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The Beothuks and the Newfoundland Mind

RICHARD BUDGEL

> When the cumulative impact of continuous misinterpretation of historical events is surveyed and appraised we will find that much of what passes for history dealing with Indians and whites is a mythological treatment... disguised as history.[1]

THE DEATH IN 1829 of Shawnadithit, the last known Beothuk Indian, and the extinction of her race, are events in Newfoundland history which have captured the attention of writers throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The extinction of the Beothuk was a tragedy, but not one without parallels elsewhere in North America and the rest of the European colonial world.

There is a significant and apparently growing group of Newfoundlanders who produce "amateur" or popular histories or commentaries on the Beothuk. Popular histories often serve an important function of attracting readers who would not otherwise be interested in a particular subject. However, as I will show in this paper, the work of these non-academic writers is more interesting as a cultural and literary phenomenon than as history.

There is also a small and dedicated group of academics, mainly non-Newfoundlanders resident in Newfoundland, who are committed to furthering the knowledge of the Beothuk by using ethnohistorical methods which combine interpretations of primary documentary sources with archaeological research. I have not examined, except as background, the work of these writers. A review of their work would usefully be the subject of further study.[2]

The abundance of Newfoundland writing about the Beothuk may relate in part to the publication in 1915, and reissue in 1974, of James P. Howley's *The Beothucks or Red Indians: The Aboriginal Inhabitants of Newfoundland.* Howley's work is more published archive than narrative history. He collected and transcribed primary sources, ranging from the fifteenth to the nineteenth centuries, which discussed the Beothuk, and linked these pieces together with minimal commentary of his own. Howley is in the tradition of the Newfound-

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land amateur historian, and few of his successors have expanded on the information he disseminated. Its availability and accessibility facilitate the work of twentieth-century Newfoundland writers, who often do little but regurgitate the references which Howley collected.

A capsule version of Beothuk history will be useful to readers of this paper. As residents of the eastern seaboard of North America, the Beothuk were among the first North American aboriginal people to encounter Europeans. When Europeans began fishing off the east coast, the Beothuk did not become involved with the European fishery, but their own coastal fishing sites were preempted by the Europeans for the inshore fishery and fishing premises. This left the Beothuk more dependent on the resources of the Newfoundland interior, which may not have been abundant enough to provide adequately for their population. The Beothuks stole European goods which they had no other means of procuring, engendering European hostility and violence.[3]

At least initially, no significant fur trade was prosecuted in Newfoundland. However, by the mid-eighteenth century "fishermen-furriers" began to trap furs in northeastern Newfoundland, in what would normally have been an economic niche for aboriginal people. By this point relations were so hostile that the Beothuks would not have been able to occupy this niche had they wanted to. Their lack of participation in the European economy meant that their disappearance had no economic significance.

Newfoundlanders break down into two camps on the Beothuk question: those who would accept partial or full responsibility for the disappearance of the tribe, and those who refuse to accept any collective responsibility for the actions of their ancestors.

Newfoundland writing about the Beothuk, whether defending settlers or Indians, serves as an example of many of the stereotypical representations of North American aboriginal people or of "primitive" peoples generally. Both sides of the dispute, which centres on the causes of the extinction of the Beothuk, often lose themselves in a soup of racial stereotypes, apocryphal stories and cultural archetypes that do little to dignify the arguments they are meant to support. Still, it is a discussion of surprising vitality in Newfoundland and one which, in the final analysis, has much more to do with the nature of contemporary non-aboriginal Newfoundlanders than with the nature of the Beothuk themselves.

The dichotomy between savagism/primitivism and civilization is central to the discussion of the Beothuk by Newfoundland writers. Stanley Diamond, in discussing the nature of anthropology, argues that western "philosophers, writers, travellers and historians have been... deeply concerned with *uncivilized* people" [emphasis mine] since ancient Greece. Diamond goes on to say that what runs through all such writing "is the sense of contrast."[4] As Roy Harvey Pearce explains in his book *The Savages of America*, for much of the history of

the paradigm of savagism versus civilization, the two qualities are seen as contrastive but also as opposite ends of a spectrum: it is possible for the savage to evolve into the civilized.[5] By the same token, the savage or primitive represents a temporal predecessor; the European observer is inclined to believe, as Diamond says, that "this is the way we were before we became what we are, this is the other side of our humanity."[6] There are, as well, subtle differences between the concept of savagism and that of primitivism. As the uncivilized man, the savage has little to recommend him; the primitive, however, is more akin to the "noble savage" whose life in a state of nature may be happier than that of the civilized man.[7] What is clear in much western thought about the savage and/or primitive, and what occurs in Newfoundland writing about the Beothuk, is that the aborigine is always referential, as part of an explicit or implicit comparison.

Newfoundland writing about the Beothuk can be organized into four main themes: 1) the Beothuks as primitives/exotics, of an essentially benign nature; 2) the Beothuks and/or their fellow aborigines, the Micmacs, as savages; 3) early Newfoundland settlers as savages; and finally, 4) parallels and relationships between Beothuks and Newfoundlanders.

Beothuks as Primitives and Exotics

Among those who accept the responsibility of Newfoundlanders for the extinction of the Beothuk, a central argument is that the Beothuk themselves were defenceless children of nature living in a somewhat improbable Garden of Eden, the island of Newfoundland, until they were disturbed by the arrival of Europeans. It is a portrayal of aboriginal people with long antecedents, one common in descriptions of European contact with indigenous groups throughout the world. In some cases the Beothuks are additionally portrayed as strange, mysterious exotics, with unknown racial origins.

