A LITTORAL PLACE: LOSS AND ENVIRONMENT IN CONTEMPORARY NEWFOUNDLAND FICTION

by

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A thesis submitted to the Department of English

In conformity with the requirements for

the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Queen’s University

Kingston, Ontario, Canada

(September, 2010)

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Abstract

This dissertation examines three contemporary Newfoundland novels to reconsider the relationship among loss, environment, and Newfoundland identity. Studies of Newfoundland literature often perform environmentally deterministic readings, or readings that characterize Newfoundland as a nostalgic and pathological culture fixated on loss and disaster. Newfoundlanders are too frequently understood as victims either of environment or of their colonial past. The dissertation argues that Newfoundlanders are, rather, victims of a misunderstanding of both. Using the works of philosophers Edward Casey and Arnold Berleant, I contend that these novels retell the history of Newfoundland as the story of places being treated as interchangeable sites, and criticize the consequences that stem from this misperception.

Chapter 1 outlines the development of two dominant literary traditions in Newfoundland writing—“Romanticism” and stoicism—and their corresponding place myths. Chapter 2, which discusses Wayne Johnston’s *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams* (1998), explains Casey’s and Berleant’s distinction between space and place, traces the history of Newfoundland being treated as an exchangeable site in empty space rather than as a unique place, and sets the theoretical framework for the dissertation. I counter environmentally deterministic readings and argue that Johnston reveals Newfoundlanders’ relationship with place to be reciprocal.

Chapters 3 and 4 question the assumption that “Romantic” and sentimental expressions of loss are pathological fixations. Chapter 3 examines Kenneth J. Harvey’s *The Town that Forgot How to Breathe* (2003), an antimodern and dystopic novel set in
outport Newfoundland following the collapse of the cod fishery. I employ Svetlana Boym’s distinction between “restorative” and “reflective” nostalgia to suggest that reflective nostalgia might play a key role in re-placing Newfoundland. Chapter 4 focuses on Lisa Moore’s *February* (2009), which portrays the grief of a family following the loss of their father in the *Ocean Ranger* disaster. The chapter contends that the same mentality that regards places merely as sites for resource extraction also considers people to be dispensable, and I argue that “resistant mourning”—rather than being pathological—amounts to an ethical protest against this mentality. I conclude by discussing the difficulty and necessity of understanding the ocean as place.
Acknowledgements

A wise woman once said, “To get to the finish line, you’ll have to try lots of different paths.” Well try lots of paths I did, and I was lucky to have many wonderful companions and wise guides on my journey, without whose support I would never have finished, and to whom I owe so much gratitude.

To my mother: I have always admired your dogged determination, voracious curiosity, and love for learning; your fierce love has always guided me. To my father, who brought home books every Friday of my childhood, and who used to read us The Story of A Fierce Bad Rabbit until he was blue in the face—thanks for always believing in my dreams. I am grateful also to my three brothers: John, whose fearless pursuit of his passion and gift for teaching have always inspired; Kevin, my first place philosopher, who made us reenact Lorne Greene’s New Wilderness and build “animal habitats” every weekend; and Sam, whose unparalleled ability to spin a riveting tale taught me about good fiction in the first place.

The Queen’s English Department and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada were helpful in funding my research. To my supervisor, Tracy Ware, and my second reader, Chris Bongie, the most reliable and consistent team anyone could ask for: thank you for giving me the freedom to explore different paths, and for trusting that I would find my way back. And many thanks to Kathy Goodfriend, who makes things so much easier for so many of us.

To Sara Mueller and Sheetal Lodhia: I couldn’t have picked two better mates to be in my crew. Thanks for the laughs, for always listening, and for so much more. To
Jenn Pelley and Paula Hall, who cheered and cajoled me through the finishing leg, and who turned out to be two of life’s silver linings: I’m so glad I met you on my MPA meander. The Disraeli Project gang—Ginger, Michel, Ellen and Mel—were an unexpected safe harbour (and source of muffins!) during my final year.

To the Burgess clan—Linda, Stephen, Aidan and Miranda—who were always ready with good cheer, good food, pint-sized G & Ts and car-rides full of heartfelt advice: thanks for being my favourite port of call.

And I am indebted to Sean, my first mate, editor-in-chief, formatting guru, and constant inspiration: you have always been the calm in my sea of doubts—I couldn’t have navigated the treacherous waters without you. We did it.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

And yet the problem I began with has never been resolved: How do we equilibrate or even negotiate between local identity and the abstractions of regional or national identity with the attendant clichés of "economic growth"? Obviously there can be no general answer to this question. If we see the need for an answer, then we must attempt it for ourselves in our communities. I believe that there is hope in the increasing uneasiness of people who see themselves as dispossessed or displaced and therefore as economically powerless. Growing out of this uneasiness, there is now a widespread effort toward local economy, local self-determination, and local adaptation. In this there is the potential of a new growth of imagination, and at last an authentic settlement of our country.

—Wendell Berry, "American Imagination and the Civil War"

In their analyses of Newfoundland history and culture, scholars have generally agreed that Newfoundlanders have been shaped by two main influences: a harsh environment and a series of devastating losses. In his discussion of Michael Crummey’s River Thieves, for example, Paul Chafe argues, "To write about the Beothuk is to write about loss. To write about Newfoundland is to write about the same thing" ("Lament for a Notion" 93). According to Chafe, Newfoundlanders are haunted by the "loss of independence, the loss of the cod fishery, the loss of countless lives to the sea, and the loss of opportunity," and he suggests that these losses have "forged the collective psyche of Newfoundlanders and left a distinctive trace on their art and literature" (93).

The "distinctive trace" left by loss has not necessarily been viewed in a positive light, however. Scholars have argued that Newfoundlanders’ preoccupation with and interpretation of history is at best overly sentimental and nostalgic, and at worst a pathological, melancholic, and distorted fixation. Historian Jerry Bannister, for instance, considers Brian Peckford’s argument about the impact of Confederation on
Newfoundland and contends, “in Peckford’s mind, history had inflicted a debilitating psychic wound from which it was not certain that Newfoundland could recover” (132).

According to Bannister, philosopher F.L. Jackson’s account is similar; for Jackson, “Newfoundland history represents a kind of post-traumatic stress disorder. False nostalgia for a happy past was a dangerous drug that worsened the problem” (132).

In The Literature of Newfoundland, a special issue of Essays on Canadian Writing (2004), literary critic Lawrence Mathews echoes this pathological rhetoric. He argues that of the ten most important works of Newfoundland “fiction of the past twenty-five years,” only two—Lisa Moore’s Open (2002) and Paul Bowdring’s The Night Season (1997)—contain characters who are “not bedevilled by the past” (14). Mathews contends that Moore’s and Bowdring’s characters are unique in that “they bear no trace of the ‘island-wide inferiority complex’ of the fictional figures who belong to earlier generations,” and unlike those figures, “they don’t look to the collective past for the causes of or solutions to their current predicaments” (14). The same could not be said of Moore’s newest novel, February (2009), however, which deals with one of the most poignant symbols of collective grief in Newfoundland’s recent history: the Ocean Ranger disaster of 1982.

For most scholars, the main problem with this fixation on the past is that it has become a way of avoiding present difficulties and conflicts. In his critique of the heritage industry, for example, Chafe claims that “this focus on recapturing the past has [. . .] led Newfoundland into a period of stagnation” (“Hey Buddy” 74), and he cites Bannister’s
worry that “Newfoundlanders’ obsession with their noble and tragic past may simply
stem from the fact that it is easier to bemoan our past than it is to deal with our present”
(75-76). Moreover, critics like Sylvia Söderlind fear that Newfoundlanders are so
preoccupied with the past that they are unable to look towards the future. In her
discussion of the development of national mythologies and the function of allegory in
Wayne Johnston’s *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams*, Söderlind acknowledges the role
that defeats and ghosts play in nation-building. According to Söderlind, “Without ghosts
there can be no literature,” but, she cautions, “with nothing but ghosts there can be no
future” (291).

In the field of literary criticism, this tendency to treat Newfoundlanders’
preoccupation with “their tragic and noble past” as a pathological obsession began with
Patrick O’Flaherty’s *The Rock Observed* (1979), the most influential and comprehensive
“survey of literary responses to Newfoundland and Newfoundlanders over the centuries”
(ix). O’Flaherty identifies two predominant responses to loss and environment in
Newfoundland writing. In his insightful review of *The Rock Observed*, Terry Whalen
characterizes these opposing traditions as the Romantic, or “socially rebellious,” and the
stoic (35).¹ According to Whalen, whereas the works that O’Flaherty admires possess “a
quality of strong and humble stoicism in both the land and mindscape, a subdued and at

¹ Whalen’s discussion generally collapses the “socially rebellious” tradition and the
“Romantic tradition,” which is why I am discussing them as one tradition. In addition,
Whalen—and a number of other Newfoundland critics—identify the “Romantic”
tradition with sentimentality. O’Flaherty, on the other hand, tends to use the adjective
“romantic” to describe the sentimental tradition.
the same time epic tenacity,” he shows “little willingness [. . .] to learn from the Romantic tradition of Newfoundland writing or from its socially rebellious one. Both of these other traditions (very often related) are evoked only for quick dismissal” (35). This tendency to privilege the stoic, suggests Whalen, is “both the controlling focus of The Rock Observed and also its limitation: it is a study which underlines the virtue of Newfoundland stoicism and punishes other kinds of values on its behalf” (35).

Indeed, O’Flaherty directs much of his ire at social rebels, like the nineteenth-century Reform leaders William Carson and Patrick Morris. He traces the “triumph of sentiment” (49) in Newfoundland history to these two “middle-class outsiders” (51), who, he maintains, employed John Reeves’ overly simplistic analysis in History of the Government of Newfoundland (1793) to manufacture a romantic and sentimental national myth. According to O’Flaherty,

Reeves saw the dominant theme of Newfoundland history as a struggle between ‘two contending interests’: ‘The planters and inhabitants on the one hand, who, being settled there, needed the protection of a government and police, with the administration of justice: and the adventurers and merchants on the other; who, originally carrying on the fishery from this country, and visiting that island only for the season, needed no such protection for themselves, and had various reasons for preventing its being afforded to others.’ (51)

Reeves’ analysis was based on his interpretation of the Star Chamber Rules, and “the now notorious regulations of 1671,” which prohibited planters from settling “within six miles of the sea shore” (51), and on decisions like those of the Committee for Trade and Plantation in 1675, which discouraged settlement (52).

But recent examinations of Reeves’ History suggest that his interpretation was flawed for two key reasons. First, says O’Flaherty, Reeves “seemed to equate legislative
intention with actual implementation,” a dubious conflation at best, since “apart from the
general success of the policy of denying the colony a year-round government, there was
little, if any, formal attempt to enforce such workable statutes as the six-mile rule” (52).
And second, Reeves underestimated the importance of King William’s Act (1699), a
crucial document that “attempt[ed] to outline the respective rights of migratory fishermen
and settlers, favouring the former but granting important concessions to inhabitants,”
including permission to settle under certain conditions (53). Nevertheless,

For Carson and Morris, Reeves supplied a convenient explanation for the lack of
progress in the colony and for its failure to attract a large population. They could
now blame this retarded condition, not on the climate and geography of the island,
which would have been unflattering to budding nationalists, but upon the [W]est
[C]ountry adventurers, the Star Chamber, and the fishing admirals. (O’Flaherty
54)

Moreover, this inclination to blame a variety of oppressors for the colony’s problems led
to “a paradigm of repression,” according to O’Flaherty (qtd. in Bannister 126). It also led
to two contradictory myths of Newfoundland identity: on one hand, in Carson’s
pamphlets we “see the beginning of the perennial, sturdy myth, the ‘hardy
Newfoundlander’”; on the other hand, when it suited his purposes, Carson saw
Newfoundlanders “as [being] deprived and oppressed by outsiders” (O’Flaherty 56).

According to this dichotomy, in their responses to loss and environment,
Newfoundlanders are either victims or survivors.

Although O’Flaherty acknowledges that “Reeves [. . .] was not responsible for
some of the emotional excesses of nineteenth-century historians,” he argues that his
History was “possibly [. . .] the most influential book ever written about Newfoundland,
for so stunningly simple and plausible was his reading of the colony’s past that most subsequent historians merely repeated or amplified his ideas, which then passed into school textbooks and the popular imagination” (54). D.W. Prowse was the most important historian to embellish Reeves’ ideas and to embrace Carson and Morris’ nationalist myth. According to O’Flaherty, “by combining his genuine scholarship with sentimental editorializing,” his History of Newfoundland (1895) “enveloped the history of the country more thoroughly than ever in a cloud of misunderstanding” (79). Since its publication, notes O’Flaherty, “no comparable work has appeared in the twentieth century to challenge its dominant position in historiography” (79).

Citing the work of historians Elke Dettmer and Bannister, Miriam Wright agrees that the prevailing myth—that Newfoundlanders are survivors of a history of oppression and a brutal environment—stems from “a particular representation of history found in D.W. Prowse” (151):

According to this version, the people of Newfoundland were descendants of survivors, people who had overcome great hardships, from the harsh North Atlantic environment to British colonial regimes supposedly unfriendly to settlement. Over the past number of decades, historians of Newfoundland have challenged that particular interpretation of the past, but the survivor motif has continued to be a part of representations of the Newfoundland identity. (149)

2 According to Bannister,

In the 1970s the position of Prowse’s History transformed from an authoritative text into an unreliable source. In the first sustained challenge to the prevailing orthodoxy, Keith Matthews argued the fish merchants did not conspire to prohibit settlement or stunt the colony’s growth. Interdependence characterized relations between the different groups involved in the fishery: the credit system worked to insulate both merchants and planters from cyclical economic depression. Market
Bannister argues that “Prowse’s view still dominates popular conceptions of history,” and “provid[es] the basic prism through which Newfoundland nationalism has been reflected in both the arts community and the thriving tourism industry,” because although recent historians have questioned Prowse’s philosophy that history is the teleological story of progress, they have not challenged his underlying assumption that Newfoundland’s history is the story of oppression (125).

