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Romancing Newfoundland: The Art of Fiction in David Macfarlane's *The Danger Tree*

HELENE STAVELEY

DAVID MACFARLANE'S *The Danger Tree* (1991) belongs to a category of writing that intrigues contemporary critics. Comparable in topic and technique to works such as Wayne Johnston's *Baltimore's Mansion* (1999) and Michael Ondaatje's *Running in the Family* (1993), *The Danger Tree* chronicles a family's past and, through them, the place where they belong. Mixing a history of Newfoundland with family memoirs and photographs, *The Danger Tree* examines key events that shaped both the Goodyear family of Grand Falls and the Newfoundland of which they were a part, including the Great War, Confederation, and their aftermaths. Like a growing number of historically-based works, it straddles the boundary between fact and fiction, history and novel. The book is about people who actually existed and who actually did what Macfarlane describes, yet these facts are presented in an undeniably literary manner. An accomplished writer known across the country for his regular columns in the *Globe and Mail* as well as for several acclaimed works of fiction and nonfiction, Macfarlane employs certain techniques of literary artifice to make his story coherent, and to guide his reader. In so doing, he does what historians have done from time immemorial: gives his material a specific shape or, in Hayden White's term, imposes "emplotment" on it. He shapes his narrative into what White and Northrop Frye call "comic romance" — which Frye contends is concerned with community life and regeneration — bending the book into the swirls and arabesques Macfarlane associates with vivid, powerful Newfoundland-style storytelling. Macfarlane's use of comic-romantic emplotment allows him to accentuate the enduring strengths of his grandfather, great-uncles, great-aunt and great-grandmother, and it allows him to suggest how these strengths

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persist to this day in the remarkably hardy and resourceful people of Newfoundland despite almost overwhelming adversity. By examining the figure of Macfarlane's narrator, the techniques that emplot his tale, and his employment of "literary" devices, the nature of Macfarlane's knowledge of and affection for Newfoundland will emerge as he reveals them in this rich and complex comic romance.

I. THE TELLER

David Macfarlane inscribes himself into his comic romance, suggesting that he has been shaped by the story he tells as much as he has shaped it. Like F. Scott Fitzgerald's Nick Carraway and Nathaniel Hawthorne's Miles Coverdale, he is a narrator who has participated in the drama but who stays on the periphery of events. At times he is the adult Macfarlane who is connecting with family members, questing after stories, and shaping disparate fragments into a gorgeous and shapely whole, but just as often he is a much younger David — a child in Ontario enthralled by exotic visitors from an exotic island, a teenager trying to hide his uneasiness about his elderly relatives, a university student following the footsteps of an uncle he never knew, a young adult grieving for cherished relatives and for stories forever silenced. His reasons for framing the narrative in the first place are not made explicit, but as the tale progresses it becomes evident not only that Macfarlane desires to communicate to his readers the memories of the Goodyear family and of his grandfather's generation, but that he is intent on portraying a face of Newfoundland that is not well known in mainland Canada and in the wider world.

Macfarlane is well qualified to write his comic romance. He is descended from a prominent Newfoundland family from the Grand Falls-Windsor area, and is privy to its inner workings; he has also visited the island frequently and is a first-hand witness of its attractions. He is also an outsider, an admitted "Come From Away" (38) whose heritage includes not only the Goodyear and Newfoundlander characteristics bequeathed him from his mother's line — which include a facility with storytelling as well as certain unique perspectives which will be detailed below — but also the "legendary silences" and scepticism of his father's central Ontario family. He has experienced repeatedly the phenomenon of a family "community" regenerating itself through physical proximity and story sharing; and he has also seen a different family dynamic where psychological or emotional distance is exacerbated by silence and reticence. He is the offspring of both kinds of family. "I am who I am," writes Macfarlane, "because inside me is wedded the discomfiture of two societies as distinct from one another as night and day" (20).

While the discomfiture does bring unease, apparently it also permits Macfarlane a certain clearness of eye. Raised with whatever advantages a metropolis can offer, and among people like his father who are "capable of resisting the romance of the Goodyears" (81), if he can nevertheless passionately love a place and

a people so seemingly different from his Hamilton home and its people, then it is implicit that this love must be a result of choice. It is an educated decision, made more or less consciously, to valorize Newfoundland and Newfoundlanders, while the more reticent side of his ancestry prevents him from making excessively extravagant claims. In the eyes of the Macfarlane who is inscribed into his own comic romance, Newfoundlanders are hidden gems and Newfoundland is a secret treasure whose true worth he reveals proudly to the reader, his trusted confidante. In doing so he proclaims his allegiances, claiming for his own those qualities he most admires in the Goodyear family, that small but crucial segment of Newfoundlanders who become emblems of the entire population in this book. He will share his vision of a mysterious, enigmatic, but vulnerable land. He will portray a people whose efforts to earn respect and esteem are consistently undercut by a generosity and stalwartness of heart of which the larger world compulsively takes advantage. What problems there are — political and personal — will be identified accurately and mercilessly but with unfailing courtesy by an educated, sympathetic, honest narrator.

Yet Macfarlane's perspective is not altogether the perspective of the born and bred Newfoundlander. He grew up in Hamilton and currently lives in Toronto, and the time he spends in Newfoundland through research trips, vacations and shorter visits is necessarily limited. But his love affair with Newfoundland, like the book itself, begins in Macfarlane's childhood, when people from Newfoundland were rare, cherished visitors: aunts, uncles, cousins and grandparents made especially welcome by his extroverted Newfoundlander mother, who, he emphasizes, felt out of place in staid Southern Ontario. To the young David Macfarlane, therefore, Newfoundland was filtered through stories told by adventurous and beloved travellers or remembered as the setting for extraordinary events. Tales of Newfoundland were tales of romance, of mystery and intrigue, of adventure and danger, of vast potential, evoking far-away, exotic realms. They brought wonder, excitement and anticipation to their open-mouthed hearers. The adult Macfarlane's narrative abounds with these qualities: M.H. Abrams describes the romance's depiction of life as "more picturesque, more adventurous, more heroic than the actual" (Abrams 1957, 152), which certainly seems to describe the Newfoundland we find in *The Danger Tree*. Macfarlane essentially gives his readers the Newfoundland that entranced him as a child and held him as an adult. Through it all there is a larger implication that to understand the Goodyears is to understand Newfoundland, and that to understand Newfoundland is to understand some of the best of which the world is capable.

