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A Postcolonial Reading of Wayne Johnston's The Colony of Unrequited Dreams

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"The scuttlework of empire": A Postcolonial Reading of Wayne Johnston's *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams*

PAUL CHAFE

IN A RESEARCH STUDY for the royal commission on *Renewing and Strengthening Our Place in Canada*, historian Jerry Bannister notes that Newfoundland is one of many "post-colonial societies ... confront[ing] the effects of imperialism" (Bannister 2003, 151). At the forefront of this confrontation, according to Bannister, is a "wave of new writing based on literary interpretations of the province's past" (137). Wayne Johnston's *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams* figures prominently in the article, and Bannister claims that such examples of "historical impressionism" (139) have begun to play a major role in (re)defining Newfoundland's culture and history. While the Newfoundland postcolonial condition needs to be considered, a postcolonial *reading* of Johnston's novel best demonstrates how *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams* is essentially an investigation of Newfoundland identity which subverts and rejects various myths and tropes adopted by both islanders and outsiders.

Jim Zucchero discusses the benefits of "postcolonial reading": "Theories of hybridity and ambivalence emerging out of current postcolonial studies provide useful models and methods ... for rethinking Canadian narratives ... by reorientating us to ideas about diaspora, cultural identity and cultural belonging" (Zucchero 253). While Johnston's novel deals only briefly with the "Newfoundland diaspora" (his protagonist at one point does leave the island to find work in New York), it does deal extensively with the notion of Newfoundlanders "leaving" their colony/nation and "arriving" in a strange new country. In the opening lines of the novel, Sheilagh Fielding states that "[t]he past is literally another country now," and she again expresses the anxiety generated by the loss of "cultural identity and

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cultural belonging" brought on by such a unique "diaspora" near the end, when she claims, "[w]e have joined a nation that we do not know, a nation that does not know us" (3, 560).

Yet to know Newfoundland proves to be as difficult a task for Newfoundlanders as it is for the sometime bemused, always baffled colonial educators, vice-regal representatives, and appointed commissioners, who try to define and govern the island during the period covered by the novel. Johnston and his characters at different times regard the island with earnest romanticism and cutting cynicism, limitless enthusiasm and self-ironic realism. A postcolonial reading of Johnston's characters will demonstrate how their ambivalence, and the failure to establish a singular Newfoundland identity, may actually empower Newfoundlanders — who Johnston is trying to liberate from notions of defeatism and the "culture of grievance" (Simpson A15) that are said to permeate this island.

Johnston rightly chooses the former premier and Newfoundland's most important cultural icon, Joseph R. Smallwood, as his protagonist. Smallwood's life (1900-1991) demarcates a period of great change and uncertainty, when Newfoundland shifted identity several times — from an independent country to an unwanted British colony, to a have-not Canadian province, to a potential goldmine of exploitable resources. By setting his novel in this century of turmoil, Johnston is able to use Smallwood's life as a microcosm of Newfoundland history, culture, and identity. As a direct reaction to the "contagion of self-debasement" (Johnston 338) epitomized by Smallwood's father Charlie and several other Newfoundland characters, Johnston depicts Joe as an optimist driven by failure, desperate to forge a new Newfoundland identity based on the tenet that Newfoundlanders "always succeed every time they get a decent chance" (Johnston 338, 386). As if to juxtapose (but not always contradict) Smallwood's confidence, Johnston creates the character of Sheilagh Fielding, an ironist, a seemingly boundless satirist (she goes so far as to assume a nom de plume so that she can wage a political war of words *against herself* in St. John's rival newspapers), and a distant cynical realist who (privately) romanticizes the past while meeting each attempt to deride or improve or otherwise know Newfoundlanders with the same acrid sarcasm. Both Smallwood and Fielding are personifications of Newfoundland, so contradictory yet so undeniably of the island that they threaten to debunk forever any notion of a singular Newfoundland character.

Johnston's *Colony of Unrequited Dreams* seems to fulfill several of the criteria of "postcolonial literature" as defined by literary critics. According to Saree S. Makdisi, many postcolonial narratives are "presented through a number of often conflicting voices" (542). Johnston's work is more a rejection of what Newfoundlanders are not, than a quest to discover what they are. Johnston's subject proves so multi-faceted that he is forced to employ two contradictory narrators to tell his tale. The authors of *The Empire Writes Back* claim that "[a] major feature of postcolonial literatures is the concern with place and displacement" and "a per-

vasive concern with the myths of identity and authenticity" (Ashcroft 8, 9). Fielding's unease over losing her home without ever actually leaving it reflects the postcolonial anxiety over finding one's place in an altered world. In Johnston's hands, Smallwood's life becomes a campaign to debunk the "myths of identity and authenticity" perpetrated by D.W. Prowse in *A History of Newfoundland* (1895) and believed by outside officials as well as Newfoundlanders. The authors of *The Empire Writes Back* also claim that postcolonial literatures "crack asunder the apparently inescapable dialectic of history" (Ashcroft 35). Recorded history is "tampered with, rewritten, and realigned from the point of view of the victims of its destructive progress" (Ashcroft 34). Johnston re-enters Newfoundland's history and gives voice to those who were denied it originally. The "[r]eceived history" (34) discussed in *The Empire Writes Back* is reduced by Johnston to just one story among many that contribute to Newfoundland's history and identity. Anne McClintock would call Johnston's novel a "hybrid history" (McClintock 292) in which multiple pasts are used to buttress an unlimited future.

While Johnston's work possesses many attributes of the "postcolonial novel," this reading of *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams* must first consider Newfoundland's claim to the postcolonial condition. If a postcolonial novel is a "counternarrative" (Makdisi 535) displaying "an inevitable tendency towards subversion" (Ashcroft 33), it is necessary first to determine exactly what narrative of Newfoundland Johnston is trying to counter and subvert through his "scuttlework of empire" (Johnston 442).

Is Newfoundland Postcolonial?

Johnston's use of the term "scuttlework" is worth reflection. It appears initially to be comparing the deconstruction of the British Empire to the scuttling or grounding of a ship. Smallwood uses the term while identifying confederation with Canada as a "mutual good riddance" (442) between exasperated Newfoundlanders and their exhausted British superiors. A grinding halt to imperialistic interference in Newfoundland would be welcomed by both sides — as Smallwood puts it, "once they were clear of us so would we be clear of them" (442). The larger meaning of "scuttlework" is hinted at by Johnston when he describes his novel as a reflection of Newfoundlanders' struggle to escape the confines of their history. Johnston has claimed that *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams*

> was written in the belief that in this story of Newfoundland, this love story whose two main players are characters inspired by Joe Smallwood and the wholly imaginary Sheilagh Fielding, readers everywhere would see reflected their own attempts to crawl out from underneath the avalanche of history with their human individuality intact. (Johnston, "Treatment")

Johnston releases his "inspired" and "wholly imagined" characters into Newfoundland's past in order to begin the usurpation of a Newfoundland identity fostered by this "received history" (Ashcroft 34):