Thus, historical revisionists have “collapse[d] the distance between historical epochs into a single meta-narrative which deliberately blurs the line between the past and the present” (Bannister 125). But whereas Prowse believed that “a crucial break separated the past (backwardness) from the present (progress),” and whereas “his History is an account of how Newfoundland had triumphed in the face of adversity,” according to the new historical framework, argues Bannister, “[r]ather than triumphing over their history of oppression [. . .] Newfoundlanders are haunted by it. We are not free from our past but trapped by it, forced to endure seemingly endless cycles of economic failure and social misery” (125-126). This attitude, notes Bannister, “grew out of the cultural revival of the 1970s, emerged in one form in Peckford’s economic nationalism of the 1980s, and has resurfaced in the wave of historical fiction since the 1990s” (126).

forces, resource endowment, and commercial policies comprised the vital factors in the island’s development. (130)
Contemporary historians argue that in addition to inciting a “paradigm of repression,” the nineteenth-century reformers also propagated a distorted understanding of Newfoundland’s environment and its resource potential. According to Sean Cadigan,

To answer imperial arguments that Newfoundland had no agrarian basis for colonial self-government, colonial reformers founded a nationalist myth: that the island had the resources for agricultural diversification and interior development but that these had been frustrated by a cabal of self-interested British merchants and naval governors. (289-290)

In order to gain the support of Irish Roman Catholics, the “reformers embellished their appeal” by adding a “denominational cast”: they emphasized that “supporting Reformers allowed [. . . the Irish] to strike a blow for settlers against a British and Protestant mercantocracy” (290). By this time, the British were more than happy “to shed the expense of administering Newfoundland,” and in 1855 they granted Newfoundland responsible government (290). But in acquiring this freedom, the nationalists fomented sectarian strife and—perhaps even worse—“shifted colonial policy and much of the colony’s political culture decisively from an awareness of the extent to which most people depended on the resources of the sea” (124).

That “[n]ineteenth-century nationalists [. . .] ignored the obvious dependence of the colony on marine resources,” says Cadigan, “is not surprising,” given that “Newfoundland never had much effective control over fisheries policy” (291). However, the long-term repercussions of such a shift were disastrous:

Over the long run, colonial governments’ railway and interior diversification policies undermined the basis of colonial competency. Unable to count on imperial support for the regulation of the fishery, an inherently international economic activity in terms of trade and resources, Newfoundland governments paid scant attention to the management of marine resources. Instead, to varying
degrees, they built expensive railway lines, always hoping that some new resource Eldorado might be found at the end of the next line. (290)

Unfortunately, the nationalists’ propaganda—that Newfoundland’s interior might prove to be the next Arcadia—proved to be groundless since an “extensive agricultural interior never materialized” (290). Nevertheless, successive administrations remained firm in the conviction that “there were forestry and mineral resources to be developed if colonial governments were willing to make generous concessions to international corporations” (290). The central thesis of Cadigan’s book is that this pattern—the government’s tendency to ignore marine resources, their focus on landward industrialization, and their dependence on foreign investment—has continued ever since.

The government’s reliance on the tourism industry was another pattern that began in the same period. In his seminal work, Making a World of Difference: Essays on Tourism, Culture and Development in Newfoundland (1996), James Overton argues that by “the late nineteenth century tourism was seen as an intimate part of efforts to diversify and develop Newfoundland’s economy” (12). Such diversification was seen as a necessary solution to the colony’s dependence “on a fishing industry which was periodically in crisis” (102).³ According to Overton, in response to these crises, a section of the local bourgeoisie sought alternative spheres of investment. They saw their future interests as being served by state-initiated economic development of mining, forestry, agriculture and tourism. The key elements in the ‘new economy’ were to be the construction of the railway to open up the country, using

³ As Overton notes, “export prices for cod fell drastically in the 1870s, 1880s, and 1890s” (102).
foreign capital and expertise. The state was also actively involved in encouraging this industry by advertising and the introduction of game laws. (102)

The local bourgeoisie and the state believed that tourism was an important part of the new economy not just because it was “a potentially profitable industry” in itself, but also “because it might lead to capital investment in other areas. It was a way of making Newfoundland known to potential investors,” and various writers expressed hope that the development of tourism would solve the problem of outmigration (12; 11).

Advertising played a pivotal role in establishing tourism in the region and, as Overton contends, various interests were involved in constructing Newfoundland as a desirable place to visit. Ironically, although these interests all viewed “tourism and industrial development [. . .] not [. . .] as alternatives, but as intimately connected,” their promotional materials celebrated Newfoundland’s lack of industrial development (11):

The railway company produced some of Newfoundland’s first tourist promotional literature, advertising the country as a sportsman’s paradise, abundant in caribou and other game. The country’s scenery and climate were also promoted as an appeal was made to artists [. . .] and adventurers to visit the ‘new playground of

4 For example, according to Overton,

In the early 1890s Isaac Morris wrote, in Sketches of Our Western Sea Coast, of the ‘deserted homes’ he had encountered on a visit to all the harbours of importance between St. John’s and Bonne Bay. But in spite of outmigration, there was hope. The growth in tourism in the late nineteenth-century was one reason for optimism; it inspired Morris to write these lines in The Dawn of the Twentieth Century:

Thus it is that our sky is brightening, and that the century’s dawn is favourable to our interests. We are becoming much better known, and that in our true light, and every season the good news is spreading. . .

[I]nfluential persons have given the word, and on the wings of the press it has been wafted across the Atlantic and borne around the continent. (11)
Marketing Newfoundland as a “health resort” was an effective strategy because it fit into a broader social movement. Citing the work of Jackson Lears, Peter Schmitt, and Ian McKay, Overton argues, “There emerged at the turn of the century a widespread feeling of unease amongst the business and professional classes in both Europe and North America” (13). This “unease” manifested itself in two key ways: “One expression [… ] was the emergence of neurasthenia or nervous prostration, the main symptom of which was depression, amongst the modern, educated, urban elite. Another symptom of this unease was the spread of what Lears calls ‘antimodern sentiments,’ particularly amongst ‘journalists, academics, ministers, and literati’” (13).

Although several cultural historians have employed the term ‘antimodernism’ in the past few decades, few have gone out of their way to define the concept.⁵ Incorporating Lears’ notion that antimodernism is “‘the recoil from an ‘overcivilised modern existence to more intense forms of physical or spiritual existence’” and Raymond Williams’ understanding that antimodernism is “a structure of feeling—that gave rise to a ‘sentimental…unlocalised ‘Old England’’ among the alienated urban population of industrializing Britain” (3), Lynda Jessup explains that “the term antimodernism is used to refer to the pervasive sense of loss that often coexisted around the turn of the century along with an enthusiasm for modernization and material progress. Thus, antimodernism

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⁵ Indeed, as the University of Austin website on antimodernism notes, the term has not even been included in the OED or the Mirriam-Webster Dictionary (Jerome Bump).
was often ambivalent and Janus-faced, smacking of accommodation as well as protest”

(3). As “a critique of the modern,” argues Jessup,

It describes [...] a perceived lack in the present manifesting itself not only in a sense of alienation, but also in a longing for the types of physical or spiritual experience embodied in utopian futures and imagined pasts. As such, it embraces what was then a desire for the type of ‘authentic,’ immediate experience supposedly embodied in pre-industrial societies—in medieval communities or ‘Oriental’ cultures, in the Primitive, the Traditional, or the Folk. (3)

Overton refers to this antimodernism synonymously as Romanticism, and he maintains that the Romantics’ nostalgia for idyllic pasts and utopian futures, and their anti-capitalist and anti-industrialist sentiments, coincided with “strong nostalgic feelings for unspoiled landscapes and people” (Making 112). As such, the “Romantic movement was very much dominated by the back-to-nature theme in a variety of forms. In it, nature itself, ‘natural’ economies, that is those which are close to nature and to the soil, as well as the ‘nature occupations’ take on great significance” (114). The Romantics believed that returning to nature and to ‘natural’ societies was a curative for modern neurasthenia, and so the “medical model of leisure” was born (113).

McKay’s crucial study, The Quest of the Folk: Antimodernism and Cultural Selection in Twentieth-Century Nova Scotia (1994), examines the relationship among antimodern sentiments, industrialization, and the development of tourism in Nova Scotia in the first half of the twentieth century. According to McKay, the rural folk were constructed by urbanites—and for an urban gaze—as “the romantic antithesis to everything they disliked about modern urban industrial life” (4). Within this nostalgic vision, “the fishing villages came to be seen as bearers of Nova Scotia’s cultural essence”
and the people “came to be represented as stout-hearted, resourceful fisherfolk who led a ‘simple life’ by the sea, untroubled by urban stresses” (xv-xvi). The problem, claims McKay, is that by transforming people into “inert essences,” this construction of the Folk mystified and obscured class relations, concealed the material circumstances in which the fishermen and the rest of Nova Scotians lived, and thereby preserved the status quo (xvi). Moreover, Wright summarizes, “by defining the quintessential Nova Scotian as a fisher, these creators of the Folk excluded the majority of the province’s people,” and eliminated any trace of “ethnic, racial and religious diversity” (148).

According to Wright, “McKay’s study offers an opportunity to start looking at the wider interest in the Folk and folklore in the Atlantic region” (148). In a brief article considering the applicability of McKay’s framework to early twentieth-century Newfoundland, she notes that “Newfoundland’s experience with industrialization was certainly small relative to Nova Scotia’s” in this time period (148). Furthermore, she contends that there were key differences in the dissemination and distribution of folk

6 Wright notes that Newfoundland’s tourism industry developed slightly later than Nova Scotia’s. Moreover, she says, “While the actual depictions of fisher Folk are similar, tourist promoters in Nova Scotia used these images more extensively than their counterparts in Newfoundland in the interwar years” (150). In early twentieth-century Newfoundland, the “tourist literature […] emphasizes the island’s salmon rivers and hunting lodges more than picturesque coastal communities and fisher Folk” (150-151). It was not until “after the Second World War” that this antimodernist “approach” began to promote Folk culture in tourism advertisements (151).
images and folklore products (151). Nevertheless, Wright argues that “the actual representations of the fisher Folk were quite similar in Nova Scotia and Newfoundland, and both mixed romanticism, antimodernism, and variants of nationalism” (148).

Moreover, as in Nova Scotia, the romantic, antimodern “version of Newfoundland” that “was ‘invented’ for tourists” was also invented for Newfoundlanders (Overton, Making 19). According to Overton, “The same totems, icons, and images highlighted for tourists came to be seen as essential symbols of Newfoundland national identity” (17). As a result, Newfoundlanders themselves began to believe that the landscape was spiritually restorative, and “[i]deas about landscape became central to notions of nationhood” (17). Newfoundlanders also embraced folk culture as part of their national identity: “From the late nineteenth century,” says Overton, “a host of local writers emerged to sing the praises of Newfoundland’s fisher-folk and scenery” (17). Small magazines like the Newfoundland Quarterly, founded in 1901, played a key role in celebrating and promoting folk culture (Wright 148; see also O’Flaherty 115-116).

But although the promotion of folk culture fit in with a larger antimodern movement, and although “transport improvements made Newfoundland more accessible than it had been,” the development of tourism in Newfoundland was a slow and bumpy road (Overton, Making 103). A series of events—World War I, the “near extermination of the caribou” in the 1920s, the depression, and World War II—all impeded the growth

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7 The major difference in this respect was that “rural people in Newfoundland were more often the recipients of the ‘products’ of folklore than outsiders” (Wright 151).
of the industry, but simultaneously exacerbated the tide of nostalgia that was sweeping the region (Overton 103; see also O’Flaherty 151-152). According to O’Flaherty, World War II in particular played a key role in the development of a local sense of longing for the traditional outport life:

The turmoil of the war and the accelerated rate of change which it provoked in Newfoundland society led to a literary examination of the traditional life of the country by natives of the Newfoundland outports. In part, this was a defense against the mockery and abuse directed at Newfoundlanders by foreign personnel stationed on the island […] and a response to derogatory accounts of Newfoundlanders by visiting journalists. (151-152)

Even more significant, however, and “perhaps the main reason for the appearance of a literature of nostalgia,” he contends, “was the undeniable deterioration of outport life” (152).

The importance of the port of St. John’s, and the establishment of air bases in Goose Bay and Gander, meant that “[f]or the first time, a salaried mode of life was available to great numbers of men who had known only the vagaries of the seasonal pattern of life in the outports” (146). Furthermore, the presence of Canadian and American soldiers in Newfoundland, and the influx of employment, also meant that the “war made visible, and to some extent accessible, the North American way of life, with all its extravagance, speed, confidence, and vulgarity” (146). Although these changes brought material prosperity, they also resulted—“almost overnight”—in the loss of a way of life (146). As “the tempo of life in the capital quickened,” notes O’Flaherty, “[i]n the

8 O’Flaherty notes that “it was during the war that soldiers began using the derisive term ‘Newfie’ to describe the people” (152).
outports the traditional, communal way of life, already undermined in the hungry 1920s and 1930s, kept crumbling as more and more men left the fishery” (147).

