

# Calvin Hollett, *Shouting, Embracing, and Dancing with Ecstasy: The Growth of Methodism in Newfoundland, 1774-1874.*

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and middle-class Newfoundland women, nearly all Protestants of English background, whose lives and roles contrasted sharply with those of the Avalon's Irish fisherwomen.

In short, this is a marvellous work, and this reviewer takes issue with only two points, one theoretical, the other historiographical but, admittedly, also somewhat personal. The first point concerns Keough's rather relentless insistence on the "agency" of Irish women on the Avalon (*versus* what she decries as many historians' stereotypical portrayal of women's "victimhood"). To be sure, Keough draws compelling contrasts between her subjects' multiple roles and relative freedoms, on the one hand, and the constraints of "domesticity" and "respectability" imposed on their middle-class peers, on the other hand. Despite its sometimes "New Left" associations, however, "agency" strikes me, ironically, as an inherently bourgeois-capitalist concept with "modern" and "individualistic" connotations, which therefore seems somewhat inappropriately applied to people who were embedded in what Keough describes as highly "traditional" and "communal" societies. Yet another danger in "agency" is its frequent reactionary usage — by authors with socio-political perspectives much different from Keough's — to obscure or even deny the structural inequities and systemic exploitations, which fundamentally constrain the lives of all those who inhabit "plebeian" or subaltern communities.

Finally, Keough's masterful book clearly proves that she is far too good a historian to feel any need to emphasize her own contributions by disparaging or caricaturing the work of other scholars; put bluntly, her assertion that my work depicts Irish Catholics as "an inferior ... emigrant type" (60) is a gross misrepresentation, although, to be fair, Keough is merely repeating the line taken by the reputed godfather of Irish Canadian studies, Donald Akenson, and, also to be fair, she displays more courage than most of her peers in critiquing his studies of the Irish diaspora.

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Calvin Hollett, *Shouting, Embracing, and Dancing with Ecstasy: The Growth of Methodism in Newfoundland, 1774-1874*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010. ISBN: 978-0-773536-71-5.

THIS FORCEFULLY ARGUED and finely researched study presents a fascinating account of the growth of Methodism in Newfoundland in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The first part of the study is primarily conceptual and throws down a highly provocative thesis about the character of Newfoundland Methodism and, more generally, about the social and cultural history of the island. Hollett asserts that Methodism in Newfoundland was "a robust popular movement of the religion of experience." It was rooted in local communities, led by lay preachers and class leaders, and sustained by ongoing revivals of religion that carried Methodism

throughout the colony. The author, in effect, rejects the missionary-led, “middle-class Methodism of St John’s” and focuses instead on the lay-centred “artisan” Methodism that prospered along the island’s many bays and coastlines. The study also challenges the long-held belief that, outside its one significant urban centre, the colony consisted of isolated (and depraved) communities that had little economic and social intercourse with each other and the larger world. This, then, is hot religion — shouting, embracing, and dancing — a far cry from the sedate bourgeois religion that dominates the study of Canadian religious history.

The second part of the study illustrates these assertions. Organized geographically, it describes the actual practice of this “lay and bay” Methodism as it grew up and spread all around the small coastal settlements of the colony: Notre Dame, Trinity, and Conception Bays — Fogo, Twillingate, and Moreton’s Harbour.

There are several notable features in this fine study. Readily acknowledging one’s own shortcomings, the uninstructed Canadian will come away from the book with a much finer appreciation of the geography and social life of the island. I can now grasp the relationship between religion and the rhythms of fishing and sealing, understand the distinctive structure of credit and business relations, and, if told a body were going down to Bonavista, know with reasonable certainty that person’s putative destination. More importantly, the type of Methodism the study propounds — ecstatic, demotic, iconoclastic, and contested — helps to free Hollett’s analysis of religion from the increasingly entrenched paradigms of middle-class hegemony and reminds us once again of the critical role religion can play in the process of working-class community formation. Finally, the study raises the very important question of popular religion: what does one find when one looks beyond the missionaries, the educated elites, and the propaganda of religious institutions and tries to retrieve the religion of those believers who were actively engaged in forming their own spiritual life?

In the study of religion one should never undervalue the harvest from small seeds planted in unlikely ground, and this localized study inevitably raises important questions about the relationship between Methodism in Newfoundland and the many iterations of Methodism in the English-speaking world. Do, for example, the dialectical tensions between clergy and laity, centre and periphery, help us to understand the progress of the disruption of Methodism in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries? Do they offer a way of understanding the massive battles within the British Wesleyan movement, as Todd Webb has pointed out, between the ceaseless controlling tyranny of Jabez Bunting and those who demanded more independence in both the Old World and the New? How were the tensions between Methodists and Anglicans (especially concerning Tractarian ritualism) that Hollett describes played out in other parts of British North America? Finally, for all its strengths, the study also illustrates some of the larger methodological problems around the writing of the history of popular religion. We need more descriptions of Methodists as they danced, embraced, and shouted with ecstasy. Unfortunately, the

primary sources are dominated overwhelmingly by those who controlled and spoke for the interests of religious institutions, and who drew dark veils across these popular practices. Nonetheless, the ability of this book to open our eyes and reveal so much is a considerable accomplishment.

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Kate Evans, *Where Old Ghosts Meet*. St. John's: Breakwater Books, 2010. ISBN: 978-1-550813-27-2.

KATE EVANS'S *Where Old Ghosts Meet* is a thoughtful, elegantly written novel set in 1972 about Nora Molloy's search for family history in Cullen, Ireland, and Shoal Cove, Newfoundland. When her father dies, Nora embarks on a journey to discover what happened to Matthew Molloy, her grandfather, who disappeared from Ireland when her father was a young boy. He had been considered a sort of pariah for leaving his wife and child alone in Cullen to fend for themselves. In Shoal Cove, Nora meets Peg Barry, who knew Matthew Molloy. They spend several days together while Peg tells Nora everything she can about Matthew, much of it being secrets she had to keep to herself to prevent any further small-town gossip about her from circulating. Evans does an excellent job of depicting the kind of life that Peg's character lived, surrounded by the tight-knit outport community of Berry Island, and the way that the presence of an outsider like Matthew, especially one with a questionable past, could separate her from the community that is her home. Evans weaves Nora's search for stories about Matthew together with scenes from the past that illustrate the poignancy of events such as Matthew's admission to Peg that he is married and his eventual struggle with Alzheimer's.

Matthew is a character in the fullest sense of the word, possessing extremes that are almost puzzling in scope. For example, his personal qualities include enthusiasm and creativity in his public role as a schoolteacher, which is juxtaposed with his capacity to humiliate and ridicule those same students in private situations. Through discussions with the local priest and one of Matthew's former students, Nora, who intends to find the truth about why her grandfather left his family in Cullen, eventually learns what he was actually like, "warts and all" (158), and bravely listens to stories that would be difficult to hear. These include his problems with alcohol and his erratic nature, which appears in his way of suddenly leaving Peg after her admission of love for him, only to return seven years later, out of the blue.

Evans adds another dimension to Matthew's character through an exploration of the complexities of belonging. On a surface level, the idea of belonging in an outport community such as Berry Island appears to be simple: one is born and raised there, knows everyone, and is able to rely on the community as a support network. However, Evans explores the concept of belonging further through Matthew's