II. THE TECHNIQUE

Macfarlane's desire to communicate his vision of Newfoundland as a place of superlative virtues motivates him to construct his story in a comic-romantic form. In *Tropics of Discourse*, Hayden White contends that

> no given set of casually recorded historical events can in itself constitute a story; the most it might offer to the historian are story *elements*. The events are *made* into a story by the suppression or subordination of certain of them and the highlighting of others, by characterization, motific repetition, variation of tone and point of view, alternative descriptive strategies, and ... all of the techniques that we would normally expect to find in the emplotment of a novel or a play. For example, no historical event is *intrinsically tragic*; it can only be conceived as such from a particular point of view or from within the context of a structured set of events of which it is an element enjoying a privileged place. For in history what is tragic from one perspective is comic from another ... (White 1978, 84)

White also observes that connecting cause to effect is a strong part of making a particular time, place and people understood by a reader from a different time, place and people. Drawing the connection between cause and effect artificially isolates and amplifies the importance of specific incidents. In the process it becomes expedient, even necessary, for the historian to convey his perspective or ideology by constructing his version of historical events within one of Northrop Frye's four modes: the romantic, the tragic, the satiric, and the comic. Any historical event, White claims, can be presented in any one of these four ways, depending on whether the individual author sees it as *romantic* — as an organicist quest for meaning, for an "appreciation and delineation of the particularity and individuality of things"; or, as a *tragic* "decline and fall" in which cataclysmic changes are initiated by "mechanistic causal connections" (128); or, as a *satiric* "recurrence or casual catastrophe"; or as a *comic* "progress through evolution or revolution" (82). Frye claims that both comedy and romance are regenerative: they focus on integration and continuity — marriage, procreation, fertility — and on grand quests for enlightenment. In *The Danger Tree*, Macfarlane employs both comedy and romance in conjunction, for neither satire nor tragedy has much place in his vision of Newfoundland. While he does introduce elements of tragedy, largely in his narratives of the Great War and its aftermath, he sees neither a "decline and fall" nor a "casual catastrophe" of Newfoundland's society in these events. Instead, Macfarlane emphasizes the Goodyears' abiding strength of spirit, Newfoundlanders' survival instincts, and the ways these contribute to a healthy community rich in resources and potential.

The Danger Tree is at heart a comic romance.[1] Its romantic impulse to trace the sequence of events through evolutionary processes towards vitality and security is evident at all levels of Macfarlane's narrative. Strong constancy of character is one

characteristic of the romantic quester for enlightenment. Accordingly, as he writes about family members, Macfarlane selects specific traits and presents them at different times and stages of their development, delineating how each person's character progresses or evolves under the dual pressures of personal integrity and changing times. "Skipper Joe" Goodyear, Macfarlane's grandfather, is portrayed as gruff, bluff, loyal, and generous to a fault. These characteristics see him through a wide variety of experiences, including his rescue of a sealer gone mad, his encounter with the Princess Elizabeth, his donation of financial savings to help the British war effort, his endless wrangling with brothers Ken and Roland in their later commercial endeavours, and his complex relationships with his crew of workers, whose political, social and religious differences would lead to chaos were it not for the Skipper's strict fairness. Similarly, Roland is portrayed consistently as an impractical, feckless dreamer whose visions fail to embrace the mundane concerns of marriage and business. Roland's characteristics persist and intensify until he is left in a nursing home, a senile but still dapper man surrounded by visions no longer connected to memory. In this way, Macfarlane's construction of the brothers' personalities develops consistently, even through their testing in the Great War.

Although there are also strong aspects of tragedy present within the narrative, it is de-emphasized, in stark contrast to Wayne Johnston's *Baltimore's Mansion.* In Johnston's more tragic or satiric work, the focus is placed on the unfulfilled promise of Newfoundland, tragically lost (or casually betrayed) through Confederation and other causes. Johnston also emphasizes the ensuing pain and sorrow that patriotic Newfoundlanders experienced. His tone is reflective, introspective, and soul-searching. In *The Danger Tree*, on the other hand, the reader witnesses the "decline and fall" of the hearty, good-natured Goodyear clan, which somehow is neither decline nor fall. Watching the family move from stalwart survivor beginnings to the resigned stagnation of the nursing home, the reader also sees Newfoundland change from a proud, independent country into a "poor-cousin" province fighting to maintain dignity and pride in the face of ignorance, misunderstanding and indifference. Macfarlane somewhat bitterly observes about the infamous series of jokes starring Newfoundlanders that "Canadians needed a homebred bumpkin to emphasize their own prosperity and sophistication" (159). Still, he does not emphasize what has been lost by Newfoundland and its people. *The Danger Tree* focuses instead on what has been retained at great cost. Because of this emphasis, his narrative resists tragic emplotment. Embracing the quest for meaning and the appreciation of particularity, Macfarlane's work presents the organic evolution of Newfoundland and the Goodyears as venerable emblems of hardiness.