> *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams* is not biography or history, it is a novel, fiction, a work of the imagination in part inspired by historical events and set in what Michael Ondaatje calls "historical time." ... My intention in writing *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams* was to fashion out of the formless infinitude of "facts" about Smallwood and Newfoundland a story, a novel, a work of art that would express a felt, emotional truth that an adherence to an often untrustworthy and inevitably incomplete historical record would have made impossible. (Johnston, "Treatment")

Such novels replace the "certainty" of a singular, authoritative history with a problematic plurality. Legitimized history is contaminated by the hitherto unrecognized voices of those Johnston believes are "crawl[ing] out from underneath the avalanche of history." In this light, the "scuttlework of empire" seems to refer to the holes and hatches of a ship through which crew and cargo move from deck to deck. This novel provides several entries for various Newfoundland "histories." The result is what postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha terms a "hybrid national narrative" which "turns the nostalgic past into a disruptive 'anterior' and displaces the historical present — opens it up to other histories and incommensurable narrative subjects" (Bhabha 167). The "scuttlework of empire" creates so many openings that the "historical present" becomes porous and eventually sinks beneath the incoming tide of alternative and contradictory histories. But what exactly is this "often untrustworthy and inevitably incomplete historical record" that Johnston believes is covering other Newfoundland histories?

The major source of the "grand narrative of struggle" (Bannister 2003, 128) that Johnston underwrites is Prowse's *History of Newfoundland*, a central plot device. Words are cut from it and pasted to the scandalous letter that leads to Smallwood's expulsion from Bishop Feild College. Charlie Smallwood's autographed copy of the book causes a fatal avalanche when his wife tosses it from their home. Smallwood "compulsively carries [a copy] with him throughout his journey of self-discovery" (Bannister 138) and reads it again and again as he walks across the island unionizing railway section men. Charlie Smallwood refers to the text only as "the Book," at times revering it, at other times railing against it: "[t]hat cursed Book ... I wish to God I'd never seen that Book" (Johnston 65). A counter-history which runs throughout the novel, "Fielding's Condensed *History of Newfoundland*," dedicates a chapter to "the cursed Book" she is dismantling:

> That BOOK! Had we departed from this world ignorant of its existence we should have been happier than we expect to be when the final curtain falls. Little comfort is it now that upon the publication of our History, all memory of his will, from the minds

> of the reading public be erased. If not from mine. No, never from mine, unless one of the balms of heaven be amnesia! (406)

Prowse's *History of Newfoundland* stands as the accepted narrative of Newfoundland against which Johnston's self-determining characters must establish themselves. Bannister notes that "Johnston goes so far as to depict Prowse's *History* as the secular Bible of the island's people" (Bannister 2003, 125). Writing a century after Prowse, Johnston cannot help but notice how "Prowse's view still dominates popular conceptions of history," creating a "basic prism" (125) through which Newfoundlanders regard themselves and their culture — a determining factor in the formation of the Newfoundland psyche. A text born of a "paradigm of repression" (126) which works hard to maintain that narrative, *A History of Newfoundland* is depicted as a central contributor to the sorrow and self-debasement that inflicts so many islanders in Johnston's text.

To Bannister, Prowse's *History* is "an account of how Newfoundland had triumphed in the face of adversity," a text which had inspired literature that continually

> collapses the distance between historical epochs into a single meta-narrative which deliberately blurs the line between the past and the present. Rather than triumphing over their history of oppression, according to this view, Newfoundlanders are haunted by it. We are not free from our past but trapped by it, forced to endure seemingly endless cycles of economic failure and social misery. (Bannister 2003, 125-6)

This history of abuse and exploitation at the hands of the British enabled Newfoundlanders to establish a postcolonial identity like other postcolonial nations recovering from imperial control. According to Bannister, many (including former premier Brian Peckford) believe that such a history "inflicted a debilitating psychic wound from which it was not certain Newfoundland could recover" (132). Newfoundlanders were suffering from "a kind of post-traumatic stress disorder" (132) that left them uncertain, unhappy, and forever delayed in economic and social development. Bannister notes that "Prowse was a tireless enthusiast of Newfoundland who did not disguise his efforts to promote the island's development" (127) and he makes the point that Prowse and Prowse-inspired historians (like Leslie Harris) espouse "an optimistic variant of nationalism which presents Newfoundland history as a story of struggle but not of loss" (128). While Johnston's Smallwood seems to absorb and exhibit this "optimistic variant of nationalism," he is largely alone in a novel whose characters are overwhelmed by their "history of oppression" (126).

Though he cannot be entirely blamed for the creation of the colonized and downtrodden Newfoundlander, Prowse played his part in perpetrating and solidifying this myth. In his view, Newfoundland — at best neglected, at worse op-

pressed — was a fundamentally important, though exploited and overlooked, player in the history of the British Empire. Prowse promised to immortalize the forgotten heroism of "old Devon sailors who, against tremendous odds, retained this island for England without the slightest help from the Crown" (Prowse xxv). He claimed that "our unfortunate Colony," beleaguered as it was by wars and attacks from "French privateers," was the strong link that kept Britain connected with the New World: "we were certainly the cock-pit of America" (236). Though vitally important to the consolidation of Britain's imperial presence in the New World, Newfoundland settlers were suppressed from the beginning:

> Newfoundland was colonised not by aristocratic and fantastic patentees, but by hard-working humble settlers from the West of England; oppressed by the harsh laws of the Stuarts, and persecuted by the western adventurers, they clung with sturdy tenacity to the land they had made their home. (Prowse 113-4)

Prowse essentially created from the descendants of Irish, English, and French immigrants a pseudo-race of native-born fisherfolk, labourers, and survivalists who endured enough "successive disasters ... to fill up the cup of our woe" (536). Prowse spoke for a culture that was not only destined to suffer, but *knew how to suffer*.

Prowse's (in)famous depiction of the fishing admirals immortalized the abuse Newfoundlanders allegedly suffered at the hands of the "Devonshire adventurers" for whom Parliament enacted laws "entirely to suit their selfish monopoly and greed" (Prowse 144). He portrayed the fishing admiral, representative of British authority, as a thief and a rum-runner who "freely dispensed [justice] to the suitor who paid the most for it" (226). Bannister has deconstructed this portrait, arguing that Prowse's depiction was based on (at best) fourth-hand information. Prowse had never seen a fishing admiral, and was relying on venerable accounts by Patrick Morris, who was himself pilfering from yet earlier assertions made by Lewis Amadeus Anspach. Both Morris and Anspach were "heavily influenced by John Reeves' seminal *History of the Government of the Island of Newfoundland*" (Bannister 2001, 166). "Time would fail to recount all the enormities and barbarities of these ignorant vulgar tyrants," Prowse lamented, claiming that fishing admirals "fined, triangled, and whipped at their pleasure *every* unfortunate wretch who earned their displeasure" (Prowse 226). His source was a Mr. Pearce of Twillingate who "remembered as a boy seeing *a* man triangled" (226, italics added). Incidents such as this had, by the time of the events depicted in Johnston's novel, become central "facts" which explained Newfoundland's dire financial and social situation. They were, of course, "based on little more than local legend and political hearsay" (Bannister 2001, 166).

