents the combination of physical and spiritual solidity that Duley saw as an admirable feature of women who were close to the elements. When Mageila wants to let go her own grip on life, it is Mrs. Slater who forces her to accept the duality of existence and the cyclical quality of nature. In the old woman's voice Mageila hears the roll and echo of Old Testament poetry. She is the summoner of duty, alternately feared, loved and hated by the young girl. She is the mystic, the watcher, all seeing in her solitude. As they part, old melodious blessings are poured upon Mageila, who carries Mrs. Slater with her throughout her life.

After the devastating tidal wave which sweeps away her childhood, Mageila is brought by her grandfather to his home in Ship Haven, where her life becomes more complicated by the constant interference of her Aunts, Sheila Mageila's sisters. Here Mageila retreats into a somniferous existence, much to the consternation of her relatives. The Dilke sisters, Mageila's aunts, are strong women, proud of their strength and their heritage. Yet they are superficial and arrogant. Exposed only to the benefits of a secure, comfortable

life, they have not been personally called upon to deal with the levelling forces of nature. Consequently, their viewpoint is limited ~~to~~ their own sense of self importance.

They willingly uphold the custom of early preparation for marriage and at eighteen were accumulating stocks of bed linen as part of the female contribution towards marriage. Domestic obligations are for them governed by strict protocol. Living in an atmosphere of externals and showmanship, neither Molly, Ella nor Beatie is sensitive to the suffering of Mageila. Duley writes:

Unimaginative, living energetically in an exterior world, narrow with their own importance. . . Unlike the men of their ancestry they had not learned humility from the indiscriminating seas. Like Sheila Mageila they were big frogs in little pools, despising everything beyond their range, criticizing what they could not understand.⁴⁷

Unromantic and house proud, they, unlike Mrs. Slater, accept the stoop as a frequent position in picking up after their husbands. Those women are seen as a group, a small enclave where personal and familial concerns are collective property. Referring to themselves as Dilkes, they remain self-centered women caught up in a narrow existence.

Mageila's relationship with her aunts is one of restless discontent. Aunt Molly makes her feel "miserably inadequate" and she frequently retreats into the escape of silence. An effort to interest Mageila in a young man fails miserably.

She prefers to play the piano, listen to opera broadcasts on the radio, or read. The girl is relieved to hear of her grandfather's plan to take her to Labrador. The aunts, who would have preferred shopping centres such as St. John's, Boston or Montreal, are dismayed. Their only impression of that area of Newfoundland is that it has "icebergs and flies, together!" Mageila is glad to go, for "she had never felt permanent in Ship Haven. She was always taut in her [Aunt's] presence."⁴⁸

Mageila's journey to Labrador also brings into account the young woman's relationship with the only significant male in her life. Trevor Morgan, a young Englishman stationed in St. John's, is also a passenger on the steamship Assou. They are attracted to each other and fall in love, but Trevor has a wife who insists on remaining in England, and their lives are placed on permanent hold. Trevor's wife also refuses to consent to a divorce.

After her trip to Labrador, Mageila is employed as a governess by Mrs. Kirke, a wealthy St. John's socialite. This woman, whose husband is among the living dead due to drug and alcohol abuse, distances herself from an unpleasant domestic situation. In her disillusionment she provides a foil for Mageila. Though bitter, she is not without hope and tells the girl: "Love is restoring to all women."⁴⁹ Wise and regretful, Mrs. Kirke looks old and young in turn. Because of her demanding role as wife and mother to her

husband, she resents the fact there was little left over for her sons. As war approaches, this lady becomes increasingly agitated as she struggles with conditions she is powerless to change. Her sorrow includes an empathy towards all women. From personal experience she knows the devastation of war, both physically and spiritually. There is no glory in killing, but then, "reality is never refined." Between Mageila and Mrs. Kirke a bond develops. The woman looks upon Mageila sympathetically, as one of the same generation as that of her sons, while Mageila becomes nurse, confidante and friend of Mrs. Kirke.

Moirā, the Kirkes' faithful servant, is presented to the reader as a transplanted outport woman. Competent and soothing, she gives to each of the Kirkes according to his/her needs. Significantly, her bedroom is situated between those of Mr. and Mrs. Kirke, as she is frequently required to mediate between the two, providing words of oil for troubled waters. Under her care, Mr. Kirke periodically comes back from his sub-human, self-destructive flare-ups. Never complaining, self-assured, this deep, dark woman is inexhaustible.

On the night of the fire, Moira displays a physical strength Mageila is unaware of, and when she looks into the older woman's eyes, she sees frightening depths. Moira says, "We must do something but we must have sense."⁵⁰ Moira's common sense, her pragmatism, her stoicism, form

part of her philosophy of survival. She, too, has known the pleasure and pain of love. Like Mrs. Slater and Grandfather Dilke, she can accept the whole horizon of life. Sentimentality has no function in Moira's elemental environment.

