

Peter Narváez. *Sonny's Dream: Essays on Newfoundland Folklore and Popular Culture*. (St. John's, NL: 2012, Department of Folklore, Memorial University of Newfoundland. Pp. xxi + 314, photographs, index. ISBN 978-0-88901-426-8.)

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[See table of contents](#)

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facilitate economic growth (Weir, Molloy and Urbaniak, Morisset and Mace); (2) the environmental lessons that can be learned from how these towns were developed (Barbara Hogan et al.); and (3) the potential for tourism development based on the unique histories of these communities (Urbaniak, Weir). By including essays that provide both practical guidance for preservation and adaptive reuse of heritage structures (MacKinnon, Molloy and Urbaniak), the volume situates itself as a jumping off point for both further academic research and the important community conversations about the intersection between the built environment and culture, as well as the importance of preserving company towns.

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Peter Narváez. *Sonny's Dream: Essays on Newfoundland Folklore and Popular Culture*. (St. John's, NL: 2012, Department of Folklore, Memorial University of Newfoundland. Pp. xxi + 314, photographs, index. ISBN 978-0-88901-426-8.)

The late Peter Narváez is essential reading for the history of Canadian folklore. His influence and impact can be seen through the articles that comprise the 2007 special issue of *Ethnologies* (In Honour of /Hommage à Peter Narváez, 30.2), to which I was a contributor, and to the size and breadth of his research contributions, a list of which is included in this excellent volume. (In full disclosure, my wife was engaged to help prepare this list and compile the index.) As Neil V. Rosenberg indicates in his trenchant introduction, *Sonny's Dream* originated as a tribute of sorts by the Folklore Department of Memorial University in an effort to get his various writings about Newfoundland together in one place. But upon hearing of the project Narváez took an active lead in its production, updating the articles and organizing them into themes that would be of the greatest use to the prospective reader. I assume he imagined both the general reader interested in Newfoundland folklore and popular culture and, perhaps more immediately, students in a course on the same. The scope of *Sonny's Dream* is thus somewhat modest: absent are his writings on blues outside of the Newfoundland context, which would make for a wonderful follow-up

volume, especially if his scripts for radio showcases and documentaries are included. But his writings on Newfoundland are remarkable in their own right: they helped to transition the study of Newfoundland culture from something where folklore only existed in the past or in the periphery to recognizing that it is always, and always has been, emergent.

The essays are divided into four sections. The first, "Folk Narrative," includes his well-known article on "Newfoundland Berry Pickers 'In the Fairies'" (which was included in his *The Good People: New Fairy Lore Essays* [1991]) and the retitled "Folklore About Seniors: Newfoundland Media Legends" (previously "The Folklore of 'Old Foolishness,'" a better title but one that needs immediate contextualizing). The latter turns on the conceit that technology (specifically media, but other examples as well) are detrimental to traditions: he points out, however, that new lore emerges about these technologies and, specifically, the older generation's inability to use them, much how Robert Klymasz described dialect humour among Ukrainian Canadians as being directed towards the first generation by the second (1970). Narváez also demonstrates how this is just as often inverted when the seemingly backwards "old fool / bayman / Newfoundlander" demonstrates ample facility with technology and shocks his or her "outport sophisticate / townie / mainlander" foil. He also makes ample case for legends as spread through media to be a legitimate avenue for folkloristic investigation, an idea not nearly as mainstream in 1984 as it is today, but one that he was already engaging elsewhere.

I must break here to give my one main criticism of the volume: Narváez provided the order for the articles by clustering them thematically, but had he left them chronological it would have allowed the reader to see his thought unfold. Perhaps we like to imagine our thinkers arriving fully formed, but they too develop over time. His last point about what he called "media lore" was articulated in his article "Joseph R. Smallwood, 'The Barrelman': The Broadcaster as Folklorist," which predates "Folklore of Old Foolishness" but appears in the fourth section "Popular Culture." A footnote does direct one to that article (but not to its placement in the book). As a reader I do not like seeing his work siloed, and I would be much more inspired to see how his work in one area pays off in another. But I might be a peculiar reader, and I would not deny that the clustering might be of use to others.

The second section, "Custom," includes his articles on play at Newfoundland house wakes and emotional display at CBC Radio "Send-off"

parties. The former could just as easily fit in the “Folk Narrative” section as it concerns stories of incidents at wakes as much as it concerns the incidents themselves, and it remains an exemplary piece of both archival research and theoretical analysis. The latter demonstrates his affinity for occupational folklife (a theme through much of his work in section three, “Vernacular Music”) and also his sensitivity to issues of class and folk group affiliation even within ostensibly “white collar” settings such as broadcast journalism.

“Vernacular Music” is the longest section of *Sonny’s Dream*, demonstrating his facility with an area of culture in which he was both participant and observer. “Newfoundland Vernacular Song” articulates his overall project perhaps better than any other piece: a desire to break through ideological constructs and filters when determining what constitutes the folk culture of a place.