III. THE CHARACTERS

Macfarlane presents the fortunes of the Goodyear family as intrinsically linked to Newfoundland's. This technique seems to be linked with tales that are epic in scope and romantic in structure, involving both the vast, rich struggle of human experience and the movement of society towards health and wholeness. Macfarlane represents the Goodyear family's best personal characteristics as the best characteristics Newfoundland's people have to offer, and the country's faults and failures are echoed in the Goodyears' fortunes. When Newfoundland falters and strays, so the Goodyears decline; when Newfoundland prospers and maintains its ideals, the Goodyears thrive. Their success in building the Bonavista North Road brings new prosperity and community to every part of the island it touches (229); the devastation they suffer during the Great War is paralleled by a devastating forest fire that begins as their sufferings begin and, significantly, continues well past their return home (131-49). Newfoundland's greatest chance for self-actualization is removed by joining Confederation, just as the Goodyears' glory years are ended by the bankruptcy of the family business. While the empirical timelines of history are bent to achieve this congruity — chronologically, Confederation predates the bankruptcy but the two events are placed within the same chapter and structured to climax congruently — the juxtaposition of the one with the other simply uncovers an inherent similarity that, it now seems, has been present all along.

The characteristics Macfarlane extols in the Goodyears of his grandfather's generation are implicitly extended to all Newfoundlanders. Macfarlane's great-grandmother Louisa Goodyear, family matriarch and mother of Josiah, Roland, Stan, Ken, Hedley, Ray and Kate, is "strict, frugal and hardworking" (21). Macfarlane's grandfather, the younger Josiah (also known as "Skipper Joe" Goodyear), is "generous, courteous and kind" (29), burly and gruff, possessed of a "long, slow fuse on a temper like a landmine" (34), generous; having "a sense of obligation and civic duty" (155), and dignified, courteous and courtly (159). Yet through everything, he remains a simple woodsman, more at home in the outdoors than among offices, bureaucrats, and politicians (214). Roland, a writer of the Goodyear family history like Macfarlane, is dreamy, ambitious, impetuous, and impractical, besides being one of "nature's gentlemen" (164). Stan is spirited, independent, perspicacious and irreverent (86), strong and handsome (124), calm, and popular. Ken is healthy as well as confident (89), diplomatic (172), and prudent (176). Hedley is "well-read, polite, earnest" (124), an idealist and a scholar, very much a "fine man." Kate is beautiful, intelligent, spirited, eminently practical, and passionately loyal. Young Ray is mischievous (125), stubborn (139), and patriotic (144). Dubbed by a neighbourhood minister "the Goodyears of Newfoundland," the family is as proud of the synecdochic label as they are proud of their size and strength. Of all the siblings, Ken receives both the most ambiguous description and the shortest treatment. His proficiency in business is regarded with suspicion, and there are allusions to his

"shady dealings" as well as his anxiety when the company accounts are audited; further, Ken is only mentioned in passing, whereas each of his six siblings "stars" in one entire chapter. Ken's shadiness, however Macfarlane elides it, might nevertheless have its historical counterpart in the political corruption that preceded the dissolution of Newfoundland's legislature and the arrival of the Commission of Government.

This valorization of Goodyear family members is part of the comic-romantic emplotment through which Macfarlane filters his material. From childhood on, his personal experience of Newfoundland privileges its exoticism. His early encounters with his mother's homeland predispose him towards softening the rough edges of poverty or hardship. This first-hand account of a boyhood vacation is a case in point; it takes place around 1958 with a six-year-old David visiting his great-grandmother Louisa's pre-Grand Falls-Windsor home.

> Carmanville was a magical place. It had no electricity and no indoor plumbing. It had feather beds and a well, and it had sheep that wandered everywhere. It had rickety, dangerous wharves and, along the crabbed and starfished beach, a few abandoned, rusted-out hulls from which Sir Henry Morgan could spy Maracaibo and Jim Hawkins keep a lookout for Ben Gunn.... Carmanville had old men with no teeth whom we could call Uncle, or, better yet, Skipper, and it had boys down by the water who could jump from rock to rock like cats until they seemed halfway to England, and who taught me how to swear. (105-106)

The reader is given no other description of Newfoundland's landscape through Macfarlane's own eyes; elsewhere in the book the landscape is mediated by the perspectives of Joe, Roland, Hedley, Louisa, and others. As a result, this particular description permeates our understanding of the author's Newfoundland. The best qualities of the boys' paradise known as Carmanville are transferred to Newfoundland as a whole. Everyone is kindly there, and everyone is protected from the dangers of the rickety wharves. The treacherous, rocky sea becomes a playground, and the lack of plumbing and electricity offers the possibility of adventure, not hardship. It is a land of eternal summer — a stark contrast to Wayne Johnson's *Baltimore's Mansion*, which is set almost exclusively during harsh autumns and winters. Nothing about Newfoundland is as mundane as Macfarlane's familiar home town of Hamilton, Ontario, and accordingly Newfoundland becomes the source of all delight.

The distinction between a single city and an entire island is lost on young Macfarlane. After submitting an elementary school report comparing Hamilton and Newfoundland, he realizes he has omitted to mention what he thinks is the most important difference between the two places: Hamilton's "legendary silences" and Newfoundland's oratorical storytelling performances (39). In these orations, fiction and fact are dizzyingly intertwined to heighten dramatic effect. For young David Macfarlane, Newfoundland *is* story, peppered with features out of a boy's

adventure annual, including pirates (94-99), ghosts (101-102), treasure (96-97), and heroic feats of derring-do. The "looping" spirals of these stories impress the youngster, especially since they contrast so strongly with the stern silences of his father's family, and they lay the groundwork for the concern with artistry and structure that characterize Macfarlane's own work.