In a 1954 work written as an elementary school textbook, Frances Briffett provides the most explicit expression of the children-of-nature view of the Beothuk:

> In many ways [the Beothuks] were like children. They loved to dress up. When the chief was given a towel, he put it on his head and then he and his friends joined hands and laughed and sang. Like children, too, the Indians were ready for a picnic on the beach.[8]

Elsewhere in her book Briffett describes Demasduit, a character central to the Beothuk story who was captured on Red Indian Lake in 1819, as "a gentle, graceful woman"[9] and calls the Beothuk a "shy, brave people."[10] Briffett's description is clearly meant to evoke the sympathy of her young audience for the Beothuk — a noble goal — but her method demeans the humanity of the Beothuk by casting doubt on their maturity: in essence, by infantilizing them.

James Thoms, writing for an adult readership in J.R. Smallwood's *Book*

of Newfoundland, waxes lyrical on the subject of the idyllic life of the Beothuk before the arrival of the Europeans: "In the beginning they were free. They warred with no one. They lived at peace, and flourished, and grew in numbers, until they could be counted in every part of the Island."[11] A.B. Perlin describes the Beothuk as "a simple nomadic people"[12] (it is perhaps not insignificant that in Newfoundland English "simple" can have the additional meaning of being mentally handicapped). In a variety of articles in the late 1950s and early '60s, Harold Horwood developed his portrayal of the Beothuks as a "gentle and peaceful people."[13]

The logical extension of this vision of the Beothuk as children of nature is that the Beothuks were too unsophisticated to survive after the arrival of the more technologically adept Europeans. An example cited by many Newfoundland writers is the fact that the Beothuk did not use guns or keep dogs. This is a point where the defenders of the Beothuks, and the defenders of the settlers, often agree on Beothuk primitivism. Fred Rowe, a passionate defender of Newfoundland settlers, expresses his confusion regarding the Beothuks' lack of firearms in his 1977 book *Extinction*:

> Equally puzzling is why, in spite of countless opportunities, the Beothuks never acquired guns. The simplistic answer sometimes offered is that they were terrified of those strange and deadly weapons, but other native groups were initially terrified of guns yet rapidly adjusted to them and soon learned to use them.[14]

In his later work, *A History of Newfoundland and Labrador*, Rowe arrived at what he considers a satisfactory explanation: "Taboos ... may be the explanation for their failure to adopt the use of firearms, a failure which placed them at a fatal disadvantage when confrontation with whites occurred."[15] Rowe's assessment seems to be that the Beothuk were stupid and wilful in not adopting guns. Horwood, as passionate a defender of the Beothuk as Rowe is of the settlers, attributes the Beothuk "fear" of guns to an early seventeenth century incident where a group of Beothuks were fired on from a ship: "forever afterward the natives had a superstitious dread of firearms, and one or two white men could easily put a hundred Beothuks to flight."[16] The characterization of aboriginal beliefs as "superstition" when compared to European beliefs, which are usually described as "religion," is a typical motif of primitivism. Another writer, Bob Powers, in a 1987 children's book, draws perhaps on Rowe when he says, "A final puzzling fact remains: unlike other Indians in the Americas, the Beothuk refused to use guns, leaving them only bows and arrows for defense."[17]

Puzzlement over matters such as the gun issue, while avoiding a common-sense explanation, is common among Newfoundlanders writing about the Beothuk. A probable explanation for the Beothuk not adopting firearms — one which is ignored by Newfoundland writers — is that despite Rowe's assertion that the Beothuk had "countless opportunities" to acquire firearms, they carried on little or no trade with Europeans and other aboriginal groups, and

consequently had little access to guns and gunpowder.

Beothuks are frequently described as mysterious and exotic, and as a group which bears little relation to other aboriginal groups. The fact that their history is "obscure" and that "very little is known of their origin and culture"[18] only contributes to their exoticism. Powers deserves the prize for stringing together the most epithets of this kind in the space of two sentences: the Beothuk are called "strange," "fascinating," "unusual" and "exotic."[19] Horwood hyperbolically calls the Beothuk "the greatest remaining mystery among the North American Indians."[20] For many Newfoundland writers, the mystery of the Beothuk is a built-in rationale for their own work: a number of writers refer explicitly (and ironically) to dispelling myths as a motivation for writing and publishing. Few, however, bring any new information to the task.

The mysteriousness of the Beothuk provides an opportunity for commentators to guess about their history or origins. The "lost white race" theory of their origins is one such apocryphal story. Thoms describes the Beothuks as "better-looking" than the Micmac and discusses their fairness of skin and lightness of hair.[21] J. Wentworth Day (not a Newfoundlander, but the author of an official publication of the Newfoundland government) says that the Beothuk wore plaited hair "exactly after the Viking fashion" and states that "there seems little doubt that they were cross-bred descendants of Viking seamen."[22] His use of the term "cross-bred," usually employed to refer to domestic animals or pets, offers a clue about the degree of humanity accorded by him to the Beothuk. Leo English also speculates on the Beothuk connection to Vikings and compares some known Beothuk vocabulary terms to Celtic (Gaelic) words.[23] E.L. White asserts that "the Beothucks were a white race of people from the land of Anahauc,"[24] a place name he does not then locate for us. In a theory later taken up by Thoms and Keith Winter, Horwood places the origins of the Beothuk further afield than anyone else: he traces the resemblances between Beothuk culture and that of the ancient Egyptians (citing use of red ochre, elaborate burial rituals, etc.), and asserts that the Beothuk originated in the Aleutian archipelago off the west coast of Alaska. Egyptian culture was transmitted via Asia to the Aleutians, without Egyptians themselves having necessarily migrated.[25]

As a corollary of the ancient Egyptian antecedents, Horwood, English and Thoms speculate that the Beothuks were sun-worshippers. Horwood links the Egyptian god Osiris to the Beothuk god "Kuis," and concludes that "the total evidence [of the Egyptian connection] is altogether too weighty to be overlooked."[26] The lot of sun-worshippers in the overcast and grey climate of eastern Newfoundland could not have been a happy one.