After Mr. Kirke's death, as Magella observes her matter-of-fact assurance, the girl realizes that Moira is "as warm and cold as life itself and as unsentimental as the sea."⁵¹ From her Magella learns that there are times when "everything has its uses."⁵²

Because the tidal wave swept away Magella's familial and psychological foundations, she must struggle toward a mature understanding of life and death. In Feather-the-Nest she finds support in Mrs. Slater, and she moves coweringly in the shelter of the old woman's bulk. In Ship Haven she is an exile in an alien atmosphere, where her aunts reinforce the pointed anxieties she so keenly feels. Here it is her Grandfather who is her touchstone for renewal.

Her journey away from childhood and Feather-the-Nest, to Ship Haven, to Labrador and finally to St. John's, portrays Magella at different stages of her developing maturity. It is through the journey motif that Duley brings Magella through the progressive stages of her quest. In the beginning the girl is terrified, "cowering darkly in her halfway house of death."⁵³ She is not a casualty, however, and comes full circle, back to her roots, as Magella comes to realize that childhood and upbringing are important. One

cannot truthfully turn away from one's heritage. She will continue to heal, for she has come through tragedy to the triumph of inner strength.

5.

The women of Margaret Duley's novels do not conform to the accepted norms presented in the various non-fictional studies. There are, indeed, certain points of similarity. For example, in The Eyes of the Gull the specifics of domestic outport life can be found: in the painted floor canvas, the cleanliness of the house. There is also the emphasis on the physical attributes of a woman, those qualities which aid her in her duties as a helpmate. Isabel, the protagonist of The Eyes of the Gull, is a thin 'pilgarlic' like Elfrida before her. Neither is at all suited to the rigors of outport life and the demands it makes on a woman who must be able to 'pull her own weight.'

However, Isabel is not at all a typical outport woman. At no point in the novel is she shown even speaking casually to her peers or encountering them in their daily lives. Yet, both Murray and Davis give detailed accounts of close ties with one's peers, especially of the same sex, a contact which provided a viable support system for the individual. Unlike the women depicted in Murray's study, Isabel has no concern or fears about going outdoors after dark alone. Her solitary existence and her dreams of a better world beyond

the outport are qualities that distinctly set her apart from what the various studies have presented as the 'typical' outport woman. She is a tortured soul, seeking something which fate will not allow her to find, filled with an ambivalence towards her home community which suggests much more of Margaret Duley herself than it does of outport women of the 1930's. To a very great extent, Isabel reflects some of Duley's own uncertainties and paradoxes and is, therefore, much more a revelation of the personality of the author than a depiction of the everyday life of a woman in traditional outport Newfoundland. Isabel is the exception rather than the ordinary. Undoubtedly, there were women who were dissatisfied with the narrowness of outport life, but they were certainly in the minority.

One finds much of the same deviation in Duley's female protagonist in Cold Pastoral. This time the main character is successful in moving from the cove to wider horizons, though images of her life in the cove continue to haunt her throughout her later life. Again, the ambivalence of Duley herself is apparent. Mary Immaculate, like her forerunner Isabel Pyke, is hardly a typical outport child. The most realistic depictions in this novel of outport life for women come in incidental comments scattered throughout the book which taken together suggest a significant awareness on the part of Duley of that way of life.

Nowhere is this more apparent than in the emphasis placed on daily work. A woman's role was especially demanding as her contribution was vital to the success of her husband's enterprise. If a man were unfortunate enough to marry a lazy woman, his toil could be fruitless. Benedict, in Cold Pastoral, is blessed in that he has a woman who is well able to make her contribution and never allows herself to waste time.

The woman's steady diet of hard work was not interrupted by pregnancy and birth, considered part of the normal course of events. A woman was expected to remain active up until the very onset of labour; like Josephine in Cold Pastoral, the expectant mother did not receive any special attention from her husband, nor under normal circumstances was her work load diminished.

Duley certainly viewed this way of life as static and stifling for the female. Both of the novels, The Eyes of the Gull and Cold Pastoral, project an essentially negative image of outport life and woman's function in that life. To a great extent Duley is projecting onto her protagonists her own negative responses to that mode of existence. The impressions created are, therefore, much more indicative of Duley's own viewpoint than they are realistic depictions of women in traditional outport Newfoundland.

Like the other Duley heroines, Magella Michelet in Highway to Valour is an anomaly. Again, the outport is a milieu from which the female character must escape, this

time with the assistance of nature. The implication is clearly made that Mageila's development into a fully mature and aware individual would not be possible were she to stay in the confines of Feather-the-Nest. As in the case with the two other novels, there are a number of interesting portrayals of realistic detail: Mrs. Slater in Feather-the-Nest, the Dilke sisters in Ship Haven, and the transplanted outport girl Moira in St. John's. But Mageila herself is a creation of Margaret Duley and is far removed from the types of women described in the studies discussed in an earlier chapter. The limitations of a domestic life for women are clearly rejected by Duley, as are the confining influences of isolation and the passive acceptance of fate. What Duley articulates in her novels is "a private, anxious quarrel with her own background."54

CHAPTER FOUR

MICHAEL COOK'S THERESA'S CREED

1.

Between the publishing of Highway to Valour in 1941 and Michael Cook's play, Theresa's Creed, in 1977, the entire structure of Newfoundland society had undergone some profound changes. The Second World War heralded an influx of thousands of young American service personnel who manned a number of military bases both on the Island and in Labrador. For the first time in our history, the people as a whole were exposed to high technology, cosmopolitan influences, and the transient nature of a powerful nation in wartime.

