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Michael Crummey's *Sweetland*

Caroline Rae

Set on the fictional island of Sweetland off the coast of Newfoundland in the early twenty-first century, Michael Crummey's *Sweetland* (2014) charts the life of Moses Sweetland — a seventy-year-old man whose ancestors founded the island — as he struggles against a government resettlement program[1] that would force him to leave the island. In response to this threat, the novel formulates posthuman and post-anthropocentric forms of subjectivity in relation to place and to the pressing ecological concerns presented by the Anthropocene,[2] in which the dominance of humans has had a permanent and irrevocable impact on the planet. My critique draws on Rosi Braidotti's notion that the Anthropocene involves a critique not merely of human privilege but also of the humanist ideology of a fixed and coherent sovereign subject: that is, "Man" ("Four Theses" 26). For the Anthropocene to be effectively challenged, "Neither 'Man' as the universal humanistic measure of all things nor Anthropos as the emblem of an exceptional species can claim the central position in contemporary, technologically mediated knowledge production systems" ("Four Theses" 26). Instead, I argue that new relational modes of ontology must be established between human and non-human others that deny dualisms. *Sweetland* challenges the idea of a subjectivity framed within an anthropocentric "sense of place": the subjectivity of the main character, Moses, is positioned in continual hierarchy to human and non-human others during the realist first half of the novel. This sense of place is based upon an opposition between how "inside" or "outside" the island he considers others to be. However, in the second half of the novel, this subjectivity is challenged through gothic tropes that emerge when Moses is eventually left alone on the island. These tropes, such as haunting, imbue the island with a non-human agency, which functions to dismantle his sovereign and coherent sense of self in relation to the

island. These tropes culminate in a transformation of his subjectivity into one much more relational, posthuman, and aligned with an affirmative ethics.

An Anthropocentric Sense of Place

The resettlement program that the inhabitants of the island of Sweetland face is based upon the Household Resettlement Program. Running from 1953 to 1977, it sought to move rural inhabitants of Newfoundland to purportedly more industrially viable centres in an attempt to reshape the provincial economy.[3] Mired in controversy, the program was and remains divisive in many communities, forcing residents "to make a decision that was shaped by financial incentives and, in cases where a united community decision was required by government, by peer pressure from friends and neighbours" (Vodden 225). The contentious program altered, and continues to alter, the face of Newfoundland and Labrador profoundly, and roughly half of an "estimated 1,300 pre-resettlement communities remain" (225).[4] The "shutting down" (effectively) of these communities raises questions about what was lost, and will be lost, in terms of individual and community identity in Newfoundland.

Approaching the Resettlement Program from a posthuman and post-anthropocentric perspective means distinguishing how this "loss of identity" is not necessarily tied to the loss of a closed connection to a particular place but conflated with environmental, social, and mental factors. Félix Guattari's "ecosophy" helps to illuminate how and why this sense of loss is keenly felt. Guattari argues that these three ecological registers — environmental, social, and mental — are intertwined and must be considered in relation to one another if the problems of the Anthropocene are to be addressed effectively. He posits that the systemic problem of integrated world capitalism (IWC) contributes to the major crises of human and non-human life. He defines IWC as a homogenizing system of capitalism "characterised by general equivalence" that "flattens out all other forms of value, alienating them in its hegemony" (65). The Resettlement Program can be positioned within the context of IWC: the lives of those living in these communities were presented as no longer sustainable in the context of an emerging and modernizing society, and generations of families were uprooted as their rural way of life was undermined or destroyed. This uprooting was exacerbated by

the closure of the fisheries and subsequent cod moratorium in 1992, which can be read through an anthropocentric position bolstered by IWC. Factors in the closure of the fisheries included government mismanagement of the fisheries and competition from large corporations to "develop ever more effective but capital-intensive ways to catch more fish, continuing to believe in the endless bounty of the sea even in the face of declining catches" (Wyile, *Anne* 36). These forms of environmental governance seek to exploit natural resources for human need and economic gain. The resettlement and moratorium had, and continue to have, far-reaching social and economic reverberations for small-town fisheries and communities like the one depicted in *Sweetland*, uprooting generations of families whose identities were based upon a close connection to the sea, thereby emphasizing that these three modes of ecological being — mental, environmental, and social — operate in conjunction with one another.