The portrayal of Beothuks as primitive and exotics contributes to an impression of them as a kind of hothouse flower, a breed too delicate to survive in the rough-and-tumble of post-contact Newfoundland. The authors of this

portrait are largely sympathetic to the Beothuk, but do not render their memory a service by describing them archetypally. The conception of the primitive, described by Diamond as "our contemporary pre-civilized ancestors,"[27] dooms the primitive group to changing, or perishing, as much as does the conception of it as savage.

Beothuks and Micmacs as Savages

If the symbol of primitivism is the noble savage, then the symbol of savagism is the ignoble savage, its evil twin. The ignoble savage can only wait to be redeemed by civilization; his life has no higher purpose and more closely resembles that of a beast than that of a human being. The Beothuk and Micmac as symbols of savagism recur in Newfoundland writing about the natives of the island, especially for those writers who would place little blame on the actions of Newfoundland settlers for the extinction of the Beothuk. Instead, in a "blame the victim" phenomenon, the savagism of the Beothuk themselves, or that of the Micmac, is censured.

By the late nineteenth century, Newfoundland writers were blaming the Beothuk for their demise, theorizing that their own actions or characteristics had caused a form of collective suicide. D.W. Prowse, whose 1895 history of Newfoundland was a standard reference work, denounces the Beothuk with nineteenth-century excess: he notes "the blood-thirsty character of these aborigines and their treachery;" says that "all their history shows the one ineradicable feature in their character was an insatiable hatred of the pale faces;" and wonders if they should be credited with "any intelligence."[28] In the same vein, Joseph Hatton and the Rev. Moses Harvey in 1883 describe the Beothuk as "treacherous murderers"[29] and, more mildly, the same Harvey describes them in another work as "wild, roving people."[30] Harvey makes an apparent attempt at balancing the noble with the ignoble savage in his statement that the Beothuk possessed the "virtues and vices of savage life."[31]

Nearly a hundred years later, Rowe in *Extinction* interprets pilfering by the Beothuk in a similarly unsympathetic (and uncomprehending) way. He claims "the Beothuk themselves probably destroyed [the possibility of friendly relations] through their persistent habit of stealing from the Europeans whatever they could carry away."[32] He says "the Beothuks were their own worst enemies ... they were guilty of aggression or hostile action of one kind or another."[33] In *A History of Newfoundland and Labrador,* Rowe states that "even those dedicated to promoting Beothuk welfare conceded that the Beothuk were cruel, unreliable and treacherous,"[34] and speculates that "perhaps [the Beothuk] regarded treachery as a virtue, as do some of the more primitive peoples of South America and the southeast Pacific."[35]

Beothuk pilfering is referred to as well by Thoms and Amy Louise Peyton. Peyton, a member of a Newfoundland family much involved with the

Beothuk, claims, somewhat improbably, that the Beothuk stole furs from the whites, forcing the whites to steal them back,[36] surely a twist on the usual pattern of the fur trade in Canada. Thoms says that the Beothuk were "forced into the thieving ways of the white man,"[37] while B.D. Fardy claims that the "treachery [of the Beothuk was] fostered by more than 200 years of suspicion, hatred and hostility."[38]

The list of Beothuk identifiers serves practically as a catalogue of savage characteristics, and shows the consistency of interpretation among many Newfoundland writers. It is useful to look simply at the words themselves, taken from the works of Prowse, Harvey, Thoms, Rowe, and Fardy.

treacherous
treachery
wild
roving
bloodthirsty
insatiable
hatred
[lack of] intelligence
thieving
stealing
guilty
aggression
hostile
cruel
unreliable

"Guilty" (used by Rowe) jumps out from the list, and it is a key word in the thesis, one which is, however, never explicitly stated by any of the authors. The moral for many of these profoundly moralistic writers is that the Beothuk got what was coming to them; their unpleasant characteristics doomed them, and the retaliatory violence which contributed to their disappearance was an understandable form of frontier justice.

The Micmac, whose descendants survive in contemporary Newfoundland, are tarred with the same brush of savagism. The Micmac are blamed in Newfoundland mythology for causing the extinction of the Beothuk by murdering them for a bounty allegedly provided by the French, who bring the Micmac to Newfoundland for that purpose. Rowe, who I believe is wrong about a great deal, nevertheless sees the Micmac role in murdering Beothuk for what it is, an example of myth-transfer with parallels in sources as distant as *1001 Arabian Nights*.[39] He discusses specific myths in this regard, one of which will be discussed below.

Other writers, however, are only too happy to lay blame at the feet of the Micmac, which serves the dual purpose of 1) partially or totally exonerating Newfoundland settlers, and 2) attributing savage characteristics to a different

aboriginal group (the Micmac) — a variation on the good Indian/bad Indian theme exploited in 1990 by Kevin Costner in his film *Dances With Wolves*, where the Lakota represent the noble savage, and the Pawnee are stereotypically venal.