According to O’Flaherty, this deterioration—and its subsequent examination in the literature of those who had left the region—provided the genesis for a “new kind of sentimental writing”: expatriate nostalgia (152). O’Flaherty suggests that the “evident and lamentable change [was] especially apparent to natives of the outport who had left their homes permanently in the early decades of the century to get an education and make a living in urban settings, and who had stayed in touch with out harbour developments during the intervening years” (152). Central to expatriate nostalgia was a new place-myth: in “coming to terms with the changes that were taking place in Newfoundland and with the dislocations they experienced in their own lives by leaving their homes,” expatriates “reconstruct[ed] the outport way of life they had known, or fancied they had known, in their childhood,” and in so doing, “recreated the outport as a pastoral idyll” (152).

O’Flaherty claims that outport nostalgia amongst expatriates was accompanied by a “mood of indulgent, uncritical nationalism, born of a sense of exile from an embattled homeland” (149). The *Atlantic Guardian*, founded in 1945 by three expatriates living in Montreal—Arthur Scammell, Brian Cahill and Ewart Young—was the “principal vehicle for the expression of such sentiment” (152). But if the vocalization of nationalist sentiment in the magazine was prompted by “a sense of exile,” the list of grievances that these men expressed had been building for some time back at home. Overton maintains
that “Romantic/cultural nationalism [. . .] was certainly a significant current in the late 1940s and 1950s when a group of ‘outraged patriots’ gave vent to their anger over the long period of ‘dictatorship’ in Newfoundland (suspension of responsible government and direct rule from Westminster in the 1930s and 1940s)” (Making 118-119). ⁹ As in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, this romantic, nationalist vision bore a strong resemblance to tourism advertisements (119). Speaking of the Guardian, Overton contends, “The romantic representation of rural Newfoundland in such a publication is significant for its striking similarity to the vision of ‘the ‘Real’ Newfoundland articulated by the tourism industry” (119). According to Overton, for both nationalists and tourism promoters alike, the “‘Real’ Newfoundland’ is the outports and ‘the people,’ ‘the fishermen making their nets, caulking their boats, or building a wiggly garden rod fence’” (106). Like McKay, he argues that this idealistic and selective vision of the folk is problematic because it “depoliticizes and mythologizes” class and economic differences (123).

While the nationalists looked backwards with longing and regret, the newly-formed Smallwood government looked eagerly towards the future. According to Overton, “After Confederation with Canada in 1949 the Liberal government of the new province

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⁹ Overton’s description of Newfoundland’s government during this period as “direct rule from Westminster” is not quite precise. According to the Newfoundland and Labrador Heritage Website, “On 16 February 1934 the Commission of Government was sworn in, ending responsible government, and beginning a new chapter in Newfoundland’s constitutional history. The Commission consisted of seven persons appointed by the British government. No elections took place, and no legislature was convened, for the next 15 [sic] years” (Jeff Webb).
led by J.R. Smallwood initiated a period of state-directed economic transformation under the slogan ‘develop or perish’” (Making 103). Such a transformation was believed to be necessary to solve the province’s dire economic situation (104). But although they were billed as transformative, Smallwood’s economic policies essentially “carried on in the tradition of the nineteenth-century nationalists” (Cadigan 293). Confederation did provide “financial support for expanding government services and programs,” but in other respects, Smallwood’s plans were a variation on an old theme: “Smallwood’s vision of economic development was another variety of the commitment to landward industrialization, which continued to neglect Newfoundland and Labrador’s dependence on marine resources and the diverse needs of its many peoples” (Cadigan 4).

In addition to being overly neglectful, Allan Dwyer argues that the focus of Smallwood’s fisheries policies was excessively narrow. Both the provincial and the federal government believed that the saltfish industry was outdated, and that “the future lay in exporting fresh-frozen product to rich American markets” (Dwyer). The problem, however, was that the “Smallwood government […] invested so much capital and [so

10 According to Overton, The Smallwood regime faced a rather gloomy prospect. Per capita incomes were approximately half the Canadian average. The inshore seasonal fishery, still oriented to the production of sun-dried salt cod, provided low incomes for many of those engaged in production. Unemployment was high and threatened to rise with the phasing out of military bases which had employed some 25 percent of the Newfoundland labour force during the war. To dam the flood of emigrants and address these problems, drastic action was needed. The state responded with the transformation of the fishing industry, the development of mining, forestry and power resources and efforts to establish and attract other industries. (104-105)
many] resources into the sector that little energy was left for other initiatives” (Dwyer).

For better or worse, the modernization of the fisheries did contribute to the transformation of the rural outports, however: “Newer industrial production concentrated fish processing in a few large centres. Such centralization drew many fishing households away from small communities in which they had combined production in the salt fishery with other work for generations,” but Smallwood’s attempts to reduce Newfoundland’s reliance on the ocean proved to be as unsuccessful as his predecessors (Dwyer):

[B]y the 1970s, the fisheries of Newfoundland and Labrador had been changed, but not necessarily improved. Although the industry had been modernized by the introduction of the fresh/frozen sector, overall dependence by rural Newfoundlanders and Labradorians on employment in the fisheries had not been reduced. Instead, the small-scale fishing enterprises persisted alongside the new deep-sea fishing vessels. Greater numbers of workers came to rely on employment in the new fish plants that produced frozen fish products. (Dwyer)

Moreover, because of a variety of new technologies, “[o]verall fishing capacity increased in the industry,” but this “would have disastrous ecological consequences for the fisheries of the last quarter of the 20th [sic] century” (Dwyer).

Ironically, as the outports themselves decayed, and as government policies focussed on landward rather than marine resources, the government renewed efforts to develop a tourism industry centered on nostalgic images of the outports as the “‘Real’” Newfoundland (Overton, Making 106). According to Overton, “Even in the early 1970s

11 Cadigan argues that, “[l]ike the policies of earlier colonial nationalists, Smallwood’s efforts foundered on the stark reality of the province’s fragile but unavoidable dependence on its maritime resources” (4).
the provincial government already had plans to convert abandoned outports into leisure resorts,” and by the 1980s, “deserted village” tourism had taken center stage in the government’s tourism advertising campaigns (40-41). In The Future of Nostalgia (2001), an examination of the uses and abuses of nostalgia in the former Soviet Union, Svetlana Boym argues that this kind of institutional nostalgia is paradoxical:

The rapid pace of industrialization and modernization increased the intensity of people’s longing for the slower rhythms of the past, for continuity, social cohesion and tradition. Yet this new obsession with the past reveals an abyss of forgetting and takes place in inverse proportion to its actual preservation. As Pierre Nora has suggested, memorial sites, or ‘lieux de memoire,’ are established institutionally at the time when environments of memory, the milieux de memoire, fade. (16)

This paradox was particularly apparent in Newfoundland, where during the very decades that the Smallwood government was enforcing outport resettlement programs, they were also active in promoting the preservation of Newfoundland heritage (Overton, Making 38-41).12

Perhaps the most scathing critique of institutional nostalgia in Newfoundland comes from critics who argue that antimodernism—and the institutionalization of antimodern sentiments in the heritage industry—amounts to marketing

12 Overton contends that “Smallwood, with his long-term interest in folklore and history, personally played no small part in stimulating interest in Newfoundland history and culture” (Making 38). During Smallwood’s time “[a]s president of the Newfoundland Historical Society in the mid-1960s, he ‘expressed the fear’ that much of Newfoundland ‘heritage would disappear’ unless urgent action was taken to preserve it” (38). Moreover, Ronald Rompkey argues that the Smallwood government’s desire to promote and preserve Newfoundland culture was “one of the most” compelling reasons for establishing Memorial as a full university (269).
underdevelopment. In this context, Newfoundlanders’ preoccupation with the past has been viewed as a major selling point, even if “[w]hat is being packaged and sold [. . .] is the heritage of centuries of underdevelopment” (Overton, Making 105). In 2009, Herb Wyile argued that in the rest of Canada, this double-edged sword is part and parcel of the country’s “profoundly ambivalent attitude toward the Atlantic provinces” (“Going Out” 164). So although the region’s “lack of development, manufacturing, and industry” is viewed on the one hand as its downfall, “in other respects it is the source of a more positive view of the region as Canada’s ‘ocean playground’—officially a slogan of Nova Scotia but an apt metaphor for the increasingly prevalent construction of the region as leisure space” (164). Citing the work of Overton and McKay, Wyile contends that “the two sides of this Janus-faced attitude, rather than dissonant with each other, are structurally related” (164). In other words, “governments, cultural producers, businesses, and tourist promoters have consciously turned the region’s lack of development [. . .] to its advantage, repackaging the region as unspoiled and culturally distinctive rather than underdeveloped and backward” (164).

At the same time, the Newfoundland government has also capitalized on expatriate nostalgia amongst those who—because of underdevelopment—have “move[d] away to find work in the industrial centres of the mainland” (Cadigan 251). The Smallwood government’s ‘Come Home Year’ in 1966 is the quintessential example of this trend. Although Confederation with Canada was supposed to make outmigration smoother, Cadigan argues that during the 1960s, Newfoundland expatriates “found the
reality of adjusting to life in the industrial cities of Ontario much different from the idealization of Canada set forth by Smallwood and the Confederates,” with the result that a “nostalgic romanticization of home intensified, fuelled by television and popular radio stations” (251). Although “much of this nostalgic popular culture painted an overly rosy picture of outport life,” as Cadigan suggests, “the resentment underlying such nostalgia was very real” (251). For the Newfoundland government, however, this nostalgia was seen as a way to expand the tourism market by luring expatriates home during the summer months to show them “the miracle of progress and improvement,” especially the Trans-Canada Highway (Overton, Making 30-31). The campaign proved to be an effective one, playing as it did on the expatriate’s “hope for return” (Cadigan, 251). According to Cadigan, during ‘Come Home Year,’ “[d]roves of Newfoundlanders returned home, bringing their stories of the difficulty of adjusting to life away and perhaps looking for signs of hope for a return in the superficial elements of modernization, such as the new Trans-Canada Highway or the network of provincial parks opened to foster a modern tourism industry” (251). Perhaps more important, argues Ronald Rompkey, is that “apart from its successful appeal to the longings of expatriates, Come Home Year accomplished two things: it created a link between public funding and the arts, and it entrenched the idea that traditional outport life could be commodified and marketed” (271).

In the 1960s, those still at home in Newfoundland were also beginning to voice their doubts about the effects of Smallwood’s ‘develop or perish,’ industrialize-at-any-
cost schemes, as it became “increasingly apparent to many rural Newfoundlanders and Labradorians that their province was not becoming the land of milk and honey that Smallwood had promised” (Cadigan 251; see also 252-253). Inevitably, notes Cadigan, this dissatisfaction “extended to cultural expression” (252). Satirist Ray Guy, for instance, wrote nostalgic and scathing columns in the *Telegram* that “revealed a deep, but clear-eyed, affection for rural Newfoundland, anger at the havoc wreaked by resettlement and unsuccessful industrialization, and contempt for Smallwood’s leadership” (252). Harold Horwood, himself a newspaper columnist for the *Telegram* in the 1950s,\(^{13}\) was another vociferous and influential critic of Smallwood’s schemes (O’Flaherty 162-163).\(^{14}\) According to Cadigan, “Horwood’s novel *Tomorrow Will Be Sunday*, published in 1966, revealed his disquiet with the rural communities that still gave Smallwood their support, but also misgivings about the impact of modernization in the province” (252-253).

“Disquiet” and antimodern, romantic sentiments were also expressed by those who had found a new home in Newfoundland. Just as Smallwood was trying to resettle outport residents, says Overton, “small communities were being colonized by [what Horwood referred to as] ‘emigres [sic] of polluted cities’” (“Sparking A Revolution”

\(^{13}\) Horwood was also a politician for a brief period; he “became in 1949 the first member representing Labrador to sit in the House of Assembly” (O’Flaherty 161).

\(^{14}\) Horwood was initially a Smallwood friend and supporter, and his “disenchantment with Smallwood and his policies was gradual” (O’Flaherty 162). According to O’Flaherty, “to some extent” Horwood’s disillusionment “was an understandable response to the Premier’s attacks on the *Telegram* for venturing an occasional mild criticism of his government” (162). (See also Overton “Sparking.”)
193). Farley Mowat, a friend of Horwood’s, was perhaps the most contentious and influential figure of the back-to-the-land movement. According to Cadigan, “Throughout the mid-1960s, Horwood, with Farley Mowat, the Canadian naturalist and writer who settled in Newfoundland with his partner Claire in 1962, began to promote a countercultural revival, based on a romanticized outport idyll, against the impact of modernization in Newfoundland” (253). Like Guy, Mowat and Horwood focussed much of their ire on Smallwood’s resettlement programs, which they believed to be eroding traditional rural values (see Overton “Sparkling”).