In regarding vernacular song in a holistic sense, one must not artificially separate songs into imposed *etic* (analytical) categories by genre or provenance. . . . From the vernacular perspective the significant question does not concern provenance so much as *real repertoire*, i.e., “what songs have people actually been performing and creating?” (112)

Replace “songs” with “customs,” “stories” or any other practice and you have the center of the Narváezean approach. To be sure he was not alone in this train of thought but was an exemplary and consistent practitioner of it, providing a thread between his seemingly disparate pursuits. Then follows the brief “The Folk Parodist,” one of the oldest writings in this book, which again takes the process of applying new words to established melodies seriously and not as some lesser or devolutionary practice, irrespective of whether the intent was humorous or serious.

“Collective Consciousness, Satirical Song and Labour Song” is the only previously unpublished essay in this anthology, although it has some overlap with his contribution to the *Festschrift* for Neil V. Rosenberg (2005). More accessible than that piece, it has the advantage of being written alongside this anthology’s compilation to draw on and refer the reader to his collected academic output. He returns to the subject of his dissertation, the songs of the Buchans Miners in their 1973 strike, and demonstrates how this is part of a strong tradition of satirical song in the Northeast, employing both parody and esoteric lore, and part of occupational folklife. More than anything he approaches the issues of class and local affiliation through the lens of “collective consciousness,” which he defines as “a form of achieved knowledge wherein the members of a group perceive the mutuality of

their socioeconomic position within a larger society through a holistic understanding of the power relations within that social hierarchy” (124). As ever, he is adverting to the often overlooked point that the folk are *intelligent* creators of culture.

The section concludes with three essays: his study of Ron Hynes’s “Sonny’s Dream” framed as vernacular music; song responses to the cod moratorium; and, my favourite from the collection, “Unplugged: Blues Guitarists and the Myth of Acousticity.” In this chapter his understandings of the blues as both performer and academic intersect, using the St. John’s blues scene—in which he was an elder statesman—as his ethnographic context. Despite the fact that it is achieved with pick-ups and other sophisticated technology, the acoustic blues gives the impression of less mediation and thus somehow greater authenticity. It provides the best transition to section four, “Popular Culture.”

This section begins with the aforementioned entry on Joseph Smallwood and his “Barrelman” radio broadcast, which, “Without labelling such materials ‘folklore.’ ... collected and broadcast an abundance of Newfoundland oral traditions and this folkloric content provided entertainment and grass roots interest for his listening audience” (226). Narváez makes the case not only that Smallwood functioned as a (lay-?) folklorist, but also that the intimacy of radio and Smallwood’s developing gifts as a broadcaster bridged the physical distance between the performer and the audience, thus rendering it closer to a dialogical folk performance and away from a unidirectional missive. This is keeping with the model he had been developing concerning the folklore-popular culture continuum and the bridging effects of both the particular medium and the practiced users thereof (later spelled out in the *Media Sense: The Folklore-Popular Culture Continuum* anthology co-edited with Martin Laba [1986]). “Folk Talk and Hard Facts: The Role of Ted Russell’s ‘Uncle Mode’ on CBC’s *Fishermen’s Broadcast*” is a companion piece of sorts, which considers the “Tales from Pigeon Inlet” segment of the broadcast – fictional vignettes grounded in outpost life. One of the concepts most developed in this piece is the “rhetorical community,” defined as both “groups united by sensory perceptions rather than by contiguity in physical space” (240) and “a group of radio listeners united by perceptions that approximate face-to-face relationships” (248). This cropped up frequently in his teaching about fan cultures, and informs the last essay in this section, “Fandom as Magical Practice: Great Big Sea, Stockwell Day, and Spoiled Identity,” which is the most recent previously published piece. But one can see the idea, if

not the name, throughout his work leading up to this point, including the two chapters that make up the rest of this section and are two of his earliest writings on the province, “Country Music in Diffusion” and “The Newfie Bullet – The Nostalgic Use of Folklore.” In Newfoundland, a people separated by distance are brought together through joint participation in media, which use forms of both new and old provenance to serve the same basic function as ‘face-to-face’ communication, namely the building and reaffirmation of a mutual sense of community affiliation.

My quibbles are few: it would have been nice if all the writings had been brought into uniform style, and cross-references standardized. But whatever haste may be felt in its production is offset by the understanding that the Folklore Department wished to present him with the book before his death, which came all too soon.

This book should find a place on every Canadian folklorist’s shelf: individually and collectively the writings demonstrate how the increasingly complex understanding of local and traditional cultures developed by folklorists, ethnologists and students of popular culture can be applied to a specific place and how one can demonstrate an appreciation for the dynamics of as rich and self-reflexive a traditional culture as Newfoundland’s without resort to romanticism or other ideological constructs.

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