Prowse is not as virulent in his denunciation of the Micmac as he is of the Beothuk, and says merely that the Micmac were partly responsible, along with the settlers, disease and famine, for the extermination of the Beothuk.[40] Harvey similarly says the Micmac attacked the Beothuk when they were already weakened by hunger and disease.[41] The full-scale myth is repeated by an anonymous writer, who cites Tocque[42] as a source, in the magazine *The Newfoundlander* in 1949:

> it seems that the Beothuk Indians somehow incurred the displeasure of the French authorities [in Newfoundland]. [Tocque] doesn't say what the cause of this French displeasure was, but at all events they actually offered a standing reward for the heads or bodies of some of the Beothuk chiefs... for this purpose they brought to Newfoundland a number of Micmacs from Cape Breton and Nova Scotia... As the Micmacs had learned the use of firearms, they had a big advantage in the wars of extermination that followed, and the Beothuks, or Red Indians as they used to be called in those days, were hunted like wolves, both by the Micmacs and the white men.[43]

The inseparability of white and Micmac responsibility is a common theme, found also in Perlin; in a column called "A Vanished Race" published in the *Evening Telegram* in 1956; in Day, who says "when the Micmac Indians migrated from the mainland they joined in the hunt with blood-thirsty zest;"[44] and in Briffett, who identifies the Micmac in parentheses as "Allies."[45] Peyton, after describing the early European settlement of Newfoundland, goes on to say:

> Then came the Micmacs, the tribes of Indians crossing to the Island from Cape Breton and Labrador. There were two Micmac tribes, the Shaunamunes (Montagnais from Labrador) [sic],[46] a friendly tribe, and the Shannocs (from Cape Breton) a tribe hated and feared by the Beothucks. The Micmacs were offered bounties by the French for Beothuck heads, and many of them were equipped and experienced in the use of firearms.[47]

Peyton cites Howley as her source for the above but chooses not to mention Howley's disclaimer on the same page, where he says that the statement "appears to me to be open to very considerable doubt in many respects."[48]

An example cited of joint Micmac/Beothuk savagery is the feast story, described by Briffett, Thoms and Rowe (who disbelieves it). A group of Micmac had met a group of Beothuk, and some Beothuk children accidentally discovered Beothuk heads concealed in a Micmac canoe. The children told their parents, who planned a feast to which the Micmac were invited. Once each Micmac was seated between two Beothuk, at a given signal the Beothuk fell upon their guests and slaughtered them. The story is, like so many others,

unverifiable, and is known to occur in other contexts; for example it is found in slightly varied form in Catherine Parr Traill's 1852 novel, *Canadian Crusoes*, in which the warring aboriginal groups are the Ojibwa and Iroquois.[49]

Depending on the writer, there is a variety of trends which can be identified in Newfoundland writing on the Micmac vis-à-vis the Beothuk. Linking the Micmac with the French puts the Micmac foursquare within Newfoundland demonology, which pictures the French as enemies because of 1) their early battles over the ownership of Newfoundland; 2) their occupancy of the "French Shore" on which they held fishing and foreshore rights until 1904; and 3) more recently, their connection with the Québécois, who have been demonized for their designs on Labrador. Describing the Micmac as later arrivals to Newfoundland, i.e. imported by the French, allows Newfoundlanders to deny the aboriginality of Micmacs, which is still largely the policy of the Newfoundland government. Assigning similar blame to both Micmac and whites reduces the white share of blame for the extinction of the Beothuk. The savagism of the Micmac damns them, and equating their behaviour with that of the early settlers introduces the theme of the savagism of the settlers themselves.

Newfoundland Settlers as Savages

The degree to which early Newfoundland settlers are depicted as savages or barbarians by many Newfoundlanders writing about the Beothuk is surprising. We are talking, after all, about the ancestors of the writers themselves, and it cannot be an easy thing to see one's antecedents as barbarous. Conceptually, however, the depiction fits well within the universe of savagism versus civilization.

In a discussion of the evolution of American thought in relation to Indians during the era of Jefferson, Bernard Sheehan introduces a framework which can usefully be applied to Newfoundland attitudes. Sheehan quotes Jefferson, in 1824, describing an imaginary trip across America from west to east:

> Let a philosophic observer commence a journey from the savages of the Rocky Mountains, eastwardly towards our seacoast. These he would observe in the earliest stages of association living under no law but that of nature, subsisting and covering themselves with the flesh and skins of wild beasts. He would next find those on our frontiers in the pastoral state, raising domestic animals to supply the defects of hunting. Then succeed our own semi-barbarous citizens, the pioneers of the advance of civilization, and so on in his progress he would meet the gradual shades of improving man until he would reach his, as yet, most improved state in our seaport towns. This, in fact, is equivalent to a survey, in time, of the progress of man from the infancy of creation to the present day.[50]

If the passage were transposed to Newfoundland, the Beothuk, an unimproved and untouched group, would be akin to the "savages of the Rocky Mountains."

The inhabitants of northeastern Newfoundland could be equated with Jefferson's "semi-barbarous [white] citizens." And in late eighteenth-century Newfoundland, man in his "most improved state" was to be found in the towns of the Avalon Peninsula, especially St. John's.

The significant difference between Jefferson's evolutionary voyage in America, and the Newfoundland equivalent, is that in Newfoundland there are no intermediary stages: the Beothuk exist as pure savages, with none of their members even beginning the acculturative process. There are no degrees of development between the "semi-barbarous citizens" of the northeast and the settlement-dwellers of the Avalon Peninsula. The lack of intermediary stages facilitates the stereotyping and makes it all the more transparent.