As with earlier expressions of antimodernism in Newfoundland, the back-to-the-land movement was part of a larger trend: “It was the shift in sensibility which accompanied the so-called ‘sixties revolution’ which put Newfoundland on the counter-cultural map” (193). Quoting Horwood, Overton contends that in the late 60s, “Newfoundland was being ‘discovered’ and promoted as the place to be in magazines and on radio and television, putting it almost in the same class with ‘hard rock music, marijuana and legalized abortion’” (193). But critics argue that this shift in sensibility was not without irony. Referring to Guy’s infamous column, “Newfoundlander as the once and future hippies” (1968), Overton maintains, “The irony was that, just as Newfoundland was being discovered by the hippies, and just as the way of life of the outports was starting to be widely celebrated, that way of life was being buried” (194). Moreover, O’Flaherty—a vehement critic of Mowat’s writings about Newfoundland—argues that what “orphans” like Mowat failed to recognize is “the simple fact [. . .] that
Smallwood, the greatest populist in the province’s history, could do what he did only with the consent of the people. The progress that he facilitated and initiated, the people themselves wanted” (177; 179). According to O’Flaherty, “This is the bitter pill that primitives and romantics like Mowat must swallow” (179).

Near the end of the 1960s, Newfoundland academics also began to question the benefits of industrialization and progress, and to consider whether “it might still be possible to follow an alternative non-industrial path” (Overton, Making 31). According to Overton, “By the early 1970s, a critique of modernization, which was strongly influenced by [E.F.] Schumacher’s book Small is Beautiful, was well-developed in Newfoundland and provided a sweeping condemnation of the pursuit of progress” (31). This critique was partially focussed on various government programs believed to be “undermining the viability and independence of rural Newfoundland” (31). But as with earlier romantic, antimodern sentiments in Newfoundland, “the criticism extended to take in urban-industrial values, the North American way of life, television and even electronic music” (32). Rather than perceiving Newfoundland’s lack of industrial development as a failure, these academics saw it as an opportunity “to avoid or skip the industrial stage of development in Newfoundland” altogether, a prospect they believed would only be possible if “the chains which bound Newfoundland to the powerful outside forces shaping the province’s destiny” were “if not broken, then at least substantially weakened” (32).
By the end of Smallwood’s reign it was becoming increasingly apparent that modernization and Confederation were a mixed blessing to say the least. On one hand, notes Cadigan, “[s]ocial and educational services were available at unprecedented levels” (258). On the other hand, however, “[i]mprovements in living standards had come at a price” (258):

Outports had been disturbed by resettlement in the interest of economic modernization, but little had come from this. Overcapacity dominated the fisheries, and growth centres had failed to attract significant new industries. There were new industrial ventures in hydroelectricity and oil processing, but at a great cost to government. The government had treated Labrador as a convenience for the island, but Churchill Falls had only provoked popular ire. The province had become dependent on federal financial assistance and management of its key marine resources. (259)

As “dissatisfaction” with Newfoundland’s situation increased, once again, “people became interested in new notions of nation” (Cadigan 259).

By the late 1970s and early 80s, a full-blown neo-nationalist independence movement had taken root in the province (Overton, Making 32-33). Overton claims that this movement “had many variants, but found its most forceful expression in the election of the Progressive Conservative government of Brian Peckford” (33). By this time, outport nostalgia—and the victim/survivor motif—were employed not just to market the province to tourists, but also to combat external political forces, especially the federal government. “After Peckford took power in 1979,” contends Rompkey, “the fear of losing a characteristic way of life was invoked for a variety of political purposes from the defence of the seal hunt to the appeal for greater control of the fishery and offshore petroleum resources” (272).
According to Overton, various scholars have tied what Sandra Gwyn famously referred to in a 1976 *Saturday Night Column* as a “cultural renaissance” in Newfoundland to “the prospects of oil development” and to the fear of losing a distinctive way of life (“Sparking” 167). Quoting the work of Harry Hiller, Overton maintains that “it was the promise of such development which provided the ‘energy, the confidence and the occasion’ for ‘an awakening in Newfoundland’s cultural and economic aspirations’ in the 1970s” (167). Perhaps more important, “‘the prospect of economic betterment,’” and “the ‘confrontations with the federal government and the earlier modernization’” together “‘provided the catalyst and underlying condition to make the movement possible’” (qtd. in Overton 167).

If oil and “‘confrontations with the federal government’” provided the impetus for the cultural renaissance, it was the threat of modernity and Newfoundlanders’ desire to preserve a connection to the past that was believed to be the source of creative inspiration. According to Rompkey,

Sandra Gwyn was the first to recognize and name something extraordinary in the making and the first to link it to a sense of the past. ‘A society turned in upon itself and threatened from outside…is undergoing the agony and ecstasy of a revolution,’ she announced. ‘Newfoundland artists are discovering, as their Québec colleagues did before them, that their life force flows out of their folk tradition: Celtic and passionate, funny and tragic, salty and earthy’ (273).

But critics have pointed out that whether or not Newfoundlanders’ “life force flows out of their folk tradition,” for better or worse, investment in these new oil prospects flowed, once again, from foreign investors.
For despite the neo-nationalist rhetoric of independence, says Overton, in practical reality,

the independence movement in Newfoundland was entirely contradictory. Provincial control of offshore oil resources would provide the economic basis for this greater independence, but this would be at the expense of dependence on the major oil companies. Revenues from oil would provide a degree of independence from ‘Uncle Ottawa’ but the level of revenues would have to be negotiated with the oil companies. (Making 33)

Granted, “[t]hese revenues would be used to save rural Newfoundland—the heart of Newfoundland culture—from eclipse and destitution,” but all of this would come “at the cost of export-led industrialization under the control of the multi-nationals” (Overton, Making 33). For all of their lofty rhetoric, then, the independence movement, and the small-is-beautiful, “post-industrialists,” were beginning to appear to be merely industrialists by another name. To be sure, “[w]hat was meant by post-industrial society was less than clear in most cases” (Overton 33).

The biggest threat to rural, outport Newfoundland came in the 1990s, when it became clear that the fisheries modernization program had increased capacity to the point that the fish stocks were in crisis. By 1992, the “cod stocks collapsed, and the federal government put in place a series of moratoria on ground fisheries” (Cadigan 280). The effects of the moratoria on rural Newfoundland were profound and widespread. According to Overton, the 1992 moratorium “displaced over thirty thousand people from the industry in the province and made the abandoned fish plant a feature of the landscape” (“‘A Future’” 60). The federal government instituted compensation and job training programs, but these did not entirely satisfy the fishers, who believed that
“compensation was insufficient,” and who maintained that “training programs were inadequate to convince them to leave the fishery permanently” (Cadigan 280).

Once again, many wondered if the outports could “survive” (Overton 63). And once more, threats to the outports’ survival led to an outpouring of nostalgic and neo-nationalist cultural expression. As I have already noted, in the words of Bannister, the 1990s witnessed “a wave of historical fiction” in Newfoundland, and there was also a burgeoning of Newfoundland popular culture dealing with the loss of the fisheries (126). According to Cadigan, “The fisheries crises [. . .] focused the anger of fishers against the federal government. The producers of popular culture often shaped this anger by playing a neo-nationalist tune, perhaps the best example being the ‘Fisherman’s Lament’ from the self-titled debut album released by the band Great Big Sea in 1993” (281-282).

Considering this song, and the work of poet Mary Dalton, singer-songwriter Ron Hynes, and satirist Ray Guy, Cadigan contends,

All of these artists expressed a profound sense of loss, but with little notion about the part the peoples of the province had played in the many misfortunes of Newfoundland and Labrador, whether in depleted fisheries, previous support for

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15 However, according to Overton, “While there was much talk about survival, little was said about what […] the term meant,” and it took on a variety of connotations:

For many, survival meant being able to find work and stay in their communities in the face of the fisheries collapse. [. . .] For those with inadequate support, survival largely meant leaving to find work. [. . .] For others, survival meant the survival of Newfoundland as a distinctive political and cultural entity. (63)

Because “[i]mages of rural Newfoundland and Labrador and of the outports have a key place in ideas about the province’s identity,” a “threat” to the outports “was seen as a threat to [. . .] the province’s cultural identity” (63).
Smallwood’s modernization, or being bamboozled by the neo-nationalism of Peckford. (282)

For Cadigan, although the anger of these artists might be heartfelt, the lack of policy knowledge that they have demonstrated in their laments limits its critical validity (282).

In what has become a familiar pattern, in response to the fisheries crisis and to fears of rural decline, the government turned to the tourism industry. In the years following the moratorium, writes Overton, there was a “growing interest in heritage generally, and [in] what has become known as ‘outport archaeology,’” and this was “part of a growing trend to engage in rescue work in rural Newfoundland” (“A Future” 65). But, contends Overton, although it may be true that, in the words of one local newspaper columnist, “Vikings mean value,” there is a fair bit of doubt about what—besides Viking relics—this kind of work is salvaging (qtd. in Overton 65). Summarizing Gregory Ashworth’s assessment of Newfoundland tourism, Overton concurs that “[s]uccessful tourism will destroy many of the things that make the outports distinctive” (67).

Moreover, he notes that even the government’s own report, *A Vision for Tourism in Newfoundland and Labrador in the 21st Century* (1994), implied “that the industry would ‘not be a panacea for the Province’s economic ills’ because ‘the capability of the tourism industry to absorb large numbers of workers displaced by downturns in the traditional sectors will be relatively limited in the short term’” (64).

Near the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, there is now hope that the offshore oil industry will be the “‘panacea’” for Newfoundland’s economic problems, but doubt remains. Although Danny Williams’ government purports to distance itself
from previous administrations and their neo-liberal policies—policies which, argue critics like Overton, contributed to Newfoundland’s crisis in the first place—he is actually “pursuing such policies with renewed vigour” (“‘A Future’”61). Moreover, according to Cadigan, Williams’ “neo-nationalist Ottawa bashing,” although garnering much national media attention and engendering huge levels of support at home, bears an uncanny and disconcerting resemblance to that of his predecessors (296). The Canadian government has been a convenient scapegoat for Newfoundland politicians, but Cadigan maintains that we need to acknowledge that

the supposed failings of Confederation for Newfoundland and Labrador—economic dependency and underdevelopment, the undermining of a ‘traditional’ outport culture, the depletion of natural resources, and outmigration—are all problems that predate Smallwood and union with Canada. The problems have their origins in the nationalist policies of the nineteenth century. (296)

As I noted earlier, these policies had devastating consequences because they disregarded the “ecological constraints that were the material reality of life for most of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador” (296). For although the “resources of the sea were paramount, [. . .] they have rarely been at the centre of Newfoundland development policies” (296). So whether or not offshore oil becomes “the economic saviour of Newfoundland and Labrador” really “depends on whether the province [. . .] use[s] the wealth generated by the industry to invest in people and communities in ways that sustain both them and the ecologies in which their fortunes are inextricably bound” (297).

It may well be that the stoic tradition in Newfoundland literature—unlike the Romantic tradition—recognizes Newfoundland’s “ecological constraints,” but it often leads to an equally problematic understanding of Newfoundland identity. As Whalen
suggests, O’Flaherty’s “stoic bias” may be “connected with something very real and visible in the region,” but it is also profoundly “limiting” (35-36). Perhaps most disturbing given O’Flaherty’s own scathing critique of the consequences of a “paradigm of repression,” (qtd. in Bannister 126) is how easily the stoic acceptance that O’Flaherty so admires can be read by critics like Whalen as “submissiveness” and “stoicism of a defeated order” (44). Indeed, thirty years before Prime Minister Stephen Harper’s notorious remark that in Atlantic Canada there is a “culture of defeatism,” Whalen argued that O’Flaherty’s stoicism “brings to mind W.L. Morton’s claim that […] ‘defeat has been our national portion in America, but we survive and we go on in strength’” (35). According to Whalen, this defeat is “particularly emphatic to the region of Newfoundland” (35), and he uses O’Flaherty’s analysis to bolster his own troublesome bias that the Atlantic region is “a living demonstration to the rest of the country of how [a] hangdog mentality can become a way of life” (33).17

16 See harperindex.ca, “Atlantic Canada,” for the number of places Harper has made this comment and variations on this comment.