Macfarlane's delight in the storytelling marathons that were a Goodyear family tradition is obvious. He reflects that it was "as if Newfoundland contained all the best stories in the world":

> What I liked best was that they talked in great, looping circles.... [M]y Newfoundland relatives set their stories going and then let them roll from one tale to the next until I ... was certain they had no idea where they had begun. Their plots and jokes and family legends possessed the same broad, meandering curlicues as their accents. Stories that began conversations were left unfinished.... Tales were abandoned in the telling in favor of other tales, but one story led seamlessly to another, spiralling like drifting pipe-smoke, farther and farther away from the conversation's beginnings. Yet somehow, ... the stories found their way back, hours later, to where they had started.... (41-42)

In Macfarlane's hands, this type of progression becomes an artful device that shapes the narrative and forms a crucial part of the narrator's emplotment strategy. Take for example Chapter 8, "Beer and Skittles." Here we find stories of the deaths of Josiah and Louisa and of their catastrophic investments; a natural disaster; the Depression; of Kate and her life in a retirement home; her legendary tears and her deep affection for brother Hedley; and the story of Aunt Kate when a nurse and the soldier, interspersed with discussions of the War, poison gas, and hospital practices. The focus of this chapter involves loss, and the struggle to continue past it with the prospect of death constantly nearby. Kate and her courage are presented as possible models of how to react. Her physical tininess and fierce loyalty towards soldiers threaten to weaken her as she struggles against such oppressive forces as the hospital bureaucracy, a hierarchic system that will not let her contribute to the war effort as directly as she would like. She is described as small, trembling, and on the verge of tears as she faces the hospital director. But her passion and fortitude enable her not only to stand strong in the face of these forces on her own account, but to strike a heroic blow against bureaucratic indifference by fighting against the callous treatment of not one, but many soldiers. Such passion and fortitude, it is inferred, are our best weapons against loss in all its forms; they will guide us towards a vestige of tranquillity. The threads of all the stories that Macfarlane weaves into this chapter, so many of which cover topics that seem unrelated to Kate's story, all build towards this resolution, making each of them in effect a tale of the extraordinary heroism inspired by everyday situations. By implication the inevitability of death, the tragedy of natural disaster and economic collapse, the human evil that invents poison gas and bureaucrats — all these can be allayed, perhaps even coun-

tered. A spirit like Kate's becomes an effective tool against evil, as does the process of comparison and unification that Macfarlane achieves here by arranging problems and people in parallel lines to attain unforeseeable resolutions.

IV. THE ANOMALY: FACT OR FICTION?

Although she is referring to essentially the same phenomenon, narratologist Monika Fludernik calls the form of oral storytelling that Macfarlane imitates in his writing "recursive" (as in curving back) rather than "spiralling." Fludernik observes that narratives that arise spontaneously in conversation, as they do in the Goodyear marathons, often "[come] to the point right away, then [backtrack] for vital information," resulting in "an apparently random and 'urgent' structure" (Fludernik 1996, 62). Drawing on Deborah Tannen's work, she further notes that in conversation "storytelling is conducted, not in the spirit of truth or information, but in order to create or preserve face. Narratives in spontaneous conversation are frequently told to demonstrate that one is a 'good' or 'reliable' person, or they attempt to create emotional solidarity with the listener" (64). Macfarlane's disarming spiral form evidently goes a great distance to try to evoke the kind of immediate, emotive response characteristic of a conversational listener. It also subtly encourages the reader to empathize with the narrator, perhaps to admire his virtuosity, and to extend that empathy and admiration to the Newfoundlanders who are so expert in this form. Macfarlane adopts it to pay homage to his family's storytelling expertise but also to identify himself as a storytelling Goodyear. His admiration of it is self-justifying; it seems poetic justice to use this form to write about the family that used it so masterfully.

Yet Robert Scholes contends that when spiral-form plot structures appear in literature, the narrative's "tale-ness" and its literariness are both accentuated, since embedding tales within tales draws attention to the artifices of construction (Scholes 1979, 2-3). Macfarlane's use of the spiral pattern of oral storytelling, then, may mimic an organic pattern of growth and progression, but it is also self-conscious, very calculated, and patently artificial as a literary device, adding substantially to the rich texture of his narrative.

Macfarlane takes pleasure in the manipulation and control of narrative. This is evident from his diction, style and tone. Paragraphs filled with rapid-fire, thoroughly researched, textbook-type facts are juxtaposed with paragraphs constructed from family memory or with others that fictionalize those memories and facts. The episode in which Louisa Goodyear washes the corpse of Roland's wife Susie Green is a case in point (77-79). If he had intended to "factually" report the episode, Macfarlane might have begun and ended with Louisa's professional experience as community undertaker, for a village undertaker's standard experience with the human body, human mortality, and rituals of death would have provided a sufficiently

rich source of material from which to draw. Instead, he chooses to present the scene in fictional terms. He provides detailed descriptions of the room, the quality of the day's light, the water-filled bowl, and characteristics of the denuded corpse. He also ascribes to Louisa thoughts and observations that he could not have known. Louisa observes,

> The features of a man, no matter how much a fool he had been in life, often settled to a heroic grandeur in death.... With women, as soon as the face crumbled and the eyes darkened, as soon as the color went out of the skin — and it always went immediately — everything changed, and never for the better.... Beauty and plainness, intelligence and stupidity, sharpness and warmth, happiness and melancholy, pleasure and suffering, fell as abruptly and as suddenly from a woman's face as her own sinking blood. (77-78)

The adjectives that appear here are evaluative and subjective. They depend entirely on the perspective of the individual who thinks the thoughts. It is impossible to know, for example, whether what Louisa perceives as an "intelligent face" would be perceived so by Macfarlane. When this kind of slippage between character and author is elided with such emotional impact, it grows difficult to distinguish between fact and fiction. It even seems undesirable to do so, to further interrupt the narrative's eddying torrents with evaluative questioning. The spiral storytelling form, where one story interrupts another, has permitted Macfarlane to interpolate his own interpretation of an event within the body of the narrative. "Freeform" storytelling is now seen to be a useful technique for eliding slippages between fact and fiction, even for capitalizing on them.

