

Riots, Referendums, and Raging Fires: Revisiting History in Recent Newfoundland Fiction

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Riots, Referendums, and Raging Fires: Revisiting History in Recent Newfound- land Fiction

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The Badger Riot by J.A. Ricketts. Flanker Press, 2008. ISBN: 978-1-897317-32-7

The Flannigans by M.T. Dohaney. Flanker Press, 2007. ISBN: 978-1-897317-06-8

1892 by Paul Butler. Flanker Press, 2008. ISBN: 978-1-897317-28-0

MUCH INK HAS BEEN spent over the past ten years discussing the fictionalization of history in Newfoundland writing, especially historical events such as Confederation and figures such as J.R. Smallwood. No clash between fiction and history has resounded more loudly than the critical responses to Wayne Johnston's much-celebrated novel *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams* (1998), which famously — or notoriously, depending on your viewpoint — re-tells the story of Smallwood's life. Unsatisfied with Johnston's free interpretation of Newfoundland history, Rex Murphy criticized the novel in a review published in the *Globe and Mail*, complaining that the author's "fictional ventriloquism" resulted in a mere "pastework substitute" for Joey Smallwood, and the former Premier became an entity that was actually "smaller and more wooden" (D15). Stuart Pierson's review of the novel in *Newfoundland Studies* offered a substantial list of historical inaccuracies and anachronisms in Johnston's novel, and concluded that historical fiction "must, if it is to last and be re-read, *illuminate* the historical record. It must be superior history" (292). Pierson also opined that the sequences in which Johnston is clearly diverging from the historical record and giving free reign

to his inventive powers contribute to, rather than assuages, one thing the book complains about: that the history of this place has not been taken seriously enough (293). Johnston's subsequent response to Murphy also addresses some of Pierson's concerns. As Johnston states, his "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 adherence to an often untrustworthy and inevitably incomplete historical record would have made impossible" (D1). The debate here is clearly over two different kinds of "truth": a historical truth and an "emotional" truth. The reality is that, as Johnston emphasizes, the actual "facts" are often unreliable. Surely the two truths can be combined, but Johnston's point is that strict reliance on the historical record can rob a narrative of its emotional poignancy. So if, for example, Johnston does situate his "Bishop's Feild College" "at the corner of King's Road and Colonial Street" (a corner that does not actually exist in St. John's), it could be countered that there is "a certain symbolic resonance in the conjunction of 'King's' and 'Colonial'" (Mathews 5). Additionally, in regards to one of Pierson's specific complaints, it is Joey Smallwood who laments that Newfoundland has not been "taken seriously enough"; Sheilagh Fielding, on the other hand, writes her own "Condensed History" as a parody of the previous attempts to capture Newfoundland in an official and, more specifically, *colonial* History — that by the eminent Victorian historian, D.W. Prowse. For this reason, *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams* should not be viewed strictly as "historical fiction" but perhaps as a species of "historiographic metafiction," a term Alexander MacLeod takes from Linda Hutcheon to denote the postmodern technique of composing narratives that deliberately depart from the established historical or biographical record (MacLeod 69).

Three recent works of Newfoundland fiction might also be interpreted in light of this fiction/history debate. J.A. Ricketts's *The Badger Riot* explores the famous International Woodworkers of America (IWA) strike and resulting riot that took place in Badger in 1959. M.T. Dohaney's *The Flannigans* concerns the always volatile subject of Confederation in 1949 through the perspective of one family. Finally, Paul Butler's *1892* deals with one of the great fires in the nineteenth century that destroyed a large portion of the city of St. John's, and a romance between two working class individuals caught up in the tragedy. While Ricketts's work is painstakingly concerned with getting the facts down accurately — to the point of sacrificing plot, character, and metaphorical possibilities — Butler's novel uses just a handful of facts as the germ for a story enriched by intriguing characters and sometimes lyrical prose. Dohaney might be seen as somewhere in the middle, creating a handful of interesting characters while leaving others less developed, presumably when they no longer serve a thematic purpose in the story. While it is not my sole purpose in this review to evaluate the historical accuracy of these novels, I am interested in how each work "*illuminate[s]* the historical record." For

it is the skill with which a novel shapes the “formless infinitude of ‘facts’” into a narrative that makes it superior fiction.