17 Such a remark reveals the truth behind Ian McKay’s insight that “[t]o be a scholar of Atlantic Canada […] is to wrestle, often at the very outset of one’s inquiries, with a subtle, pervasive and durable language of disparagement and marginality” (qtd. in Conrad and Hiller 3). However, in 1980, Whalen saw the current flowering of Atlantic culture and literature as a sign that it might be possible to break with this mentality: “Many now see the defeatism of Going Down the Road as a bygone thing, a remote and tail-end portion of regional Atlantic despair. It is being crisply replaced by a new faith in home, a neo-provincialism (vs. parochialism) which trusts the cultural bearings of the region instead of uncritically consenting to bearings that beckon from down the road, over the pond, or across the border” (33-34).
O’Flaherty’s “stoic bias” also reveals a problematic understanding of Newfoundlanders’ relationship to place. His preference for stoic acceptance leads him to read Newfoundland’s history and its literature through the lens of environmental determinism, so that whereas “many of the Romantic rebels have blamed the causes of poverty on the political cruelty of a glib empire, O’Flaherty tends to stress the geographical grimness of the place as being the dominant source of the woe” (Whalen 42). Here O’Flaherty invokes his own “paradigm of repression,” but in this case, Newfoundlanders are oppressed by their environment instead of by the British. Rather than subscribing to the merchant versus planter narrative, O’Flaherty reads Newfoundland’s history neither as the story of colonial oppression, nor of class conflict, but as the story of man versus nature. According to this interpretation of Newfoundland’s past, the common man’s primary adversary was not the British merchants, but the place itself, and in the confrontation between man and nature, man was—and continues to be—the loser. For O’Flaherty, it is this adversarial relationship with nature that provides “the essential continuity of life in Newfoundland over the centuries” (15). Thus, for example, he remarks of the Journal of James Yonge (1647-1721),

> From the primitive beginnings of organized society which he observed around the coast, the ‘planters,’ ‘inhabitants,’ and ‘interlopers’ who would stay on in Newfoundland after the migratory fishermen had gone home, would grow a people shaped by the same fickle, relentless pressures of geography that dominated life in Renfrews in 1663. A process of ‘merciless winnowing’ had begun, and from it would come ‘a race apart.’ (15)

O’Flaherty argues that the Newfoundland landscape exerts a profound influence on its inhabitants, and fundamentally alters the Newfoundland character.
He perceives this influence to be unidirectional, however; although the landscape has shaped Newfoundlanders, he claims that it has remained impervious to human imprint: “For perhaps it would be hard to find a place in the world in which greater effort has been expended with so little remaining to show for it” (100). Moreover, he contends that the ocean is particularly resistant to human imprint and attempts at mastery. For O’Flaherty, such is the import of Norman Duncan’s hero in the story, “The Fruits of Toil”:

And with so much effort directed at the sea, which shows no mark of human labour and savagely reduces the subtlest contrivances of man to garbage on beaches, at times the long history of ordinary Newfoundlanders seems as evanescent as Solomon Stride’s battle for a living in Ragged Harbour. Surrounded by a northern ocean that forever refuses to be companionable, Newfoundland is a region, like Hardy’s Egdon Heath, where human enterprise with ‘pickaxe, plough or spade’ is less noticeable than ‘the very finger-touches of the last geological change.’ (100)

Given what we now know about the collapse of the cod fishery and the disastrous consequences of various oil spills, and given the havoc that global warming is expected to wreak on the ocean’s ecosystems, O’Flaherty’s assertion—that the sea shows “no mark of human labour”—is in serious need of re-evaluation.

In their assessments of Newfoundland literature, then, critics tend to resort to environmentally deterministic readings, or to readings that characterize Newfoundland pejoratively as a nostalgic culture fixated on moments of loss. Either way, Newfoundlanders are too often understood as victims, either of environment or of their colonial past. Ironically, by suggesting that environment is the primary difficulty, the very critics who condemn Romantic place myths for being overly naïve and simplistic
frequently paint an equally reductive—and deterministic—vision of Newfoundland history and of Newfoundlanders’ relationship with place. My dissertation argues that Newfoundlanders have been victims neither of environment nor of history, but of a misunderstanding of both.

I examine three contemporary Newfoundland novels—Wayne Johnston’s The Colony of Unrequited Dreams (1998), Kenneth J. Harvey’s The Town that Forgot How to Breathe (2003), and Lisa Moore’s February (2009)—in order to reconsider the relationship among loss, environment and Newfoundland identity. If “to write about Newfoundland” is “to write about loss,” then the primary question is: what exactly has been lost, and how did it get lost? (Chafe, “Lament for a Notion” 93). My second chapter, on Johnston’s The Colony of Unrequited Dreams, “the centrepiece of ” Mathews’ “artificial canon” of contemporary Newfoundland writing, and arguably the centrepiece of my thesis, addresses this most pressing question (9). Using the theoretical framework of two phenomenologists, Edward Casey and Arnold Berleant, I argue that the loss of place sense—to borrow Casey’s expression—is the fundamental loss.

Mathews astutely notes that Colony represents a significant departure from the contemporary writers O’Flaherty examined some thirty years ago, particularly Percy Janes and Harold Horwood, because it brings the two predominant voices in Newfoundland writing—Romanticism and stoicism—into a dialogue with each other (Mathews 8-9). Not surprisingly, the critical debate surrounding the novel is divided into two camps: those like Alexander MacLeod, who read Colony as an example of
environmental determinism, and those who focus on *Colony*’s nostalgic and sentimental critique of colonial oppression. This division illustrates one of the key problems with Newfoundland literary criticism and historiography: in seeking to isolate a single cause for Newfoundland’s troubles, academics frequently distinguish human history from environmental history—as though the two were separate—and thereby perpetuate the very distorted understandings of place that they purport to critique. Employing Casey and Berleant’s distinction between place and space, I argue that *Colony* narrates the history of Newfoundland being treated as an exchangeable site in empty space, rather than a unique place, and critiques the unfortunate consequences of this error; in so doing, Johnston links colonialism to a flawed understanding of Newfoundland’s environment, and brings human history and environmental history together.

Chapters 3 and 4 examine Romantic and sentimental expressions of loss, such as nostalgia and melancholia, to reconsider whether some of these expressions—rather than being merely pathological fixations—might lead to new understandings of the relationship between Newfoundlander and place. Whalen is one of the few critics who disagrees with O’Flaherty’s disparagement of the Romantic tradition, and suggests that “a few of Newfoundland’s significant writers are valuable precisely because they are Romantics and they risk stepping past the boundaries of the stoic” (42). In Chapter 3, I contend that Harvey’s antimodern and dystopic novel, *The Town that Forgot How to

\[\text{It is the “tradition of Romantic rebelliousness,” according to Whalen, which promises to “show us that if the economic heritage of the region is a tragic one, it is also possible to face its consequences squarely and to exorcise its ghosts” (58).}\]
Breathe, which chronicles the effects of the collapse of the cod fishery on a Newfoundland outport—one of the major outcomes of Newfoundland being treated as an interchangeable site—is a crucial example of how the nostalgic tradition can provide new and valuable understandings of place. In contrast with most Newfoundland literary criticism, which views nostalgic portrayals of loss as reactionary and distorting, I employ Boym’s distinction between restorative and reflective nostalgia to suggest that reflective nostalgia, like that used by Harvey in his call for a return to local knowledge and storytelling, might serve a crucial role in re-placing Newfoundland.

As I have noted, many Newfoundlanders hope that the offshore oil industry will be—to borrow Cadigan’s expression—“the new resource Eldorado” in Newfoundland (290). However, in Chapter 4, I argue that Moore’s February—a heartwrenching account of one family’s grief following the death of their father on the oil rig, Ocean Ranger—is a timely and sobering reminder that “all that glitters isn’t gold,” and a vital illustration of the possibilities of what has been variously termed melancholia or “resistant mourning.” In her work on modernism and the elegy, Patricia Rae contends that there is an increasing body of scholarship that recognizes the political and ethical potential of refusing to complete the “work” of mourning. According to Rae,

At the heart of what has been called a ‘depathologizing’ of melancholia, a movement whose recommendations extend to struggles with the loss of places, abstractions, and ideals, even with ‘the past’ as a broad abstraction, has been a sense that such ‘work’ amounts to a forgetting of, or an abdication of responsibility for, what has been lost, and that this amnesia has been too often demanded and paid in the interests of preserving the status quo. (18)
As *February* demonstrates, the same mentality that treats places solely as sites for resource extraction also treats people as exchangeable and dispensable. In their rhetoric of efficiency, profit, and “risk assessment,” oil companies—and governments—tend to treat both people and places as abstractions. But in her insistence that the loss of her husband is irrevocable, that her memory can provide only a fragmentary and incomplete recreation of his life, and that her mourning will never entirely end, Helen resists the status quo. Her grief suggests—to borrow the words of Wendell Berry—that it is only “by placing the world and its creatures within a context of sanctity in which their worth is absolute and incalculable,” that Newfoundlanders can hope to regain the sense of place they never fully had (32).
Chapter 2

“It is not down on any map”: Wayne Johnston’s *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams* and Newfoundland Place Sense

It is not down on any map; true places never are.

~ Herman Melville, *Moby Dick*

Wayne Johnston is undoubtedly Newfoundland’s most well-recognized and distinguished living writer. In *The Literature of Newfoundland* (2004), Lawrence Mathews argues that “Johnston’s reputation dwarfs” the other writers he included in his canon of contemporary Newfoundland fiction, and—although he says that five of Johnston’s novels would make his top ten list—he chose *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams* (1998) because it is the work “for which he is best known outside Newfoundland and which has caused the strongest reaction in Newfoundland” (4).

Surveying the reviews of *Colony*, Alexander MacLeod notes that, aside from Rex Murphy’s protests about the historical accuracy of Johnston’s Smallwood, “most of the commentary written about *Colony* focuses not on the novel’s appropriation of the historical record, but on its representation of Newfoundland geography” (70).

According to Johnston’s website, *Colony* won the 1998 Thomas Raddall Atlantic Fiction Prize, the 1999 Canadian Authors’ Association Award for Fiction, and it was shortlisted for the 1998 Giller Prize and Governor General’s Award. It was also the “Critics’ pick” for *The Globe and Mail*’s “One of the Year’s Top Ten Books” list, and was selected for their list of the “Top 100 most important books in Canadian History.”

Although the majority of reviews focus on the novel’s representation of geography, there are a number of critics who have recently discussed *Colony*’s representation of history and/or the relationship between history and geography in the novel, including...
to MacLeod, “For the vast majority of Colony’s reviewers, especially those outside Newfoundland, Johnston’s novel is not so much a playful re-telling of a history they have probably never heard in its original form, as much as it is an almost naturalistic representation of a harsh physical environment they have probably never visited” (70).

The reviewers’ myopic focus on the geographical aspects of Colony is somewhat perplexing given that, as MacLeod notes, the novel might aptly be considered to be historiographic metafiction:

Johnston’s retelling of Joseph R. Smallwood’s slow but relentless rise to political prominence in Newfoundland meets all the requirements of the genre Linda Hutcheon sees as a distinctive feature of Canadian postmodernism (Hutcheon 13): the novel freely departs from the established biographical facts of the long-serving premier’s life; it comically undermines the linear objectivity of D.W. Prowse’s History of Newfoundland by replacing that magisterial 750-page text with an ironically ‘condensed’ fifty-page summary of the same events; and its narration oscillates between two first-person points of view that interpret the same historical events from opposite perspectives. (69)

MacLeod notes that even Hans Bak, who finds Johnston’s treatment of history innovative and postmodern, finds his treatment of geography comparatively old-fashioned: “Bak’s essay [. . .] describes Colony as a ‘hybrid’ text, a work that is both a ‘compellingly ironic postmodern meditation on the fictionality of history’ (218), and a ‘narrative in [the] nineteenth-century mode,’ which explores a ‘geography that impresses itself most deeply upon its inhabitants’ souls and sensibilities’ (220)” (71).
In MacLeod’s opinion, “Johnston’s text wavers between [these] two polarities” (71). On one hand, *Colony* may be interpreted as “a cutting-edge masterpiece of narrative technique—a text that effectively explodes the objectivity of established historical truth and fits very nicely into the trajectory of Canadian Postmodernism established by Hutcheon” (71). On the other hand, it can be read as “a reliable, nearly realistic work of Canadian regionalism, a book that would easily fit into those now infamous thematic studies of Canadian ‘Survival’ or the ‘Garrison Mentality’” (71). MacLeod argues that these conflicting interpretations result from the tension between Johnston’s representation of history and his representation of geography: “In *Colony*, it seems that although we are encouraged to read history as a subjective, infinitely re-workable narrative that can be accepted, rejected, or edited at any time, we are simultaneously taught that there is nothing flexible about geographic discourse” (71).

Employing the work of spatial theorist Edward Soja, MacLeod alleges that Johnston’s prioritization of history over geography reflects the fundamental bias of the humanities as a whole (73). Summarizing Soja, MacLeod maintains, “most scholars still tend to think of social space as an intellectual void, a perfectly blank slate, unaffected by human activity and conveniently untouched by culture, politics, or ideology” (73). In the humanities, much attention has been paid to historiography, but geography has been almost completely ignored: “In the rush to explore the fascinating complexities and startling incongruities of historical narrative, theorists have simply taken geography for granted, positing it as a neutral, stable, and unchanging background” (73). Such a
formulation of the time/space relationship has dire consequences for the study of both history and geography, notes MacLeod: “When scholars privilege time over space, they activate the progressive dialectic of history and simultaneously arrest any parallel possibilities for geographic discourse. In other words, history appears to ‘move’ in time only because geography is expected to remain steadfastly immobile and perfectly ‘natural’” (73).

MacLeod contends that Canadian literature and criticism share the “historical bias” of humanities research (73-74). Citing Lisa Chalykoff’s essay, “Overcoming the Two Solitudes of Canadian Literary Regionalism,” which bases much of its analysis on the spatial theories of both Soja and Henri Lefebvre, he argues, “the spatial assumptions that support most traditional studies of Canadian regionalism are ‘ripe for reassessment’ (161)” (74). The title of Chalykoff’s essay refers to her argument “that most Canadian regionalist criticism can be divided into ‘Two Solitudes’ of spatial thought” (MacLeod 74). As MacLeod summarizes,

Critics who view cultural geography as an environmentally predetermined, materialist product or a set of inert physical facts fall into Chalykoff’s ‘First Solitude.’ These thinkers are influenced by what Lefebvre calls the ‘illusion of opacity’ (27). They interpret social space as impenetrably ‘natural’ or objectively ‘real’ and generally accept the assertion that society plays ‘no role in the process of spatialization’ (Chalykoff 161). (74)

According to this illusion, “spatial divisions are not believed to be produced at all, but are rather thought to be ‘found’ in ‘nature’” (Chalykoff 161). The naturalization of spatial divisions mystifies the social discord that exists within regions and, more insidiously, notes Chalykoff, obscures the source of that discord:
Not only does this denial of the role of the social reify the processional character of regional production by positing regional borders as ‘fixed,’ atemporal entities, it also, more disturbingly, presents an image of regional society as an artificially harmonious collective by mitigating the inevitability of intraregional group conflict within these ‘naturally’ founded regional spaces. (Chalykoff 164)

“Second Solitude” critics, on the other hand, view geography as neither “natural” nor “neutral” (MacLeod 3). Quite the opposite, they “draw their readings of geography more directly from the idealist philosophical tradition. They are influenced by Lefebvre’s ‘illusion of transparency’ and view geography more as a mental construction or a completely imaginary creation dominated by subjective readings and writings of the landscape as versions of text (27)” (MacLeod 74). Chalykoff is equally critical of both “solitudes” because, she maintains, “although these two illusions are to an extent distinct, they operate in tandem to obscure the fact that ‘(social) space is a (social) product’ (Lefebvre 27)” (Chalykoff 162).