In the aftermath of war, the issue of Union with Canada resurfaced, was bitterly contested and finally resolved with Newfoundland's entry into Confederation on April 1, 1949. Although change had begun in the preceding years, the formal political change opened the floodgates. Some of the implications were immediate. For the first time Newfoundlanders could travel to a North American country without requiring a passport; compulsory education was strictly enforced, and the traditional pattern of communal work force involving the extended family began changing to that of wage labour and individual enterprise.

These new influences were especially felt by the women of Newfoundland society. The most evident was the new cash economy to which women had access in their own name, as opposed to the non-wage reciprocal nature of much of women's work before this time. A "revolution of rising expectations"¹ swept the province as communications systems improved, land transportation quickly replaced that of water as new road systems connected the outports, and the larger, North American cultural milieu became highly accessible through the media.

However, dramatic change also brought a certain confusion of values. Change became synonymous with improvement and pre-Confederation systems and values, whether good or bad, were discarded in a wholesale acceptance of the new. But by the time Michael Cook began writing of Newfoundland life and culture in the early nineteen seventies, much of the earlier euphoria had died away, to be replaced by a self-conscious reassessment of our cultural heritage. It is from this post-Confederation viewpoint that Cook in Theresa's Creed explores this duality.

Michael Cook was born in London in 1933, the youngest of three children. His mother died while he was young and thereafter Cook received his formal education in a series of boarding schools. The war years proved to be a turbulent period with no family contacts and at fifteen he was expelled from school. For the next few years, Cook worked at a number of different jobs until 1949, when he joined the army, after

altering his birth certificate in order to bring up his age to the legal requirement. During his army stint he became involved in troop entertainments as well as writing. After twelve years of service, Cook left the army and his life resumed a pattern of transience.

In 1965, Michael Cook arrived in Newfoundland where he became involved in radio and stage. He was also hired as a drama specialist by Memorial University's Extension Service. Around this time he began a weekly television and theatre column for the St. John's Evening Telegram and taught English Literature at Memorial University. In 1970, he began writing seriously for the stage, and five years after took an extended leave from this University in order to devote full time to his writing. In 1977, he was awarded a Canada Council Short Term Grant in order to visit various European theatres. He was also named playwright-in-resident at the Banff Festival during that same year.

Subsequently, Cook resumed his career at Memorial University. He has written and produced a number of successful plays, including Theresa's Creed, and has published articles in national journals and magazines, such as: Canadian Theatre Review, Maclean's, Performing Arts, Ten Cent Review, and Vie des Arts.²

"Theresa is an amalgamation of characters, details and circumstances,"³ rooted in pre-Confederation Newfoundland while her adult experiences span the post-confederation

period of change. The author uses the monologue as a method by which this woman takes the spectator backward in time to glimpse at different phases in her life. In this way, Theresa is the focal point in specific time frames. The structure of the play is characterized by compactness, intensity and density, as Cook makes use of short periods of time in the narrative present, into which he fuses the past. Theresa, a three dimensional character with emphasis on her life as a girl, wife and mother, provides us with a unique study of the outport woman.

As the play opens, Theresa is shouting instructions to her teenage children as they board the school bus. There are errands to the store and old people to be visited. She immediately shows the earlier cultural influences in the method of assigning those chores. Any reluctance on the part of the children is dismissed as irrelevant.

While involved in her daily work, Theresa is also pre-occupied with both thoughts of the past and anxiety for the future of her children. But the frugality of her life pattern has not dulled her sense of fun; and because she spends much of her daytime hours alone, she has fallen into the habit of talking to herself. As a widow, Theresa is left to support four growing children on an allotment of two hundred and eighty dollars a month. The cost of food alone dictates the small amount remaining to spend on other necessities of life. Nevertheless, she has a fierce, independent streak.

and is determined not to compromise her own integrity. She is still an attractive woman, although not interested in marrying again. She does, however, admit to being lonely at times and she misses intimate, male companionship.

In a self-conscious way, Theresa has taken up smoking and punctuates the completion of household chores with a cigarette and a mug of tea. This woman has brought ten children into the world, eight of whom are still living. Theresa's situation as a middle-aged widowed woman, left to bring up the younger portion of her large family is not rare in the Newfoundland setting. Her task must be accomplished on her own initiative and on a subsistence allowance.

Theresa takes her audience back in time through her memories of childhood. Endurance, acceptance, the lack of choices and the fact that one's destiny is determined by forces outside oneself, are the main threads of Cook's portrayal. Hard work and industrious activity form the unvarying pattern. There is little time to think, with work after school, work in the house followed by helping with the fish or in the gardens. Once in a while, a girl would go for a walk on Saturday, and there was the occasional dance. Pregnancy for a single girl usually resulted in marriage; otherwise there's "the shame of it on ye, and the pain of it on ye, too soon be half, an yer girlhood gone like a flower cut wi' the frost."⁴

As early as nine or ten years of age, children in Theresa's world were aware of what lay ahead for them. While in grade eight, she was already preparing to leave school. The only consolation her mother could give was that as a young girl she was pretty enough to get a good man for a husband, but not so beautiful that she could flirt too much and possibly end up with nobody.