These momentous changes in Newfoundland over the latter half of the twentieth century meant that "what it means to be a Newfoundlander" changed dramatically, and the loss of a particular way of life was tied to that change. In an article for *The Globe and Mail* on the changing face of Newfoundland and Labrador, Crummey stressed a sense of loss:

> It's a sad fact of life that the disappearance of these and other outport communities won't alter much about the world at large. The GDP won't change, the oil boom will carry on pumping money into provincial coffers, the northeast Avalon will continue to be swallowed by cookie-cutter suburbs. In almost every way we quantify such things, their absence will make no difference. But the loss we're facing is real, if subtler and harder to measure.
>
> It may be true that we won't be poorer without them. But we will be, intangibly and inevitably, something less. ("What It Means")

For Crummey, the loss of these communities because of the ongoing impact of the Resettlement Program is acute. In the context of IWC, this loss is not necessarily "quantifiable," but it is nonetheless significant because it alters the sense of both identity and community in contemporary Newfoundland. The reconfiguration of a Newfoundland identity in the face of these contemporary crises is reflected in much of the literature emerging from the province. The diversity of subject matter

and style of these novels has incited Paul Chafe to assert that "to read any contemporary novel about Newfoundland is to become witness [to] and participant [in] . . . the active refashioning of what it means to be a Newfoundlander" ("If I Were"). The suggestion here is that the fiction being produced is contributing to shifting perceptions of what constitutes a "Newfoundland identity" in the twenty-first century. Chafe differentiates between contemporary novels that frequently pay "more attention" to "characters and plot rather than place" and those that demonstrate a more "one-sided relationship between person and place" ("If I Were"), thereby highlighting how authors vary in their approaches to and depictions of Newfoundland and Newfoundland identity. In many ways, *Sweetland* occupies a space between the two forms of novel identified by Chafe. It both explores and troubles the "one-sided relationship between person and place," and it examines the changing form of subjectivity in the context of contemporary Newfoundland. In doing so, the novel addresses the sense of loss but also offers the potential for reconfiguration by demonstrating how, in the context of the Anthropocene, new models of relational ontologies can help to overcome this sense by denying oppositional thinking and decentring the sovereign position of the human.

Sweetland is divided into "The King's Seat" and "The Keeper's House," which offer differing perspectives on selfhood and subjectivity in relation to place in the Anthropocene. Written in a realist style, the first half of the novel helps to establish that the identity of Moses is constructed in hierarchical relation to the island and its other inhabitants through an anthropocentric sense of place. There is a strong focus on the quotidian lives of Moses and the islanders. The everyday life of Moses as he hunts rabbits, plants potatoes in his garden, and fishes helps to position the novel within the "stereotypical association of Atlantic-Canadian literature with a kind of rock-bound, elemental, simplistic realism" (Wyile, "Surf's Up!" 9). This focus on his connection to the land, as Chafe describes it, is an attempt by Moses to establish himself as "an authentic and authorized occupant of Sweetland-the-island" ("Entitlement" 7). By working the land, Moses believes that he will gain a more justified relationship with it, assuming that "his labour garners him an authority over the place" ("Entitlement" 13). Consequently, his grafting in the first half of the novel is not only a realist literary technique of documenting the "everyday" but also an attempt to control the

land, to establish himself as superior to it, and consequently to construct a highly anthropocentric sense of place.

No distinct reasons are given for why Moses decides to stay on the island, but there are strong indications in *Sweetland* that he feels bound to the island that anchors his subjectivity. Following an angry exchange with Rita, also a long-standing inhabitant of the island, he contemplates why he is so determined to stay:

> He could hardly admit to knowing why he felt a particular way about anything. The stronger the feeling, the less able he was to break it down into identifiable categories, into cause and effect. But he wasn't accustomed to being called out for the lack and it served only to make him increasingly close-mouthed and obstinate. His conviction more firmly anchored as the holdouts dwindled, as if to offset the loss in numbers with a blind uncertainty.
>
> He found himself enjoying it almost, to be the one knot they couldn't untangle. Holding on like grim death and halfways invigorated by the effort. Twisted, Ruthie used to say of him, and Sweetland couldn't argue her assessment. Or change his way in the world. (49)

This passage gives an indication of the subjectivity of Moses. The aggressive language positions him as closed off, driven by obstinacy and sheer refusal to change his "way in the world." It is a highly reactionary position, and Moses distances himself from those around him by upholding his own perspective. Edward Relph considers that our sense of belonging to a specific place is gained from the meanings that we have attached to it, but these meanings are dependent on how "inside" or "outside" a place we are (49), thereby constructing a hierarchy of and exclusivity to places, disallowing those who do not have such fixed attachments to geographical places. Crummey draws attention to the fact that Moses is very much inside the island of Sweetland — through his eponymous connection to it and his feeling that he had "been measured and made to the island's exact specifications" (280). This alignment between man and island and his refusal to "change his way in the world" indicate his unwillingness to change his sense of self and subjectivity in relation to the island. Emphasizing the realist style of the novel's first half, the narrative impact of "cause and effect" means that the repercussions of this style are plentiful. Moses vehemently decides to remain on the island when the resettlement program is instigated,