March 2009 marked the fiftieth anniversary of the IWA strike, which rocked Newfoundland in the winter of 1959. The strike itself originated in the awful conditions of the logging camps scattered throughout the island that were run by the Anglo-Newfoundland Development Company (AND). When the IWA, led by the charismatic H. Landon Ladd, was decertified by Premier Smallwood in February of 1959, Ladd responded by attacking the AND camps and driving out the “scabs” who replaced the picketing loggers. The strike reached its peak the following month when a small contingent of the RCMP was sent to one of the logging camps in Badger. With tensions rising, a riot broke out on March 10 and, after a clash between police and strikers, young Royal Newfoundland Constabulary officer William Moss suffered a fatal head trauma.

Ricketts’s novel focuses on the loggers who went on the picket line, those who crossed it, the wives and children of these men, and the contractors, constables, taxi-drivers, telegraph officers, and priests who were affected by the strike and the resulting riot. While the storyline of *Badger Riot* is based closely on the details that were reported by both the local and national press, Ricketts employs a large cast of fictitious characters to develop her tale. Part I introduces us to most of the main characters, including their backgrounds, family relations, love lives, and conflicts with other characters; Part II focuses specifically on the strike in 1958 and how these figures are affected by the resulting community unrest; and Part III focuses on the “riot” of 1959. Most reviewers have applauded Ricketts for dramatizing such a riveting event. Elizabeth Cran, writing in *The Guardian* (Charlottetown), calls *Badger Riot* a “truly remarkable novel, which could be accurately described as an epic” (D2). Sharon Hunt, in the *Sunday Herald* (St. John’s), argues that despite “the many characters [Ricketts] brings to life, she doesn’t let the novel get bogged down or confusing as she moves toward the strike and the riot” (F14). For Andrew Hunt, writing in the *Globe and Mail*, the novel “is a rare combination for a historical novel: It is gripping and accurate. It is historical fiction done right”; and like “other great historical novelists (American author E.L. Doctorow comes to mind as a heavy hitter in the genre), Ricketts seamlessly mixes fictional characters [...] and real-life figures.” The response by readers has apparently confirmed such glowing praise, and, with more than 15,000 copies sold since its publication in September 2008, the novel appears to be something of a literary phenomenon in Newfoundland. For these reasons, my criticisms will likely sound heretical, but let it be said that all three books under examination are being judged primarily as *works of fiction*, not as *histories*.

At least two reviewers have attempted to define what sort of novel Ricketts has written. The novel is large in scope, with some sprawling and often extraneous storylines, but this hardly justifies calling it an “epic.” Andrew Hunt insists that the work is “historical fiction.” That definition doesn’t quite fit either; after all,