The supposed iniquities of British officials and their hostile attitudes toward Newfoundland residents would continue to be fodder for Newfoundland historians

who followed Prowse. Patrick O'Flaherty cites a well-known seventeenth-century British aphorism which is meant to encapsulate the English attitude toward British emigrants: "An Englishman transplanted ... was not the same kind of Englishman" (O'Flaherty 54). O'Flaherty's text abounds with unflattering depictions of Newfoundland settlers set down by British observers:

> The [Newfoundland] inhabitants were unruly, took up the best places for fishing and debauched the seamen by selling them wine and brandy.... Newfoundland, once summer ended [and the British authorities departed] was pictured as a cesspool of vice, laziness, and drunkenness. (43)

By the time Johnston began *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams*, fishing admirals, merchants, and other "British" officials had long been established through Prowse's *History* and other subsequent histories and textbooks as "the villains in the story of early Newfoundland" (Bannister 2001, 167). Derogatory depictions of Newfoundlanders such as those mentioned by O'Flaherty confirmed the smugness and self-supposed superiority of those who not only ruled Newfoundlanders, but regarded them as a fallen people. Newfoundlanders' claim to the postcolonial condition shared by former British possessions like India may be tenuous, but is certainly heartily believed. In "The Politics of Cultural Memory," Bannister questions this type of Newfoundland history by claiming it "has perpetuated romantic myths rooted in an interpretation of Newfoundlanders as victims" (Bannister 2003, 145). Richard Gwyn does Bannister one better when he writes that the "Newfoundland pride" that rises from this supposed legacy of abuse not only "represented a triumph over adversity, it represented also a triumph over reality" (76).

In his biography of Smallwood, Gwyn cites "the most eloquent speech [Smallwood] ... ever made" (97), at the National Convention on 27 October 1946. An assembly elected to discuss Newfoundland's constitutional future, the Convention enabled Smallwood to tackle all the myths about Newfoundland and Newfoundlanders that had been created and compounded since Prowse. Smallwood began by reiterating a common lament: "The history of this island is an unbroken history of struggle.... We live more poorly, more shabbily, more meanly [than our brothers on the mainland]. Our life is more a struggle. Our struggle is tougher, more naked, more hopeless" (97). Rather than continuing the tradition of blaming Newfoundland's lot on Britain, Smallwood encouraged Newfoundlanders to take responsibility for their situation: "[w]e take for granted our lower standards, our poverty. We are not indignant about them, *we save our indignation for those who publish such facts*" (97, italics added). A people that is "poor but proud" must realize that it is their decision to remain that way, that their deplorable state is an extension of a perverse need to be forever looking back at themselves as a neglected nation. Smallwood exploded this tendency by exclaiming: "Our danger, so it seems to me, is that of nursing delusions of grandeur. We are

not a nation" (97). Newfoundlanders could accept their supposed destiny as a second-class nation, looking at the "incredibly higher standards" of others, and doping "[them]selves into the hopeless belief that such things are not for them" (98), or Newfoundlanders could reject this identity of isolation and ineptitude and join "in the march of time" (98). As Gwyn notes, this speech was a précis of "all that is essential in the sociology of Newfoundland: the long history of struggle and the pride of having endured; the inexplicable wayward charm of the land and of its people; the pathetic, unending poverty to which all but a handful were condemned" (98).

Johnston owes much to *Smallwood: The Unlikely Revolutionary* (he credits it in the acknowledgements), but this isolated moment of Smallwood in the Convention is arguably the inspiration for his protagonist. Richard Gwyn claims that Johnston's "Smallwood is far too reflexive and introspective" to become the modern "medieval monarch" (437) into which the real Smallwood evolved. Bannister notes as well that "Johnston was criticized for projecting too much of himself onto his subject and veering into autobiography" (Bannister 2003, 138) — an accusation that has some merit when one considers that Johnston was writing the autobiographical *Baltimore's Mansion* at the same time. Though it is undeniable that the author leaves a trace of himself on his characters, the Joe Smallwood in *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams* remains remarkably true to the Smallwood of 27 October 1946 — the Smallwood who denied all notions of defeatism, rejected all moments of romanticism, and refused to regard Newfoundland as anything more or less than a country waiting for the right leader to make known its limitless potential.

The Newfoundland into which Johnston's Smallwood was born is portrayed as being prone to continuous political and economic failure, forever being saved by the British, that grander race of people from which many Newfoundlanders are descended but to whose grandness so few Newfoundlanders can attain. The Amulree royal commission (1933) represents the end of Newfoundland as a nation, and marks once and forever Newfoundland's inability to govern itself. Sociologist James Overton notes that the commission's report irreparably damaged the character of Newfoundlanders:

> ... the Amulree Commission suggested that Newfoundland surrender responsible government for government by commission. Part of the Amulree Commission's argument was that the country's problems were of a moral nature. The people had proved incapable of sustaining parliamentary democracy because of their deficiencies.... The political events of the early 1930s, and the finding of the Commission, put Newfoundland's "national character ... under a shade." (Overton 12)

Johnston makes Smallwood an appalled observer of the investigations of the Amulree Commission, and to the reception of its findings by a population that had long viewed "Newfoundland history [as] an unbroken tale of mistakes and missed opportunities" (Bannister 2003, 133):

> A contagion of self-debasement swept the land, as if we had lived in denial of our innate inferiority for centuries and at last were owning up to it. There was more than a hint of boasting in it, a perverse pride in our ability to do anything, even fail, on so grand a scale. Whether our distinguishing national trait was resourcefulness or laziness, ineptitude or competence, honesty or corruptibility, did not seem to matter as long as we were famous for it, as long as we were acknowledged as being unmatched in the world for something. (Johnston 338)

It is onto this sea of admitted incompetence that Johnston launches his protagonists, characters who are born of this failure and are born into it. Lord Amulree, chairman of the "commission of inquiry into the state of Newfoundland society and economy" (337) which bears his name, is depicted by Johnston as a typical colonial authority who has already determined, before meeting his Newfoundland "subjects," that they are inferior, peculiar, and unruly:

> He was the most open-minded man I had ever met. Told two contradictory versions of the same event, he believed both, as long as each reflected badly on the character of Newfoundlanders. I have never met a man so eager to have his sensibilities offended. A day was not complete until he had professed himself shocked by something. (338)

Yet Amulree "was treated to a country-wide admission of misconduct and inadequacy" by the people he had come to observe and condemn: "The baron and his commission were received like parents in whose absence we had torn the house apart and to whom we were now relieved to unburden ourselves of our guilt, having lived with it so long" (337). These people of Newfoundland, the sealers, the railway workers, the fishermen, the countless isolated families had all lived under the "shade" their character cast over them long before the Amulree Commission, and they had come to accept their fate as a flawed people. A Spaniard's Bay native becomes the mouthpiece for these self-abnegating individuals during one of the Amulree hearings:

> where I comes from your honour, all we does is drink, even the women is at it; half the children don't know who their fathers is. Oh my, oh my, it's something shocking is what it is, I don't know why we acts like that. We're just low-born I suppose, we don't know no better. (337-8)

While working as a reporter aboard the S.S. *Newfoundland*, Smallwood notices "a kind of shy awe" displayed by the sealers when they discover what he is doing: "They could not read or write and had never met someone whom they perceived to be the epitome of reading and writing, a newspaper man" (98). Smallwood witnesses the same sort of servility during his quest to unionize fishermen. Joining a fisherman one morning to handline for cod, Smallwood cannot help but notice the fisherman's typically Newfoundland tendency to avoid eye contact:

> I faced him in the boat as he took the oars and, with his eyes averted from mine, looking out across the water, rowed for hours without changing his pace or his expression. He was, he told me later, keeping his eyes fixed on some landmark, but landmark or not I'm sure he would have looked the other way. I had yet to have someone look me in the eye for long, as if to do so would have been an impertinence. (352)

This sort of head-down, eyes-averted timidity is exemplified by many Newfoundlanders in this text, as if the "contagion of self-debasement" had so infiltrated each character that they believed themselves unworthy of interaction with an individual of stature. This hangdog humility is best demonstrated by Smallwood's father Charlie, who roars against his social betters in private, yet balks at the opportunity to meet Prowse, deeming himself unworthy:

> My father seemed almost terrified at the thought of meeting the judge. "No, no, my God, no," he said, as if I had made some dreadful blunder, pacing about the floor of the front room, shaking his head, worried that Prowse might already have arranged the meeting and the judge might be expecting him. I assured him this was not the case, but asked him why he did not want to meet someone whose work he so admired. "I don't know why," my father said. "I don't want to meet a man like that, that's all I know."
>
> "Meet not the judge lest ye be judged," my mother said. (46-7)

It is as if characters such as Charlie, the man with whom Smallwood shares a dory, the sealers, and the shifty and eccentric families working and living along the railway turn both their heads and their eyes downward in the face of those they perceive to be their social betters for fear of meeting their eyes and finding themselves lacking. Rather than face the continuous reminder of their supposed inadequacy, these characters avoid interaction and accept their failings. The people Smallwood meets during his voyages across Newfoundland all seem to suffer from a form of island paranoia — they all view outsiders as dangerous harbingers of changes beyond their scope of understanding.

Charlie Smallwood is the most outspoken of these paranoid islanders and he haunts the early pages of Johnston's novel, roaring into the fog and the darkness from his back deck on "the Brow," cursing and renaming the island of his birth: "They should have called it Old Lost Land, not Newfoundland but Old Lost Land" (17). In his eyes, Newfoundlanders have always-already fallen — they are irreparably and primarily failures *because* they are Newfoundlanders. The elder Smallwood subscribes to the rhetoric of "if only" discussed by Bannister. This form of "determinism remains at the core of Newfoundland nationalism," Bannister contends, "*[i]f only* Newfoundland had been granted a different constitutional regime, so the argument runs, then its economy would have prospered" (Bannister 2003, 148). The narrative of Newfoundland is full of many such "if only" moments, it appears, and Charlie has many late night soliloquies looking down at St. John's

while he laments, "[w]e're not good enough, it seems" (Johnston 16). Charlie sees himself as the end product of a long line of failure and while he readily rages against his fate, he as eagerly accepts it. "You're ruined, boy, you're ruined," he bawls at Joey during one of his drunken tirades. "We're *both* ruined, we're *all* ruined" (65). Faced with an extensive narrative of Newfoundland failure, Charlie accepts his lot and laments the glory that could have been, *if only*. It is into this life of self-inflicted abnegation that Joseph R. Smallwood is born.

POSTCOLONIAL READING

It is useless to dismiss completely the notion that Newfoundland is postcolonial. A former colony of Britain, Newfoundland does exist in a world that is (arguably) post-colonization. Yet it is harder for Newfoundland to claim the postcolonial condition shared by India, South Africa, and other countries who were occupied and oppressed by foreign powers. Poverty and struggle are undeniably and inextricably part of Newfoundland history, but the source of this suffering is not a colonizing power bent on domination of Newfoundlanders. Newfoundland is a settler society. As Vijay Mishra and Bob Hodge note, "[w]hite settler colonies ... as fragments of the metropolitan centre, were treated very differently by Britain" (Mishra 285) than were non-white colonies. Newfoundland is an instance of "complicit postcolonialism" where Britain was not an oppressive *other* but "the Mother Country" (Mishra 284, 285). Notions of Newfoundlanders regarding themselves as a breed apart are tempered by the willingness of young Newfoundland men to fight for Britain in both world wars, and most notably by Prowse's use of "we" when discussing both Newfoundlanders and the British who wrested this land from French "invaders." Bannister asserts that the idea of "Newfoundlanders as a special people with a unique past ... [suffering] unremitting tyranny under the system of naval government" was largely fiction, "a history tailor-made" to suit the goals of "St. John's reformers [campaigning prior to 1832] for greater local autonomy" (Bannister 2003, 147). Such a claim raises serious suspicions around Newfoundland's existence as an allegedly conquered colony.

Terry Goldie writes, "For me, the best answer to 'Is Canada Postcolonial?' is another question: what opportunities for understanding Canada are provided by the question?" (Goldie 311). The same can be said of Newfoundland and a postcolonial reading of Johnston's text. Neil Besner includes *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams* among several texts he believes offer "wider opportunities ... for a postcolonial critic, not because these texts are now lifted out of a national context, but because, on the contrary, they can be read as more deeply embedded in a more various understanding of Canada" (Besner 46). Besner believes that postcolonial readings of novels like *Colony*, Alistair MacLeod's *No Great Mischief* or Hugh MacLennan's *Barometer Rising* reopen foreclosed notions of identity: "the postcolonial ap-

proach can open out the categories of region and nation again, and differently" (47). Such texts provide what Edward Said calls a "contrapuntal reading" (Said 66) of received history. In these texts several descending voices are given the opportunity to (re)insert themselves into recorded history and rework and requestion accepted "facts."

The result is never a new history regarded as *the* story of a particular people or place, but an approach to the "felt, emotional truth" Johnston is looking for through his "scuttlework" of Newfoundland history. As Laura Moss puts it, the answer to such a question as "Is Canada Postcolonial?" reveals that there is not one but a "plurality of Canadas" (Moss 4). Multiple stories arise that are not "right or wrong but both" (Zucchero 265). Readings of nations and narrations conducted by postcolonial critics have revealed a hybridity and an ambiguity at the heart of any place or people. A nation/colony/province like Newfoundland can only be read postcolonially, for such a reading strategy is the only one that will respect the amalgam of "truths" that is Newfoundland:

> Postcolonial reading strategies confer neither moral superiority nor inferiority on either the critic or the subject matter; rather postcolonial reading strategies attend to the material conditions in which the critic finds herself, conditions that are seldom morally clear cut. (Brydon 1995, 9)

In other words, the multiple readings of Newfoundland found through a postcolonial reading of *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams* are neither "right [n]or wrong but both." While this move toward a hybrid "Newfoundlandness" is a disconcerting leap from the comforting (though also limiting) certainty of Newfoundland identity, it is an act of liberation for Newfoundlanders, an emancipatory *break* from the "*unbroken* tale of mistakes and missed opportunities" (Bannister 2003, 133).