Here we see again the appreciation of balance, an avoidance of extremes. The 'golden mean' is an ideal to work toward. Anything out of the ordinary, be it ugly or beautiful, was a disadvantage.

Theresa is thankful to have lived a more comfortable life than her mother had. Childbirth for the earlier generations of women was a factor added to, rather than subtracted from, the regular chores. When Theresa was born, her mother had been working in the stage with Theresa's grandfather, when her "water broke." The old man reluctantly permitted his daughter to go back to the house but with the comment, "If ye must ye must, I suppose, but don't ye be too long."⁵ When the local midwife came, towels and hot water were all in readiness. By evening, Theresa was born and her mother was back in the stage.

However, nothing detracted from the beauty of her mother's hair. Theresa, as a child, brushed the long, dark hair until it gleamed, while her mother sat by the fire and sang. For the child, the long hair of her mother was an

all-encompassing symbol of beauty, almost out of place in an atmosphere of fish, smoke and the drudgery of everyday existence.

Theresa also holds the thread of continuity which extended back to her grandmother who came out from Ireland, as a young woman. During the sea voyage across the Atlantic she suffered from a fever, which caused her hair to fall out. Perhaps it is also symbolic that her hair never grew back; likewise, she never went back to Ireland.

Theresa's emotional ties with her mother expanded to include the physical care of the elderly woman. Her work roles overlapped, in that she was a daughter caring for an aged parent even after she became a wife to her husband, Pat, and mother of her own children. Theresa's life pattern came full circle, from a child brushing her mother's hair to a strong but burdened adult woman. These roles of caring for others were very important and pervasive factors in the lives of outport women.

When Theresa grew to womanhood and married Pat, they both settled down to rear up their growing family. The responsibilities were always increasing, adding to the feelings of desperation and "no choice." Yet there were happy times as well. As a young woman, Theresa loved to be on the sea with Pat. She was never afraid, although sometimes she felt "the sea would swallow us up fer sure, an' him whistling away not giving a damn."⁶ This was when she loved Pat most.

However, Theresa's husband had a dual quality in his personality. Hard working and confident on the water, while on shore or in his home, Pat was a changed man who displayed swift mood changes, lack of confidence and defiance. Theresa, as wife, is philosophical and understanding, aware of the sense of freedom he has on the water where he is as natural in a boat as a boat in the sea. On land, he did not show the same naturalness in dealing with people. Pat refused to go to court with their son Walter when he was charged with killing caribou out of season, but became in turn angry and proud at the way Theresa defended their son before the magistrate. As Theresa assesses him: "The sea and the creatures in it ... war the only world fer him. The rest o' it war a millstone."⁷

Theresa's husband once told her that he hated her, and although she was hurt, she knew it was really a sign of resentment against his poverty, his ineffectiveness in dealing with authority, which seemed to conspire to keep them poor, irrespective of toil and perseverance. Theresa, as a wife, shows a deep awareness of the unspoken burden of making a living for so many, and the fatalism of such an existence:

We niver had no choice. If ye was a boy ye got thrown into manhood afore ye was wet behind the ears, no matter how hard the mothers prayed for 'em to be something other than fisherman ... and we ... I minds me mother to this day.⁸

In another incident, Pat rudely dismissed Theresa's fears as he took their son out to sea on a search for two lost men, during a fierce storm. Pat was so foolhardy she wondered if he just didn't care any more and wanted to end it all. Ironically, Pat had the same suspicion in regard to the two lost men. His bitterness was voiced in his tirade against blind acceptance:

"It was dem ... and the way it is here, an' who knows but dey didn't want to go dat way, f'er there's damn' all to keep us."

Theresa then muses on how little we really know about those we love, as there were many thoughts the couple did not share, principally due to a pervasive shyness. Then too, the children and work took up most of their time.

Although Pat was extremely skeptical about such things as the will of God and man's purpose in living such a hard existence, he did experience an emotional reaction at the reunion on Duck Island. As the people assembled for mass, Pat, Theresa and the children were among friends and neighbours from around the coast. Pat seemed to know it was the end of an era, but Theresa herself did not recognize this until afterward.

The idea that someone would take complete care of old people, even to making every day decisions, was appealing rather than appalling to Pat. To him, after years of toil, he felt relieved not even to have to think. Theresa, however,

was dubious about such an arrangement, but she knew too, that Pat was simply worn out. In death he finally achieved rest and his face became peaceful and composed. As the memory returns, Theresa begins to cry but will not allow herself to indulge in self-pity.

Theresa's life as a mother and homemaker follows the seasonal pattern of work order, and she is responsive to her environment. During the summer, fragrant winds from across the marshes freshen newly washed clothes which dance on the line. Theresa loves nature in the softer aspects of summer days and mild weather, as opposed to the fierce power of stormy seas. She hates the first snow which announces the approach of long, dark winter, as it settles on her "like an auld coffin lid." She feels as one of the living dead, struggling to be released from winter's leaden oppression.

