

Ursula A. Kelly and Elizabeth Yeoman, eds., *Despite This Loss: Essays on Culture, Memory, and Identity in Newfoundland and Labrador.*

Marilyn Porter

Volume 26, numéro 1, spring 2011

URI : https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/nflds26_1rv06

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Faculty of Arts, Memorial University

ISSN

0823-1737 (imprimé)

1715-1430 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce compte rendu

Porter, M. (2011). Compte rendu de [Ursula A. Kelly and Elizabeth Yeoman, eds., *Despite This Loss: Essays on Culture, Memory, and Identity in Newfoundland and Labrador.*] *Newfoundland Studies*, 26(1), 131–133.

but in some cases this leads to a rather heavy-handed sense of irony and a slightly clichéd notion of life's unpredictability.

Despite an occasional weak story, an advantage to the multiple voices that Collins creates in this collection is that he avoids repeating a tiresome formula in which the reader is forced to see a rural community only through the eyes of an educated character who subsequently faces marginalization for his or her difference. Collins depicts anti-intellectualism and other polarizations endemic to rural life — especially horrific in “The Darkness and Darcy Knight” — without limiting his perspective to that of the educated. Other characters of varying intelligence, education levels, and aptitude are portrayed sympathetically, indicating a commitment to a fair exploration of rural life in Newfoundland by an author who knows his subject well.

In all, Collins's fictional town of Darwin is one the reader will want to visit for its sheer abundance of character study and its realistic depiction of rural life. Darwin's residents have a lot invested in how they are perceived in the community, and Collins's stories provide us with a privileged look beyond the veneer to a seedier side of the happy outport. This is a welcome addition to any collection of writing about Newfoundland, and a book that should be of interest to anyone who enjoys Canadian or rural literature.

Gina Granter
Memorial University and Dawson College, Montreal

Ursula A. Kelly and Elizabeth Yeoman, eds., *Despite This Loss: Essays on Culture, Memory, and Identity in Newfoundland and Labrador*. St. John's: ISER Books, 2010. ISBN: 978-1-894725-09-5.

THIS COLLECTION OF essays is based on a workshop held in 2006, which brought together a diverse group of people to think and talk about how the ‘experience of loss and unresolved grief’ have marked and shaped ‘us,’ i.e., Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, especially in the context of culture and of an examination of what Newfoundland and Labrador means as ‘home’ both for those who are here, and for those who have left.

The diversity between both the approach and the background of the participants leads to an inevitable unevenness in this book, with contributions including a wide range from recondite and theoretical musings to grounded community activism, and from photo-based analysis to edited interviews. This challenges the reader not only to understand the contributions for themselves but also to relate them to each other and to the overall theme. All the contributions are focused tightly on the Newfoundland and Labrador experience, which is both a strength and a weakness.

Part of the strength lies in the profound, and often personal, knowledge of the kinds of grief and loss the authors are writing about. This is particularly true when the contributions directly address the decimation of the culture and economy of the Labrador Innu and Inuit peoples. Tshaukuesh (Elizabeth Penashue) and Sophie Tuglavina show us directly the issues they and their people face, where they battle the losses their people continue to experience. Dianne Grant takes up some of the same issues, from the perspective of an outsider interested in education. Marlene Creates, Robert Mellin, Clar Doyle, and Kate Bride, in different ways, either create or study visual, photographic, dramatic, and architectural ways of representing a culture of which only echoes remain. The losses they describe are as varied as the closure of the Grace Hospital, the preservation of vernacular architecture (and the loss of the lifestyle that supported it), the periodic tragedies that afflict societies dependent on resource extraction in a harsh climate, and the dramatic rendering of the loss of traditional outport culture. Two authors — Susan Tilley and Jennifer Wicks — write about the complex of loss (of language and of identity) that they experienced as Newfoundlanders who have spent time away, and Vicki Hallett talks about a different kind of belonging and not belonging as her mother and grandmother negotiated their places in a family that had moved “into town.” The remaining papers (Kelly, Yeoman, Hoben, and Kennedy), while looking at particular tragedies or losses, try to take a wider view of the context and meaning of both loss and, as they see it, of unresolved grief. Of course, the losses described in this book are not the only ones in Newfoundland and Labrador history and several authors point out that the extermination of the Beothuk was so complete that their loss is now a silent reproach.

Even this brief summary should show that this is a powerful collection that makes serious efforts to understand significant aspects of Newfoundland and Labrador identity and culture — and to move on from there. Several of the authors — the two editors in particular — are very clear that they want to get past the negative grieving of the cultural impact of loss that results in nostalgia, negativity, even a kind of xenophobia, to build a more hopeful future based on an honest recognition of what we have lost and an optimistic appraisal of what that future might hold. However, because of the way the book is framed, a number of papers dwell on loss and grief to the exclusion of more hopeful realities or happier memories. The overall result does tend to overplay the negative aspects of loss over other interpretations that might explore the positive side of changes and adaptations. This is not helped by the lack of contextualization of the position of Newfoundland and Labrador in the wider flow of history. Some authors, especially the more academic ones, do cite studies and reflections on other experiences of loss, and mention similar situations elsewhere, but they do not enter into close comparison regarding *if*, or *why*, the situation and the consequences were different here. The decimation of rural communities is a near-universal process and is coupled with the massive flooding of rural populations into cities and urban areas. We find deserted or impoverished

villages in practically every country in the world — from Scotland to China; from Brazil to Australia. We also find that inshore fisheries have collapsed worldwide, taking their communities with them. Any community that depends on resource extraction, especially in harsh climates, is prone to the kind of tragedies that Newfoundland and Labrador knows so well. In many cases, the result has also been forced out-migration and a sense of loss of culture and identity, together with efforts to reconstitute cultures and practices by living in the same localities in their new cities and preserving remnants of their cultural practices and values, just as Newfoundlanders do in Toronto and Fort McMurray. This is not to deny the reality of loss of so many rural communities, but it is to suggest that our experience is not unique and that we could learn much from how other communities have responded.

Marilyn Porter
Professor Emeritus, Memorial University