Among Newfoundland writers, Horwood offers probably the most vivid portrayal of the savagism of Newfoundland settlers. In a series of 1958 talks, he labels settlers as "our murderous ancestors" and describes their raids on the Beothuks as "unequalled anywhere in North America for sheer cruelty and ferocity."[51] In a 1959 article published in *Maclean's*, he states that "northern Newfoundland was settled by outlaws,"[52] whom he describes elsewhere in the article as "rough and lawless" people living in "semi-slavery."[53] He lists several pieces of evidence for their savagism: they dressed in sealskins; they had no formal law amongst them; they traded with "the more civilized parts of the colony;" and many had Inuit wives.[54]

Tony Thomas, a nature columnist for the St. John's *Sunday Express*, explains that "the white people of those days were uneducated and they lived a hard, day-to-day existence which had little room for kindness and forgiveness."[55] White, another recent commentator, says Shawnadithit was "kidnapped by a tribe of European savages ... and employed as a slave,"[56] and refers to "European barbarians, in their savage greed for wealth and power."[57] More than a hundred years earlier, Harvey said that the "rude fishermen and trappers of those days were an immoral, lawless order of men."[58] Fardy assigns blame on a more personal basis to John Peyton Sr. who, along with his "cronies," is accused of being "stealthy."[59] Fardy claims that Nonosbawsut, the husband of Demasduit, recognized Peyton Sr. "for the killer he was."[60]

The way in which the Beothuk were killed by settlers receives a great deal of attention. Briffett says they "were shot like wild animals";[61] Perlin refers to the Beothuk being "mercilessly hunted";[62] Day says they were "shot like dogs."[63] The greatest descriptive excess is employed by Horwood, who says the Beothuk were "regarded as part of the natural game of the country, which white men had the same right to hunt as they had to hunt bears or caribou."[64] With only a slight adjustment of the metaphor, Horwood reiterates in his 1959 magazine article that the Beothuk were "hunted and shot as remorselessly as the wolves and caribou."[65] His interpretation and words are remorselessly plagiarized by Keith Winter, writing in 1975 (Winter is not a Newfoundlander,

but is married to one, as he states on the dust jacket of his book). Like Horwood, he says that "frequently the motive for these brutal murders was sheer sport."[66] The use of animal metaphors, and the sports hunting comparison, unconsciously reinforce the savagism of the Beothuk (who are like animals), and explicitly point to the savagism of the settlers, for what kind of human beings except savages would do this?

Somewhat curiously, the savagism of the settlers is used as a defense or explanation by their apologists such as Rowe. While in general minimizing the degree to which settlers were involved in brutality against the Beothuk, Rowe attempts to situate it in historical context by making statements such as "the average European was prepared to turn his gun on an Indian with the same nonchalance with which he would shoot a duck or a seal."[67] In the same vein, he states that some fishermen believed "in the doctrine then so widely believed and practised elsewhere in North America that the only good Indians were dead Indians."[68] He adds that "from 1750 to 1810 or thereabouts, pioneer settlers in the British colonies and what later became the U.S. routinely slaughtered Indians with as little compunction as they killed buffalo."[69]

Rowe looks at only one side of the coin here, and employs a highly selective filtering of whatever historiography he is drawing upon. Europeans on the archetypal frontier were doubtless guilty of brutality towards aboriginal people, especially in the classic conflict between European agrarians and aboriginal hunter-gatherers. There were, however, instances, for example in the fur trade, where natives were economically essential, and their disappearance would have been correctly perceived as catastrophic. The noble Canadian tradition of treaty-making and settling Indians on reserves is often contrasted in Canadian historiography with the venal American practice of forced migration and making war on Indians. This historic dichotomy has inherent dangers of stereotyping polite Anglo-Canadians and ugly Americans; nevertheless, there have been differences between British/Canadian colonial practices vis-à-vis indigenous groups, and American practices. One of the mistakes which Rowe makes is failing to note those differences, and assuming the more widely known American experience is typical elsewhere in North America.

Rowe also refers on a number of occasions to the difficulties of life for early settlers: "in short, life was one long continual struggle to survive, and there was little room for leverage."[70] Similarly, Powers says that "the pioneer settlers were strong and stubborn, and beyond the control of Newfoundland's military government."[71]

The pseudo-historical musings of these writers are part of a spotty record for historical accuracy in Newfoundland writing about the Beothuk. Some of the analysis is based on historical fact, but the conclusions are often spurious. Horwood, Thomas, Powers, Rowe and others refer to the hardships of life for the settlers. Indeed, many Newfoundland settlers were highly indebted to fish

merchants and could be described as existing in semi-slavery. The "outlaw" nature of some settlement was literally true, given early prohibitions on settlement; and among British colonies Newfoundland was slow to develop a public and judicial administrative infrastructure. Education levels among Newfoundland fishermen at the time were certainly low, and most settlers were impoverished members of the working class.

However, many of the interpretations of the characteristics and lives of early settlers are more stereotypical than historical. For example, lack of codified and enforced law does not necessarily equal lawless behaviour and immorality, as any observer of non-literate cultures can testify. Communities can evolve codes of behaviour which have little to do with judges or police. Poverty does not equal meanness of spirit; strength, stubbornness and roughness do not eliminate the possibility of kindness or humanity. Working-class life and lack of education do not equal brutality toward one's fellows, of the same or different races. Wearing sealskins, while married to Inuit or not, does not a savage make; sealskin may have been simply practical because of the warmth it offered in a harsh climate and its ready accessibility as a material for clothing.

Writers trot out this variety of class- and race-based prejudice and historical myth perhaps to distance themselves from earlier Newfoundlanders and demonstrate the success of social evolution. See, we're well-educated middle class Newfoundlanders, look how far we've come from our savage ancestors. There is, lurking behind many of the descriptions of early Newfoundland settlers, a premise that our hold on civilization is tenuous: if, as Powers says, settlers were "beyond the control of Newfoundland's military government," then of course they were going to act like savages; without the firm hand of western institutions, society reverts to its savage origins and mores.

At a certain point the savagism of one's ancestors, and the savagism of the people which they allegedly slaughtered, inspire inevitable comparisons and relationships.