In another case, Macfarlane discusses Hedley Goodyear's death in Belgium during the Great War (288-91). Much is made of a touching letter Hedley wrote to his family on the eve of the battle of Amiens, the battle in which he is reputed to have died. Hedley's acquaintance, E.J. Pratt, immortalizes Hedley's letter by broadcasting it annually on radio and television on the anniversary of that battle, so that the young man's heroic death is widely publicized and accepted as fact. Yet this actually turns out to be a "fiction." Years later, the adult Macfarlane discovers a second letter from Hedley in an old chest of Josiah's, a letter dated and postmarked nine days after Hedley's supposed death at the battle of Amiens. Presumably suppressed for an unknown reason by Hedley's brother Josiah or his mother Louisa, this second letter is cheerful and cocky in tone, contrasting strongly with the brave solemnity of the first letter. Reflecting on the gap between what he had believed and what actually was true, Macfarlane interpolates an extended construction of what would have happened had Hedley *really* survived:

> Reading the letter, I imagined Uncle Hedley returning to Scotland after the war was over. He would have arrived at Betsy Turnbull's door in Hawick, a bouquet of flowers in his hand and his Military Cross gleaming on the breast of his uniform. He would

> have taken his fiancée in his arms and, with both her feet off the ground, danced her round in circles of happiness. A month after that, back in Canada, he'd have stood in Aunt Kate's doorway, laughing at her tears and telling her that you'd think she'd never had a visit from a brother before. He'd take off his cap and undo his overcoat and tell us we'd all been mistaken. We'd got the story all wrong. (289-90)

Yet Macfarlane's reader already knows that this fiancée was never reunited with Hedley and never married; she remained his tragic "fiancée" until her death decades later. Further, the reader already knows that Hedley never returned from the war. The reader has been given no prior reason to believe in this fanciful construction, this miraculous, impossible, imagined visit to his family; in fact, we know that it never could have happened. It is therefore evident that although the Goodyears, E.J. Pratt, and several newspapers had managed to get "the facts" wrong about the details of the time of Hedley's death, the main fact that he did die is unchanged. In other words, although the young lieutenant survived a battle on 8 August in which everyone believed he perished, his survival had little effect in the actual world because he survived only to die ten days later. Moreover, it is more convenient, more "poetic," more "true" for Hedley to die as his legend says he did, instead of surviving only to die at some less memorable battle.

This slippage between facts, falsehoods, possibilities and actualities has been operating throughout the text, destabilizing the actual or real. Similar breaches of the factual occur frequently throughout the early part of the text. In some cases, Macfarlane clearly defines the limits of what is known about an occasion, then finds a means of proceeding beyond those limits when it suits his purpose. One example is the tale of what happened when Joe Goodyear "dressed-down the Queen of England" (33). Macfarlane writes, "No one is sure what he said, but it's possible to hazard a guess" (35). He then provides a careful postulation of "Skipper Joe's" diatribe on England's treatment of Newfoundland. This imagined reconstruction of the diatribe reaffirms all the qualities the reader has learned to associate with this gruff and honest but essentially kindly man.

In other cases, the gaps are simply identified and left, impassable barriers to full understanding. Concerning the young E.J. Pratt, we learn of Aunt Kate's recollection that "for some reason money was loaned to the cheery, bright, smooth-talking young man. Where the money came from, and why it was loaned to a visiting stranger, is a mystery" (61). And there the story ends, after some brief and comparatively half-hearted speculation. Pratt has been dismissed by the family as pretentious and false, so he is accordingly cut out of the narrative except for his less attractive traits. Shortly after, we learn that "Somehow — and no one is really sure how — Stan acquired the Grand Falls Stables" (67). Macfarlane believes the whole family's fortunes were based on this lucky acquisition, but this story is also dropped without further speculation. Of Ray, we learn very little indeed. Aunt Kate believes "he'd been too young to have left many memories behind. 'You'll have to imagine him,' she said. 'He was just a boy'" (136). And this is exactly what Macfarlane

leaves the reader to do. Even the Goodyear family history itself is apparently almost impossible to trace. Macfarlane writes, "Records of the early fishing settlements are incomplete, and in what little documentation can be found the name is variously spelt" (93). Macfarlane expertly uses the gaps between what is known and what has been irretrievably lost to charge his narrative with possibility, filling it either with his own tempting, imaginary confections or with the kind of just-vacated emptiness that reminds the reader of vanished knowledge.

Macfarlane's representations of more factual material also capitalize on his ability to load gaps with emotional resonance. Macfarlane describes the Newfoundland countryside as his great-uncle Roland presumably saw it — in pastoral terms:

> This was the very center of the island — a land of bottomless ponds and rushing black brooks, barrens and bog that stretched away from the abrupt round hills and that looked like blankets of Scottish tweed. Here, the pine and spruce stands were a dark, majestic green and seemed to go on forever. The fireweed was like purple smoke in the distance. The soft forest floors were thick with lady ferns and harebells and bunchberries and pink tops. The air was sweet with bog rosemary and cranberry patches and Labrador tea. (48)

This pleasant, colourful, fertile landscape seems wild and romantic, full of intriguing potential. But Wayne Johnston has a very different interpretation of the same Newfoundland interior:

> We came upon a desert of black peat bog on which there was no snow, though there was snow all around it, as if a deluge of water ten miles wide had splashed down. Here and there the peat bog had collapsed of its own weight, its soggy crust caved in to form a great crater of peat, a black bog hole that was warmer than the air so that steam issued up from it like smoke. You could tell from these peat pits that underneath its topmost layer, the whole bog was like this, a steaming black muck too loose to support the roots of even the smallest of trees. (Johnson 1999, 87)