even though it will be implemented only if all the residents agree to it. The reimbursement offers inhabitants a minimum of $100,000 (10), and consequently Moses begins to receive death threats as he clearly isolates the other islanders by his obstinance. His decision to stay will also negatively affect his few remaining family members, his niece Clara and his great-nephew Jesse. It is hinted that Jesse is on the autism spectrum and that moving to St. John's would give him access to a tailored school program and a more thorough doctor's assessment (29). Moses thereby privileges himself over others on the island, setting himself up in opposition to them as he asserts his sovereign sense of self over the place that he inhabits.

Moses positions himself above both other inhabitants of the island and those who would be considered as typically outside this fixed and coherent sense of place — the Sri Lankan refugees whom he rescues with his boat in the opening scene of the novel. Although this scene does not offer us much insight into his subjectivity, Moses does characterize the Sri Lankan refugees with a troubling racial generalization: "He looked Indian, Sweetland thought, or some variation of Indian, he never could tell that crowd one from the other" (4). This perspective situates the Sri Lankan refugees as racialized others and sets up a dualism between them and Moses. He later recollects how he uncovered his sister's adultery with the reverend when he visits the church where she is supposedly mourning the death of one of the refugees. Also, "He had no inkling how long he would drag those peculiar men in his wake. He almost resented having found them out there for a time, thinking he'd never have discovered the truth about Ruthie otherwise and would have been happier not knowing" (246). Not only does the phrasing "drag[ging]" the "peculiar men in his wake" have racist implications, but also Moses aligns his far more trivial discovery of his sister's affair (and subsequently pushing her into another marriage) with the plight of the refugees left adrift in the Atlantic Ocean. Therefore, by refusing to acknowledge their suffering, he places himself above the refugees in a highly anthropocentric hierarchy.

Gothic Interventions: Destabilizing the Sense of Place

The second half of the novel destabilizes the subjectivity of Moses and his sense of place. "The Keeper's House" thus provides a stark contrast to the realist first half of *Sweetland*, in which there is a strong focus on

the quotidian and a plot structured on "cause and effect." Indeed, his subjectivity in the first half, though constructed in relation to the island, remains highly internalized. Beginning after Moses fakes his own death in order to remain on the island alone, the novel takes an uneasy turn when gothic tropes begin to permeate it. Consequently, his subjectivity is slowly dismantled through these tropes of death, madness, ghosts, and dismembered animals, which serve continually to undermine conventional constructions of the human subject as stable and bound to geographical place — capable of viewing the world outside from a fixed and static position. Moses is thus forced to question his identity and sanity as he is left alone on the island, and he begins to experience various spectral encounters. These moments are gothic because they represent the uncanny for Moses — a sudden transformation of the island that he knows so well into something unknown. Translating the word *uncanny* back into its original German of *unheimlich* or "unhomely" demonstrates how something known and familiar to Moses, his sense of place, becomes unfamiliar and frightening. There are various instances of this throughout the second half of the novel. In one scene, Moses names the various points of Sweetland on a map — "dotting the shoreline with islands and communities and features that didn't exist, naming them all after people he knew" (248). This pattern of naming echoes a similar move that he makes at night, naming the points on the map after the real geographical places, "being careful to include as much detail as possible" (239). Such naming becomes an act of trying to maintain the sense of place that Moses holds on to — as Neil Evernden points out, the "act of naming may itself be a part of the process of establishing a sense of place" (101). Moses uses the real geographical place names initially before describing them as people who lived on the island.

The moment of this naming is uncanny in the final and highly significant scene of *Sweetland*. Moses awakens after passing out after nearly drowning and goes to look at the map where he drew the names:

> He had to work up the nerve to look closer, bringing the lamp down across the map for the light. Where he expected to see Sweetland there was nothing but blue water. And Little Sweetland beside it the same. The names he'd written across the islands were gone. He thought Keith might have erased them, but even the ink outlines the names had been printed over were missing from the map. As if he'd only imagined seeing them there. (316-17)

In this unnerving scene, the island that Moses thought he knew so well — had named every part of to establish his knowledge of and relationship with — disappears in a haunting moment of watery dissolution. Therefore, this naming, as a mode by which he tries to establish a stable sense of place and a subjectivity in relation to that place, becomes utterly dissolved, unfamiliar, and replaced by "blue water." David Punter claims that the uncanny functions by this process, whereby "below, or athwart, the 'grounding' of our conceptions and self-conception — below, indeed, the 'conception' of the self — there is another force at work, which serves to undo, or to have already undone, the sureties by which we try to live" ("Uncanny" 132). The uncanny exists alongside a stable sense of self and reveals the inconsistencies of that self, undermining the foundations and grounding principles upon which we base this conception of self as stable, coherent, and whole.