Parallels and Relationships between Beothuks and Newfoundlanders

The close relationship that Newfoundland writers assume between Newfoundlanders and Beothuk takes a variety of forms: 1) Newfoundlanders are assumed to have a particular responsibility for maintaining the memory of the Beothuk, and particular expertise in explaining what happened; 2) Newfoundlanders have to grapple with guilt, which they accept themselves or which others would want them to accept; 3) the Beothuk's status as aboriginal people can be thrown into question, which makes them all the more like white Newfoundlanders; and 4) the Beothuk constitute an object lesson for contemporary Newfoundlanders on the precariousness of life in Newfoundland.

Rowe as usual can be relied on to illustrate many of these trends. In both *Extinction* and *A History of Newfoundland and Labrador* he cites the degree of support which his interpretations find among "scientists and others ... who are regarded as authorities in their respective disciplines."[72] It begs the question as to why Rowe himself, rather than the scientists, must write on this topic. The answer he provides is that as a Newfoundlander he must dispel the confusion about the Beothuk, which has inspired both hatred of Newfoundlanders by other Canadians and "a guilt complex of the first magnitude" among Newfoundlanders themselves.[73] Rowe goes so far as to make a comparison between the seal hunt and the extinction of the Beothuk;[74] by making the comparison, he is implicitly, and I think correctly, saying that both have been used by non-Newfoundlanders as indicators of the brutality (i.e. savagism) of Newfoundlanders, and that both have contributed to a rustic stereotype of them which is not without its nasty underside.

Peyton's motivation is similar, but more personal: she sees herself, in her biography of her husband's ancestors, as "set[ting] the record straight."[75] Some interpretations "have laid a great shadow on the younger John Peyton," she says, adding: "Although history has not been kind, it is a more serious charge that it has not been accurate."[76] Armed with her credibility and expertise as a member of the same family and as a Newfoundlander, Peyton intends to correct this.

The guilt accepted by or imputed to Newfoundlanders for the disappearance of the Beothuk forever binds the two groups together. Briffett accepts it, saying "we have much to feel ashamed of in our treatment of these shy, brave people."[77] Perlin says "there is no blacker page in the history of Newfoundland than the extermination of the aborigines."[78] White asks, "why haven't these things been researched? Have these things been ignored because of these feelings of guilt?"[79] References above, such as Horwood's to "our murderous ancestors," imply that there is guilt on the part of Newfoundlanders for the tragedy of Beothuk extinction. And in an initiative by a weekly magazine, *The Newfoundland Herald*, Newfoundlanders are asked to submit designs for a proposed memorial to the Beothuks.[80] Letter writers grapple with what would be a suitable design and message for the memorial; one suggestion is that, "since they are a vanished tribe, they do deserve some recognition." In a natural (if illogical) outpouring of emotion, another writer suggests:

> Anybody who has feelings, especially Newfoundlanders, must feel remorse for a people who were here long before any of our ancestors...
>
> A memorial is only fitting. We should show our appreciation for their situation. Let's show that we are humble and affectionate people.
>
> I think a good idea for a memorial would be a miniature version of a typical Beothuck home and immediate surroundings. The plaque for this memorial might read, "A forgotten people whose children should be our friends."

In a rare prescription for action, yet another letter writer suggests that "a monument to the Beothuk should not conclude the story of our aboriginal people, it must only be a start of a new era of commitment to our native people."

The last writer quoted is exceptional because of his translation of guilt into action. This is precisely what is missing in most Newfoundland writing about the Beothuk. Guilt for the disappearance of the Beothuk can become quite comfortable, because aside from the proposed construction of a memorial it has no implications for the contemporary scene. As a *fait accompli* there is nothing that can be done to revive the Beothuk, and no attitudinal or behavioral change on the part of modern Newfoundlanders will make any difference to the issue. Newfoundlanders need not inquire whether or not they are racist because it is too late; the Beothuk are gone. As James Candow puts it in his "Obligatory Beothuk Poem":

> All the tortured white artists in the world
> couldn't put you back together again.
> Just think,
> if you were alive today
> you'd be second class citizens
> dependent on government largesse
> occasionally making headlines
> with some pathetic act of protest
> we could all laugh off or
> get indignant about.
> But dead
> you fester in our psyches like maggots
> as you are claimed by myth.
> Baby, you never had it so good.[81]

The Beothuk are part of Newfoundland mythology instead of Newfoundland reality. The historical treatment of the Beothuk and the residual guilt are not equated with the contemporary treatment of the Newfoundland Micmac, whose land claim was categorically rejected by the Newfoundland government. As suggested above, Micmac are viewed as 1) "immigrants" imported by the French; therefore not aboriginal to Newfoundland and having no aboriginal rights to the island, and/or 2) Beothuk-killers, hence undeserving of any special consideration.

There is even some confusion about the aboriginality of the Beothuk themselves. The doubts in the minds of many writers about the racial origins of the Beothuk, discussed above, contribute to this picture of the Beothuk as possibly partly European, which only reinforces their connection to Newfoundlanders. They are described incongruously as "the first *settlers* in Island Newfoundland [emphasis mine]" by the authors of a Grade V geography text; in contrast, aboriginal people in Labrador are described as "descended

from native North Americans who lived in this area long before the white men came,"[82] which clearly establishes the aboriginality of Labrador natives. In a short magazine article, Ab Stockwood describes an early explorer, John Guy, encountering "the 'settlers' of Trinity Bay, the Beothuk Indians."[83] Thoms and English refer to the Beothuks as the "first Newfoundlanders." The word "Newfoundlander" often implies an ethnic as well as a geographic description, similar to the term "Québécois." For many Newfoundlanders it is a club for members only, and membership is only through ancestry.