The endless rounds of washing, cooking, curing fish, cutting wood and berry picking continued after marriage. But these activities were not new for Theresa. For her, work had long since replaced play, until it seemed there was no recreation. Yet she remembers fondly the gatherings at her house when Pat was alive, when he played the accordion and sang. We see also Theresa's strong sense of community and family unity which has since disappeared. "Didn't seem to matter den dat we got nothing. We was all together then ... but tis as if now we's all separated, like the cream from the milk." 10

As a mother, Theresa is concerned for her children's future and is apprehensive about their graduation from high school. She misses Pat and wonders if things would have been different if he were still alive. As a parent, she laments the fact that as soon as one's children are old enough to be accepted as adult companions, they are gone from home and one is left with an empty house, a few mementos and chipped dishes. A recurrent thought of Theresa's is that Pat knew all along the struggle was hardly worth it.

As a mother, she has real fears for her daughter Bernice who seems to have grown up too quickly and is very self assured. She is adamant in telling Bernice of the shame and misfortune of unwed pregnancy. Nevertheless, as a mother, Theresa knows that she would be supportive if the need arose. As a mother, she is anxious about what she sees as a lack of respect on the part of young people and the tragic effects on their future this lack of caution could bring; even good intentions can sometimes bring negative results. She thinks back to the time she went to court with Walter. Theresa was proud of her son "who acted like a man to get meat for us."¹¹ The result was that Walter's fishing money for that season went to pay the court fine. In her mind she always puzzled over why she had to be the parent to support Walter before the Magistrate when she felt Pat's presence would have been more appropriate.

Theresa also feels she doesn't have the same control over the children since Pat died. The younger children in particular are more self-willed and lacking in discipline. She must decide whether or not to keep her youngest son out of school to help ease the financial burden, and to help her set the vegetables. But then, such a move would bring extra obligations to the son by requiring him to attend night school. Theresa doubts if Bernice will graduate from grade eleven, but then, times are not what they used to be. In Theresa's day a girl would be glad to be employed as a 'servant girl' in a nice home. Now the young girls want a professional career. Besides, girls are "some expensive."¹²

One interesting perspective provided by Theresa is her awareness of how cultures and values in general, as well as her own particular situation, have changed over the years. People have come to expect 'something for nothing' as their due, and Theresa is caught in the middle. After working hard all her life, she has no marketable skill. She has contempt for the superficial as noted in her ridicule of such things as royal greetings for centenarians, and the attitude of some women in her community who see no further than to wait for the security of old age allowance.

Theresa was of a generation that never questioned; anything unavoidable was the 'will of God.' Yet Theresa remembers, worries and ponders, accepts and laughs. She is prepared to lie in the bed she has made for herself, but a

new factor is surfacing -- a questioning of the old attitudes combined with rebellion, in that her 'bed,' to a large degree, was made for her rather than by her.

Those influences, sometimes antithetical, are fully recognized by Michael Cook, who presents the relentless determination of an individual who also insists on the basic joy of life, despite a harsh environment which necessitates the sublimation of personal inclinations in the interests of survival. As Cook himself says:

For a lot of women, dependence on the fishery was terrible. But here was a stoic people; fatalistic. The pure, physical hardship would shake the contemporary woman. The changes in the bearing and rearing of children have to be for the good.¹³

The author depicts the paradox of a seemingly strong patriarchal society, wherein women had a great deal of influence and sense of purpose. He continues:

Women had a double role. They were responsible for maintaining the culture in a patriarchal society. The men were tended on hand and foot. In reality there existed a matriarchal society. The women were not subservient and exercised extraordinary control.¹⁴

It was necessary for survival that women be strong in an environment which favoured strong, independent men who were more comfortable in dealing with the natural surroundings than with people. Cook touches on the dichotomy of male/female roles in their public/private spheres. Pat is confident and

fearless at sea, temperamental at home and condescending to those in authority. Theresa is a unifying, understanding woman in her home but is "saucy" to the magistrate. Cook sees this mixture of "loyalty to the family; sense of community" as related to "a capacity for survival."¹⁵ Mary Frances Decker, noted by Cook as Theresa's prototype, "because the play is her, I guess,"¹⁶ also expresses the unspoken rule that when the women worked in the stages, each adult was responsible for all the children, not just one's own.¹⁷

The work load, of course, was staggering. Mrs. Decker also picked berries, knit, kept a garden, pigs and hens to supplement her income. It was not unusual for her to "bring a one hundred pound sack of berries five miles, to a man from Boyd's Cove who brought it to St. John's to be exchanged for its worth in flannelette."¹⁸

While Theresa's Creed is the only Michael Cook play that focuses entirely on a women, female characters are not completely absent from his other Newfoundland plays. A case in point is The Head, Guts and Soundbone Dance.¹⁹ Although the main emphasis in this play is on the effect of a dying culture on an obsessed old man, the lone female figure in the play speaks with the voice of rationality, stressing the importance of commitment to home, family and community. The woman, whose name is Rachel, cries for the child who has drowned, whose pleadings for help were ignored by the two

men in the fishing stage caught up in their own obsessive dreams, the "dirty ravings of a dead past."²⁰

Cook himself comments on the outpost life in general and feels that here is a picture "of two thousand years of man's struggle for expression."²¹ He continues:

The experience of such people teeters between private suffering and defiant joy. Their expression is essentially artistic, a satanic struggle to impose order upon experience rendered frequently chaotic by a blind and savage nature.²²

Cook shows his deep sensitivity to the people and the culture which many observers never achieve. He respects the cultural and sociological patterns which have evolved over the centuries.