Johnston's work certainly meets the criteria of Bhabha's "hybrid national narrative" as wholly fictional and partly fictionalized characters witness, experience, and criticize the historical moments that have come to define Newfoundland and Newfoundlanders. The definitive history of Newfoundland is literally doubled, as Johnston permits Smallwood and Fielding to tell their "stories of Newfoundland." This alternative history is doubled again as Smallwood and Fielding exchange narrative authority within Johnston's work — emphasizing the ambivalence at the core of any singular Newfoundland identity. Through his creation of Joe Smallwood, Johnston is able to re-enter Newfoundland history and provide a different voice than the ones recorded in the "official" narratives of struggle and failure. In Smallwood, Johnston creates a character that exists outside this oppressive history. Though surrounded by notions of Newfoundland hopelessness, Smallwood becomes an optimist who refuses to be trapped in the unending cycle of Newfoundland defeatism.

For Johnston's Joe Smallwood, the mantle of inadequacy which Charlie Smallwood assumes for himself and his "luckless brood" (Johnston 8) is compounded by the education the boy receives at Bishop Feild College, a bastion of English ideals, fashioned in the "Tudor-style" with a "turret-crowned entrance" (23) — a venerable fortress of Englishness placed at the edge of civilization in the hope of plucking from the fire a few brands who may rise above their fate as Newfoundlanders. Nothing of Newfoundland is taught in this school, though the teachers readily deride the country in which they find themselves by "itemizing its deficiencies and the many ways it fell short of being England" (34). If Newfoundland was not England, then these Newfoundlanders were certainly a far cry from Englishmen — a point Headmaster Reeves discusses on numerous occasions:

> The worst of our lot comes over here, inbreeds for several hundred years and the end-product is a hundred thousand Newfoundlanders with Smallwood at the bottom of the barrel.
>
> ... many of you are descended from people who couldn't even make the grade in Ireland, a country of bog-born barbarians, or in Scotland, whose culture peaked with the invention of the bagpipes. My God, it boggles the mind. If you lot are the elite of Newfoundland, what must the rest be like? Smallwood here we may think of as the riff-raff's shining star. Try to imagine someone in comparison with whom he would seem to be a shining star. No, the mind balks, it is beyond imagining. The riff-raff are out there, we know by extrapolation from Smallwood that they exist, but luckily for us, we cannot picture them. (36, 38)

Despite witnessing his father's continued self-berating at home and receiving the brunt of his teachers' anti-Newfoundland sentiment at school, Smallwood maintains a pride and a postitiveness which baffles his teachers: "[t]he masters never seemed to know quite what to make of me" (35). Smallwood receives the barbs of his "wittily scornful" (34) masters and returns them with equal flare. Knowing full well that a posting in St. John's meant a failure on the part of his headmaster "to find a place at some public school in Britain or some colony more highly prized than Newfoundland" (34), Smallwood is as quick to highlight the shortcomings of his teacher: "'Your parents must be very proud of you, sir.... Your having got such a superb posting as Bishop Feild, I mean. Have they been to visit lately?" (37). Smallwood represents an unknown entity, a Newfoundlander unashamed of his heritage and unwilling to be transformed into a colonial mimic man. Such an enigma would seem impossible to these "itinerant Englishmen" (33) who saw the inhabitants of the island they were forced to temporarily occupy as "nothing more than savages descended from the 'dregs of England'" (34). Spawned from failure, and motivated by it for the rest of his life, Joe remains irrepressible, determined to counter these past failures with future successes beyond anyone's imagination.

Johnston has explained the parallel he draws between Smallwood and Newfoundland:

> In Smallwood's case, he identified with Newfoundland because he saw Newfoundland's position in the world as being equivalent to his position in Newfoundland. They were sort of at the bottom of the barrel. His personal struggle for success eventually became synonymous with Newfoundland's struggle to raise itself beyond Third World levels. (Morris 12)

Smallwood's desire to succeed is thus directly linked to his desire for the improvement of his home country, and he expresses this in a drunken speech to his socialist comrades in New York: "Newfoundland ... will be one of the great small nations of the earth, a self-governing, self-supporting, self-defending, self-reliant nation, and I will be prime minister of Newfoundland" (Johnston 165).

The Amulree Commission further entrenches failure as a fundamental part of the Newfoundland identity. Just as the Newfoundlanders Smallwood meets during his tour with the commissioners accept their large-scale failure as an assurance they are "acknowledged as being unmatched in the world for something" (338), Charlie Smallwood willingly accepts the continued failure of his country and his fellows as justification for his own lack of success. According to Joe:

> My father at first welcomed the Commission of Government, and I could understand why. He had himself been just such a commission for decades now, endlessly taking stock of himself and the world, postponing action until all the findings were in, knowing they never would be. It was as if, at last, the rest of the country were in step with him, as if this new national development vindicated the way he had lived his life, as if he had known the country was headed down a dead end and would have to double back and for this reason remained aloof. The failure of an individual in a country fated for failure was inevitable, excusable. (339)

Joe will have none of his father's fatalism and takes to the airwaves in defiance of the failing grade his country's culture had received.

The boy once described as the "bottom of the barrel" was now the "Barrelman," an uncontained booster of Newfoundland and Newfoundlanders who reminds his countrymen of their limitless potential: "I read on the air stories I encouraged my listeners to send me, stories that showed 'how brave, hardy, smart, strong, proud, intelligent and successful Newfoundlanders are'" (385). Smallwood becomes obsessed with creating a new Newfoundland identity on the ruins of the old one. This desire follows him into the premier's office as he squanders millions of dollars on impossible schemes and shaky enterprises. It is Smallwood's sole purpose to show that Newfoundland, once thought of as a place where nothing can be done, is now a place where anything can happen: "Someone convinced me there was no better place in the world to manufacture gloves made entirely from the skins of gazelles than Newfoundland. Into this scheme went half a million dollars; out of it came not so much as a single pair of gloves" (502). It is Smallwood's desire to refocus Newfoundlanders' pride, from their perceived perseverance in the face of ad-

versity to their potential as a productive and modern people. He believes the only way he can foster this change is by creating successes as monumental as the failures by which Newfoundlanders identify themselves. The real Smallwood and his drive for colossal success was most recently considered by Rex Murphy, who claims the former premier was "unduly influenced by the example of the pharaohs.... If a project was massive, grand, monumental, it had intrinsic appeal" (Murphy A23). Smallwood did "drag his people into the twentieth century" (R. Gwyn 437), but he desired too much too quickly and left Newfoundland much the same as he found it — economically unsound and dependent upon another nation for assistance.