there are only a handful of actual “historical” figures in the work, such as H. Landon Ladd and Smallwood, and they are less “characters” than disembodied voices in the novel (Smallwood, for example, is merely a voice on the radio). But it is not the *lack* of history that I take issue with here but rather the degree to which most characters — historical and fictional — are so poorly developed as living, breathing entities. The large number of characters — there are at least twenty, although there are so many that I lost count — hinders the novel; the cast might have been reduced to a handful. While such a reduction may have undermined Ricketts’s intention to render the widespread effect of the strike, it would have enabled her to focus on important characters like Jennie Sullivan, the daughter of the old river driver, an active participant in the strike, and clearly Ricketts’s favourite. We are told repeatedly that Jennie is a tough, hardy, and no-nonsense woman — “With Jennie Sullivan there were no back doors” (34). She is also apparently perceptive and “quick” (36), has a “quick temper and saucy tongue” (53), and, when she begins to assist on the picket lines, we are told that she has a “commanding presence” (149). However, Jennie isn’t as interesting when the story is being told through her perspective; she never really behaves (acts, speaks, *commands*) in the assertive way that we are told she does. This contradiction becomes apparent during Jennie’s encounters with Suze Hillier, the horrible and bigoted Pentecostal mother of Jennie’s husband Tom. Indeed, it is when Jennie is thrown into the intense atmosphere of the Hillier home, after her marriage to Tom, that we expect her fiery nature to manifest itself; surely Ricketts lost a huge opportunity here to demonstrate Jennie’s pride, wit, and tenacity. When Mrs. Hillier calls her a “Catholic whore” (56), Jennie remains surprisingly silent. Sadly, we only *hear* about her temper and quick tongue, and never see evidence of it. Again, when Jennie and Tom begin to quarrel over Tom’s awful mother, we expect her to display some of her assertiveness and independence; but after Tom leaves her, Jennie spends most of her days mooning over him. (Her flakiness is also apparent when she moons over Landon Ladd and his cashmere jacket [149]).

In other instances, Ricketts refuses to let her characters develop independent of her omniscient statements, and she cannot seem to resist the temptation to summarize her story with hackneyed phrases. Early in the novel, when Ricketts deals with the death of contractor Rod Anderson’s brother Melvin, the author attempts to create a sense of pathos. The tragedy is well presented, until the author tries to elaborate: “Rod could hold it in no longer. He howled his grief to the ceiling, a long, drawn-out cry from deep inside him. His brother, on whom his father had pinned his hopes and dreams to succeed him, was gone. Rod knew that Melvin’s accident had changed all their lives forever” (15). What is originally a moment of real pathos becomes, by turns, excessively melodramatic and trite. Shortly after this we have a tired bit of metaphorizing: “Grief lay over the house like a blanket, smothering every bit of happiness and joy *there was to be had*” (16; emphasis added). Not only is the choice of simile simply overused and un-

imaginative; but, as in several instances throughout the novel, the sentence itself is awkward and clunky. Again, it is a matter of too much *telling* and not enough *showing*, which requires a close attention to the subtle nuances of language.

Given these flaws, it would seem that the reviews within and outside Newfoundland are overblown, particularly Andrew Hunt's comparison of Ricketts to Doctorow. Most of the central characters in the novel are less interesting than the author claims; but perhaps one antagonist does deserve an honorable mention. Cab-driver Vern Crawford, an old childhood chum of Jennie's, finds himself on the other side of the struggle, sneaking scabs into the work camps that are abandoned by the picketing loggers. Consistently underhanded, Vern nevertheless has a motivation for being a (s)cab driver: the job is lucrative and he is the only one crazy enough to do it. He's a heel, to be sure, but he's also the most consistent source of Ricketts's rambunctious and raucous humour (see especially 132-35); this is definitely her strength, since she has a harder time creating pathos.

M.T. Dohaney is more skilled at combining both comic and tragic elements in her saga of the Flannigans and their involvement in the anti-Confederation movement of the 1940s. After World War Two, many people felt that "Responsible Government," the independent form of political rule, had not managed to provide answers to the economic crisis in Newfoundland. It was also widely felt that Peter Cashin's Responsible Government League was a "merchant-dominated" association that did not care a whit for the impoverished rural regions of the island. Nevertheless, Cashin found some success in his campaign, particularly since it was still easy to convince many that Confederation might just allow Canada to engulf Newfoundland and take what little resources it still had.

