

# Pathways of Creativity in Contemporary Newfoundland and Labrador



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Edited by

María Jesús Hernández Lerena

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For Rafael and Eva Anguiano

“The brutal mechanics of having a wish come true.”  
—John Steffler, *The Grey Islands*



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## PREFACE FROM THE EDITOR

I arrived in St. John's, Newfoundland, one night in September 2007. I was a day late because I had been detained by a Canadian customs officer at Toronto's Pearson airport. He had found an extra "h" in the word "authority" in my passport and made me wait for the rest of the passengers to disembark. It was a short connection and I missed my next flight. Then he took me aside and made me spell the word "authority" out loud. The following day, after having been mistakenly flown to Saint John, New Brunswick, I was redirected through two more flights to my intended destination, Newfoundland.

Before embarking on my unlikely journey, I had read Katherine Govier's *Creation*, a novel about the treacherous coast of Labrador. In this narrative, imposing and unapproachable shores had made a celebrated nineteenth-century painter and ornithologist lose his grasp on science, art and God's mandate. I also came to read by chance Douglas Glover's *Elle*, a novel about a sixteenth-century French noblewoman marooned on an island off the coast of Newfoundland, a story that had happened before Canada existed. I was fortunate because these novels directed my gaze to a part of the world I would not have noticed otherwise. Literature makes things happen, and those two books took me to a part of the world I did not know, and where I did not know anyone.

I did not imagine that I would soon come across an amazing panorama in the field of literature and culture on an island that is not so distant from my country in a geographical sense, but whose very existence seemed to defy any leap of faith. The authors of this book and I would like to share our experience of this place with readers interested in the diversity of Canadian literature, history, and art, and also with those for whom Newfoundland and Labrador is as yet an unimagined reality. Even now, many people think of Newfoundland, "Terranova" in Spanish, as a remote nothingness with a sea full of cod. On the day I was to purchase my flight in a travel agency—which sported on its walls a beautiful modern map of the world where St. John's did not exist—there had been a brief report on Spanish television about a landslide burying a house in Newfoundland. I was talking about this to the travel agent when an eavesdropping customer sitting at another desk joined in the conversation: "It must have been about the only house there", he said. Often, we blindly stick to our uninformed

impressions of the world because, among other reasons, it takes a great deal of effort to seek out information untainted by generalization. Stereotyping others gives us the comforting feeling that we are looking at them from the centre of things.

One of the purposes of this book is to avoid reducing the world. We would like to invite its readers to consider a place that may have been just a blurred patch in their minds so far. Description of this place will be provided by scholars and writers who are deeply engaged in the academic and artistic life of Newfoundland and Labrador. Thanks to their expertise, we can start a journey that is, like most journeys, a plunge into more intimate knowledge. It is our aim to provide a wealth of detail leading to a discovery of the work of novelists, poets, playwrights, filmmakers, storytellers, journalists, painters, activists, etc., and also leading to a better understanding of cultural communities whose creativity has acquired resonance outside its borders and needs more critical attention. For this reason, this volume may also be of help to educators and researchers of the cultures of Newfoundland and Labrador. Thus, although its chapters may serve to introduce some readers to writers they have not read before, the essays are not written on an introductory level; they offer in-depth scholarly analyses of a range of literary and artistic works and of the contexts that make them meaningful.

These are not the only fascinating authors born in, or related to, Newfoundland and Labrador. Many others could not, unfortunately, be included in this book, which offers only some possible pathways into a changing creative landscape.

# INTRODUCTION

MARÍA JESÚS HERNÁEZ LERENA

## **1. BRIDGING GULFS between Newfoundland and Labrador and Elsewhere<sup>1</sup>**

When the real is reinvented into story (or poetry or painting or drama) a parallel reality reciprocally thickens the real. (Stan Dragland, 1998: 74)

“Lost. And found.” This is the motto that sustains one of the most insistent tourism campaigns about Newfoundland and Labrador. This phrase cashes in on the hope that one can still discover a place that progress has not changed and find there a stable core of identity, both in oneself and in others. The view of spectacular cliffs and scattered saltbox houses produces the story of a place where you can recover meaning by going back to the basics. The solution to unhappiness seems to be geographical. Is it? This Canadian province has been made mythical by so many kinds of discourses that it is difficult for the outsider to find a safe observing position between, on the one hand, the romantic reverie and, on the other, the reluctance to believe in the existence of untroubled idylls.