Johnston describes a winter landscape of apocalypse and devastation; Macfarlane describes a romantic summer idyll. For Macfarlane Newfoundland seems to be a pastoral place; as in the passage above, he consistently describes it in terms of flowers, grasses, trees, rivers, fish and caribou, emphasizing its wild pastoral abundance. R. Rawdon Wilson notes that

> The pastoral life in literature is an expression of disdain and contempt for worldly success.... It is also a literary expression of the idealization of the human experience: it suggests ... what might have been, and what still might be, momentarily and in a little space, given enough goodwill. Pastoral, then, is double-edged.... Citizens scorn society when it is no longer desirable, that is, when it has refused to offer the rewards they

> desire or when the object of desire has fled them. At that point the pastoral world becomes a refuge for society's excluded and self-excluding. (Wilson 1990, 91)

This observation can also be extended to the elegy, which extols the virtues of the honoured dead and laments their passing, suggesting that the world is immeasurably poorer for their loss. Most of the generation of Goodyears presented in this book have passed away, and Macfarlane's regret manifests itself in an elegiac tone. Intermittently adopting the pastoral and elegiac modes within his comic-romantic emplotment, Macfarlane praises a way of life that is rich and rewarding but irretrievably vanished. We are impoverished as a result, he implies, and he places himself squarely on the side of that vanished Newfoundland. By extension he rejects that which opposes it: today's sophisticated and fast-paced world with its cynicism and corruption.

Macfarlane might just as easily have employed the sinister, foreboding imagery of Johnston's *Baltimore's Mansion* to drive home his point about the unrecognized value of Newfoundland and Newfoundlanders, about potential sadly lost. The story of the Goodyears might have been set during the Roaring Twenties — like Ondaatje's *Running in the Family* — when the surviving Goodyears were presumably busy marrying and establishing their commercial success. If Macfarlane's only purpose is to valorize "diamond-in-the-rough" Newfoundlanders, it would be no less effective to do so by focusing on the Twenties, even though Newfoundland was then still suffering from financial deprivation and political instability. But instead, Macfarlane draws his narrative from an era that lets him portray the Goodyear family as virtuous, untainted by the disease of politics, heroically equal to the elements, mystically attuned to the island's potential, unfailingly stalwart, healthy, cheerful and capable, and refreshingly direct. The Goodyear man, like the archetypal Newfoundlander, is in tune with his environment, a fitting representative of a secret Eden, and he has no need to concern himself with society's pettier preoccupations. The era Macfarlane selects is one that, because it is completely irretrievable, and because it is considered to be the Western world's last gasp of innocence and heroism, permits a romanticized, even a gently idealized treatment: a treatment that yearns for lost ideals from a position of current disillusionment, as is typical of the pastoral. In doing so, Macfarlane continues the family tradition of telling stories that "lament the present and mourn the past" (103).

V. Inside and Outside

Linda Hutcheon writes of the narrators of Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967) and Ondaatje's *Running in the Family* that "the writer is from the world he writes of (and creates) and yet outside it, both present and absent in the writing" (Hutcheon 1988, 88). Although Macfarlane makes his presence very

much known within the text of *The Danger Tree*, he also keeps himself outside the "main story" when appropriate. He is both present and absent, apologizing for his lapses in understanding, differentiating flights of fancy from factual expositions, and managing throughout to imply that his story is of primary importance, much more so than any irrelevant personal characteristics he has that may colour his story. Although he shares neither their surname nor their home, Macfarlane's narrative persona incorporates the best traits of the Goodyears. In his portrayal of his mother's family, he has emphasized as far as possible their loyalty, heartiness, trustworthiness, generosity, conscientiousness, and charm. These traits are good ones for a narrator to have if the parallels he draws between a family and an island are to be accepted as he intends. Further, this is a story with many unverifiable details, based on anecdote, on "fusty archives, regimental records, old copies of *The Veteran*, questions put to relatives, and Uncle Roland's trunkful of papers" (208). To validate his patchwork reconstruction of events, Macfarlane links himself with "archetypal Newfoundlanders" and their qualities. Noting that his factory co-workers in Hamilton are Newfoundlanders whose character traits are identified as "Newfoundland" traits, he describes his camaraderie with them at some affectionate length, choosing to emphasize their sincere effort and their charisma, their humour, their unconventionality and their spirit. By emphasizing his friendship with them, Macfarlane accentuates not only their admirable qualities but his own, reinforcing once again his "Newfoundlander" attributes: charisma, spirit, humour, unconventionality, practicality, and an unshakeable foundation of personal responsibility.

Macfarlane does not explicitly claim for himself what he calls "the unruffled independence of mind that characterizes the archetypal Newfie" (160). But the other characteristic that signifies archetypal "Newfoundlandishness" is the ability to tell great, long, swooping stories, an ability that he shows himself to have inherited. His elaborate and artful construction of the different stories of *The Danger Tree* seems intuitive, natural and organic. The figure of the Danger Tree itself is a case in point, appearing in two different but related guises. During the war that killed half the Goodyear brothers, a blasted tree stands in the no-man's land between German and Allied forces at Beaumont Hamel (Photo 1). The soldiers name it the "Danger Tree" because it identifies a point of no return, being a marker of extra danger within an already intensely dangerous situation (231, 302). The closing chapter is called "Danger Tree"; it describes the tragic massacre of the Newfoundland regiment as it advances towards the German forces, able to gain only the ground between their front lines and the blasted tree. But the opening chapter is also called "Danger Tree." In it, Skipper Joe Goodyear's wife lies near death in a nursing home. She recalls a winter sleigh journey with her husband and infant daughter (who becomes Macfarlane's mother) which had nearly ended in tragedy. Reconstructing her reminiscence, Macfarlane writes, "They'd come to a dead tree on the side of the ridge. It stuck out of the snow like a skeleton, and the dog sensed the dan-