In the context of this heightened political climate, Dohaney sets her tale of two brothers, Ernest and Anthony Flannigan, who are faithful supporters of Responsible Government, and their wives and children who get caught up in the conflict. In her review of the novel, Jennifer Bowering Delisle argues that "the characters' motivations [in the novel] are explicitly described rather than genuinely felt" (132). The opening section of Dohaney's main narrative, in which we are first introduced to Ernest and his charismatic personality, is much less compelling than it could be. Page after page drags on as Dohaney rehashes the political debates between supporters of Responsible Government and the pro-Confederation supporters. Indeed, as in Ricketts's novel, there is too much *telling* and not enough *showing* as Dohaney tries to convince us in less-than-lively prose that Ernest is "god"-like (7), that he has the respect given to a "monarch" (9), and that his manner of gesturing is "saviorlike" (16). But the writing improves when Dohaney lets Ernest's personality come through in his fiery speech:

Let us never forget that Confederation is our enemy, the enemy of our country, the enemy of our religion. And mark me words, within six months of Canada taking us over, we won't have a pot to piss in or a window to throw it through./And in five years, there

won't be a mineral left in the ground or anything with a fin on it left in our ocean. Every bit of salmon spawn will be leached out of our rivers; they'll suck it out of our waters and take it back to Canada. Mark me words! (21)

There is a rhetorical flourish here that transforms Ernest into a larger-than-life personality. Granted, Ernest's style here is inflated and annoyingly bombastic, but the speechifying serves a purpose. It reinforces the propaganda war between the two sides of the political struggle and foreshadows Ernest's eventual defeat, not just by the Confederates in the second referendum of 1948 but, before this, by a member of his own family. Moreover, I think that Dohaney has deliberately inserted this speech to imitate, if not lightly satirize, the paranoid rhetoric used by many "Anti" leaders, such as Charles Fox Bennett in the late nineteenth century and Cashin in 1940s. Ernest's impassioned, aggressive argument, which borders on demagoguery (if we consider his manner of appealing to the emotions of his mass audience [14-22]), is actually countered by his nephew Gerry's pro-Confederate argument, which is blurted out at the peak of the dinner-table episode when he can hold it in no longer (84). Moreover, Dohaney is at her strongest when she employs dialogue; the sparring that ensues between family members is effective as a technique to enhance the larger political conflict in Newfoundland and the degree to which Confederation could potentially split families apart. For example:

"What're you going to do, Uncle Ernest," Gerry quips, straight-faced. "Are you going to get one of Major Cashin's henchmen to give me concrete shoes and drop me off a wharf?"

Ernest jerks partway up in his chair and hovers there. His nostrils flare. Angina pain leaks down his left arm and spikes out his index finger.

"You young shit," he snarls, rubbing his arm to ease the pain. "Still wet behind the ears and talking to me like that. You're a disgrace to the Flannigan family. A filthy Confederate disgrace! Fer two cents, I'd give you the back of me hand."

[...]

"Me? A disgrace? You're calling me a disgrace? You're the one who gnaws the pillars in the church on Sundays, and on Mondays you set up innocent Newfoundlanders for lifetimes of poverty. Lifetimes on the dole. You're not just a disgrace to the Flannigan family, you're a disgrace to the whole human race!" (93)

In the aftermath of Gerry's revelation that he is a Confederate, it is rumoured that Ernest was once involved with a servant girl named Barbara Ellen who had worked at a hotel in St. John's (102). While he never commits physical adultery with the girl, he obsesses over her in his mind. When the girl leaves Newfoundland for Halifax, Ernest's private fantasy is crushed; and it is at this stage in his life that he develops a hatred for Canada, "for having lured Barbara Ellen to its shores" (117). Delisle argues that "when the very personal source of [Ernest's] anti-confederate drive is revealed, his character does not seem fuller, but rather be-