Newfoundland in the novel is spotted not with testaments to Smallwood's successes, but with disabled and deflated reminders of his shortcomings. The (then) ruins of the refinery at Come by Chance and other such failed and forgotten structures are described by Fielding:

> This country is strewn with Come by Chance-like monoliths, the masterpieces of some sculptor who worked on a grand scale and whose medium was rust. Quarries, mines, mills, plants, smelters, airports, shipyards, refineries and factories, to all of which paved roads still lead, though no one travels on them any more. (Johnston 555)

Unfortunately, Smallwood's legacy as the man who brought Newfoundland into Confederation and the modern era is inseparably linked to his disrepute as a leader who held on too long, threw his province's finances and future away on ridiculous schemes and unreliable supporters, and "all but gave away Churchill Falls" (555). Regardless of his fate, the Joseph R. Smallwood of Johnston's novel is representative of a narrative of optimism underwriting the history of failure. Smallwood's enthusiasm demanded a leap which his fellow Newfoundlanders were unwilling to take, and his vision of an industrialized, vibrant "small nation" would become one more unrequited dream.

FIELDING

The authors of *The Empire Writes Back* are only partially right when they claim that through postcolonial novels "the perspective changes to that of the 'Other'" (Ashcroft 34). A truly hybrid narrative makes possible the perspective of multiple others — the histories of Bhabha's "incommensurable narrative subjects" from which "emerges a strange, empowering knowledge for the migrant that is at once schizoid and subversive" (Bhabha 168). Bhabha refers to postcolonial subjects as migrants for he believes they are never truly "home" in a place they are forced to continually negotiate. Sheilagh Fielding's voice not only subverts accepted Newfoundland history, it also rivals Smallwood's voice of progress and industry. In Fielding Johnston creates a truly postcolonial narrator, a Benjaminian "angel of

history" who is propelled "into the future to which [her] back is turned" (Benjamin 258). Fielding is a romantic bound to the ever-progressive Smallwood yet consumed by what Gayatri Spivak calls "a nostalgia for lost origins" (Spivak 87). Smallwood's industrialize-or-perish attitude is tempered by Fielding's lament for the Newfoundland his modernizing threatens to destroy. Through Fielding, the readers can witness the "schizoid and subversive" nature of the postcolonial subject. Fielding's romanticism is countered with cynicism; her inability to claim a "home" does not prevent her from idealizing, defending, and mourning her "homeland"; her newspaper articles and "Condensed *History of Newfoundland*" deconstruct Newfoundland history while paradoxically preserving a Newfoundland identity.

Fielding, Smallwood's fictional (and unrequited) love interest and foil, is given the first and last words in the novel. At times romantic and at others caustic, Fielding seems to embody not only Johnston's novel, but the essence of Newfoundland itself. Refusing Charlie Smallwood's resignation while refuting Smallwood's renaissance, Sheilagh Fielding is Newfoundland. A sickly, crippled child of the New and Old Worlds, in her own words "at once self-ironic and humorously scornful of others" (Johnston 27), beleaguered by alcoholism and the loss of her children but fortified by her wit and wistfulness, Fielding represents so much that is Newfoundland.

The most beautiful moments of nostalgia come courtesy of Fielding. The following passage is a lament for a past forever lost:

> After it rained, the schooners would unfurl their sails to let them dry, a stationary fleet under full sail, the whole harbour a mass of flapping canvas you could hear a mile away. How high those sails were. If they had not been translucent, they would have cast a shadow in the evening halfway across the city.
>
> Instead, in the evening, in the morning, the sun shone through the sails and cast an amber-coloured light across the harbour and the streets, a light I have not seen in twenty years. (6)

Fielding's romantic turn toward the past works in stark contrast to Smallwood's desire to construct a future of prosperity to overshadow a past of poverty. One of Johnston's sources for Fielding is undeniably the columnist Ray Guy, who painted idyllic portraits of Newfoundland which Guy himself admits "drew in large measure on a nostalgia for a past that never actually existed, but ... was necessary as a way to combat the propaganda of the Smallwood regime" (Bannister 2003, 129). Fielding names one of the participants in the "war of words ... between her two imaginary selves" (Johnston 256) "Ray Joy," an obvious tribute to the man described by Patrick O'Flaherty as "what the fool was to King Lear, a cranky, disconcerting, insistent reminder of a previous dignity, now violated" (S. Gwyn 45). Fielding follows Guy's credo, not just tempering Smallwood's modernization, but also refusing to acknowledge that this move forward only further amplifies the

backwardness of Newfoundland's past. Guy has said that his motivation for writing was to counteract the image proffered by "Joey and his crowd," that before Confederation in Newfoundland "there was only depravity, poverty and corruption" (Paddock 9). Smallwood's failure to create a prosperous Newfoundland could easily be dragged into the narrative of disappointment he is working against. It is Fielding's whimsy and wit that truly "scuttles" this history and turns this narrative of Smallwood into a narrative of hope.

The most obvious moments of underwriting a "received history" come through "Fielding's Condensed *History of Newfoundland*." Fielding's tiny history is what Mishra and Hodge would term "a supplement" (Mishra 280). Fielding's work is "a form of intervention that questions, as supplements always do, the very adequacy of a theory" (Mishra 280). In her concluding remarks in *Colony*, Fielding claims that her life "for forty years was a pair of rivers, the river that might have been beside the one that was" (Johnston 560). Johnston's novel reads like a multiple of rivers all running side by side and "Fielding's *Condensed History of Newfoundland*" runs parallel to Prowse's "official" history, though at times running deeper as it diverges momentarily from the common path.

Said would call Fielding's work "revisionist scholarship" (Said xxiv) — a work that retraces the steps of supposedly authoritative histories and not only offers alternatives, but blatantly questions the validity of the accepted text. Prowse's several-times-removed sources of information which Bannister questions are openly ridiculed by Fielding. William Vaughan, a source often used by Prowse, is said by Fielding to have never visited "his colony" (Johnston 67) though he writes an authoritative text on the island:

> Vaughan ... is writing *The Newlander's Cure*, a tract of advice for settlers about how to survive the perils of life in Newfoundland, which, though he has never experienced, he, being a writer, is able to imagine so vividly that other people who have never been to Newfoundland find the book convincing and it sells quite well. (77)

Having painted a dubious picture of Vaughan, Fielding demonstrates how Prowse's *History* is flawed through dependence on *The Newlander's Cure* and other "nonsense that Vaughan is churning out" (83). The judge credited with recording the history of Newfoundland "was completely taken in by Vaughan, to the point of believing that Vaughan travelled to Newfoundland and began a colony at Trepassey, when in fact he never in his life sailed far enough from England to lose sight of shore" (83).

Fielding's corrective history also dismisses the notion that Newfoundland has been for generations the colonial whipping post of an insatiably imperialistic Britain. Chief Justice John Reeves's *History of the Government of the Island of Newfoundland* is a major source for Prowse's assertions that "England has for three hundred years been exploiting Newfoundland" (Johnston 209). According to

Fielding, "John Reeves was a peevish crank who wrote an entire history of Newfoundland just to get back at some West Country merchants who, he said, 'are so miserly that, were I to allow it, they would be constantly contesting in my court some Newfoundlander's right to breathe their air'" (209-10). Fielding/Johnston follows the same line of historiography as does Bannister in "The Politics of Cultural Memory," noting that from Anspach to Prowse, countless Newfoundland historians "repeat in their histories this heinous lie of [Reeves's] as though it were the gospel truth" (210).