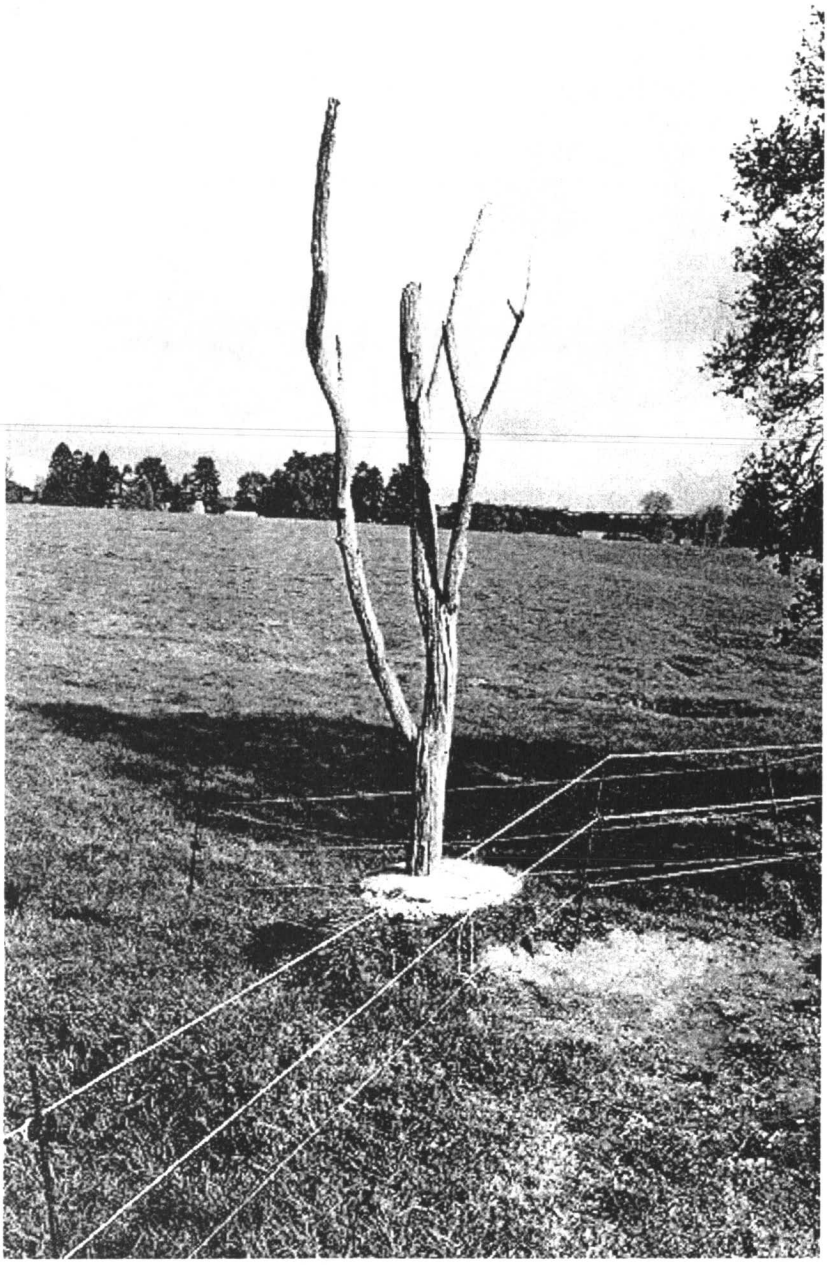

Photo 1. The Danger Tree at Beaumont Hamel. Courtesy of John Stephens, Brampton, Ontario.

ger" (4). When forced beyond the tree, the dog tumbles into freezing, churning water, almost dragging the sleigh with it and endangering both mother and baby. The episode originally terrifies the young Mrs. Goodyear, but later, as the dying grandmother crosses the boundary between life and death, she recognizes this incarnation of the danger tree and greets it with acceptance: "We'll go down here, just past the tree. Then over they go, but she doesn't move. It's white and dangerous and empty. She lies in her bed like a baby in a wooden box. Hush, she used to say whenever they cried. Hush now" (5).

