

***Myth and Milieu : Atlantic Literature and Culture, 1918-1939.***  
**Edited by Gwendolyn Davies. (Fredericton : Acadiensis Press, 1993. Pp. iv + 209.)**

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treatments especially as administered to very young children to “clean them out.” I have seen economically-strapped mothers who cannot afford to buy food for their families because a physician — who has no understanding of their household finances — has prescribed expensive brand-name drugs for children suffering from a common cold.

The book is clearly written with a physician in mind. It opens with a scenario of how difficult or dangerous it could be, in the first half of the 20th century, for the physician to travel to his patients. Yet, the reader is given no sense of what it was like to live in pain with multiple complaints. I would also contend that, while it is important that physicians become more aware of local metaphors or idioms of distress and patient use of alternative medicines, it is also important to realize that if Newfoundlanders today remember little discussion about health in the old days it is because in the old days discussion of health care was discussion about “everything else” (my term not Crellin’s). Crellin, however, put this “everything else” beyond his analytical reach with a quote from Faulkner (p. 45) : “ ‘You can’t understand it. You would have to be born there.’ ” I would argue that any microanalysis of medical practice in everyday life must grapple with local understandings. This is currently being done, as attested by the recent flowering of studies on the embodiment of culture and the social construction of health and illness. But it is precisely at this point that Crellin gives up. Nevertheless, *Home Medicine* represents a promising first step towards a social history of self-remedy in Newfoundland.

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*Myth and Milieu : Atlantic Literature and Culture, 1918-1939.*

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While the years between the two great wars were not a time of prosperity in Atlantic Canada, the region’s economic hardship did not inhibit cultural activity. In an effort to document the range of cultural endeavour, a conference called “Myth and Milieu : Atlantic Literature and Culture, 1918-1939” was held at Acadia University in 1991. The proceedings of that conference are the subject of this volume edited by Gwen Davies.

The collection contains an Introduction and nineteen essays organized under six categories. Many of the essays focus upon individual cultural workers such as L.M. Montgomery, E.J. Pratt, Thomas Raddall, Helen Creighton, Frank Parker Day, Vernon Rhodenizer, Molley Beresford, G. Horn Russell, Donald

McRichie and Robert Chambers. Thematic papers deal with cinema and live theatre, music education, Newfoundland literature, and Atlantic women.

Beyond a doubt the prize of the collection is Ian McKay's essay, "Helen Creighton and the Politics of Antimodernism." One has the feeling that the whole collection would have been stronger if each of the other authors had been asked to recast their work in light of McKay's penetrating analysis. The literary papers in particular would have benefited from McKay's insights, which might have pushed the critics to escape their somewhat narrower boundaries of form and convention.

McKay explains that "[a]ntimodernism coloured virtually all the words and things cultural producers fashioned in the 1920's and 1930's to convey the essence of Nova Scotia" (p.1). As a result of this antimodernistic colouring, he says that "Nova Scotians were told that their society was essentially *innocent* of the complications and anxieties of 20th-century modernity. Nova Scotia's heart, in its true essence, resided in the primitive, the rustic, the unspoiled, the picturesque, the quaint, the unchanging" (p. 2).

McKay then proceeds to analyze the applied antimodernism of Helen Creighton, and he does so with respect and admiration for her contributions to Atlantic folklore. But he is unrelenting in his identification of her middle class, capitalist biases under headings such as "Assumption of Organic Unity and the Denial of Class," "Gender Ideals," "Race and Ethnicity," "Magical Thinking" and "Neo-Nationalism." He concludes by noting that in the process of denying that the Folk could be radical she "politicized the very sphere she wished to purify of modern politics" (p. 16).

Other essays in the collection unintentionally illustrate the antimodernist thesis. Essays on L.M. Montgomery, and Frank Parker Day emphasize the role played by chivalry and romance. A useful paper on the Halifax literary group called "the Song Fishermen" would seem to be at home within McKay's analysis as well.

Diane Tye also contributes some fresh thinking in her essay on "Women's Oral Narrative Traditions as Depicted in Lucy Maud Montgomery's Fiction, 1918-1939." She applies the folkloristic theory of gossip to the literary texts with fine results. Tye, using Montgomery, challenges the frequent belief in the social sciences that gossip is about social control. She prefers to see the use of gossip as "multi-stranded" with the capacity to either "enhance status or diminish it." Ultimately, she says, "how one interprets the functions of women's oral narratives depends in large part on how one defines power."

There are other worthy papers in this collection. Lewis J. Poteet does a nice job describing South Shore speech. David Pitt has a harder job describing E.J. Pratt's Newfoundland connection given that Pratt left the "Rock" when he was 25, and rarely returned from Toronto. However, in his identification of Pratt's attitude towards the sea as "foe, antagonist, destroyer," he describes a stance

which moves Pratt outside the antimodernist position.

Some essays display the results of "prospecting" in the various archives. They are "finding" exercises which will be of use to cultural researchers in areas such as art, music and theatre.

The final impression of the book is that the decision to use six subject headings legislates against the identification of common themes across disciplines. The papers tend to be like Leacock's man who jumped on his horse and rode off in all directions. A much more thoughtful "Afterword" might have integrated the text. Certainly, with McKay pointing the way, this could have been done. In addition, notes on contributors would be useful. While Atlantic Canadians all know each other, those of us who are expatriates do appreciate having disciplines and institutions indicated. We might want to write home.

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*Russian Folk Art.* By Alison Hilton. (Bloomington : Indiana University Press, 1995. Pp. xxi + 356.)

"Everything You Ever Wanted to Know about Russian Folk Art" could have provided an alternative title for this intelligent, well-written, beautifully edited and handsomely produced foray. With its wealth of detail and interpretive perspectives this is the ideal book for anyone whose Russian language skills are too weak to permit a critical reading of relevant literature ; and in this regard, it is certain that Hilton's *Russian Folk Art*, like the English-language survey of *Russian Folklore* by Iurii M. Sokolov (1950), will take its place as a prized handbook for readers in search of information written in English. As outlined in the blurb on the inside, front-flap of the paper jacket, Hilton's book "describes the traditions, style, and functions of a broad range of objects made by Russian peasant artists [...] Beginning with the settings in which folk artists traditionally worked [...] she discusses the principal media they employed [...] and the items they produced [...]" The survey "emphasizes the cumulative originality inherent in Russian folk art, the balance between time-honored forms and techniques, and the creativity of individual artists. It shows how pervasive images and designs evolved from ancient Slavic sources, absorbed elements of church, court, and urban arts, reflected historical events and daily life, and helped to form a Russian esthetic identity in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Finally, it examines the complex interaction between folk art and high culture: the role of serf artists, the preservation and reinterpretation of folk art by scholars and professional artists, and the new roles of folk art in the Soviet era."