By utilizing tenets of the gothic, Crummey captures the anxieties that Moses experiences when faced with this issue and the possibility of leaving the island that he knows so deeply. His stable sense of place is disrupted and undermined. The island of Sweetland represents an inward-looking site — self-contained and isolated, like the traditional castle of gothic novels, the island represents a space cut off from the rest of the world, mirroring the protagonist's psyche as both Sweetlands are left alone and closed off. Laurie Brinklow emphasizes this, commenting that the island is a "compressed space" with a "real boundary that is the ocean" (133). The mental state of Moses is thus reflected in the island; he is left alone, isolated with no power, no running water, and no one else around but the strange spectral presences that he begins to see and feel. Yet in these moments when the island becomes uncanny to Moses there is, as Punter states, "another force at work" ("Uncanny" 132) — revealing something other on the island that imbues it with supernatural agents. In *Sweetland*, Moses begins to think that he is going insane, suspecting that he is "[l]osing his frigging mind" (231). A number of terrifying, uncanny moments occur. In one instance, Moses visits his friend Duke's barber shop. During the first half of the novel, the two men play chess there, but in the second half Moses notices that the chess pieces on the board have moved, with the "black king in check" (222). In another example, Moses is adrift at sea, and haunting music guides him back to shore, but when he reaches the coast he no longer hears the

music (220). All of these moments suggest an alternative, supernatural agency on the island.

Moses frequently passes off moments of supernatural occurrences as dreams or figments of his imagination. He imagines telling Duke about some of the events before realizing that his response would be skeptical: "You're dreaming, he'd have said. You been drinking bad brew. You needs to give your head a goddam good shake" (222). Denials of these moments of the supernatural and attempts to rationalize them — through either being insane or dreaming — mean that *Sweetland* inhabits a place where the boundaries between a known, familiar reality and the unknown supernatural are blurred. As Kelly Hurley observes, the "unnerving possibility of one's own madness is preferable to the still more unnerving one of supernatural agency disrupting known, familiar realities" (15). By believing in one's madness, one asserts some agency over uncanny events. It is an attempt to provide a reason for them since the alternative would be something frightening. For Moses, the "known, familiar realities" are the island that he thinks he knows so deeply and the sense of place that accompanies it. Confronted with hauntings and ghostly presences, it is preferable, at least initially, for Moses to attribute them to madness or "bad brew" rather than to otherworldly phenomena.

The madness of Moses extends outward, infecting the reader and disrupting any "known, familiar realities." The first half of *Sweetland* lures the reader into a false sense of security through the realist style. In this half, any incursion of the supernatural is thoroughly dismissed. One such moment is when Jesse sees Hollis, the dead brother of Moses, who discusses these sightings and interactions with his niece, Jesse's mother, asking her "Have they got a name for it yet? . . . Whatever is wrong with the youngster" (29). Moses claims Jesse's sightings as symptomatic of something abnormal, and his mother confirms that Jesse has been diagnosed with a form of autism (30). The apparition of Hollis is thus reasoned away with a medical diagnosis. Moreover, any other "occurrences," such as the dismemberment of rabbits in the snares that Moses sets, are attributed to one of the other islanders. Such security is not afforded in the second half of the novel: with everyone gone, there is no one to provide reason besides Moses himself — for both himself and the reader. So, when ghosts and hauntings fissure the second half, the reader is intensely connected with Moses. In short, the reader must ask whether the realism of the first half is being punctured by supernatural

events or whether Moses is descending into madness. The reader thus becomes ungrounded.