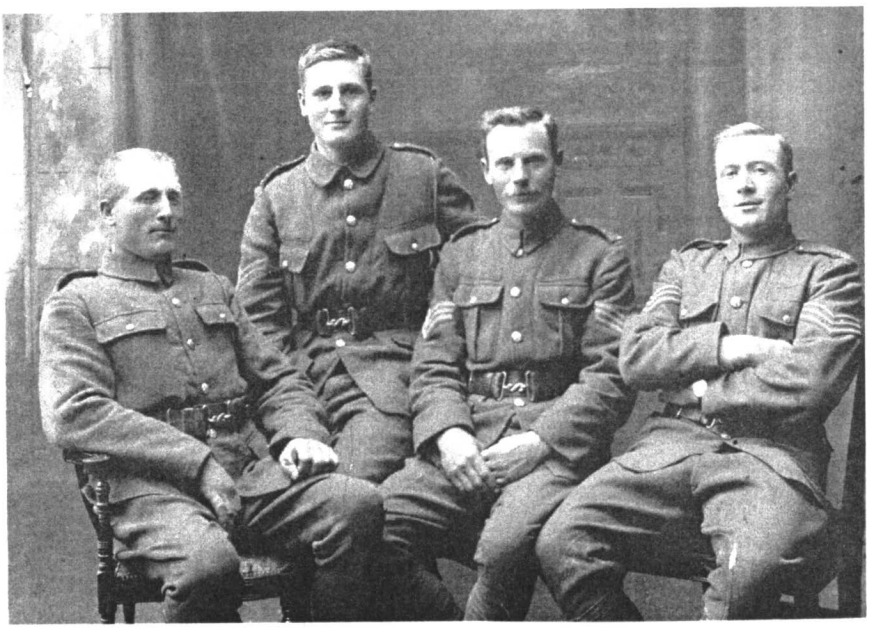

Photo 2. From left to right: Sgt. Josiah Goodyear, 1st 500, wounded in 1917 (as a Lieutenant) and transferred to the Forestry Corps; Pte. Kenneth Goodyear, wounded at Beaumont Hamel (as a Lieutenant) and transferred to Forestry Corps; Sgt. Geo. Hicks, wounded at Beaumont Hamel (Lieutenant), survived the war, Captain with MC and Bar; Sgt. Stanley Goodyear, 1st 500, killed at the Broembeke, 10 October 1917, Lieutenant (Transport Officer), awarded MC. Courtesy of the Grand Falls-Windsor Royal Canadian Legion, Branch 12, Military Museum.

Macfarlane's narrative opens and closes with the Danger Tree as a sign of imminent death, a marker of the perilous edge of limbo. Appearing so powerfully in the first and last chapters, the tree carries associations of danger, inevitability, and endings. But the image also attests to an almost incredible congruity of experience. Generations and continents apart, a Goodyear woman and Goodyear men (Photos 2, 3, 4) shared a similar experience of a dying tree as a signpost of intense danger.

Photo 3. Capt. Hedley John Goodyear, MC, 102nd Battalion CEF killed in action on the advance from Amiens 22 August 1918, buried at Hillside Cemetery, Le Quesnel (Somme). Courtesy of the Grand Falls-Windsor Royal Canadian Legion, Branch 12, Military Museum.

Photo 4. Lance Corporal Raymond Goodyear, killed in action at Gueudecourt 12 October 1916, age 18, buried at Baricourt British Cemetery. Courtesy of the Grand Falls-Windsor Royal Canadian Legion, Branch 12, Military Museum.

Without this crucial lock, the narrative's overall progression would remain essentially linear, a straightforward movement from young Macfarlane's description of his Hamilton childhood towards the evocative closing image: the present day Macfarlane watching Newfoundland's train, with all its accumulated associations of wasted hope and lost potential, pulling up its tracks after itself. If the Danger Tree appeared once only without the other image to temper it, the sense of balance and completion would vanish, leaving in its wake a stronger sense of loss and deep, deep injury. But because it is repeated, the image of the Danger Tree forces the narrative into a circle form, into cyclic repetition that still somehow offers hope. Circles can suggest sameness, wholeness and infinite repetition, or patterns that change as they remain the same; this one is so strong that it will survive not only the train that erases itself from existence, but it will survive all the losses, all the gaps in the story it embraces. The most crucial of these losses are the tales that died in the Great War with three Goodyear brothers:

> The three Goodyears left behind their photographs, one or two letters, a few often-repeated stories, and an emptiness that steadily compounded itself over the years. It was a different family after the war. Something was gone from the heart of it. Ray's innocence and enthusiasm would never temper Ken's guile and ambition; Stan's charm and level-headedness would never leaven my grandfather's stubbornness; Hedley's wisdom and learning would never sustain Roland's flights of fancy. Somehow the wrong combination survived. Fights erupted in their absence. A balance was never regained. (191-192)

Yet somehow the Goodyear family does survive, even without the contributions of the brothers whose virtues were gilded by young, noble death. Despite their loss, the Goodyear family makes a concrete, ineradicable mark on the geography and society of Newfoundland. Because of their efforts in roadbuilding, outport communities are less isolated; their commercial success ensures that many families benefit from employment and the example of the Goodyears' initiative; because of their enduring love and the strength they draw from family, their values are passed from generation to generation, even to descendants who live "away." Because of the Goodyears' personal integrity, dedication, and love for their land, a narrative has been written, sharing the best that they are with the wider world. The circle holds its beginning in its end; it will endure, and with it will survive the best qualities of Newfoundland and the Goodyears.

Ondaatje writes, "During certain hours, at certain years in our lives, we see ourselves as remnants from the earlier generations that were destroyed. So our job becomes to keep peace with enemy camps, eliminate the chaos at the end of Jacobean tragedies, and with 'the mercy of distance' write the histories" (Ondaatje 1993, 179). Macfarlane's strategy all along, like Ondaatje's, has been to shape peace from chaos by writing this merciful history, celebrating the good and validating the worthy. Macfarlane's comic-romantic pastoral elegy conflates actuality and

possibility, truth and probability. His emplotment, his technique of using style and aesthetics to make his material "literary," and his cause-oriented explications all problematize his factual material, leading not only to nostalgia but to cautious optimism. In the end, Macfarlane's exuberant form and the vitality of his expression lend a prophetic tone to material that remains nobly humble and humane throughout.

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Notes

[1]While White does not specifically name other literary modes that contribute to emplotment, there are nevertheless several that do so. Other literary labels beyond "comic romance" can be applied to *The Danger Tree*. It is elegiac because there is a sense of mourning and a pervading sense of loss; it is pastoral because it depicts a rural locale and uncomplicated times that seem exotic and desirable because they are outside normal urban experience (Abrams 1957, 47-48; 127-129). It is epic because it is a lyric rendering of "heroic deeds of the distant [in Macfarlane's subjective experience] past" (Fludernik 1996, 59). The elegiac, the pastoral and the epic all look back nostalgically to a different and perhaps simpler time that is now inaccessible except through memory, art, and surviving artifacts of contemporaneous media.

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