Thus problematizing Prowse's sources and "facts," Fielding unearths alternative histories she claims were dismissed as nonsense by Prowse and others. Fielding claims to have found the original version of Robert Hayman's *Quodlibets*, a "corrective" (83) to Vaughan's *The Newlander's Cure* that was never properly published. She also claims to have found the alternate "Ode to Newfoundland" with considerably less patriotic verses: "When rotting sculpins line thy shore, / When capelin swarm thy strand, / The stench is such one hears men roar, / 'thou reekest, wind-swept land'" (475). The ambiguity of Fielding's postcolonial self is revealed through her recreation of the Ode, as in the final alternative verse Fielding reveals that she too is moved by the legacy of the exploited Newfoundlander: "As lived our fathers, we live not, / Where once they knelt, we stand. / With God nor King to guard our lot, / We'll guard thee, Newfoundland" (475).

Fielding's obscurity permits her to continue battling the notion of Newfoundlanders as a failed "neo-primitive white culture" (Peacock xix) while not being entirely consumed by Smallwood's enthusiasm, an attitude Harry Hiller has classified as "Newfoundlanders against the world" (Hiller 264). Smallwood is often at the mercy of Fielding's wit, especially in her parody of the jingoistic Barrelman:

> Newfoundlanders, send me your recipes, your sayings, your local customs. All over Newfoundland the old ways are dying out. I for one would want nothing to do with a Newfoundland in which it was no longer the tradition to shoot the Christmas pudding out of a pot with a shotgun. BONG. (Johnston 387)

For all her ability to sweep the legs out from under any cause, Fielding's purpose seems to be irony. She rarely comes out in favour of or against a particular cause. In a rather masterful metaphor, Johnston has Fielding literally demonstrate her fence-straddling tendencies during one of the definitive moments in Newfoundland's history — a moment when everyone would presumably be on one side or the other. During the storming of the Colonial Building in 1932, Smallwood begs Fielding to join him on a rescue mission for Sir Richard Squires. Despite Smallwood's desperation, Fielding remains indifferent but finally decides to join Smallwood for, as she puts it, "I'm sure there's a column in it" (316). Fielding maintains a judgemental and ironic distance as she surveys the mob before joining

Smallwood: "With one leg on either side, standing on top of the fence, she paused to look out over the crowd, shook her head" (316).

Yet an ironic position is most certainly an impotent one, and Fielding is often found beside Smallwood despite her scathing articles and send-ups. In one of their last meetings, Fielding admits to Smallwood that she feigned her passion for socialism as a young woman so she could be near him: "I didn't tell [my father] about you converting me to socialism, which by the way you never did, I just pretended so I could be with you — My God Smallwood, how many shades of purple are you capable of turning? I've never seen that one before" (549). Despite Smallwood's blush upon learning this secret, it is doubtful that Fielding wanted to be around Smallwood for sexual reasons. More than likely it was the optimism he exuded that so attracted her. Fielding, both bolstered and beleaguered with a nostalgia for a lost home and a readily deployed sarcasm for those who try and know and change that home, is herself saved by Smallwood's buoyancy. Without his optimism to hold onto, Fielding would remain either forever looking backward or be consumed by her cynicism.

Fielding's conflicting moments of mockery and myth-making find their roots in what Richard Gwyn calls Newfoundland's "national surrender" (R. Gwyn 445). Newfoundlanders had inflicted their greatest defeat "upon themselves when, in 1933, they became the only people in history to voluntarily give up self-government after having won it" (R. Gwyn 445). Fielding becomes a revisionist, not only underwriting the history of Newfoundland, but recreating Newfoundlanders' claim to this island. Faced with a people who have declared themselves not fit for self-government, Fielding tries to bolster their spirits (and hers) by waxing poetic about Newfoundlanders' mystical connection to the land. The last lines of the novel try somehow to mingle her people with their island, an attempt perhaps to replace the moment in 1933 when Newfoundlanders judged themselves unworthy of their land with a new mythology of Newfoundlanders as *one with the land:*

> ... the northern night, the barrens, the bogs, the rocks and ponds and hills of Newfoundland. The Straits of Belle Isle, from the island side of which I have seen the coast of Labrador.
>
> These things, finally, primarily, are Newfoundland.
>
> From a mind divesting itself of images, those of the land would be the last to go.
>
> We are a people on whose minds these images have been imprinted.
>
> We are a people in whose bodies old sea-seeking rivers roar with blood. (562)

In his concluding remarks, Johnston tunes into a tendency that occurs too often in literature about Newfoundland — the description of characters as somehow being mystically of the land. In Annie Proulx's *The Shipping News*, the characters are as windswept, creviced, untamed, and unkempt as the land itself: "Diddy Shovel's skin was like asphalt, fissured and cracked, thickened by a lifetime of weather, the scruf of age. Stubble worked through the craquelured surface" (Proulx 79). Diddy

has the beaten and blasted appearance of a boulder left behind by a glacier; he is somehow inseparably and originally of the island. In *Gaff Topsails*, Patrick Kavanagh extends the metaphor even further, having the founding father of his village actually make love to the land in order to symbolically create a hybrid offspring that are as much island as they are human. They are born of a community Kavanagh describes as a "womb-cove" and live their lives in "rhythms [which] echo ... the touch of the sea upon the land" (Kavanagh 139).

While such dreamy depictions of Newfoundland may be fanciful and moving, inspiring people like Justin Trudeau (who championed Johnston's novel on a 2003 edition of CBC's Canada Reads) to describe Newfoundland as a "barren rock upon which nothing was expected to grow ... least of all a people as tragically beautiful and noble as Newfoundlanders" (Trudeau 2003), they overlook the fact that Newfoundlanders are not of the island but have worked against it for generations. This impractical picture of a Newfoundland *people* is arguably an attempt to create a home for Newfoundlanders who have surrendered their nationhood, been cut loose by Britain, and taken in by Canada — the "nation that we do not know" (Johnston 560). Fielding's attempt to romanticize a race that is as rough and regal as the land itself is counterbalanced by her realization that, though she loves this land, it can never be *hers*.