By throwing the reader from the rational reason and familiar realism of the first half into the more uncertain and supernatural second half, *Sweetland* challenges the relationship among madness, the reader, and Moses. Scott Brewster considers the relationship among these elements — madness, the reader, and the narrator or protagonist) — in gothic fiction. Drawing on Fred Botting (*Gothic*; *Limits*) and David Punter ("Narrative"), who argue that the gothic generates multiple readings eliciting a form of madness in the reader,[5] Brewster argues that this madness is further complicated by the psychoanalytical framework that the gothic simultaneously invokes and undermines. He asserts that the "[g]othic at once objectifies and lives out the madness it encounters, striving for a metalanguage to categorise or explain insanity at the same time as it performs, even participates in, that very irrationality" (483). The gothic seeks to rationalize itself while undermining that rationality — a means to explain the very irrational encounters that it seeks. Brewster insists that readers must be involved in this process, stating that they must participate in uncovering, categorizing, or explaining the insanity that they encounter alongside the narrator or protagonist. They too become subject to the madness invoked in the novel, for through the analytical process "to 'see' delusion or mental aberration is to mimic or reproduce it, to occupy its place" (485). In *Sweetland*, there is a continual search for explanations, raising questions about whether the ghostly encounters are the results of Moses having passed out drunk, high, or from sheer exposure to the elements. Thus, the reader is imbricated through the novel's structure: the halves move the reader through a familiar reality, a firm sense of place, and a certainty of the subjectivity of Moses to a reality in which they similarly experience moments of disorientation, uncertainty, and dissolution of reason.

One instance is the ghostly appearance of Hollis. His previous appearances to Jesse were explained away by reference to the child's autism, but in the second half of *Sweetland* the ghost appears to Moses after he has nearly drowned at sea and returns home. He is injured and likely suffering from exposure after walking home. Moses drifts through what could be sleep and a dream and has a possible hallucination of the government officers. He awakes, and the world is "askew" (307) before

he realizes that someone is sitting beside the window, and he recognizes the ghost of his brother:

> Sweetland closed his eyes again. "Is Jesse with you?" he said and he waited a long time for a reply before he glanced around again. Still just one pair of boots under the table. He felt too vulnerable suddenly to stay where he was and he forced himself to his knees, hefted his fractured weight into the chair he'd been sitting in before he passed out. Looked across at his brother in the chair opposite. The young face so pale it glowed like the underside of sea ice. The kelpy hair streaming, his dead eyes glassy and expressionless. (308)

Perhaps this appearance of Hollis is the result of injuries that cause Moses to hallucinate. This position is countered by his engagement with the ghost — Moses asks if Jesse is "with" his brother — and the fact that the monstrous reconfiguration of his brother — soaking wet, pale as ice, and covered in seaweed — sits before him. This indicates that all along Hollis might have existed as a ghost, thereby refuting the initial, reasoned, and rational explanations of the first half of the book.

The trustworthiness of Moses, and of the novel itself, is called into question as the previously firm boundaries that separate the realism of the first half of the novel from the second half become even more blurred. This is another impact of *Sweetland*'s gothic imperative — continually raising more questions than it answers. The gothic text thereby acts reflexively, prompting the reader to search for answers in the text but offering none, leaving the reader hesitating between the known and the unknown and forced to "compulsively interpret random signs, haunted by the possibility that we may be deluded" (Brewster 493). Through the continuing process of interpretation, the reader is consequently never allowed any full sense of closure in *Sweetland*, in which no reason or rational explanation fully triumphs, and is left with only more questions and the possibility of one's own delusion. This denial of closure has resonances with what Hurley sees as the fantastic text's capability to "disrupt conventional meaning systems" and to make "room for new ones to emerge" (7). The realism of the first half, while appearing closed and unified, is disrupted as the second half sees the non-human and supernatural emerge, creating new possibilities for understanding our relationship to place. It is only when Moses is left alone on the island, removed from the anthropocentric reason that

governs the first half, that the island begins to display agentic capacities of its own.

Posthuman Gothic Reconfigurations

Although the gothic elements of *Sweetland* dismantle the subjectivity of Moses and his sense of place, they also reconfigure them, providing for him a new mode of posthuman ontology much more interconnected with the island and its non-human agency. As Moses remains on the island, his own anthropocentric and agentic capacities are no longer the driving force that ensures his survival but often the results of unknown agencies on the island itself. He gradually comes to this realization as he experiences more hauntings. Disembodied music guides Moses back to shore when he is adrift at sea (219). Similarly, at another point, on uncovering dead gulls washed up on shore, he recognizes that

> There was a new world being built around him. Sweetland had heard them talking about it for years on the Fisheries Broadcast — apocalyptic weather, rising sea levels, alterations in the seasons, in ocean temperatures. Fish migrating north in search of colder water and the dovekies lost in the landscape they were made for. The generations of instinct they'd relied on to survive here suddenly useless. The birds and their habits were being rendered obsolete, Sweetland thought, like the VHS machines and analog televisions dumped on the slopes beyond the incinerator. Relics of another time and on their way out. (277)

When he sees the dead birds, for the first time in the novel Moses begins to extend his view of the island beyond simply his own bound and closed sense of place, understanding the impact of actions on the environment. The place that he supposedly knew so deeply is being infiltrated by those whom he simply heard about on the radio, removed from a reality that he considered unchanging and unaffected. Sweetland no longer represents a "compressed space" bound by the ocean (Brinklow 133). Like the birds that he sees before him, Moses appreciates that, to carry on with this relationship to place, he risks being "rendered obsolete" and must develop a new understanding of the island if he is to survive.