They lead highly complex, ritualistic, community lives, yet preserve a core of silence, an inner communion with the self which is rarely manifest.... The country is pitted with the marks of the struggles of individuals.²³

Yet he is apprehensive of the post-Confederation trends which have become apparent. The author says that "patterns of change have been created by a 'hand out' economy." This change has been all pervasive. "Even physical structures changed... Old houses came tumbling down for bungalows -- which have all the amenities -- but change the outlook."²⁴ The following remarks of Michael Cook are astute observations on the passing of a cultural identity:

Something has (appears) to be happening in relation to the perception of the environment, and I'm not sure what it is. Memories of hardship, the continuous struggle for money, especially on the part of women; for the woman was the financial manager ... Sustaining values have been replaced by materialism. The sense of community was profound; the sense of identity -- an enormously rich value -- that has been taken away. The spiritual artifacts of Newfoundland have suffered enormously.²⁵

2.

Theresa's Creed not only presents this dichotomy within the musings of the protagonist but gives a well defined sense of what life was really like for the Newfoundland woman of the pre-Confederation outports. Cook succeeds in incorporating into his portrayal of Theresa a deep understanding of what it meant to be a girl, a wife and a mother in rural Newfoundland. Throughout the play, one can detect many echoes of incidents and descriptions related in the non-fictional studies of Hilda Chaulk Murray and Dona Lee Davis. For example, Theresa's experience of leaving school at an early age, as well as her financial difficulties in keeping her own children in school, is paralleled in Murray's observation:

A girl ... had to leave school with just Grade Two and assumed the responsibility of running a home. Another, who entered service at age eleven, nevertheless got as far as Grade Four. A widow with six or seven children could not keep them all in school.²⁶

A further incident in Theresa's experience which is supported in one of the non-fictional studies occurs when Theresa, not her husband, defends their son Walter before the magistrate. Here she displays a boldness in her power struggle with a complicated bureaucratic system. Davies concurs in that "women feel particularly free to cause a spectacle or behave rudely when their family or household has been threatened or wronged."²⁷

There is also a sense of that new isolation and alienation that Ellen Antler attributes to the dramatic political and economic changes that took place after confederation. Elaborating on the consequences of industrialization with its dependence on the availability of a steady, cheap wage labour work force, Antler notes:

What has happened to the fisherwomen and men of Newfoundland is hardly unique; they have been proletarianized. It has been a coercive process in Newfoundland just as it has been elsewhere, and not all the changes have been in the conditions of work. Changes permeate all circumstances of life. Outport women now find themselves suffering the same isolation, alienation and sense of powerlessness that plague women in urban, industrial centres. They labour privately and without the rewards that their previously productive labour brought. For Newfoundland women this has all too often been translated into depression and apathy.²⁸

In addition, Theresa can be seen as the embodiment in fiction of that woman who is in transition from the traditional to a more modern life style, a subject discussed in some detail:

in the study entitled Not For Nothing. This study notes that traditionally, any surplus wealth was channeled into dependable areas of investment rather than the fishing industry itself. Therefore the whole economic direction of the province became dominated by a few multi-national corporations whose interests lie elsewhere. In addition, the modern trend towards mechanization in combination with the emphasis on cheap labour, means that women in the traditional outport community have become isolated from mutual support systems and are often powerless in supplementing their income. The balancing of the gains and losses of the newer economic system has not yet been either achieved or determined. Women receive wages, are entitled to unemployment insurance, worker's compensation and other benefits. On the other hand, because they must work outside the home, the women of the outport community of today have a "greater need for a cash income while at the same time their access to a job is often ... very precarious."²⁹

Theresa, "the product of two time periods,"³⁰ is still in the transitional phase although she remains fully determined not to become trapped in a closed existence. She exudes her special brand of "defiant joy,"³¹

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

The insights into the lives of Newfoundland women provided by the works of Norman Duncan, Margaret Duley and Michael Cook parallel to a great extent the accounts given in the more factual sociological studies.

Norman Duncan, who spent a number of summers on the northeast coast of Newfoundland, can be regarded as an accurate observer of a way of life set apart from the mainstream of North American society. As a result of his familiarity with the culture of the people and their geographical surroundings, Duncan was successful in depicting the essence of both the physical and spiritual struggles of women in a harsh environment.

Certain characteristics dominate Duncan's delineation of women: early indoctrination into the work ethic, divisions of labour along sexual lines, women as nurturers and comforters, mothers as symbolic figures, and the stereotyping of family roles in general. Duncan also gives graphic descriptions of scenes frozen in time: a woman waiting for the safe return of her husband during a storm, her 'brood' clinging to her skirts; evenings in a cosy house with supper cleared away and the fire roaring up the chimney; summer evenings with

the renewal of courtship rituals; old people sitting by the door; the click of knitting needles silenced as news of a tragedy is brought home. Even though his main concern is with men and their constant struggles with the sea, Duncan does succeed in reproducing in very realistic terms what it was like to be a woman in early twentieth century Newfoundland.