It is interesting to note that during her final assessment of Smallwood, herself, and the island they occupy, Fielding compares herself as a young girl inflicted with tuberculosis to Shawnawdithit, the last of the Beothuk:

> ... when I was in the San[atorium], I was drawn, morbidly drawn perhaps, to read and re-read Howley's book [i.e., the Beothuks or Red Indians], and I was young enough to think that Nancy and I had a lot in common....
>
> My father could not bear to watch me die. When he was told my death was certain, he stopped coming to the San to see me.... It was partly my father's abandonment of me that made me identify with Nancy. I fancied that Cormack had been in love with her and had gone away because he could not bear to watch her die. There are times when I still think it might be so.
>
> She made a great impression on people long before they knew that she would be the last Beothuk. But it is hard to think of her as that, "the last Beothuk," perhaps presumptuous to try in what is, after all, an address to absence, silence. (558, 559)

Though writing in 1959, and therefore only 60 years old, Fielding perhaps foresees her entrance into the absence and silence occupied by Shawnawdithit and the Beothuk. Fielding projects a time when Newfoundland's past life as a colony or an independent country will no longer exist in living memory, and any talk of such times will be an address to a lost and unanswering past.

Fielding's affinity with Shawnawdithit (or Nancy April as she was renamed by her captors) stems out of her feelings of abandonment and loss not only during her time in "the San," but also as a Newfoundlander ten years after Confederation with

Canada. Like Shawnawdithit, Fielding has lost the Newfoundland in which she lived and grew up. Like Shawnawdithit, whom Fielding notes "left behind her in the interior two children about whom she 'fretted constantly'" (559), Fielding knows that her children (one who died in the Second World War, and the other who lives in New York) will never know the Newfoundland of their mother. Most importantly, Fielding knows that her life, much like Shawnawdithit's, was overrun by an all-consuming, progressive force — a double-edged sword that would ensure the continued existence of *many* Newfoundlanders only by bringing about changes that would make necessary the loss of *a few*. For Shawnawdithit this loss came in the form of the extinction of her people, in Fielding's case the loss was of a spiritual, personal nature in which many Newfoundlanders were now forced to refer to themselves as Canadians — the weak link in "a nation that does not know us." Shawnawdithit and the Beothuk represent the sacrifices that must be made to achieve progress and survival — the casting off of a fundamental and foundational part of the self that no longer has a place in a changing world.

The Beothuk haunt the last pages of Johnston's narrative. They are the indigenous peoples Mishra and Hodge claim were once silenced by settlers but can no longer be ignored. According to them, indigenous "ghosts ... invade the texts of the dominant tradition" (Mishra 289). Their disappearance is a reminder to Newfoundlanders that they are not this island's native inhabitants. It is is also a warning that this island is always in a state of flux and what may seem like home may actually be a new colony/nation/province in which certain Newfoundlanders no longer have a place. It is the "unhomely" feeling experienced by Fielding as she tries to find her "home" that is the true postcolonial aspect of *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams.*

Mridula Chakraborty claims that "nostalgic narratives" such as Fielding's enable the postcolonial, unhomed subject to find "not only a memory of home, but a home in memory" (Chakraborty 128). Fielding walks a line between "feeling out of place in [her] new country" (Chakraborty 128) while remaining familiar with it. "The past is literally another country now," and Fielding, forever the "angel of history," is hurled into the future while facing the past. The "pile of debris" Walter Benjamin describes as "grow[ing] skyward" (Benjamin 258) before the angel is the multiple interpretations of a comforting past, the "home in memory" which gives succour to the subject being thrown into a new and unsettling "homeland." This desire for a noble and triumphant past that never was is also part of the "avalanche of history" from which Johnston is trying to dislodge his country.

The fate of one submerged in history is demonstrated by Johnston when he has the young Smallwood visit the aged Judge Prowse to have his father's copy of *A History of Newfoundland* autographed. The judge is first seen "all but buried in the detritus of scholarship" (Johnston 47). Debilitated both physically and mentally by a stroke, Prowse has been "revising" his history since 1905 to include "new documents that had come to light, documents ages old of which there seemed to be no

end" (47). Almost suffocating in the debris of history, Prowse suffers from agraphia and has filled "page after page of illegible scrawl" (49) recording the history of Newfoundland and the life of Cluney Aylward, "the representative Newfoundlander" (48) Smallwood very quickly discovers to be a "stroke-inspired fiction" (49).

There is no definitive Newfoundlander, just as there is no definitive Newfoundland history. It must be noted that Fielding's depiction of a St. John's bathed in amber "in the evening, in the morning" by sun shining through unfurled sails is impossible. Anyone possessed with a rudimentary knowledge of St. John's would know that the setting sun could never pass through the sails of schooners docked in the harbour and cast a glow across the streets. Fielding is creating a "home in memory," a version of Newfoundland so that she may stave off the realization Smallwood has at the end of his narrative: "I did not solve the paradox of Newfoundland or fathom the effect on me of its peculiar beauty. It stirred me, as all great things did, a longing to accomplish or create something commensurate with it. I thought Confederation might be it, but I was wrong" (Johnston 552).

That Newfoundland is a paradox is at first unsettling for the postcolonial subject, craving as she does a home from which to combat outwardly imposed imperialism and progress. Throughout the novel, Fielding is confronted with depressing histories, valorizing myths, and troubling changes that she counters with either romanticism or scorn. That multiple interpretations of Newfoundland can be countered in a multitude of ways always forces Fielding to realize that these ideas of Newfoundland are not "right or wrong but both." This moment of realization is described rather turgidly by Bhabha in *The Location of Culture*: "The unhomely moment relates the traumatic ambivalences of a personal, psychic history to the wider disjunctions of political existence" (Bhabha 11). More simply put, the personal perceptions of place and identity, no matter how passionately believed, must be regarded as but one of the ever increasing "realities" of a place. The Beothuk, the British, the Americans, and the Canadians enter the narrative of Newfoundland and "the home turns into another world" (Bhabha 10).

Smallwood is driven to find the "something" that is Newfoundland, or at least find a definition of himself and of Newfoundland that would set him "free of Fielding and the nagging tug of the past, my pointless preoccupation with things as they were not and never could have been" (Johnston 452). Fielding can never shake free of this preoccupation and is forced in the end to create Newfoundlanders through whose hearts pump "old sea-seeking rivers." Fearing the loss of her culture as her home transforms into another country, Fielding places Newfoundland *within* Newfoundlanders.

A peculiar form of immigrant, the Newfoundlander occupies the in-between space of identity. A hybrid production of past narratives and future possibilities, the Newfoundlander, like any postcolonial subject cannot be contained within a definitive identity. Yet it is not easy for Newfoundlanders to dig out of this avalanche of

identity, culture, heritage and history. There remains always a longing for a return to what never was — the colony of Newfoundland *if only* things had turned out differently. This is the narrative that haunts Newfoundlanders, not a definite past, but a probable past from which would supposedly be engendered a prosperous future.

Jerry Bannister writes that "[s]tudying the province's history is absolutely critical to understanding our current challenges, but we must keep in mind that the past is as messy and complex as the present" (2003, 152). *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams* inspires postcolonial readings of this province's history — readings that regard the past as hybrid and multi-faceted, full of conflicting "truths" that create not one Newfoundland history but a Newfoundland and Newfoundlanders that contain multitudes. Through such readings the present does not become the latest chapter in a narrative of loss and failure, but a possibility among infinite possibilities. A novel like Johnston's inspires its audience to become postcolonial readers who refuse to lament, valorize, or dismiss the idea of a successful Newfoundland as another unrequited dream.

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