One way in which this new understanding is developed is through a reconfiguration of the human subject via a recognition of its watered embodiment. Posthuman feminist phenomenologist Astrida Neimanis

dismantles the human subject as a coherent, impermeable subject through fluidity and therefore posits new understandings of human and non-human subjectivity and embodiment. She argues that embodiment is dependent on our watery composition, and this flow of water that comprises us connects us to other humans. She asserts that "Our watery relations within (or more accurately: as) a more-than-human hydrocommons thus present a challenge to anthropocentrism, and the privileging of the human as the sole or primary site of embodiment" (2). Because we have a "hybrid assemblage of matters" that makes up our embodiment, we cannot be considered as simply human — we are continually comprised of an ever-changing matter — yet "This is not to forsake our inescapable humanness, but to suggest that the human is always more-than-human. Our wateriness verifies this, both materially and conceptually" (2). Neimanis asserts that through a complex watery embodiment, humans continually experience processes of flowing and connecting with other bodies — both human and non-human — and as such humans are never completely *just* human: whole, discrete, and impermeable. This scene with the dead birds suggests how the mutual interaction of a shared hydrocommons has far-reaching political implications environmentally, socially, and economically that dismantle the fixed and established sense of place. Human interconnectivity through water expands on a global scale and takes into account every other living being on the planet. Intrarelations with water are thus also deeply imbricated within power relations: ocean acidification and pollution, rising sea levels, and disappearing rivers operate alongside attempts to commodify and control water supplies amid their increasingly alarming scarcity with real consequences for the planet. Neimanis insists that in the Anthropocene humans must be conscious of this and careful not to remove or distance themselves from their watery origins (21). Therefore, as Moses looks out over the ocean at the dead birds, he gains a sense of interconnectivity and relationality through the ocean, envisioning himself within that framework and recognizing that this is part of the "new world being built around him."

The ghostly apparition of Hollis in *Sweetland* proffers not only gothic resonances of madness and the breakdown of the human subject but also a moment of reconstructing that subject — a moment of understanding and a re-evaluation by Moses for both his relationship with his brother and his sense of place. The return of Hollis is an uncanny

experience of the repressed, familiar other as exemplified in the sense of guilt that Moses feels about his brother's death. Moses lies to his mother about his brother's suicide, claiming instead that Hollis fell off the boat during a fishing trip, that his clothes got caught in the line, and that Moses cut the line to relieve the weight, but inevitably Hollis drowned. Moses retells this story to Jesse, continuing the lie, and says that the decision to cut the line was the "Worst thing I could've done" (134). However, this recognition might also refer to his shame about lying to his mother. The ghost of Hollis is a watery figure whose embodiment — "kelpy hair" and "young face" like "sea ice" — mirrors the sea (309). His ghost not only points to his death by drowning but is a metaphor for the relationship to the sea and an eerie premonition of the eventual watery engulfment of Sweetland, both man and island.

Hollis represents a moment of abhuman gothic possibility for Moses, displaying what Hurley would qualify as "the spectacle of a body meta-morphic and undifferentiated; in place of the possibility of human transcendence, the prospect of an existence circumscribed within the realities of gross corporeality" (Hurley 3). Hollis offers an alternative in *Sweetland* to the existence of Moses on the island, the possibility of becoming something other and re-engaging with the island in a more fluid and open way. The appearance of Hollis occurs shortly after Moses has a near-death experience — a moment when he realizes that "There was the sway of things. . . . There was fighting the sway of things or improvising some fashion of riding it out. And then there was the sway of things beyond fighting and improvisation" (300). Moses con-sequently accepts that the means by which he adapted his sense of place to the island must shift: not to fight against the currents and the island's uncanny agents or improvise some means to "muddle through" and sur-vive but to find some intermediate position between the two to negotiate and participate in the ebb and flow of the island itself. He realizes that he must not view himself as outside the "sway" of it.

The ghost of Hollis presents that possibility; severely injured and drifting through consciousness on the brink of death, Moses has a one-way interaction with the ghost in a moment of acceptance and under-standing. Moses nonetheless pursues a form of engagement:

> [H]e thought he might offer some sort of apology then, but even in his addled state he could tell they were beyond apologies. He

clenched his teeth against the chattering. "It's good to see you," he said.