In order to explain the tension in *Colony* between its “postmodern reading of history” on one hand, “and its naturalistic interpretation of geography” (74) on the other, MacLeod synthesizes “Soja’s critique of the dominating historical bias of humanities research with Chalykoff’s equally forceful assessment of the materialist and/or idealist tendencies that influence reading of social space in Canadian literature” (74). He concludes that “[a]lthough Johnston’s postmodern reconstruction of Smallwood’s life

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3 According to Chalykoff, “This utopian aspect of first-solitude regions can be linked directly to first-solitude regionalists’ investment in the illusion of opacity because, as Edward Soja tells us, this illusion results typically in the ‘submergence of social conflict in depoliticized geometries’ (124)” (164).
rewrites the historical record, his narrative is fused to a ‘first solitude’ interpretation of regionalist environmental determinism” (74). MacLeod’s reading of Colony assumes that the text advocates rather than interrogates Smallwood’s perception of Newfoundland geography: “In this definitively postmodern Canadian novel, geographical determinism is endorsed rather than deconstructed” (80). Moreover, in his view, Colony’s postmodern experimentation with history actually relies upon its deterministic treatment of space:

This pattern will continue throughout the text: in Colony, postmodern readings of history and deterministic depictions of geography often seem interdependent: Whenever the power of history is challenged and/or questioned, the power of geography is reinforced and/or acknowledged. Although we are taught that the story of the past can be retold in multiple variations, we are also reminded that the story of space is literally set in stone. (72)

But MacLeod’s reading too closely aligns Smallwood’s perception of Newfoundland history and geography with Johnston and the novel’s understanding of Newfoundland history and geography. As MacLeod himself acknowledges, that the novel deconstructs Smallwood’s perception of history is obvious, especially given the historiographic elements that MacLeod notes, particularly the multiplicity of voices and the intertexts within the novel, not to mention that much of the novel is dedicated to critiquing Smallwood’s gaffes, foibles and cockamamie schemes. But if history and geography are interdependent, and we do not trust Smallwood’s perception of history, why should we trust his perception of geography? For it is Smallwood’s perception that Newfoundland space is “set in stone” (72). Time and again Colony shows that geography is no more static than history, and that the inhabitants of Newfoundland, including Smallwood, have just as much of an effect on environment as it has on them.
Moreover, Johnston links the miseducation of Smallwood’s perception to the history of Newfoundland. In *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams* history and geography are indeed interdependent, but not in the way MacLeod supposes. By reading *Colony* through a phenomenological approach to space and place, I will show that the novel does deconstruct Smallwood’s perception of geography, and that the deconstruction of Smallwood’s perception of space and place is intimately linked to the novel’s critique of Newfoundland history. An examination of the relationship among time, space, and place in *Colony* will show that, contrary to MacLeod’s reading, Johnston’s “narrative” is not “fused to a ‘first solitude’ interpretation of regionalist environmentalist determinism” (74). The history of Newfoundland, as Johnston retells it, is the history of place being treated as space, and the novel chronicles the place pathologies that have resulted from such confusion. Any critique of history in *Colony* is thus always already an implicit comment on geography.

Furthermore, while I agree with MacLeod and Chalykoff’s call for the need to reconsider spatial studies in Canadian literature, I would argue that it is just as important—if not more so—to consider the role of place studies in Canadian literature. Although is true that our understanding of space has suffered because we “privilege time over space” (MacLeod 73), it is also vital to acknowledge, as does philosopher Edward

As Wyile argues, “Johnston depicts Smallwood both as a mock-heroic champion of Newfoundland and as a man who, warped by his mission to save Newfoundland from the legacy of its past, is a carrier of the pathogens of its history” (*Speculative Fictions* 126).
Casey, that our understanding of *place* has suffered even more at the hands of time and space:

In the past three centuries in the West—the period of ‘modernity’—place has come to be not only neglected but actively suppressed. Owing to the triumph of the natural and social sciences in the same period, any serious talk of place has been regarded as regressive or trivial. A discourse has emerged whose exclusive cosmological foci are Time and Space. When the two were combined by twentieth-century physicists into the amalgam ‘space-time,’ the overlooking of place was continued by other means. For an entire epoch, place has been regarded as an impoverished second cousin of Time and Space, those two colossal cosmic partners that tower over modernity. (*Getting Back* xiv)

So as to avoid participating in the suppression of place to time and space, and because my argument rests on the distinction between space and *place*, I will employ the terms space and place rather than Lefebvre’s terms ‘social space’ and ‘absolute space,’ or Soja’s terms ‘social space,’ ‘physical space,’ and ‘mental space.’

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According to Chalykoff, “Social spaces are those we encounter most frequently in daily life. Even our knowledge of that most personal of all spaces—our ‘material’ bodies—is mediated to us through socially produced epistemes that imbue these intimate spaces with a highly social character” (162). Although MacLeod does not address the distinction between social space and other types of space, Chalykoff asserts that this difference is crucial to our understanding of how social space operates: “For social space is not definitively knowable in and of itself; rather, it is knowable to the extent that it is differentiable from two other kinds of space—namely, ‘the physical space of material nature and the mental space of cognition and representation’ (Soja 120)” (161). However, she argues that,

It follows from the relational character of social space that both physical and mental space are ‘incorporated into the social construction of spatiality,’ and thus cannot be separated definitively from social space (Soja 120). Yet neither physical nor mental space is equitable with social space. Therefore it is as important to maintain some distinction between these three kinds of space as it is to acknowledge and work to understand the points of conjunction that render physical, social, and mental space highly articulated categories. (162)

Understanding the “points of conjunction” and “maintaining some distinction between these three kinds of space” is particularly crucial in understanding literary regionalism,
To clarify my argument that the history of Newfoundland, as Johnston tells it, is the history of place being treated as space, I will use the work of two phenomenologists, Casey and Berleant, to tease out the distinctions between space and place. Casey and Berleant define place in contrast to space and, not surprisingly given that they are phenomenologists, their distinction focuses on how our experience and perception of space and place differ. Both Casey and Berleant argue that we have inherited our current understanding of space from Cartesian philosophy, particularly from the idea of mind-body dualism. We believe that just as our minds are separate from our bodies, so too are mind and body separate from space. Thus, says Casey, we experience space as abstract, separate, and detached from us: “Space: a totality of extension, unending and limitless; locations within it are sites; as an abstraction from place, it is experienced in disembodied detachment” (*Representing Place* 350). By contrast, our experience of place is characterized by attachment. Berleant and Casey argue that just as there is no separation between mind and body, so too is there no separation between person and place. Rather than being experienced in “disembodied detachment,” Casey says that we experience place as a “scene of situatedness; experienced by the entire body” (*Representing* 350). Place, says Casey, is “felt bodily first of all” (*Getting Back* 313). Thus, Casey uses terms

notes Chalykoff, because she maintains “that the history of Canadian literary regionalism has been dominated by a [. . .] ‘physical-mental dualism’ that has prevented the field from recognizing that literary regions, like all geographic divisions, are social spaces par excellence (Soja 120)” (162). MacLeod’s failure to discuss the relations among these three kinds of spaces thus limits the efficacy of his argument.
like embodiment, implacement\(^6\) and place attachment, and Berleant uses words like reciprocity, continuity, participation and engagement to describe our experience of place.

In addition, Casey argues for the primacy of place: “Place comes first: before Space and Time” (\textit{Getting Back} 313). As such, “Time and Space, Body and Mind, reside in place and are resumed there” (313). According to Casey, this means that existence itself is place-bound, even if we fail to recognize it:

\[ T \text{o be is to be in place. There is no being except being in place. Put the other way around, there is no utterly placeless existing, even if there are beings deeply alienated in and from place who suffer from the dire state of being out of their native places. To be a sentient bodily being at all is to be place-bound, bound to be in a place, bonded and bound therein. (313) } \]

Because place is fundamental to our existence, the failure to recognize our place attachment or to suffer from place pathologies is potentially catastrophic.

Berleant’s and Casey’s phenomenological approach to space and place provides an alternative to the “two solitudes” of spatial thought in Canadian literature. According to their approach, environment is an undeniable physical fact, but we affect it just as much as it affects us. We are connected to place whether we perceive ourselves to be connected or not, but, as I will elaborate, Berleant and Casey maintain that there are negative consequences to our false perception of detachment. According to Berleant, “considering human beings apart from their environment is both philosophically unfounded and scientifically false, and it leads to disastrous practical consequences”

\(^6\) “The \textit{im} of \textit{implacement} stresses the action of getting in or into, and it carries connotations of \textit{immanence} that are appropriate to the inhabitation of places” (\textit{Getting Back} 315).
(Living 12). In other words, our subjective perception has material, objective consequences. I will argue that the spatial and placial critique of The Colony of Unrequited Dreams is precisely in revealing the disastrous effects of Smallwood’s misperception that he is detached from place, and in tracing the genealogy of this faulty perception.

As Herb Wyile notes, Johnston’s work is “[h]eavily influenced by the Bildungsroman,” and his Bildungsromans are usually structured around a central mystery, the solution to which helps the characters determine their place and identity: “Johnston’s work has been consistently preoccupied with protagonists whose development of a sense of self and search for a place in the world revolves around unravelling some enigma involving parenthood or parental behaviour” (“Historical Strip-Tease” 85). Wyile says that in Johnston’s later novels he extends the purview of the Bildungsroman to connect the personal histories of the protagonists with larger historical issues: “the penetration of these enigmas has developed into a larger allegorical concern with history, imperial relationships and the politics of nation building” (85). In its “concern with [Smallwood’s] individual growth and social experience” (88), The Colony of Unrequited Dreams certainly replicates the structure of the Bildungsroman, and as Wyile says, its larger historical and allegorical concerns add a twist to the genre. However, if the Bildungsroman is “[a] novel that recounts the development (psychological and sometimes spiritual) of an individual from childhood to maturity, to the point at which the protagonist recognizes his or her place and role in the world”
(Bedford Glossary, emphasis added), then I would argue that The Colony of Unrequited Dreams is not just a Bildungsroman with a twist, it is a thwarted—or unrequited—Bildungsroman because Smallwood never does find his “place in the world” (Wyile 85). Smallwood suffers from chronic displacement, or atopos, throughout the novel and, as a result, never really comes to terms with his Newfoundland identity.

Casey argues that there is a fundamental link between our relationship with place and our identity: “Despite the costly character of an accelerated life, it remains the case that where we are—the place we occupy, however briefly—has everything to do with what and who we are (and finally that we are)” (Getting Back xiv). Among its many functions, place has the “power to direct and stabilize us, to memorialize and identify us, to tell us what and who we are in terms of where we are (as well as where we are not)” (xiv). On the other hand, displacement and its destabilizing effects results “in a large measure from a failure to link up with places, beginning with local places such as those occupied by entire cities and regions, cultures and societies, and ultimately the natural world” (xiv).

Although we may move from place to place throughout our lives, most of us have what Casey variously refers to as a “primal place” or an “ur-place,” in relation to which we orient our future experiences and ourselves:

[W]e rarely pause to consider how frequently people refer back to a certain place of origin as an exemplar against which all subsequent places are implicitly to be measured: to their birthplace, their childhood home, or any other place that has
had a significant influence on their lives. Indeed, many human beings are enthusiastic or nostalgic, at home in the world or out of sorts there, in relation to just such an ur-place. (xiv-xv)

Although Casey is professedly anti-nostalgic, he argues that to stave off placelessness, or displacement, we might have to return to our primal place: “As Freud, Bachelard, and Proust all suggest, to refind place—place we have always already been losing—we may need to return, if not in actual fact then in memory or imagination, to the very earliest places we have known” (x).

But what if we lack a primal place? Because place attachment—particularly our attachment to our primal place—plays such an important role in our ability to orient and re-orient ourselves in an ever-changing world, Casey argues that to be without an ur-place “is to be ‘homeless’ indeed, not only in the literal sense of having no permanently sheltering structure but also as being without any effective means of orientation in a complex and confusing world” (Getting Back xv). Although Smallwood recognizes the relationship between place and identity—the first thing he tells us about himself, “I am a Newfoundlander” (8) exemplifies this recognition—he never really forms the place attachment necessary to orient himself “in a complex and confusing world” (ibid.xv). That he never really experiences place attachment and suffers from a perpetual sense of placelessness and displacement partially stems from his lack of an ur-place. Moreover, Smallwood’s childhood placelessness affects his future actions, and explains his overwhelming and obsessive desire for the unification of Newfoundland. However, if, as
Casey argues, regions are “a group of closely concatenated places that are spatially continuous with each other as well as temporally coexistent,” and if Smallwood cannot “link up with” primal place, then he has no hope of linking Newfoundland together (Getting Back 352; xiv).