comes deflated, less believable” (132). I would argue that the *deflation* of Ernest’s character is precisely the point: he is “deflated” when his own puffed up image of himself is pricked by his nephew’s eloquent pro-Confederate argument. Gerry’s position is viewed as a betrayal, but Dohaney does an excellent job of revealing *Ernest’s* betrayal of his wife through a detailed description of his infidelity (107-18). It is notable that Ernest is a perfect mouthpiece for the anti-Confederation movement, echoing the traditional objections that Newfoundland would lose its identity, geographical uniqueness, and so forth; and yet, Ernest’s real objections are personal and selfish. Michelle Stewart’s review in *The Labradorian* suggests that Dohaney’s primary concern in the novel was with Ernest: “The hurt and betrayal was more than an uncle could stand learning his beloved nephew was a turncoat.” However, despite Ernest’s belief that his nephew has destroyed the family, it turns out that Ernest himself works mischief among the members of the family: bullying, cajoling, and ultimately disowning Gerry, before the nephew rushes out of the house and is shortly thereafter killed during a riot between “Antis” and “Cons.” While it is unfortunate that Gerry, the novel’s most complex character, is killed off by the midway point of the novel, his death brings poignancy to the political struggle and provides an effective climactic punchline to the crackling dialogue that has come before.

After the novel’s tense middle section, however, the action wanes as we await the outcome of a Referendum vote that we know will favour Confederation. While I disagree somewhat with Delisle’s remarks about Ernest, I concede that some characters are poorly developed. “Gran,” who is the voice of reason and the peace-maker during family disputes, simply functions as the stereotypical figure of veneration whose speech is frequently limited to expressions of dismay: “Oh my! Oh my!” It is also disappointing that the character of Ernest’s daughter Julia is never really developed; she is apparently a “goddess” (44), but of *what* we never learn. She is entirely too meek when it comes to her father’s bullying ways, and is pathetically passive when Gerry reveals his political leanings: “I’m going to be so ashamed if the nuns in Litledale find out my cousin is a Confederate. They’ll think I’m not worthy of being in there” (92). Generally, though, Dohaney gives us an intriguing family drama, and another novel to be added to a long list of Confederation fictions. As Stan Dragland has noted, “Confederation will die as an issue in Newfoundland when everyone feels the same way about it; J.R. Smallwood will lie quietly in posterity only when everyone agrees about him. What are the chances of either of those things happening?” (189)

But before the issue of Confederation metaphorically set Newfoundland ablaze, it literally burned three times in the nineteenth century. One of these times is the subject of Paul Butler’s novel, *1892*. Butler is adept at using historical events in his compelling story about the developing intimacy of two lower-class young people. Their relationship enables Butler to explore class relations in St. John’s, which emulated the most pretentious aspects of the Victorian age: an unreasonable

obsession with upper-class fashions, a pseudo-religious devotion to civic ethics, and a deep fear of the contaminating effects of close contact with members of the lower class. These issues are explored with intelligence, and the book is written in an economic but lyrical style.

The fire that constitutes the climactic event in Butler's novel broke out on 8 July, 1892 at the premises of a Mr. O'Brien, near the junction of Freshwater and Pennywell roads. Popular lore has established Patrick "Tommy" Fitzpatrick as the culprit, and it has since been accepted that the young man, hired by O'Brien as a farm labourer, accidentally dropped his pipe into a pile of hay. There has never been any definitive evidence to prove that Fitzpatrick started the fire, and the young man denied the charges. Over 10,000 people were left homeless, but only four casualties were recorded. Butler takes these spare details to form the backbone of an absorbing tale about Tommy Fitzpatrick and his complex friendship with Kathleen, an Irish servant girl in the house of Mrs. Stevens. It is interesting to note that the female servant is a historical figure but, in recorded history she was not given a name; while she was one of the victims in the fire, she is only identified as a "servant girl — name not known." Butler himself mentions this sad detail in his earlier non-fiction work about the event, *St. John's: City of Fire* (2007), and it seems likely that the impetus for his novelization stems from his discovery of the "tragic facelessness of the working class" (73) and his wish to change the accepted view that the fire "ravaged [only] the middle class" (74).