Together with popular nature pictures of Newfoundland—edge-of-the-world cliffs, icebergs and whales—and the evocation of Newfoundland’s past through images of houses being hauled across water and tiny cemeteries in abandoned outposts, lie the facts of history. Newfoundland was for a long time a British colony and is claimed to be the oldest in North America. For centuries it was dependent on its fisheries, attracting ships from diverse parts of the planet until, ultimately, it became a permanent victim of overfishing. It possesses the allure of having been the stepping stone for Arctic explorations: Newfoundland’s collective imaginary is haunted by disasters at sea, some distant like the SS Newfoundland, others more recent, like the Ocean Ranger oil rig. It is also haunted by other wounds such as the disappearance of the Indigenous Beothuk<sup>2</sup> and the tragic toll of its involvement in World War I.

“[T]he failure of this distinctive society to establish itself as a nation,” as Adrian Fowler (2003: 317) has put it, was also a hard blow, when, in

1949, the vote for confederation with Canada won.<sup>3</sup> This was followed by several traumatic resettlement programs, by the failure of the new industries of the 1950s and 1960s, by the demise of the cod fishery in the late 1980s and by subsequent out-migration. Newfoundlanders have historically resented Canada for its inappropriate and untimely policies toward the province. The more recent tourist boom and the money from off-shore oil have provided an economic way out for the island, but it has also produced a cultural climate of acute sensitization to the exportation of simplified versions of their culture to urbanites in need of primitive myths.

It is difficult not to think of Newfoundland as a therapeutic place, however, because of its powerful identitary narratives and its peculiar historical and geographical circumstances. The other much less populated part of the province, the Peninsula of Labrador, which does not blend easily with the island of Newfoundland, was often regarded in the past as the supreme wilderness by Americans, and it has had to cope with its own set of problems, such as the occupation by NATO forces, the reaction of its Indigenous peoples to governmental policies, or controversial developments such as the Muskrat Falls hydroelectric project. As an impersonation of the True North, it carries both hellish and redemptive connotations, and it contains much more embodied experience than simply being the stage for well-known expeditions.<sup>4</sup>

The above-mentioned events are only some of the facts that help us understand the styles of thought articulated in the stories and images coming from the island and the peninsula. Some of Newfoundland's traditional paradigms for self-explanation have been: extreme geography,<sup>5</sup> rugged individuals wrestling a life from the sea, the cohesive communities of the outports and a strong tradition in oral storytelling and other arts. Historically, Newfoundland has been a have-not Canadian province, publicized as laid-back and smiling in a no longer face-to-face world. Over twenty years after the cod moratorium, Newfoundland's cultural life is still engaged in preserving its memory as well as in coming to terms with the dilemmas of a post-industrial era where environmental degradation, out-migration and the all-reaching virtual worlds of technology might blur the ties with a past that has traditionally been held as psychologically sustaining. The art boom in Newfoundland since the 1970s has been associated with a renewed sense of national identity but also with a reaction against the symbolic appropriation of Newfoundland by tourism. The desire of place, as will be seen in many chapters of this book, shapes the artistic responses of those born inside and outside this region.

One of the research interests for the contributors of this book is to identify the juncture points—ideological as well as aesthetic—in which a



range of contemporary writers and visual artists become both inheritors of past definitions of national and regional identity and individual creators of narratives, poems, plays, films and paintings which address the roots but also the fractures threatening their society. Both writers and critics are in a position to offer revised representations of the region by absorbing and questioning the parameters of a strong legacy which has been forced to rethink notions of survival and dignity. Additionally, in an attempt to make this book a suitable platform for witnessing the realities of Newfoundland and Labrador, there has been a deliberate plan to foster among its essayists a discussion on how Indigenous groups have struggled to come to terms with the presence of white settler cultures and how they currently fare within mainstream representational systems.

The critical position in this book will be the intersecting perspectives between literary history, social record and textual analysis. The contributors to this volume are experts—among the few that exist—on the topics they chose to examine closely. They are professors, critics and writers who currently play a very important role in the literary and artistic panorama they endeavour to spell out and assess here. According to Jacques Rancière, “human beings are tied together by a certain sensory fabric, a certain distribution of the sensible, which defines their way of being together” (2009:56). The links between artwork and human community become the impulse that pushes forward each chapter of this critical anthology and gives it coherence as a book. The intimacy of its essayists with that “sensory fabric” allows them to describe how individual artists give shape to the ordinary and the extraordinary and transform them into the communal.

