Newfoundland and Labrador Studies

Robert Chafe. *Two-Man Tent*. St. John's: Breakwater Books, 2016. ISBN 978-1-55081-660-0

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Boschetti, F. (2017). Compte rendu de [Robert Chafe. *Two-Man Tent*. St. John's: Breakwater Books, 2016. ISBN 978-1-55081-660-0]. *Newfoundland and Labrador Studies*, *32*(1), 246–248.

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Published in October 2016, *Two-Man Tent* is Robert Chafe's first collection of short fiction. Governor General's Literary Award for Drama winner (2010), playwright, and artistic director of Artistic Fraud of Newfoundland, Chafe has written stage plays such as *Under Wraps* (1997), *Tempting Providence* (2002), *Afterimage* (2010), *Oil and Water* (2011), and *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams* (2015). *Two-Man Tent* is a collection of seven short stories dealing with a whirl-wind of issues concerning relationships involving loss, blame, failure, uncertainty, sexual orientation, conflict, and (dis)connection. The stories are simultaneously interrupted and held together by a series of online conversations between a Chafe-character and a man he meets on a "gay chat site" (176), with whom he subsequently spends a brief vacation in Washington, DC.

The collection is experimental in its form and mirrors contemporary relationships — by reproducing the myriad of ways in which people nowadays are connected electronically, and by tackling how their feelings are affected by online communication. In the "Woof" sections (numbered one to four), in which Chafe reports the online conversations he has with his friend, the author skilfully switches from chats, instant messages, texts, and e-mails. To begin with, the conversations are made very current by Chafe's inclusion of links to YouTube videos, screenshots, photos, and mentions of Facebook, Twitter, and TED talks. Furthermore, the exchanges appear authentic and contemporary because of the insertion of details such as the delivery problem experienced by Chafe when he sends a food picture and his friend does not receive it. The gaps and silences between messages, later ignored or forgotten, reproduce the "jumps" from one topic to another characteristic of online communication, frequent when trying to create a connection with someone we do not know and with whom we are unable to communicate face to face.

From the online conversations we discover that Chafe and the

man exchange a few phone calls as well, but we are unable to "listen" to them, as the focus in the collection is on the "visual" and the "written." When they start chatting, the two men send flirty messages to each other, and slowly commence to exchange deeper conversations. After a few months, they discuss how their exchanges have turned into something not-so-frequent-anymore, and wonder whether their messages have decreased in frequency because they have become more comfortable as they have come to know each other better. The chat sessions cover all of the stages of a relationship built and developed online, including questioning whether the other person has stopped responding because he is offended or annoyed — for example, Chafe asks: "Is it something I have said or done?" (125).

Not only are all the sections of the book (and the different segments of each story) held together by an icon resembling a tent (which evokes the title of the collection and of one of the stories), but Chafe also operates on a double level to blend the stories of the collection and the online conversations. On the one hand, details and events occurring in the stories reappear in the chats, and common threads hold the collection together, such as feeling out of place, experiencing loss, and having a connection to St. John's. On the other hand, the online conversations are presented as taking place at the same time in which Chafe is writing the collection of short stories. Meta-literary reflections permeate Chafe's chats, in which he often reflects on the structure of his collection: "my original idea was to do a series of stories that could/would be categorized by a body part . . . on the whole this is not coming together like that, so I have no idea what I am writing now" (33). The Chafe-character focuses on rearranging the collection: "I'm jumbling them up and sorting them into chapters of a sort. They're gonna be a kinda examination of 'obstacles'. First chapter, distance. Second chapter, politics. Third chapter, ??. Maybe desire. Or lack thereof? Hence melancholic. Heavy but beautiful too. Ya know?" (178). However, we are not provided with Chafe's final decision on how the collection will be ultimately structured: that aspect is left to the attention and discovery of the

reader. What emerges with clarity is the Chafe-character's (and per-haps Chafe-the-author's) desire to use the chats to "comment on" and "illuminate" the fiction of the short stories (185) in an attempt to play with the boundaries between fiction and reality.

In fact, in *Two-Man Tent* Chafe plays with real versus fictional, clearly stating that he is "borrowing heavily from real life" (33). During one of the chats, his friend does indeed ask whether Chafe is "trying to script" him like "a character in one of [his] plays" (176). Furthermore, Chafe includes a real picture of himself as his character's profile photo, while his friend's photo is blurred. The real and the fictional blend even further when it comes to naming: when Chafe asks for his friend's permission to use their online conversation in his book, he offers to use a pseudonym rather than a real name, or even to omit his name. His friend does not want to be identified with a name, but mentions (jokingly?) that he would not mind having the book dedicated to him. Indeed, the volume has a dedication: "For Charlie," a detail that makes the reader wonder whether Chafe is once again disrupting the distinction between real and fictional. However, more confusion is added by the fact that other than the blurred photo and the letter "G" in some of the chats, no pseudonym is used to identify the man from the US.

Two-Man Tent is a thought-provoking collection that skilfully merges "regular" short stories with texting, chats, and e-mails to pro-vide a truthful depiction of contemporary relationships and online habits. Typos, pauses, silences, unsent drafts, and well-thought-out questions make Chafe's account interesting to both a younger and a more mature audience.

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