As I have already noted, MacLeod argues that in first-solitude texts like Colony, “history appears to ‘move’ in time only because geography is expected to remain steadfastly immobile and perfectly ‘natural’” (73). I would counter, however, that many of Smallwood’s feelings of placelessness, and his inability to form an attachment to primal place, stem from the instability of his childhood homes, and it is precisely this instability that leads him to search for an “immobile” geography in his adult life. Cresswell’s survey of the concept of place illustrates that “[f]or many, the most familiar example of place and its significance is the idea of home” (24). Cresswell says that Yi-Fu Tuan, a pioneer of place studies, believes the idea of home plays a central role in the establishment of place:

For Tuan, geography is the study of the Earth as the home of people (Tuan 1991). By transforming the Earth into home we create places at a myriad of different levels. Tuan argues that the making of places at all scales is seen as the production of different kinds of homeliness. Home is an exemplary kind of place where people feel a sense of attachment and rootedness. Home, more than anywhere else, is seen as a center of meaning and a field of care. (24)

Cresswell traces the “centrality of home to humanistic approaches to place” to “Heidegger’s focus on ‘dwelling’ as the ideal kind of authentic existence” and to Gaston Bachelard’s The Poetics of Space (24). He says that Bachelard “considers the
house/home as a primal space that acts as a first world or first universe that then frames our understanding of all the spaces outside” (24).

Even though he considers Bachelard to be one of the “sensitive commentators,” Berleant critiques Bachelard’s distinction between inside the house and outside:

“Although houses and rooms do possess an intimate bond with ourselves, Bachelard saw the self as subjectivity, and this led him to subjectify space and to an aesthetics of withdrawal” (Living 123). Although he objects to the discontinuity between self and place that is suggested by Bachelard’s “aesthetics of withdrawal,” Berleant nevertheless sees the home—especially our childhood home, or as Casey calls it, our ur-place—as a primal place, our relationship with which profoundly influences our perception of and attachment to all kinds of places:

Yet we find ourselves intimately connected to the rooms and houses we inhabit precisely because we cannot separate our selves from them. We see ourselves in the houses of our childhood; they contribute to the selves that we are; we become ourselves in and through those places. Here, in the heart of withdrawal, is the very continuity, that fusion of self and place, of which I have been speaking. That fusion, however, does not end at the outside wall. (123)

If home is indeed “an exemplary kind of place” and “a center of meaning” as Cresswell claims, and if—as Berleant maintains—“we become ourselves in and through” the homes where we grow up, then an unstable childhood home could easily lead to an unstable sense of place and geography, as Smallwood’s childhood homes do. Moreover, this unstable sense of place and geography poses problems for identity because it disrupts that “fusion” between “self and place,” and inside and outside, that begins at home.
A number of factors hinder Smallwood’s ability to form an attachment to his childhood homes. Smallwood’s ability to feel at home—or in Casey’s terms to feel *implaced*—is impeded by the family’s constant mobility. According to Casey, mobility is a necessity of animal, and particularly human experience:

Animal life refuses the immobility of the plant. Animals, including human animals, are not only able to change their places, they *must* do so if they are to survive. No given place suffices indefinitely. Appetite, along with memory and desire, calls for a continual change of place and hence moving to locations where the enhancement of survival or simple ‘animal satisfaction’ beckons. Only by foraging in another place can the insufficiencies of the present place—its lacks and privations—be overcome. (*Getting Back* xii)

Even our physiology, notes Casey, demands movement: “our very metabolism and musculature, conspire to keep us moving” (*xii*).

Yet, citing Pascal, Casey notes that it is movement that is often the source of much of our unhappiness: “Pascal also remarked that ‘all of human unhappiness stems from one thing: *not to know how to remain in repose in a room*’” (*xii*). The reason mobility causes so much unhappiness, says Casey, is that “with the freedom to change places [. . .] comes the danger of getting lost. [. . .] A mobile animal [. . .] continually confronts the unhappy prospect of being *unplaced*, which constant movement brings with it. Not only may the former place be lost but a new place in which to settle may not be found” (*xii*). Thus, he concludes that “[w]ith increased mobility and range comes increased risk above all the risk of having no proper or lasting place, no place to be or remain. A transitory place is better than none at all, but it only spurs on further searching for an enduring or at least reliable place” (*xii*). Smallwood’s family is constantly in
transit, rarely stopping long enough in any one house for Smallwood to feel a sense of stability, security, or a sense of home. According to Smallwood,

> We were forever changing houses, forever being turfed out of the ones we were renting and moving on to even shabbier establishments. All I remember of the houses we lived in is a succession of attics and basements, for these, whether empty or cluttered with objects discarded by strangers, all seemed unique, whereas the houses themselves all seemed the same once the furniture was put in place, our furniture, which went with us from house to house like parts of our essential selves. (12-13)

Whereas you might expect memories of childhood homes to center on rooms like the kitchen or living room, Smallwood does not remember the living spaces in many of the houses where he spent his formative years. According to Cresswell, “home is an intimate space where experience is particularly intense. To Bachelard the interior arrangement of the house constitutes not one homogenous place but rather a series of places with their own memories, imaginings and dreams” (24). For Smallwood, however, except for the attics and basements of these houses—which Cresswell notes that Bachelard identifies as “the place of the intellect and rationality” and “the place of the unconscious and of nightmares” (24) respectively—most of the Smallwoods’ houses are made up of a series of homogenous spaces, at least in his memories. His lack of emotional attachment to these houses and his inability to remember them shows just how unplace-like Smallwood’s childhood homes really are.

The family’s furniture is the only place-like entity to which Smallwood is attached. And although adding furniture to a house, as Cresswell notes, can be one of a variety of “place-making activities” (5)—indeed, one could argue that many pieces of furniture, the couch for example, function as places in themselves—simply adding
furniture to a house may not be enough to make a house feel homey or to foster a lasting sense of place. Noting that “[a]n advertisement for a large furniture shop in [his] Sunday paper reads ‘Transforming space into place’”(8), Cresswell says,

The ad suggests we might want to take the rooms we have recently bought or rented and make them mean something to us by arranging furniture in them—making them comfortable literally and experientially. Humanistic geographers are unlikely to agree that the mere purchase of furniture is going to enact such a transformation but they will recognize the intent. (8)

Smallwood might remember the family’s furniture, but given that he is unable to recall any of the rooms in which the furniture sat, it seems to have done a paltry job of turning “space into place” or house(s) into home(s) for him. Somewhat ironically, the family furniture, far from making each house seem distinct and more place-like for Smallwood, actually contributes to his perception that all of the houses the Smallwoods occupy are the same house: a series of homogenous “shabb[y] establishments” (12-13). In a series of houses distinguished only by their degree of shabbiness, the detritus of strangers generates more place sense for Smallwood than his family’s possessions. Moreover, that Smallwood’s recollections of his early homes are so superficial illustrates Casey’s assertion about the potential costs of incessant mobility: “Rushing from place to place, we rarely linger long enough in one particular place to savor its unique qualities and its local history. We pay a heavy price for capitalizing on our basic animal mobility. The price is the loss of places that can serve as lasting scenes of experience and reflection and memory” (Getting Back xiii). Because of his family’s peripatetic journeying from house to house, Smallwood has few places from his childhood that form the basis of such “reflection and memory.”
Of course, not all nomadic peoples suffer from displacement. Casey maintains that journeying between places can actually evoke a unique understanding of place. In discussing the travel writings of Bashō, whose “journey consists in a continual alternation of staying put and moving on” and features “no lasting stopping places” (282), Casey argues that the “alternation need not be frenetic or manic or distracted. If known and avowed as such, it can be the source of a special sense of significance not otherwise accessible. Whitehead has written that ‘contrast elicits depth’ and only shallow experience is possible when there is a lack of patterned contrast” (282). Journeys are significant in establishing place sense to the extent that they prompt an understanding of a particular kind of contrast:

What matters is not the journey as such, much less its value as an incursion into the heroic or the exotic, the natural or the supernatural. What matters is its ability to present a contrast between the virtues of lastingness and the values of transience, between remaining in place and moving among places, and to do both in ways that realize an intricate dialectic of space and time. (283)

But to the young Smallwood, his family’s mobility, far from evoking a “patterned contrast” between “lastingness” and “transience,” seems completely unpredictable. He is never sure when the family is going to leave one house and move to another, or where they are going when they do move. Thus, the only pattern that the Smallwoods have established is frequent and unpredictable transience. Consequently, Smallwood has little sense of lastingness.

The result of this lack of “patterned contrast,” aside from Smallwood’s perpetual feelings of disorientation and homelessness, is that he has a “shallow experience” of all of the places where he lives. This “shallow experience” is illustrated in his perception
that all of the Smallwood houses seem like the same house. Thus, rather than being a series of homes, the Smallwood houses are—to borrow Casey’s phrase—a series of “transitory place(s),” and the result is that Smallwood spends his life searching for “an enduring or at least reliable place” (Getting Back xii). This search has two significant repercussions. On one hand, it leads Smallwood to search for a “neutral, stable and unchanging” place—the likes of which does not exist (MacLeod 73). On the other hand, in his search for this mythical “immobile” geography, as MacLeod calls it, one of the great ironies of the novel is that Smallwood spends much of his adult life mirroring his childhood pattern of transience (73).

Smallwood’s feelings of extreme placial instability are illustrated in his recollection of the Smallwoods’ final move, when he says he cannot even feel certain that his own family will not pack up and leave without him:

I came home from school one day to find the entire contents of our house on Gower Street piled atop two horse-drawn carts at the reins of which were men I

7 Casey argues that there is an important distinction to be made between fixity and stability. According to Casey,

Fixity of position is an instance of simple location, i.e., the presumption that a given object taken as an independent individual thing possesses one (and only one) determinate site. Both simple location and fixed, one-point perspective are important chapters in the modernist grand narrative of Space. In this metastory, they stand in close proximity to claims that all space is homogenous, isotropic, and infinite and that, nevertheless, for us no object in space is experienced directly but must be represented in our minds as the specific content of an ‘idea’ or ‘a perception.’ (Getting Back 285)

Stability, on the other hand, “is quite another matter.” As Casey maintains, “it signifies a way of being in space that suspends fixation on fixity itself in both of the senses just distinguished” (285).
had never seen before. My father was at the reins of a third, in which there were hampers of clothing and the smaller bits of furniture. My mother and the younger children had found what room they could among the clutter. It was the first I knew that we were moving, and I thought I had caught them in the act of leaving me behind. It was all my mother could do to convince me that they had not been about to leave without me, but on the contrary, had been waiting for me and would have waited forever if they had to. (13)

That this scene is such a poignant memory for Smallwood suggests his mother’s reassurances had little effect in providing him with a sense of comfort and stability. Moreover, that the family’s furniture, which Smallwood describes in the previous paragraph as being “like parts of our essential selves” (13) could so easily be taken away without his knowledge, illustrates the precariousness of what little place attachment—and consequent sense of self—the young Smallwood possesses. If the furniture symbolizes “parts of [his] essential sel[f],” then taking it away threatens his very being. Of course, this simile is somewhat hyperbolic—no one ever had an identity crisis because s/he threw an old Ikea sofa away—but the point remains that if, as Casey argues, “[t]o be in the world, to be situated at all, is to be in place” (Getting Back xv), then any threats to implacement are also threats to our existence.8 Despite its inability to transform space

8 Casey’s discussion of the Navajo, who “have been subjected to literal displacement by the United States government as a result of the Navajo-Hopi Land Settlement Act of 1974” is a poignant illustration that displacement threatens existence:
The results of the relocation (a notion for which the Navajo say there is no word in their language) have been disastrous. A quarter of those relocated have died, including an unusually high number from suicide. Alcoholism, depression, and acute disorientation are rampant. Not only that, but significant parts of the land cleared for purposes of relocation are slated for coal and uranium mining and for the dumping of nuclear waste products, all of which if effected will render the area uninhabitable into the indefinite future. (35)

Moreover, according to Casey,
into place completely, the furniture represents one of the few place markers to which Smallwood is attached, and that these markers are so easily removed illustrates Casey’s assertion that “displacement threatens implacement at every turn” (34).

The family’s final move to the house on the Brow, where the family permanently settles, does little to foster Smallwood’s sense of implacement. As with all of the other moves, this move seems to be haphazard, and it takes him by surprise. To Smallwood, his father’s choice of location for the new house seems entirely random: “we drove for so long I began to wonder if we had a destination or if my father was merely looking for a place to pitch the tent my mother said we would wind up in someday” (13). The seemingly random process by which his father appears to pick a house contributes to Smallwood’s sense of disorientation and displacement. In his discussion of how we take the role of place for granted, Casey argues,

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What is striking in the Navajo tragedy [. . .] is the explicit acknowledgment by relocated people themselves that the loss of the land was the primary loss in the circumstance. The Navajo consider it to be an unalterable premise that ‘there is no land like this land. Our land is our life.’ It follows as a devastating deduction that to take away land is to take away life, that the major cause of illness is not something ’physical’ or ’psychological’ in the usual bifurcated Cartesian senses of these words but, instead, the loss of landed place itself. In fact, the Navajo believe that illness proceeds from a distorted relationship with the land: ‘To take from the Earth without reciprocating, without having first become a part of the life of the place, is to disrupt a sacred balance and ultimately to grow ill.’ To take a people’s land away altogether, so that reciprocating with it is not even possible, is to disrupt the sacred balance even more drastically. (35)

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9 According to Alex Beam, the Brow is “a neighbourhood straddling the steep slope overlooking the harbour” (Beam).
Descriptions of place tend to reduce it to bare position in space, where ‘position’ implies an arbitrary location. ‘If I weren’t still here in Chicago, I’d be back on Long Island,’ I say to myself idly in O’Hare airport, as if changing places were just a matter of exchanging positions in a geographical board game having no significant stakes. Philosophy and physics, followed closely by psychology, also operate on a model of manipulable positions in empty space—‘sites,’ as I shall call them. (Getting Back xiii)

The Smallwoods’ somewhat “arbitrary” choice of location for a new house exemplifies the cavalier attitude towards changing places that Casey critiques. To Smallwood, his father seems to have no more investment in finding a new home than he would in finding a temporary spot to pitch a tent (13). He seems to be choosing, not a place to inhabit, but a site “to occupy” temporarily (Getting Back 149).