It is an interesting historical corollary that the mid-nineteenth century saw the beginning of Newfoundland nationalism as well as the disappearance of the Beothuk. In the 1840's — a little more than ten years after the death of the last known Beothuk — the Newfoundland Natives' Society was formed, drawing its membership from the native-born Newfoundlanders, whose interests and identity were contrasted to those not born there.[84] It was for a time a "potent force in local politics," although it proved unable to overcome continuing divisions in Newfoundland society.[85] As Keith Matthews says in his *Lectures on the History of Newfoundland 1500-1830*, many of the leaders of the Newfoundland nationalist movement were not Newfoundland-born but recent immigrants; the true distinction was between Newfoundland residents and merchants resident in England or Ireland, who still wielded considerable political power in Newfoundland during this period.[86] The disappearance of the Beothuk may have given Newfoundlanders greater conceptual room to establish and define their own rights in Newfoundland vis-à-vis those of outsiders.

Finally, Newfoundlanders are tied to the Beothuk by their marginality and their shared understanding of life in a difficult place. Rowe implies a kind of kinship in that both Newfoundlanders and Beothuk are/were persecuted unfairly: Newfoundlanders by Canadians, and Beothuks by early settlers. Thomas writes feelingly about the emotions inspired by a reconstructed Beothuk dwelling in central Newfoundland: "your senses go back in time. To spiritual kinship. With lost people."[87] Is the kinship particularly poignant because the Beothuk disappeared and Newfoundlanders fear their own disappearance? Thoms contributes a somewhat maudlin bit of prose and poetry as the conclusion to his article:

> There was no one to weep for them, until it was too late; and each of us, forever, must share the shame and blame for what happened.
>
> I, the white man, for what happened,
> I must pay eternally;
> No one wept for you, Beothuk —
> Is there one to weep for me?[88]

The rhetorical answer to Thoms' question, I think, is that Newfoundlanders feel that few others would weep for them, and the reminders of this are persistent: in 1989 it was suggested to them by a federal Cabinet

minister that their island be towed further out to sea and sunk. Because of their self-definition arising out of the circumstances of their historical development, Newfoundlanders see themselves as a people apart, with few solid relationships to the rest of the world. Like the Beothuk cut off from their Algonkian brethren, Newfoundlanders were isolated from their European roots and did not develop a strong sense of belonging to North America, or to Canada, even after forty years of being part of that nation.

The "otherness" of the Beothuk savage is something many Newfoundlanders find easier to relate to than the "belongingness" of the civilized Canadian. The question for contemporary Newfoundlanders is whether their "otherness" will continue to be a barrier to, or can become a link with, the surviving aboriginal people on the island of Newfoundland, the Micmac; does being an "other" preclude a relationship with another "other"? If the agonizing by Newfoundlanders about the Beothuk does not lead them to a more sympathetic position towards the Micmac, then the lessons of history have not been learned. Regrettably, however, this would not be the first time in Newfoundland or elsewhere that the lessons of history in relation to indigenous peoples have been ignored. Instead of being a tool for understanding, mythology in this case serves only to perpetuate sterile stereotypes which divide instead of unite.

Notes

[1]Vine Deloria, Jr., "Revision and Reversion," in Calvin Martin, ed., *The American Indian and the Problem of History* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 84-90.

[2]See, for example, by Ingeborg Marshall: *Reports and Letters by George Christopher Pulling relating to the Beothuk Indians of Newfoundland* (St. John's: Breakwater Books, 1989); *Beothuk Bark Canoes* (Ottawa: National Museums of Canada, 1985); *The Beothuk Indians of Newfoundland* (Ottawa: National Museum of Man, 1984); "Beothuk and Micmac," *Acadiensis*, Spring 1988, 17:2, 52-82; by Ralph Pastore: "The Collapse of the Beothuk World," *Acadiensis*, Fall 1989, 19:1, 52-71; "Fishermen, Furriers, and Beothuks: The economy of extinction," in *Man in the Northeast*, 1987, 33, 47-62; by Leslie F. Upton: "The extermination of the Beothucks of Newfoundland," *Canadian Historical Review*, June 1977, 58:2, 133-153, "The Beothucks: Questions and Answers," *Acadiensis*, 1978, 7:2, 150-155.

[3]R. Cole Harris (ed.), *The Historical Atlas of Canada. Volume I, From the Beginning to 1800* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987).

[4]Stanley Diamond, *In Search of the Primitive: A Critique of Civilization* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Books, 1974), 121.

[5]Roy Harvey Pearce, *The Savages of America: A Study of the Indian and the Idea of Civilization* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1965).

[6]Diamond, *In Search*, 122.

[7]See Pearce, *Savages*, 135-137.

[8]Frances B. Briffett, *The Story of Newfoundland and Labrador* (Toronto: Dent, 1954), 18-19.

[9]*Ibid.*, 21.

[10]*Ibid.*, 22.

[11]James R. Thoms, "The First Newfoundlanders: The Beothuks," in *The Book of Newfoundland*, Vol. 3 (St. John's: Newfoundland Book Publishing Company, 1967), 225.

[12]A.B. Perlin, *The Story of Newfoundland, Comprising a New Outline of the Island's History from 1497 to 1959* (n.p., 1959), 118.

[13]Harold Horwood, "The people who were murdered for fun," *Maclean's*, October 10, 1959, 27.

[14]Frederick W. Rowe, *Extinction: The Beothucks of Newfoundland* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson Ltd., 1977), 125.

[15]Frederick W. Rowe, *A History of Newfoundland and Labrador* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson Ltd., 1980), 161.

[16]Horwood, "The people," 36.

[17]Bob Powers, *Shanawdithit: Last of the Beothuk* (St. John's: Harry Cuff Publications, 1987) iv.

[18]Rowe, *A History of Newfoundland*, 153, 156.