The three novels of Margaret Duley reveal a novelist concerned with the characterization of women who are atypical. Her protagonists are high strung, sensitive dreamers who find it difficult to cope with the demands of daily life in an outpost. These women, with Botticelli features and wrapped in silence, are out of time and place. Duley was concerned with the plight of women who must have found the burden of so many responsibilities too confining. She was also fascinated by the attributes of a people who could mourn, pray and eat at the same time,¹ who spent entire life cycles in isolation. Unlike Duncan, Duley brings to her characterizations her own strong feelings about the place of women in contemporary society. This contrast can be seen in their respective uses of common images. For example, to Duncan a cove was symbolic of shelter -- home, warmth and family unity. To Duley, a cove meant isolation and confinement of spirit.

Duley shows a more complex form of portrayal in that she depicts "women outside convention,"² while placing them in the familiar surroundings of time and place. Clean outpost houses have painted kitchen floors, lace curtains

and dim, stuffy parlours. Large city homes are multi-storied examples of acquired gentility. Duley places romantic, feminine protagonists against the backdrop of women who are 'house proud,' caught in 'leashed maternity,' or creeping within the sheltering bulk of older, wise women. This author too, sees the all consuming struggle between independence and blind acceptance. Like trees during a storm, these women are gouged up by the roots to be transplanted in different soil. Eventually both Duley and her protagonists realize that one's culture is part of the individual. One cannot be completely severed from one's roots.

Michael Cook's play, Theresa's Creed, shows with astute clarity the ripple effect of a traditional, outport society, caught in the process of transition to a technological age. Modeled on a real person, living in a specific area of Newfoundland, Theresa is a woman whose life style and values originate in the pre-Confederation era, but who must cope with the post-Confederation period in which she finds herself. She is an example of many women in our society who throughout their working lives have contributed to a non-wage, reciprocal life style but have acquired no marketable skills in the present economic structure of private enterprise. The old, established values are swept before an all consuming flood of cultural upheaval.

Cook portrays the void left when the "spiritual artifacts"³ of a people have been cut off, and expresses the ambiguities

of life for a woman in Theresa's situation. In spite of all this, he recognizes that in their tenacity exists the capacity for survival, and going beyond survival to a "defiant/joy" in overcoming the odds. This actual worth in survival remained a mystery to Norman Duncan who was impressed by what he felt was a form of "escape through endurance." Margaret Duley echoed this need which, for her, was through physical escape. But Michael Cook touched the core of a people in their defiance and joy. He depicts as well, the demise of the very qualities that enabled women to cope with the hardship of our history.

While all three writers, then, draw on situations that were all too real for the women of traditional outport Newfoundland, each approaches the female characters from a different vantage point, with a different set of impressions and with different objectives.

NOTES

CHAPTER 1.

¹Hilda Chaulk Murray, More than 50% (St. John's: Breakwater Books, 1979).

²Ibid., p. 33.

³Ibid., p. 31.

⁴Ibid., p. 12.

⁵Ibid., p. 32.

⁶Ibid., p. 144.

⁷Dona Lee Davis, Blood and Nerves An Ethnographic Focus on Menopause (Institute of Social and Economic Research, Memorial University of Newfoundland, St. John's; 1983).

Ellen Antler, "Women's Work in Newfoundland Fishing Families" Atlantis, 2. 1977: 106-113.

Women's Unemployment Study Group, Not For Nothing: Women, Work and Unemployment in Newfoundland and Labrador, 1983.

⁸Davis, Blood and Nerves, p. 57.

⁹Ibid., p. 73.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 62.

¹¹Ibid., p. 60.

¹²Ibid., p. 72.

¹³Ibid., p. 75.

¹⁴Antler, "Women's Work;" p. 112.

¹⁵Ibid., pp. 108, 112.

¹⁶Ibid., pp. 108, 109. Also see Not For Nothing,

17 Antler, "Women's Work," p. 112.

18 Ibid., p. 112.

19 The eight women who contributed to the study are as follows: Jane Bowman, Cecilia Benoit, Isabella St. John, Jean Robinson, Ronnie Beals, Lee Seymour, Elaine Wychreshuk, Margot Metcalfe.

20 Murray, More than 50%, p. 144.

21 Patrick O'Flaherty, "Norman Duncan" in Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature, Wm. Toye, Gen. ed. (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1983), p. 224. See also Thomas R. Moore, "A Biography of Norman Duncan." Unpublished Master's Thesis, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1977.

22 Alison Feder, Margaret Duley Newfoundland Novelist: A Biographical and Critical Study (St. John's: Harry Cuff Publications, 1983).

23 Patricia Donnelly, "Women in the Novels of Margaret Duley." St. John's: Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1973. See also Linda Whelan, "Margaret Duley A Critical Study." Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1973 and "Margaret Duley's Highway to Valour", Quill and Quire, December 1977, 30.

24 Roberta Buchanan, "Outport Perspectives," Canadian Theatre Review, Summer 1985: 114.

25 Ibid., p. 115.

26 Michael Cook, "Culture as Caricature," Canadian Literature, Spring 1984: 76.

CHAPTER 2.

1 Patrick O'Flaherty, "Norman Duncan" in Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature, Wm. Toye, Gen. ed. (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1983), p. 224.