Traditionally, the starting point for European students of Canadian literature was the lack of connectedness between the white settler and the “new” land. “CanLit” was generally taught within the context of a mystique of dislocation: the feelings of absence which the immigrant experienced in the wilderness, the disconnection between their “old” language and the “new” land, the sense of unhomeliness, a lack of epic in their accounts of exploration and conquest, and the sense of imprisonment and terror in the face of a hostile or indifferent nature. The image of Canada as a God-forsaken piece of land that precludes verbalization, confidence or pride has been typified, among others, in well-known critical pieces by Northrop Frye (1967), Margaret Atwood (1972), Dick Harrison (1977), or Robert Kroetsch (1989), for example, and also in poems widely used in Canadian literature classes: Douglas LePan’s “A Country without a Mythology,” Earle Birney’s “Can. Lit.,” Margaret Atwood’s “Progressive Insanities of a Pioneer” and “Disembarking in

Quebec.” In those examples, Canada is seen as an obstacle and presented to us through feelings of failure and alienation, visibly contrasting with the triumphalist strategies of historical remembrance common in the U.S.A. The entering and settling of Canada as a dumbfounding, annihilating experience was shown as a distinct drama in comparison with the way the United States has traditionally imagined its destiny with the help of Edenic imagery.<sup>6</sup>

Although this one-way plot in Canadian literature has been widely contested, the idea of the Canadian landscape as a thorny psychological challenge still proves enticing for authors and also for foreign teachers and students. In view of this, it may come as a surprise to find in Newfoundland a prevalent model of collective imaginary based rather on a sense of cohesiveness resulting from a firm anchorage in its settler communities. Their stance on a place where for a long time it was forbidden to settle comes together in Newfoundland with a tendency for authors to conduct themselves in literature outside the postmodern distrust in the legitimacy of traditional narratives, postmodernism being the main focus of critical attention through the 80s and 90s in university courses.

There is very little criticism on Newfoundland and Labrador literature in view of its immense creative output, especially in the form of books. In addition to valuable unpublished dissertations, many of them to be found in the libraries of Memorial University and the Centre for Newfoundland Studies (St. John's, Newfoundland),<sup>7</sup> the journals *Newfoundland and Labrador Studies*, *Newfoundland Quarterly*, *Riddle Fence*, *Them Days*, *Postscript*, *WANL's Monthly Newsletter*, *The Overcast*, and the extinct *TickleAce* and *The Scope* include essays and reviews on the literature and arts in the province together with articles devoted to other disciplines. One example of the reluctance to critically assess literary achievement in Newfoundland—if we compare it to the profusion of creative pieces—is illustrated by the dwindling number of critical articles in *Riddle Fence* since its first issue in 2007.<sup>8</sup>

Sometimes the Maritimes and Newfoundland and Labrador are lumped together in journal monographs and, even if the label Atlantic Canada is used, Newfoundland and Labrador is often underrepresented.<sup>9</sup> There is, instead, an incredible number of fascinating anthologies which, however, do not normally provide sufficiently elaborated introductions about the literary panorama or about the work that is being sampled.<sup>10</sup> The recent publication of the anthologies *The Breakwater Book of Contemporary Newfoundland Poetry* (2013, Callanan and Langer, eds.) and *The Breakwater Book of Contemporary Newfoundland Plays* (2014, Lynde, ed.) may also respond more to the need of giving more visibility to new

interesting work than to the urge of providing contextualization and criticism.

When looking for criticism about the literature of Newfoundland and Labrador in book form, we find some books and journal monographs that provide useful insights into the literature and also into the history, traditions, or publishing conditions in the province. Patrick O'Flaherty's *The Rock Observed: Studies in the Literature of Newfoundland* (1979) was the first book to explain in depth the contribution of Newfoundland authors to a tradition marked by economic hardship. Almost 25 years later, Martina Seifert offered in her *Rewriting Newfoundland Mythology: The Works of Tom Dawe* (2002) a substantial study of the literary tradition in Newfoundland and of its historical determinants. Another book, Danielle Fuller's *Writing the Everyday: Women's Textual Communities in Atlantic Canada* (2004) provided a conscientious examination of the publishing restraints that shape women's writing in the Atlantic provinces. In a different vein, James Overton's *Making a World of Difference: Essays on Tourism, Culture and Development in Newfoundland* (1996) and Herb Wylie's *Anne of Tim Hortons: Globalization and the Reshaping of Atlantic-Canadian Literature* (2011) have provided documentary evidence of the impact of the traffic in images on the island's culture and ecology.

Another book published in the province was Joan Strong's *Acts of Brief Authority: A Critical Assessment of Selected Twentieth-Century Newfoundland Novels* (1994). It is a careful discussion of the diverse legacies of writers born in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and the first half of the twentieth: Margaret Duley, Harold Horwood, Percy Janes, etc. Wayne Johnston is the youngest writer of the selection. Of a more miscellaneous nature was Stan Dragland's edition of the writings of the scholar Stuart Pierson in *Hard-Headed and Big-Hearted* (2006) and Ronald Rompkey's *Literature and Identity: Essays on Newfoundland and Labrador* (2006). Outside the province, Noah Richler's *This Is My Country, What's Yours?* (2006) included a chapter about Newfoundland in the mood of cultural tourism.

