

***Home Medicine : The Newfoundland Experience.* By John K. Crellin. (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994. Pp. 280.)**

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hungry. But it will anger you for not giving the tools to contextualize what is told you.

The book ends with an anecdote about one of Helen Creighton's informants, an important one — he was one of the people who sang "Farewell to Nova Scotia" for her in the 1930s. She went on to publish the song and in the 1960s it became an anthem of provincial pride. At age 90 this man was asked to sing it on a television programme. Rather than sing it as he had sung it for Creighton decades earlier, he sang it in the new-fangled Catherine McKinnon fashion. The mediated text had become the prestige text. If Catherine McKinnon sings it this way, he said, then it *must* be right ! This struck Creighton as puzzling. Croft passes the story on with no comment.

Such an experience is common to many folklorists, especially those of us who engage in exactly the kind of popularizing that is inevitable when your scholarly work becomes the object of popular interest. It's a feedback mechanism that a couple of generations ago was looked down on over Dorsonian noses, but which nowadays is seen as being part of the dynamic of folklore in every era.

We folklorists in the late 1990s know there is no "pure" folk tradition. *It's all been cut with stuff*. Every recording of folklore, written or electronic, every collection of folklore, published or archival, every compilation of folklore, by academic or enthusiast, is an intrusion into the tradition. In this way, this book is like all our works as folklorists. It is not so much a collection of folklore as an enterprising source of it, a miscellany of popular antiquities.

And as annoying as its lack of source information may be, I cannot help but admire its good looks, and its good conversation.

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*Home Medicine : The Newfoundland Experience*. By John K. Crellin. (Montreal : McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994. Pp. 280.)

*Home Medicine* is an interesting and engaging book that should appeal to popular and academic audiences. Crellin sets out to present both a comprehensive reference to folk cures and self-treatment and a social history of Canadian pharmaceutical practices in Newfoundland. The bulk of the book consists of an encyclopedic listing of ailments and treatments used during the first half of the 20th century in Newfoundland. For each entry (i.e., from abortion to Zam-Buk ointment), Crellin provides a brief description, in which data on the incidence and

recognition of each specific complaint among Newfoundlanders are presented and speculations are made concerning utilization of home treatments versus reliance on commercially available patented medicines. Overall, Crellin claims that Newfoundlanders lacked development of local lore, particularly in terms of herbal remedies. They were, however, ready consumers of locally available patented medicines that were widely advertised in medical booklets and newspapers during this time. Many entries contain a section where Crellin, a physician, speculates on the effectiveness of the cure and provides an update on how the complaint would be self-treated today. This usually leads to a comparison of current day holistic health beliefs with the more traditional ones. References to contemporary biomedical treatment issues are more rare.

Crellin also purports to present a social history of medical practice in everyday life in Newfoundland. This social history is based on data from folklore archives, medical advertisements, and health-care interviews. Some tantalizing observations are made. Crellin notes that local language could be uncommonly expressive with metaphors, analogies, and resonances helping to preserve memories and experiences. Themes of purification and elaborate concepts of strength and weakness seem to characterize many of the entries, especially those related to nerves and blood. The important roles women played in family health care are noted. Fatalism is offered as a probable explanation of lack of elaborated home remedies. Yet the sociocultural or historical relevance of these observations remains unexplored. Especially frustrating is Crellin's unwillingness to deal with some seminal social issues such as the association of complaints suffered by Newfoundlanders in the period from 1900-1950 with poverty. A generic Newfoundlander dominates the text; no distinctions between social class, urban or rural residence, levels of education, or religion are made. Although mention is made of health status being related to the nature of the fisher, this seemingly important social factor is largely overlooked. Moreover, source materials fail to provide a sense of everyday life. For example, mention is made of patented medicines and home remedies that could have been used as abortifacients, but Crellin states that there is no evidence that they were ever used for this purpose in Newfoundland. Divorced from the actual experience of Newfoundlanders, they are discussed at length nonetheless.

The notion of social history as the interplay between mainstream medicine and physicians, on the one hand, and alternative treatments and folk beliefs, on the other, could certainly benefit from a more critical tone. For example, although Crellin mentions chemical coping, and physician and patient abuse of prescription and over-the-counter drugs, he does not pursue the important social dimensions of these issues, such as why the prescription rates for tranquilizers for women in Newfoundland are among the highest in North America. The sections on obesity contain no mention of dangerous dieting fads and abuse of diet pills. The sections on laxative use and purging fail to address abuse of these

treatments especially as administered to very young children to “clean them out.” I have seen economically-strapped mothers who cannot afford to buy food for their families because a physician — who has no understanding of their household finances — has prescribed expensive brand-name drugs for children suffering from a common cold.

The book is clearly written with a physician in mind. It opens with a scenario of how difficult or dangerous it could be, in the first half of the 20th century, for the physician to travel to his patients. Yet, the reader is given no sense of what it was like to live in pain with multiple complaints. I would also contend that, while it is important that physicians become more aware of local metaphors or idioms of distress and patient use of alternative medicines, it is also important to realize that if Newfoundlanders today remember little discussion about health in the old days it is because in the old days discussion of health care was discussion about “everything else” (my term not Crellin’s). Crellin, however, put this “everything else” beyond his analytical reach with a quote from Faulkner (p. 45) : “ ‘You can’t understand it. You would have to be born there.’ ” I would argue that any microanalysis of medical practice in everyday life must grapple with local understandings. This is currently being done, as attested by the recent flowering of studies on the embodiment of culture and the social construction of health and illness. But it is precisely at this point that Crellin gives up. Nevertheless, *Home Medicine* represents a promising first step towards a social history of self-remedy in Newfoundland.

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*Myth and Milieu : Atlantic Literature and Culture, 1918-1939.*

Edited by Gwendolyn Davies. (Fredericton : Acadiensis Press, 1993. Pp. iv + 209.)

While the years between the two great wars were not a time of prosperity in Atlantic Canada, the region’s economic hardship did not inhibit cultural activity. In an effort to document the range of cultural endeavour, a conference called “Myth and Milieu : Atlantic Literature and Culture, 1918-1939” was held at Acadia University in 1991. The proceedings of that conference are the subject of this volume edited by Gwen Davies.

The collection contains an Introduction and nineteen essays organized under six categories. Many of the essays focus upon individual cultural workers such as L.M. Montgomery, E.J. Pratt, Thomas Raddall, Helen Creighton, Frank Parker Day, Vernon Rhodenizer, Molley Beresford, G. Horn Russell, Donald