2 Norman Duncan, The Way of the Sea (Ottawa: Tecumseh Press, 1982), p. 7.

3 Ibid., p. 162.

4 Ibid., pp. 171-172.

⁵Ibid., p. 210.

⁶Ibid., p. 30.

⁷Ibid., p. 158.

⁸Ibid., p. 158.

⁹Ibid., p. 123.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 161.

¹¹Ibid., p. 196.

¹²Ibid., p. 61.

¹³Ibid., p. 198.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 261.

¹⁵Ibid., pp. 315-316.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 206.

¹⁷Norman Duncan, Doctor Luke of the Labrador (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1904), p. 75.

¹⁸Murray, More Than 50%, p. 39.

¹⁹Davis, Blood and Nerves, p. 56.

²⁰Murray, More Than 50%, p. 40.

²¹Ibid., p. 78.

²²Davis, Blood and Nerves, p. 126.

²³Ibid., p. 127.

²⁴Murray, More Than 50%, p. 44.

²⁵Ibid., p. 34.

²⁶Duncan, The Way of the Sea, p. 88.

²⁷Davis, Blood and Nerves, p. 125.

²⁸Ibid., p. 100.

²⁹Murray, More Than 50%, p. 15.

³⁰Ibid., p. 136.

³¹Davis, Blood and Nerves, p. 119.

³²Ibid., p. 67.

CHAPTER 3.

¹Feder, Duley, pp. 24, 25.

²Ibid., p. 27.

³Ibid., pp. 25, 26.

⁴Ibid., pp. 29, 30.

⁵Margaret Duley, The Eyes of the Gull (Toronto: Griffin House, 1976), p. 50.

⁶Ibid., pp. 31-32.

⁷Ibid., p. 39.

⁸Ibid., p. 121.

⁹Ibid., p. 100.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 17.

¹¹Feder, Duley, p. 30.

¹²Margaret Duley, Cold Pastoral (Toronto: Griffin House, 1977), p. 7.

¹³Ibid., p. 57.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 34.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 22.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 195.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 64.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 21.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 34.

²⁰Ibid., p. 52.

²¹Ibid., p. 52.

22 Ibid., p. 165.

23 Ibid., p. 103.

24 Ibid., p. 27.

25 Ibid., p. 47.

26 Ibid., p. 50.

27 Ibid., p. 52.

28 Ibid., p. 13.

29 Ad de Vries, Dictionary of Symbols and Imagery (Amsterdam: North Holland Publishing Company, 1976), p. 512.

30 Duley, Cold Pastoral, p. 303.

31 Ibid., p. 271.

32 Ibid., p. 336.

33 Margaret Duley, Highway to Valour (Toronto: Griffin House, 1977); p. 9.

34 Ibid., pp. 25-26.

35 Feder, Duley, p. 10.

36 Ibid., pp. 10-13.

37 Duley, Highway to Valour, p. 38.

38 Ibid., p. 97.

39 Ibid., p. 6.

40 Ibid., p. 100.

41 Ibid., p. 33.

42 Ibid., p. 36.

43 Ibid., p. 16.

44 Ibid., p. 51.

45 Ibid., p. 14.

46 Ibid., p. 69.

47 Ibid., pp. 79-80.

48 Ibid., p. 106.

49 Ibid., p. 50.

50 Ibid., p. 289.

51 Ibid., p. 303.

52 Ibid., p. 257.

53 Ibid., p. 51.

54 Patrick O'Flaherty, "Margaret Duley and Newfoundland," Dalhousie Review, 57, Winter, 1977-78: 644.

CHAPTER 4.

¹Bryan Fennigan, Cy Conick, eds., Making It: The Canadian Dream (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Ltd., 1972), p. 380.

²"Michael Cook, Biographical Checklist," Canadian Theatre Review, 16, Fall 1977: 26-31. See also "Michael Cook" in Canadian Theatre Review, 1, Winter, 1974: 74-76.

³Interview with Michael Cook conducted by Rosalie Colbert, September 16, 1985.

⁴Michael Cook, Three Plays (Portugal Cove, Newfoundland: Breakwater Books, 1977), p. 89.

5 Ibid., p. 87.

6 Ibid., p. 92.

7 Ibid., p. 93.

8 Ibid., p. 86.

9 Ibid., p. 98.

10 Ibid., p. 95.

11 Ibid., p. 92.

12 Ibid., p. 99.

13 Interview with Cook.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Cook, Three Plays, p. 83.

¹⁷Interview with Mary Frances Decker conducted by Rosalie Colbert, August 6, 1985.

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Cook, Three Plays, p. 51.

²⁰Ibid., p. 78.

²¹Canadian Theatre Review, 1. Winter, 1974: 74.

²²Ibid., p. 74.

²³Ibid., pp. 74-75.

²⁴Interview with Cook.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Murray, More Than 50%, p. 56.

²⁷Davis, Blood and Nerves, p. 98.

²⁸Antler, "Women's Work," p. 112.

²⁹Women's Unemployment Study Group, Not For Nothing,

p. 11.

³⁰Interview with Cook.

³¹Ibid.

CHAPTER 5.

¹Duley, Cold Pastoral, p. 9.

²Ibid., p. 322.

³Interview with Cook.

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