The special issue of the journal *Essays on Canadian Writing: The Literature of NEWFOUNDLAND* (2004), with an introduction by Lawrence Mathews, focused on the novels of Patrick Kavanagh, Wayne Johnston, Michael Crummey, Michael Winter and Joan Clark. It contained powerful tools for reflection on the legitimacy of symbolic appropriations of Newfoundland, such as the controversies generated by the novels *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams* by Wayne Johnston and *The Shipping News* by Annie Proulx. As many critics have argued, a region is not a location, it is an ideology produced by a set of rhetorical devices. Although the idea

of region can exert pressure against global standardization (Hart 1998: 115), many dangers arise when official and literary discourses give geographic location preference over other criteria such as class, gender, ethnicity, ideological diversity or individual agency when thinking about people in the abstract.<sup>11</sup> The pressing issue of geo-historical determinism in Newfoundland is also present in the 2010 special issue of the journal *Newfoundland and Labrador Studies*. However, the works under analysis—by Kenneth Harvey, Michael Crummey, Michael Winter, Lisa Moore and John Steffler—are being interrogated this time by using a different set of questions, such as the interactions between biography and surveillance, neoliberalism and neo-nationalism and the postcolonial and the ecocritical.

Similarly, and although some of the questions which agitate the pages of this book revolve around the awareness that its contributors have of historically shared experiences—and also of shared delusions—we wish to offer essays that promote thought beyond the gravitational force of the binaries local/universal, romanticism/cynicism, Newfoundlander/Come-From-Away. Furthermore, we hope to make a contribution to the above mentioned and other valuable studies by opening up our overview to other writers, genres and artistic forms. To this end, the debate is expanded by taking into account Aboriginal writing and orature. How can Indigenous peoples find a voice in a world that does not belong to them? How have they recorded themselves and how has writing fostered their political and cultural agendas? The chapters devoted to these questions unearth issues that reverberate elsewhere in this book, such as the value of the spoken and the written word in our societies and the ways in which writing can become an ethical choice and an instrument for change.

Most of the publications mentioned above do not assume a non-Newfoundlander or non-Canadian readership, and they may take for granted a knowledge of the region which readers from other countries, or even from Canada, may not have been previously exposed to. In this volume, we therefore seek to provide the historical and social context without which the reception of literary texts and artistic works may lack full dimensions. However, although *Pathways of Creativity in Contemporary Newfoundland and Labrador* bears witness to the cultural mores of the region, this book is not only a meditation on heritage. Novels, films and art pieces are not only cultural artifacts but products of individual urges and convey imaginative proposals that open up the range of sensations that can be felt and ideas that can be thought. Thus, each chapter engages in a conscientious close reading of one or several texts that may offer inspiring entrance ways to literature and art through a consideration of unique perspectives and strategies.

## 2. Book Structure

This book contains: a chapter on the history of Newfoundland and Labrador; a chapter on travelling by early women travelers and journalists; two chapters on fiction; two chapters on Aboriginal writing; a chapter on poetry; a chapter on theatre; a chapter on film; a chapter on storytelling; two chapters on painting and sculpture; and a chapter with transcripts from conversations with some Newfoundland writers. The progress is from interpretations of history and description of social milieu (chapter 1) to gendered conditions of travelling in the region (chapter 2), then, from fiction devoted to a past where it was possible to make a living from the sea (chapter 3) to current renditions of urban experiences (chapter 4). Following these essays on history, journalism and fiction, we devote space to considering how Aboriginal peoples have been imagined by others and what happens when that process is reversed (chapter 5). After this, poetry, theatre and film in contemporary Newfoundland are given the spotlight (chapters 6, 7, and 8). From there we move to storytelling in settler and Indigenous societies (chapter 9). Chapter 9 is complemented by another essay that focuses on the efforts of the Labrador Innu to achieve visibility and control over their communities through writing (chapter 10). The last two chapters (11 and 12) are devoted to painting and other forms of artistic production in contemporary Newfoundland and Labrador; they consider both Indigenous and settler societies. The book concludes with a chapter titled “Afterwords.” It is a collage that assembles excerpts from interviews with Newfoundland writers in which they offer their personal views on issues that have previously been examined in the book within the format of the scholarly essay.

The first chapter of this book, “Newfoundland: A Story of Loss & Forgetting” sets the others in meaningful motion. In it, Maura Hanrahan provides a detailed rendering of the main historical facts necessary to understand Newfoundland and Labrador’s culture. The essay deals first with the history of the First Peoples for whom loss, the first word in the lexicon of Newfoundland, has had more tragic consequences. Maura Hanrahan examines the turn of circumstance that led to some groups being romanticized to exhaustion and others demonized to this day. She also dissects other events that are indexical to Newfoundland society’s collective imaginary; their dependence on the sea for sustenance, the loss of political independence in 1933, their reluctant confederation with Canada in 1949, the consequences of resettlement policies and the demise of the cod fishery, made official in 1992. This latter blow was one of the worst environmental, economic and social tragedies Newfoundland has

had to face. It fossilized a way of life in the outposts, the small fishing communities that dotted the coast of Newfoundland, which were abandoned at the time and then became haunting memories.