And the figure nodded again in the same distracted fashion.

"Say me to Jesse if you sees him," Sweetland said. "And Ruthie." (309)

Instead of being terrified by the ghost — deeming himself mad — Moses considers apologizing to it. The acceptance and closure that he gains from interaction with his brother's ghost suggest how new models of subjectivity and embodiment can emerge within a gothic framework and be understood and embraced. In this instance, Moses acknowledges that this "being" represents a new way of viewing his existence in relation to the island. For Moses, this is finally achieved by Sweetland the island's watery disappearance and Sweetland the man's subsequent ghostly transformation.

In the final scene, this ghostly transformation is not perceived as death and imbued with mourning or grief. Instead, it is an affirmative process that emphasizes vitalism and the joyful transformation of becoming. Braidotti has discussed in depth the potential of an affirmative ethics,[6] arguing that an ethics of affirmation turns negative affect into positive activity ("Affirmation" 244). Braidotti contrasts negative affect, a sense of being static and bound, with a more positive process of becoming. Negative affect is "not a value judgement . . . but rather the effect of arrest, blockage, and rigidification that comes as a result of an act of violence, betrayal, a trauma — or which can be self-perpetuated through practices that our culture simultaneously chastises as self-destructive and cultivates as a mode of discipline and punishment" ("Affirmation" 247). In this sense, when negative affect occurs following a traumatic event or self-inflicted behaviour, its stupefying nature prevents the subject from interrelating and connecting with other bodies — both human and non-human. To apply this to Moses, his sovereign sense of subjectivity, which connects him to the island, is traumatically disrupted. His rigid refusal to leave the island results in his great-nephew Jesse's death at the end of the novel's first half — a situation that leads Moses to fake his own death in order to remain there. This physical inertia to leave the island and let go of his sovereign sense of self can be correlated with Braidotti's definition of negative affect. However, after his encounters with the spectral others of the island, his subjectivity begins to change, culminating in his own final ghostly transformation.

Braidotti highlights an ethics of affirmation as the "transformative process of achieving freedom of understanding through the awareness of our limits, of our bondage. This results in the freedom to affirm one's essence as joy, through encounters and minglings with other bodies, entities, beings, and forces. Ethics means faithfulness to this *potentia* [sic], or the desire to become" ("Affirmation" 245). Consequently, one turns negative affect into positive activity through the ability to recognize one's own limitations, and that brings both freedom and capacity to connect better and relate to human and non-human others. As opposed to "fighting against the sway of things," of looking inward, Moses walks out into the night in the final scene of *Sweetland*, "along the back of his property and up beyond the new cemetery, away from all he'd ever known or wanted or wished for. At the King's Seat he turned to look down on the water and there was nothing but a featureless black, as if the ocean was rising behind him and had already swallowed the cove and everything in it" (317). Moses turns away from all that has held him to a fixed and defined sense of place — the things that he has wanted from Sweetland the island. Instead, he looks out at the ocean as it seems to engulf him in a cathartic moment of watery dissolution. There is no real sense of loss or negative affect in this scene but awareness and understanding. He then joins the other spectral figures and walks toward the cliffs, becoming one of them standing and looking out over the ocean. He feels "anonymous" (318) among them, yet there is no negativity. The final line — "He felt all of a sudden like singing" (318) — suggests the joyful transformation that Braidotti defines as crucial to this ethics of affirmation. Moses embraces the anonymity and ghostly transformation. As one form of association to place is dismantled through his ghostly transformation, another is constructed — one more willing to accept the supernatural occurrences prompted by the island's own agentic capacities, forces, and non-human beings. This new association denies the bound and closed subjectivity of the former sense of place that prevented this realization and awareness. Brinklow notes that, "Instead of dying alone on the island, Sweetland becomes part of the weave of life and death. . . . Moses is absorbed into the mirror that is the island" (142). By mingling with the other ghostly figures and achieving a ghostly transformation himself, Moses obtains a new form of subjectivity interrelated with human and non-human others, and he becomes part of the island itself. It is a subjectivity characterized by joy, freedom, and interconnectivity.