In the opening chapter, Butler establishes the novel's arch-motif:

The music-box ditty is reawakened by a distant echo of hooves somewhere down on Water Street. The tune jingles in my ears like coxcomb bells — *All things bright and beautiful. All creatures great and small* — keeping pace with clop-clop rhythm. Both sounds are part of a marionette dance sweeping through the night. (1)

These simple lyrics form part of a recurring metaphor or poetic conceit in which images of heat and light are linked to love, lust and desire, as well as Christianity and its stern promise of eternal hellfire for those who refuse to repent. The hymn, repeated throughout the novel, debuts as a gift from a stranger: Tommy steals the music box from a store and anonymously sends it to the Stevens's residence, where Kathleen works, thus initiating the central plot.

While initially he is an unlikely fellow, Tommy gains our sympathy when we are exposed to the hypocrisy of the middle- and upper-class citizens, especially the clergy. Indeed, Tommy's dislike of respectability is connected with his hatred of religion, particularly Catholicism, since it does not seem to promise any reachable salvation. For example, when Tommy approaches a priest in order to apologize for a drunken bout that lands him on the Cathedral steps and in the midst of the shocked and dismayed parishioners, the Father coldly asks, "What earthly use are you, Fitzpatrick?" (1892 94). Butler does a delicate job of dramatizing Kathleen's

gradual attraction for Tommy: her initial fear of being seen with such a scruffy fellow; her confused sense of Tommy's intentions when he steals the pretty music box for her; the way in which the music box reminds her of her home in Ireland, but gradually begins to remind her of this uncouth but "sensitive" boy; her reluctant consent to take a walk with him, and then her discovery that she sympathizes with him, especially after she sees him being manhandled by some of the parishioners at the Cathedral. He is, despite his rough appearance and "criminal tendencies" (70), someone of her class. Finally, after an initial attempt to reform him, she rejects the presumption that she is better than him, and begins to love him for his kind-hearted gestures. The music box, which had been associated with the ideal of home and orderliness, is seen as a sham, "a mirage of home" (30). Tommy steals the gift thinking that he will win Kathleen with it, but it is actually only after she rejects the music box that Tommy succeeds in wooing her. In a sense, the music box stands in the way of their relationship: its charms and lulling music disguises the fact that it is linked to a purchase system that ultimately excludes the lower classes. It is in this spirit of destroying the sham of bourgeois society that Kathleen sets fire to one of O'Brien's barns. She can no longer "stand" the way in which good people like Tommy are separated from the rest of society. In this rewriting of history, the young female servant *deliberately* attacks bourgeois society by destroying a piece of its beloved property. Ironically, Kathleen's anarchical gesture of setting the fire, which is intended to only eradicate Tommy's awful working conditions, succeeds in destroying their union: after she leaves the O'Brien premises, she returns to Mrs. Stevens, not realizing that the northwesterly wind has pushed the fire down to the Stevens home. Consequently, the fire guts the house and kills everyone inside, including Kathleen, Mrs. Stevens and her daughter Louisa. In a fit of violent anguish, Tommy sneaks into O'Brien's stable yard and gouges out the eyes of two horses, suspecting that they might be God's "spies," and that they had possibly "whispered their secret on the wind, and brought God's fiery revenge on Kathleen" (163).

The sub-plot of the novel, involving the mysterious Dr. Glenwood, enhances the metaphorical richness of the narrative, which is consistently shaped through images of heat and fire, light and brightness. The music box initiates this image cluster in the opening pages when Kathleen first lifts the lid of the trinket and hears Cecil F. Alexander's 1840s children's hymn, "All Things Bright and Beautiful." The theme is developed further when we are introduced to Stevens's cousin Dr. Glenwood, a respectable scientist experimenting with photographic technology who asks Kathleen to assist him. In what turns out to be a foreshadowing of Kathleen's death, Butler provides a detailed description of Kathleen's ordeal as she sits under the blinding and sweltering gas lamps while Glenwood operates his strange machinery. "They're very bright," Kathleen says of the gas lamps, hoping to speed up the process (1892 49). The next sequence is somewhat difficult to explain because Kathleen herself is bewildered by it: Glenwood completes his