As a sharp corrective to the commonly held beliefs maintained against evidence in the past, this chapter pinpoints the ironies of history and dismantles slogans: Maura Hanrahan's consideration of the histories happening in other parts of the world allows us a look into Newfoundland and Labrador from a broader perspective than usual, one that takes into account the history of the Aboriginal peoples and also events happening on an international level. "A Story of Forgetting and Loss" weaves a fabric made of motifs and obsessions that are still present in Newfoundland and Labrador; they will be explored in their literary, filmic and iconographic facets by other critics in the book.

In the next chapter, "With 'High Hearts': Women Travelers to Newfoundland and Labrador," Valerie Legge works on the connections between history and myth by tracing the first imaginative and journalistic constructions of Newfoundland and Labrador on the part of Europeans and Americans whose sense of adventure—and occasionally their misfortune—took them to the exotic and dangerous territories of the North. Most of us are familiar with the names of explorers such as Erik the Red, Giovanni Caboto, Jacques Cartier, George Cartwright, Robert Peary, etc. What Valerie Legge does is shift our attention to their wives, lovers and other women of courage whose travels and explorations have also exerted a lasting fascinating power, their lives being re-invented over and over in the popular imagination. These figures also occupy a considerable space in the imagination of contemporary Canadian authors: the Norse women Freydis and Gudrid; the French noblewoman Marguerite de Roberval; George Cartwright's partner, Mrs. Selby; or Mina Benson Hubbard, the wife of the ill-fated adventurer Leonidas Hubbard.

Valerie Legge scrutinizes the overlapping spaces of colonization, travel and gender by assessing the legacy of these women travelers, who tried to come to terms with a nature and a society at odds with their own. They contributed to history through their special manner of observation since most of them were interested in issues beyond the appeal of discovery and exploration and were also active in the early cultural traffic that shaped the ideas of country and region.

The complexities of the interaction between locality and globalism in a place that was historically regarded as marginal to Canada will continue to be an important undertow in subsequent chapters. In "'The rock beneath his feet': Cultural Nostalgia in Donna Morrissey's *Sylvanus Now*," Jennifer Bowering Delisle engages with the issue of management of the

ocean's resources hand in hand with the ethical values coming from Newfoundland traditions. She shows literature to be a powerful medium to see through the systems of wealth distribution. Her essay tackles important issues in Newfoundland's history: loss of nationhood, promised welfare, migration and overfishing. *Sylvanus Now* recreates the 1950s in Newfoundland, the first period of resettlement and incipient industrialization. Jennifer Bowering Delisle's unique perspective is that she uses the frequently vilified notion of nostalgia as a critical tool which, kept at a distance from simplistic sentimental discourses, offers an alternative understanding of cultural communities. Nostalgia has fared poorly in its intellectual competition with parody or irony, but for Delisle it contains a potential for protest and an anchoring in factual reality that can be activated in certain contexts. Her analysis shows that certain ideological resources implicit in the notion of nostalgia can empower people and societies in their fight against the irrational impositions of the market.

In Donna Morrissey's novels, the outpost is still an agglutinating communal force, at the same time giving substance to life and resonating with failure. In the next chapter, "Townie Lit: Newfoundland Refocused in the Writing of Lisa Moore and Michael Winter," Adrian Fowler looks at what comes after the outpost in order to engage in a literature that addresses a more urban existence. This critic initially provides an outline of the evolving archetypal plots that have predominated in Newfoundland literature with a view to describing where literature may find itself at present in relation to issues of tradition and cultural identity. Is contemporary lifestyle in Newfoundland oblivious to the pastorals and the traumas of the past? Can its landscapes and seascapes still be considered builders of character? These are some of the questions explored within the context of Lisa Moore's and Michael Winter's fiction.

Adrian Fowler traces the connections between past and present by looking at characters in the eye: he ponders their habits and the events that structure their lives. This chapter offers an index to many of the symbols and practices that formed the lifestyle of Newfoundlanders in former times and today, a time when writers live under the pressures of cultural authenticity, that is, of the staging of their culture for outsiders in a touristic world where the illusion of undisturbed locality is a plus. His essay registers the lifelines that connect archetype with contemporariness and the tensions between individuality and community in the era of digital existence.