Conclusion: Posthuman Becomings

In *Sweetland*, forms of subjectivity in relation to place and the sense of place are changed and reformed. By breaking down boundaries through the gothic tropes in the novel and destabilizing the perceptions of inside and outside as a coherent sense of self in relation to geographical place, the novel highlights the limiting and problematic factors that such a bound and fixed relationship to place can hold. Emerging at a time of geopolitical anxiety, the novel shows how new identities and links can be forged in the face of such anxieties. As such, the gothic mode of the novel becomes productive rather than merely "symptomatic" (Hurley 6). The loss of Sweetland, both the man and the island, through the metaphorical engulfment by the ocean signals not a moment of loss or negative affect but a keen awareness of how overcoming such fixed subjectivities — primarily in relation to place — is necessary in the face of these social, ecological, and cultural issues. Through the materializing of both man and island into the ocean, new material formations are constructed. This is a liberating experience that can help us to reposition ourselves in relationship to the environment and the non-human. By letting go of the anthropocentric privilege that binds us to place, we can instead become with it, become entangled with it and appreciate our bodies' morphic capabilities and our more-than-human capacity for change.

The final transformation of Moses rejects the anthropocentric perspective that he adopts in the first half of the novel as the boundaries that hold him connected to a fixed and coherent subjectivity disappear through this process of positive affirmation. Braidotti argues that the "practice of defamiliarization is a key methodological tool to support the postanthropocentric turn. That is a sobering process of disidentification from anthropocentric values, to evolve toward a new frame of reference, which in this case entails becoming relational in a complex and multi-directional manner" ("Four Theses" 30). In this sense, Moses also undergoes a process of becoming: the anthropocentric privilege that he previously occupied disappears. This in turn enables a stronger posthuman reconnection to and interaction with the island, in a way that reimagines his relationship with place extending across time, space, and species. The subjectivity that he gains is necessarily posthuman, according to Braidotti, since it typifies the idea of "an expanded relational vision of the self, as a nomadic transversal assemblage engendered

by the cumulative effect of multiple relational bonds" ("Four Theses" 33). In other words, the transformation of Moses is enabled through his connection to the non-human forces of the island. He no longer adheres to a fixed and established sense of place and replaces it with one that repositions the subject as a complex, collective assemblage — interwoven with the other forces and non-human beings on the island. The moment when he turns his back on all that he has wished for and wanted of the island further solidifies this, showing how there is a stronger fluidity in this new subjectivity — Moses has decided to "change his way in the world" (49).

Notes

¹ This is based upon the Household Resettlement Program, which began in 1954 in Newfoundland and Labrador. Under the government of Joseph Smallwood, resettlement began with centralization in 1954 when those who volunteered to resettle in larger cities and towns were offered small sums of money as an incentive (Martin). A decade later the Fisheries Resettlement Program was introduced, and residents were moved to designated "growth centres" where "industries would be established, services centralized, and people regulated" (Kelly 22). These programs had, and continue to have, lasting impacts on Newfoundland and Labrador since they frequently divided communities and families. The Household Resettlement Program was renewed in 1970 under the Federal-Provincial Partnership, and though it remained in place officially only until 1977 many small communities have sought government assistance to relocate in the twenty-first century.

² The term "Anthropocene" was coined by ecologist Eugene F. Stoermer in the 1980s but was later made popular by Paul J. Crutzen, primarily through the article "The Anthropocene: Are Humans Now Overwhelming the Great Forces of Nature?" (see Crutzen et al.).

³ There are numerous detailed studies of the socio-economic impact of the Household Resettlement Program. Noel Iverson and D. Ralph Matthews offer case studies of communities affected by the program. Miriam Wright focuses on the decline of the fisheries and the Fisheries Resettlement Program, providing a historical account of Smallwood's attempts to transform the fisheries.

⁴ Resettlement remains a fraught and contentious issue in Newfoundland and Labrador. Although relocation peaked during the mid-late twentieth century, many rural areas have recently taken relocation packages. The inhabitants of Great Harbour Deep voted to relocate in 2002, Petites was "abandoned in 2003," and Grand Buit was deserted in 2010 (Crummey, "What It Means"). Furthermore, the government increased the settlement offer from $100,000 to $270,000. Little Bay Islands is currently in the midst of debate on possible resettlement. In 2015, 89.47% voted to leave, falling just short of the required 90% (Cook). A new vote in March 2018 put the numbers at eighty-five to leave versus ten to stay (Bailey). For many, the decision to leave is driven by the need to access vital public services (O'Neill-Yates), but this need does not detract from the difficulty of leaving their homes and lives behind.

⁵ Punter claims that the gothic can incite a form of paranoia (*Literature* 183) and a kind

of delirium — a "dreadful pleasure" (7) — that threatens the reader with the potential for the madness to spill out of the text. Botting similarly states that the gothic is a "writing of excess" (*Gothic* 1), which can also produce a "limit and challenge to the sway of reason" (*Limits* 116). Brewster draws on these points, claiming that the madness must exist both outside and inside the text, and traces how the very act of reading gothic texts can cause a kind of madness.

⁶ See also Braidotti, *Nomadic Theory*.

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