experiment (probably something akin to an early cinematograph or perhaps even an X-ray, as it is later suggested), and then behaves as though something intimate has passed between them. The experiment is performed again later, and this time Glenwood seems to shake and convulse in Kathleen's presence as he views his photographic display, applying pressure to her shoulder and breathing heavily (88-89). Glenwood's erratic behaviour is symptomatic of his developing mania for controlling light, which he calls "God's own medium" (87); but more importantly, his behaviour suggests his obsession with capturing Kathleen's image. The sinister element of Glenwood's experiment is hinted at again when he reveals that his photographs have produced a skeletal image of Kathleen (89); he produces a similar result after acquiring Louisa as his assistant. The x-ray-like reproductions may seem common enough to twenty-first century readers, but Butler employs them to emphasize Glenwood's predatory nature — that he sadistically enjoys framing, capturing, and ultimately preserving these women (108), but to what end? The answer comes later on when Louisa is found dead in her room, evidently strangled — possibly an experiment gone wrong — and that Glenwood is somehow responsible (147). Before he can be accosted, he escapes from the house, locking in Mrs. Stevens, the dead Louisa, and Kathleen. While the Glenwood character is invented, the rest is, as they say, history: unable to escape, the servant-girl dies in the fire. But there is still more to dwell on here. Given Butler's obvious interest in class issues, it is notable that the photographic machinery is operated by an upper-class male: Glenwood can use his gender and position to manipulate Kathleen. The parallel situation is Kathleen's relationship with Tommy, another male who attempts to court Kathleen with a machine that produces "light"; in the case of the music box, "all things bright and beautiful." But, as Glenwood reveals, all things "bright" are *not* necessarily beautiful, meaning not just that fire, as a light source, can also kill, but that beauty is not inherently connected with respectability. This inversion of the music-box sentiment is reinforced in the Epilogue when Tommy encounters Glenwood just as he has discovered the still-intact trinket lying amongst the rubble of the Stevens's mansion. (Tommy, of course, has not met Glenwood before, nor is he aware of the doctor's involvement in Kathleen's death). There is a certain chilling irony when Glenwood, observing the object in Tommy's hand, announces gaily, "What a world of joy and fantasy such novelties contain!" (162). Tommy has been stigmatized from the beginning, and despite his ignominious act in the stable yard, Glenwood is exposed here as a more sinister figure whose sociopathic behaviour is easily disguised under the cloth of respectability.

Because fable rather than the historical record has placed the blame on Tommy Fitzpatrick and led us to believe that the middle and upper classes were the real victims in the great St. John's fire of 1892, Butler has chosen to freely interpret the event. As he states in his Afterword, "The spirit in which I have approached this book is that of novelist, not that of a historian" (1892 165). For this reason,

Butler comes the closest to presenting a “historiographic metafiction,” since he deliberately departs from established facts. Like Johnston, he is aware of both the drawbacks of an “incomplete historical record” and the benefits of exploring an “emotional truth.” Using some of the basic facts about the time period, Dohaney invents her own set of motivations for her anti-Confederate protagonist, making him believable, even if a little deflated. (Indeed, the same could be said for Johnston’s Smallwood: that his motivations and enthusiasm are believable, if less than honourable.) Dohaney succeeds somewhat in presenting the emotional impact of the Confederation era of the late 1940s, even if the narrative flags towards the end. Ricketts, on the other hand, repeatedly falls back on clichés and truisms in her fictionalization of the Badger riot of 1959. It is almost as if she wants to enforce her themes all the way through: *this is history not fiction; this story is very simple* (which makes me think that *Badger Riot* may have been better as a straight *history* rather than a novel). She seems too concerned with reproducing every detail of the event, and the emotional, or at least *aesthetic*, potential of a Newfoundland “riot” is hindered by too many characters, who seem all too often of the “pastework substitute” kind.

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