Roberta Buchanan in chapter four "The Aboriginal Writes Back: Representations of Inuit in Wayne Johnston's *The Navigator of New York*

and *The Diary of Abraham Ulrikab*” gives visibility to other forms of staged identity for commercial purposes and, like previous critics, she interrogates notions of progress and knowledge. This time our look will be directed to peoples about whom we usually know very little. Is it possible to envision Canada through the eyes of the First Peoples? Can we think outside a Eurocentric cognitive model? What resources do Indigenous peoples possess to rule themselves and get their stories heard? This chapter, together with chapter ten by Robin McGrath, puts these questions in sharp focus.

Roberta Buchanan offers contrasting views of the North, of its Aboriginal peoples and of Arctic adventure. Her essay initially focuses on the European gaze toward Non-European peoples as enacted in a novel by Wayne Johnston, one of the best known Newfoundland writers, who fictionalized the life of explorers Cook and Peary in their frantic expeditions to the North Pole. When we swap positions and look at Europeans through Indigenous eyes, what we see hurts. This happens when we learn of a journal written by an Inuk, Abraham Ulrikab, who was taken to Europe with his family to be exhibited at zoos and fairs in 1880. In this chapter, as in the chapter by Robin McGrath, we do not come to know about Indigenous peoples as characters in European plots, but as hostages raising their voices in a colonized world. We bear witness to their struggles for expression and dignity through the encounter with the factual circumstances of their lives recounted in first person.

In a different context, the efforts to minimize foreignness and encourage indigeneity mark the next chapter, which inaugurates the focus on poetry in the book. Mary Dalton’s essay “From Colonial Tropes to Vernacular Muse: The Poetry of Newfoundland” gives the rare opportunity to follow closely the work of poets from the beginning of Newfoundland’s literature until the present day, and to find out what happens when the energy of the vernacular goes into print. We become both revelers and alert critics of the poems when guided by Mary Dalton’s scrutiny.

How to write about a place not written about before? How to render the pulse of life, the feel of place, the sound of people in ways that ring true to them? Mary Dalton identifies the failures, the successes and the difficulties involved in conveying the sound of the vernacular in poetry, and she shows us that the vernacular is indeed much more than dialect or the transcription of local speech. Her scope is wide and deep: she discusses the work of a number of poets and poetic genres while she traces the connections and disconnections between orality and the printed page, the spoken and the written language, in a terrain where the vernacular is a form of liberation from colonization and standardization. With Mary



Dalton we experience the gaps between ear and eye and discover ways to bridge them and to engage with an uttering of voices which contain the distinct “psychic identity” of Newfoundland.

The chapter on poetry is followed by a survey of Newfoundland’s theatre. The resurgence of theatre in the 1960s preceded what is sometimes called the Newfoundland Renaissance. In “Three Contemporary Newfoundland Playwrights: A Reflection of an Island People,” Jamie Skidmore gives an overview of Newfoundland drama from its beginnings and focuses on the work of three outstanding Newfoundland playwrights and performers: Andy Jones, Bernie Stapleton and Robert Chafe.

Jamie Skidmore follows the line that moves from community theatre to individual talent; theatre in Newfoundland was revived in conjunction with a sore sensitivity about the stereotypes that Canadian mainlanders often held of Newfoundlanders. Also, nostalgic regionalism was starting to receive outspoken criticism by Newfoundlanders themselves, and those reactions stimulated a new kind of theatre, one which dealt with shifting paradigms in the culture of the province. These plays, which also materialized as TV programs, effected a wake-up call; political issues re-fuelled a dynamics of hilarity and creativity. However, satire is not the only expressive mode in Newfoundland theatre and Jamie Skidmore proceeds to unveil the lyricism and the potential for signification contained in theatrical production, his focus being on the staging of metaphor.

Film comes next. It had to, as filmmaking is another area of intense artistic outburst in Newfoundland. Chapter six rotates around the binary of locality/globalism. These concepts, which roughly equal those of identity and commercial desires, allow Noreen Golfman in “Filming Ourselves: The Challenge of Producing Newfoundland” to provide a vivid outline of a wide range of film productions and production companies along with a description of their connections to the film industry outside the province. Focusing on the strategic shifts between margin and centre undertaken when working with Irish, American and local companies, the chapter spells out the pleasures and the frictions occurring when international money meets a distinct local culture. Tellingly, these interactions are partly reflected in the vital trajectories undergone by characters in films that have caused an international impact. The contrast between the prototypical warm, quirky Newfoundlander and the detached, corporate-minded Canadian proves to be alluring, as are the touristic campaigns which bring revenue to the region. This regionalization of the island for touristic purposes runs parallel to a hostility to inauthentic portraits of Newfoundland. The best-known case is the controversy raised

by the novel *The Shipping News* by American writer Annie Proulx, which was turned into a Hollywood film in 2001.