[19]Powers, *Shanawdithit*, iv-v.

[20]Harold Horwood(?), "Aboriginal Hunters," *Evening Telegram*, February 6, 1963, 9.

[21]Thoms, "The First Newfoundlanders," 230.

[22]J. Wentworth Day, *Newfoundland, the Fortress Isle* (Brunswick Press for the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 1960), unpaginated.

[23]Leo E.F. English, "Some Aspects of Beothuk Culture (Part II)," *Newfoundland Quarterly*, Summer, 1960, Vol. LIX, No. 2, 11.

[24]E. L. White, "Our ancestors were guilty of genocide," *Newfoundland Herald*, July 25, 1987, 5.

[25]Harold Horwood, "The Story of the Beothucks," unpublished MS.

[26] *Ibid.*

[27]Diamond, *In Search*, 131.

[28]D.W. Prowse, *A History of Newfoundland from the English, Colonial, and Foreign Records* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1895), 385.

[29]Joseph Hatton and the Rev. M. Harvey, *Newfoundland; the oldest British colony: its history, its present condition, and its prospects in the future* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1883), 90.

[30]Rev. Moses Harvey, *Text-Book of Newfoundland History for the Use of Schools and Academies* (Boston: Doyle and Whittle, 1885), 26.

[31]*Ibid.*, 30.

[32]Rowe, *Extinction*, 25.

[33]*Ibid.*, 172.

[34]Rowe, *A History of Newfoundland*, 169.

[35]*Ibid.*, 172.

[36]Amy Louise Peyton, *River Lords: Father and Son* (St. John's: Jesperson Press, 1987), 20.

[37]Thoms, "The First Newfoundlanders," 225.

[38]B.D. Fardy, *Demasduit, Native Newfoundlander* (St. John's: Creative Publishers, 1988), 14.

[39]Rowe, *Extinction*, 102-103.

[40]Prowse, *A History of Newfoundland*, 386.

[41]Harvey, *Text-Book*, 31.

[42]The work referred to is Rev. Philip Tocque, *Kaleidoscope Echoes* (Toronto: Hunter, Rose, 1895).

[43]"Short Story Corner," *The Newfoundlander*, November, 1949, Vol. 11, No. 6, 4.

[44]Day, *Newfoundland*.

[45]Briffett, *The Story of Newfoundland*, 24.

[46]Peyton is mistaken in identifying the Montagnais, now called Innu, as Micmac. The Innu belong to the Algonkian linguistic and cultural group, as do the Micmac, but the two groups are not part of the same tribe, and there is no evidence that Micmac ever inhabited Labrador.

[47]Peyton, *River Lords*, 3.

[48]James P. Howley, *The Beothucks or Red Indians: The Aboriginal Inhabitants of Newfoundland* (Toronto: Coles Publishing Company, 1974), 26.

[49]Catherine Parr Traill, *Canadian Crusoes, A Tale of the Rice Lake Plains* (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1986), 136-137.

[50]Bernard Sheehan, *Seeds of Extinction: Jeffersonian Philanthropy and the American Indian* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1973), 25.

[51]Horwood, "The Story."

[52]Horwood, "The people," 27.

[53]*Ibid.*, 36.

[54]*Ibid.* It is unlikely that many Inuit were in Newfoundland by the time white settlement was expanding into the northeast. Horwood may have confused this with early white settlement in Labrador.

[55]Tony Thomas, "No chance now to get to know Beothuk race," *Sunday Express*, August 28, 1988, 30.

[56]White, "Our ancestors," 4.

[57]*Ibid.*, 4.

[58]Harvey, *Text-Book*, 30.

[59]Fardy, *Demasduit*, 30.

[60]*Ibid.*, 43.

[61]Briffett, *The Story of Newfoundland*, 20.

[62]Perlin, *The Story of Newfoundland*, 119.

[63]Day, *Newfoundland*.

[64]Horwood, "The Story."

[65]Horwood, "The people," 27.

[66]Keith Winter, *Shananditti* (Vancouver: J.J. Douglas Ltd., 1975), 7.

[67]Rowe, *Extinction*, 22.

[68]*Ibid.*, 42.

[69]*Ibid.*, 145.

[70]*Ibid.*, 107.

[71]Powers, *Shanawdithit*, 10.

[72]Rowe, *Extinction*, 9.

[73]*Ibid.*, 7.

[74]*Ibid.*, 99.

[75]Peyton, *River Lords*, xi.

[76]*Ibid.*, 49.

[77]Briffett, *The Story of Newfoundland*, 22.

[78]Perlin, *The Story of Newfoundland*, 118.

[79]White, "Our ancestors," 4.

[80]All subsequent references in this passage are from "Beothuk Memorial Update," *Newfoundland Herald*, January 3, 1987, 18.

[81]James E. Candow, "Obligatory Beothuk Poem," *Newfoundland Quarterly*, Summer 1986, Vol. LXXXII, No. 1, 11. Reprinted by permission.

[82]William F. Summers and Mary E. Summers, *Geography of Newfoundland* (Vancouver: Copp Clark Publishing Co. Ltd., 1965), 109.

[83]Ab Stockwood, "The first settlers at John Guy's Cupids," *Newfoundland Herald*, March 12, 1988, 19.

[84]Peter Neary and Patrick O'Flaherty, *Part of the Main: An Illustrated History of Newfoundland and Labrador* (St. John's: Breakwater Books, 1983), 63-64.

[85]*Ibid.*, 63.

[86]Keith Matthews, *Lectures on the History of Newfoundland 1500-1830* (St. John's: Breakwater Books, 1988), 182-183.

[87]Thomas, "No chance," 30.

[88]Thoms, "The First Newfoundlanders," 237.