Noreen Golfman's chapter records the transactions between the real and the fictional in a scenario of continual struggle between the local and the marketable in a region where opportunities for growth (cultural and economic) may result in a commodification of place, a side effect that may not be so burning any longer.

Newfoundland is renowned for its orature, and a comprehensive book on Newfoundland and Labrador could not do without a chapter on oral storytelling. In "Not in My Time, and Not in Your Time: Storytelling and Change in Newfoundland and Labrador," Dale Jarvis displays scenarios where storytelling took place both in the past and at present as he reviews how its different traditions have evolved and survived through the centuries. His essay includes different kinds of orature, both private and public, formal and informal, including the French-Newfoundland tradition: times, recitations, legends, Märchen, ghost and fairy stories, etc. Family meetings, wakes, logging, fishing and hunting were some of the situations in which these narratives were first told. A contextualization of these activities gives the reader an accurate idea of the kind of society that found sustenance in stories before storytelling became professionalized.

Avoiding trite generalizations about the status of the oral traditions in an era of technology, Dale Jarvis gives current information about who the storytellers are and where to find their tales, as well as an update on storytelling festivals, circles and projects. Additionally, the chapter includes testimonies from storytellers and a reflection on how stories have become a source of contemporary creativity. In doing so, he attests to the important role storytelling has in Newfoundland and Labrador today.

The problems encountered with language and education in disempowered societies and the issue of revitalization of Aboriginal cultures are given special attention by Robin McGrath in "Elizabeth Penashue and the Diarist Tradition among Labrador Aboriginal People." In this essay, Robin McGrath puts her first-hand knowledge of Labrador to work and delves into the realities of Indigenous peoples by acknowledging the factors that either fostered or thwarted literacy for different Aboriginal groups. As Christianity spread, the Inuit and the Innu did not share the same fate in terms of their colonial education. Chapter ten documents the Innu's inception as writing subjects, their struggles to overcome helplessness and tragedy and to empower themselves through language. Repeatedly displaced from their homelands, when NATO low-level flights invaded what was left of their hunting grounds peaceful rebellion was aroused. Robin McGrath tells the story of the Innu awakening process into

political activism by writing in both Innu-aimun and English and explains the mixed attitudes in their communities towards activist goals, writing and translation.<sup>12</sup>

By examining the work done by Elizabeth Yeoman on the diaries of Elizabeth Penashue, an elder of an Innu community whom Robin McGrath knows well, this chapter gives access to documentation that has not yet been published and points at the future impact of these diaries for the Innu and for future researchers.

The two last chapters in the book are devoted to the visual arts. Newfoundland has a painting tradition that features artists of the stature of Christopher Pratt, Mary Pratt, David Blackwood, Gerald Squires, Reginald Shepherd and Helen Parsons Shepherd, among many others. Younger artists face the challenges of giving material shape to their own perceptions while they position themselves within a historical baggage of representations which has fluctuated between the ideas of the North as redeeming and as dangerous. In “Landscape and Narrative”, Craig Francis Power focuses on this twofold relationship the Newfoundlanders have had with their environment while discussing the work of three artists: Kym Greeley, Michael Flaherty and John McDonald. Each has found ways both to deconstruct and to pay homage to his or her past and its representations. Craig Francis Power examines technique, use of materials, gradation of color and choice of motive in their dialogue with artistic choices made by previous generations. These artists refine and subvert traditional visions of the sublime by reference to modern conditions of looking at place. The artists, two painters and a ceramicist, conceptualize in innovative ways the relationship between technique and inspiration when proving untried philosophical relationships with their own symbolic heritage and with artistic currents outside Newfoundland.

In the next chapter, “The Narrative of Light in Newfoundland Visual Art”, Jennifer Dyer also undertakes the task of outlining the imaginary continuum between artists of different generations. She looks to First Nations art and her starting point is Michael Massie, an artist of Inuit, Metis and Scottish heritage who shows how these traditions can interact with western influences. Jennifer Dyer reveals the significance of his creations by showing how objects can be made to narrate through our engagement with the movement of light. She continues with an analysis of the work of Grant Boland, Greg Bennett and Gerald Squires in which she explains how their paintings produce subtle aesthetic responses that allow us to appreciate complex dimensions added to the idea of realism.

Four artists; four ways of experiencing light. Jennifer Dyer helps us navigate their paintings and sculptures and to discover their originality by

considering light as independent from color, subject-matter, form and perspective. As a result, we feel and understand anew the spirituality of the place.

Finally, the book includes a series of interviews with Newfoundland writers which respond to a desire to make of this book a dialogue between different attitudes and forms of expression. By *listening* to writers as well as reading them, the academic approach is complemented by the personal. Both perspectives address a common range of issues, among them, the emotions, processes and choices involved in creative writing; the connotations of a sense of place in Newfoundland and Labrador; the issue of nationhood; the reverberations of history; and the meaning of tradition, change and modernity in the region. Additionally, this chapter, so full of voices, allows us to discuss the work of other writers not covered by the essays: Lillian Bouzane, Paul Bowdring, Paul Butler, Michelle Butler Hallett, Michael Crummey, Marjorie Doyle, Kevin Major, Bernice Morgan and John Steffler. Both Maura Hanrahan and Robin McGrath contribute to this book in the role of critic and of writer, because they are also interviewed in the final section of the book.

We hope that the essays and interviews comprising this book will build bridges over the gulfs of our seemingly separate worlds. The pieces transmit an incandescent energy that resists a sedate approach to Newfoundland and Labrador's realities.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Although the meaning of this title has to do with the effort to develop communication channels between Newfoundland and Labrador and Europe, the word "gulf" resonates powerfully in the Newfoundland psyche, as in the lines of the 1869 anti-confederation song "Her face turns to Britain, her back to the Gulf/Come near at your peril, Canadian Wolf!" The actual title of this chapter is, however, partly reminiscent of Newfoundland Premier Joseph R. Smallwood's thoughts in Wayne Johnston's novel *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams* (1998: 132): "Between us and them and here and there, there had to be a gulf." It was Adrian Fowler's (2003: 285) attention to this passage in his thesis that made me reconsider it as an appropriate title, taking into account that the person who is now looking out at the world is on the other side of this metaphorical gulf.

<sup>2</sup> For a critical perspective of the agonizing over the Beothuk, see Richard Budgel (1992), Dalton (1992) and Paul Chafe (2004). This book will reflect the commonly used variations in the spelling of the names of some Aboriginal peoples.

<sup>3</sup> Ironically, it was actualized on April Fool's Day, see Mathews 1990: 5.

<sup>4</sup> See Ronald Rompkey 2006: 53-62.

<sup>5</sup> The introduction to the book *extremities: fiction from the Burning Rock* (Winter 1994: xii) reads: "We live in a bruised landscape which cultivates extreme people

with extreme stories.” The expression “incandescent energy” that I use at the end of this introduction has been inspired by metaphors of the Burning Rock Collective, a Newfoundland-based writing group.

<sup>6</sup> Lecker (1991), Corse (1997), Moss (1999), Hulan (2002) and Blodgett (2003) have analyzed the prototypical patterns of Canadianness in literature created mainly for the sake of a homogeneous sense of nation. Northrop Frye’s legacy of the garrison mentality (1967: 830) and other clusters of ideas revolving around exile, invasion and the anxiety of a lack of origins have served to add strength to these views. See, for example, Robert Kroetsch (1980-1981: 16), Ramsay Cook (1984), Robertson Davies (1986), Barry Callaghan (1988) and Cynthia Sugars (2005). See Stanzel and Zacharasiewicz (1986) and Antor et al. (2005) for the European reception and teaching of Canadian literature.

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, Adrian Fowler (2003) or Paul Chafe (2008) for theses by very productive Newfoundland critics.

<sup>8</sup> In the editorial of the first issue of *Riddle Fence* (2007: 1), its editor, Mark Callanan, lamented that his call for a critical piece on “the state of critical writing in Newfoundland and Labrador” had been left unresponded to.

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, Gwendolyn Davies (1993); Wolfgang Hochbruck and James O. Taylor (1996); *Canadian Literature: The Literature of Atlantic Canada* 189 (Summer 2006).

<sup>10</sup> Some anthologies published after 2000 are as follows: *Savoury on the Tongue* (2002, Writers Alliance of Newfoundland and Labrador); *Coastlines: The Poetry of Atlantic Canada* (2002, Anne Compton et al.); *Victory Meat: New Fiction from Atlantic Canada* (2003, Lynn Coady); *A Charm against the Pains* (2006, Georgina Olivere Queller et al.), *Weather’s Edge* (2006, Linda Cullum et al.). The three-volume book *Land, Sea & Time*, edited by Eward A. Jones et al. (2000), includes every form of writing plus a bibliography for the study of Newfoundland and Labrador literature. See also *The Canadian Fiction Magazine: New Found Fiction from Newfoundland* (1990, Lawrence Mathews, guest editor).

<sup>11</sup> See James Overton (1996: 149), Frank Davey (1998: 2, 16) and Tracy Ann Whalen (1998: 118; 1999: 3-11; 2004: 52-64).

<sup>12</sup> Both Dale Jarvis and Robin McGrath provide, at the end of their essays, a list of recommended books, websites and audiovisual material related to oral storytelling and Aboriginal issues in Newfoundland and Labrador. For a list of books that cover a variety of topics, see Maura Hanrahan’s chapter.

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