In their move to the house on the Brow, the Smallwoods function as the uncanny doubles of all the early colonials who came to Newfoundland. As Johnston re-tells it, the history of Newfoundland is the history of these colonials treating the place—to borrow Casey’s terms—as a site that can be “easily exchanged or merely manipulated” (Getting Back xiii). According to Casey, a site is “place reduced to location and position in space; determined by its relation to other similarly specified sites” (Representing Place 353). In Casey’s view, to treat place as site is fundamentally mistaken because, “As A.J. Gibson reminds us [. . .] ‘We do not live in ‘space.’ Instead, we live in places. So it

10 It is worth noting that even a good camper would put some thought into the location of a tent.

11 In “Lament for a Notion: Loss and the Beothuk in Michael Crummey’s River Thieves,” Paul Chafe suggests that the unhomely feeling in much of Newfoundland literature, including Colony of Unrequited Dreams, is related to “the first great loss suffered by Newfoundland: the eradication of the Beothuk” (93).
behooves us to understand what such place-bound and place-specific living consists in. However lost we may become by gliding rapidly between places, however oblivious to place we may be [. . .], we are tied to place undetachably and without reprieve” (Getting Back xiii).

The epigraph to “The Brow,” the section in which the Smallwoods’ move takes place, foreshadows the similarities between the Smallwoods’ move and the colonials’ treatment of Newfoundland as a site rather than as a place. As the epigraph illustrates, Lord Baltimore received Newfoundland in a transaction where Newfoundland was quite literally treated as an “easily exchange[able]”—and relatively worthless—site, rather than as a meaningful place: “‘They had been friends and fellow students at Oxford, and in quite a natural way, as one pawns off a worthless horse on a friend, so Sir William sold a large portion of his grant at a very high price to Lord Baltimore’” (1). As Johnston’s memoir, Baltimore’s Mansion, illustrates, once Lord Baltimore himself leaves Newfoundland—after an ill-fated and short-lived stay—his family descendents continue this tradition of treating Newfoundland as a site to be traded:

A Protestant, [. . .] David Kirke, was given a patent to the entire island of Newfoundland, including the province of Avalon, in 1637, but it became a Baltimore family tradition to litigate against the patent, which generation after generation did for at least a hundred years. It was considered one’s family duty as a Baltimore to sue for the ownership of Avalon long after the last Baltimore who had set eyes on it was dead. (14-15)

These passages illustrate that Baltimore and his descendents treat Newfoundland as a site that is “easily exchanged or merely manipulated” in two interrelated ways (Casey, Getting Back xii). First, they treat Newfoundland primarily as a piece of real estate. In
this sense, Baltimore’s descendents squabble over the possession of Newfoundland simply for possession’s sake: they have no emotional or physical attachment to the island and certainly feel little place attachment. Second—and even more disastrous—Baltimore and his men treat Newfoundland as if it is just another location, and as if England and Newfoundland are homogenous spaces, which can be exchanged with little or no consequence. In this sense, both Baltimore and his progeny treat these real estate transactions as “a geographical board game having no significant stakes” (Casey xiii).

The failure to treat England and Newfoundland as distinct places—and to recognize them both as unique places—is exemplified in the colonists’ decision to build Lord Baltimore an English-style mansion. Both the style of the house and its location are extremely ill considered given the Newfoundland climate, and reflect the colonists’ lack of place sense about their new settlement. As Johnston imagines it, having packed “as much of home as he had been able to cram into” his ship, Baltimore sets off for Newfoundland as if moving there were the same as moving to another English manor-house:

Once he moved in, all that was required to complete the illusion that he was still in England was for him to draw the curtains on his windows. The mansion house had been located not with any mind to shelter from the elements or to fend off attack by pirates but to show it off to best advantage to Baltimore on his arrival, to the colonists and to anyone from elsewhere who might be sailing by. (Baltimore’s Mansion 258)

Rather than working with the natural surroundings, the mansion has been designed and located to dominate the landscape. Such a design and location are predicated on the colonists’ flawed assumption that the outside world can be shut out merely by “draw[ing]
the curtains,” and that—in so doing—Lord Baltimore will be able to pretend that he is still in England.

The colonists’ blunder—their failure to recognize the continuity between inside and outside, and between building and place—is a cultural legacy. According to Berleant, Western architecture has a long tradition of not acknowledging the continuity between a building and its particular site, although this is starting to change: “Another distinction that is beginning to be displaced is that between a building and its site. The concept seems obvious enough, but it has taken architects a long time to recognize the site-specific nature of good architecture” (Living 117). Berleant argues, “The sensitivity of architecture to site is a powerful integrative force. It recognizes that a building is not self-sufficient or self-contained but both influences and is influenced by what surrounds it” (117). The failure to recognize this relationship between a building and its particular site, however, can be hazardous: “When a building is not related to its physical and social context, the effects may vary from indifference to alienation and even outright hostility” (117). As I will discuss, the lack of relation between Baltimore’s Mansion and its site results in precisely the “alienation and […] outright hostility” of which Berleant speaks.

12 Such a lack of relation between building and site and the consequences that follow from such a misunderstanding are related to a larger conceptual misunderstanding, says Berleant:

Underlying many of these customary oppositions is a difficulty in grasping the relation that human beings have to the natural world. Whereas indigenous peoples develop architectural forms and other cultural adaptations that reflect the connections, indeed the continuities, of their activities with natural forces, many
Moreover, Casey argues that to ignore the region surrounding the building you are constructing is tantamount to treating a place as an interchangeable site: “Building calls for heeding the parameters of the natural setting: a building, like a mythology, ‘reflects its region.’ Not to heed the natural features of a region is to build unreflectively; it is to occupy a site rather than to construct a place adequate to its setting” (*Getting Back* 149). However, notes Casey, to build in a reflective way does not mean to surrender to the landscape: “Building so as to reflect a region is not merely submitting to the obdurate materiality of that region but *contending* with it, entering into a constructive contest with the givens of a natural place” (149). Such a contest, says Casey, can manifest itself in one of two ways: “The ensuing contestation takes two different courses, which we can label ‘contentious’ and ‘contented.’ In a contentious confrontation a building stands up to the natural world and challenges it. [. . .] In a contented connection, a building realizes an equipoise with its natural setting” (149). Similarly, Casey identifies the “distinction between *boundaries* and *monuments*” as “[a]nother way of grasping the relationship between built places and unbuilt environments” (150). Whereas “[b]uildings attentive to intellectual, religious and cultural traditions have found profound discord. (*Living* 117) Berleant argues that our understanding of humans and environment as oppositional is a relatively recent development: From a larger perspective, however, we can see these separations as an aberrant development in the history of human habitation. For most of that history, an intimacy existed between humans and the natural world. People acted in and on their environment with care and respect. A dependence on natural forces led them to proceed not from a sense of power over an alien world but from an awareness of harmony with a place that was not part of themselves. (118)
their boundaries [. . .] take account of the ‘lay of the land,’” when buildings are
monuments, the “issue is no longer one of continuity or delimitation but of building in
such a way as to resist, ignore, or even flout the natural world” (150). Such a “flout[ing]”
of natural surroundings is rooted in the long history of Western architecture.

In his discussion of how architecture came to be considered a fine art by the
eighteenth century, Berleant argues that Western architecture has long been a “tradition
that honors monumentality and constructs edifices” (Living 113). According to Berleant,

In many respects, architecture is a paradigm of art in the traditional sense. It offers
singular objects of striking size and appearance that stand apart and dominate
their surroundings. Such structures are often awe-inspiring, and their reverential
power is transferred by association to the individuals and institutions identified
with them. [. . .] Magnificence and power are taken to be the body and meaning of
this art. (113)

Although Baltimore’s mansion was built over a century before architecture became
recognized as a fine art, its design stems from this same monumental tradition: its
“striking size” and grandeur are, in Johnston’s words, “there, incongruously there for
[. . .Baltimore] to see as he hove to in sight of Ferryland” (Baltimore’s Mansion 258). Not
only does it “stand apart [from] and dominate [its] surroundings,” to use Berleant’s
phrase, but it also simultaneously “ignore[s]” and “flout[s] the natural world” in what
Casey would call a “contested confrontation” (Getting Back 150; 149). Furthermore, the
mansion stands in stark contrast not only to the landscape, but also to the colonists’ “tilts
and huts” (257), and its presence functions primarily to confer power and ownership on
Baltimore himself.
Moreover, the mansion is designed mainly—not for inhabitation—but rather for its views and to be viewed. Berleant traces the prioritization of vision in Western thought to the philosophical tradition that “consider[s] human beings apart from their environment” (Living 12): “Indeed, the blame can be placed in part on the tradition, embedded in Western culture since classical Greece, that associates experience primarily with seeing and vision with the intellect” (12). However, as Berleant maintains, “The realization is growing that both of these assumptions are false” (12); first, because “knowledge takes many forms,” and second, because “our understanding of experience has expanded greatly to involve all the bodily senses and not just the eye. We now recognize that the conscious body does not observe the world contemplatively but participates actively in the experiential process” (12). Accordingly, Berleant insists that we must re-frame our conception of “the distinction between environment and landscape […] to mirror this new understanding” (12). Whereas “we can say that environment is the more general term, embracing the many factors, including the human ones, that combine to form the conditions of life,” “[l]andscape, reflecting the experience of an immediate location, is more particular” (12). To put it another way, landscape “is an individual environment, its peculiar features embodying in a distinctive way the factors that constitute any environment and emphasizing the human presence as the perceptual activator of that environment. We can express this somewhat differently by saying that landscape is a lived environment” (12).
In his insistence that we understand landscape as “a lived environment,” Berleant foregrounds the role of the body in experiencing place: “A landscape, an environment, even more is embodied experience. As such, it is our flesh, our world, our selves” (109). Casey similarly views “the lived body as the principal locatory agent of implacement” (*Getting Back* 110). For Casey, that we know place at all is because we know it somatically: “in the order of knowing place comes first. It is ‘the first of all things’ because we know it from the very beginning. But we know it thus only because our bodies have always already, i.e., a priori, given us access to it” (110). Indeed, as *Baltimore’s Mansion* illustrates, the colonists’ experience of Newfoundland is primarily somatic.

During Baltimore’s first winter in residence, the “illusion that he [is] still in England” is brutally shattered when he and his colonists reap the consequences of the mansion’s ill-conceived design (258). The incongruity between the house and its surroundings—as well as the colonists’ failure to recognize that, in Casey’s words, “we are tied to place undetachably and without reprieve” (*Getting Back* xiii)—prove to be particularly fatal, as the colonists’ bodies are ravaged by the elements:

> When winter came—the worst one since the colony had been established—[. . .] [Baltimore] soon realized what a fool he’d been. Though he gave them shelter in his house, ten of his forty subjects died from scurvy or starvation.

> A northeast wind, when it gusted, funnelled down the chimneys, put out the meagre fires and swept in icy drafts throughout the great house, which became an infirmary. [. . .] Snow drifted down the chimneys, at first melting, then gathering like ashes in the grates until Baltimore was forced to admit that fires were unfeasible and ordered that the flues be closed and the doors and windows boarded up. (258-259)
Baltimore cannot keep the elements out just by “draw[ing] the curtains,” and the house proves to be completely insufficient for dwelling (258). It serves, not as a dwelling place, but as an inadequate infirmary.

As Johnston imagines it, rather than being what Casey calls a “full-fledged dwelling place” (Getting Back 116), the accommodations provided by Baltimore’s mansion are more akin to those of a ship:

It was not long before the house was like the steerage hold of a ship, all aboard her trying to ride out the winter the way they had the crossing from the Old World to the New. Seasickness was the one affliction they were spared. But there was no pilot to tell them how much progress they were making, how much longer they would be confined or what he thought their chances were. (Baltimore’s Mansion 259)

The colonists here feel not only extreme displacement, which is hardly surprising given the vast distance they have travelled “from the Old World to the New,” they also feel profoundly disoriented in what is supposed to be their new home. Worse than just being on a ship in the middle of the ocean, for the colonists, living in the mansion is like being on a ship with no navigator to guide them and no sustenance to sustain them.

In order to explain the phenomenon of placelessness, or atopia, Casey asks us to imagine this very condition of being adrift at sea: “Think of what it would be like to be lost at sea, not only not knowing the way but also not knowing one’s present place, where one is. ‘Where are we at all? And whenabouts in the name of space?’ Joyce’s double-edged question, posed near the end of Finnegans Wake, might have been asked in this very extremity” (Getting Back 3). This metaphor of being lost at sea is one to which
Casey frequently returns in his meditations on the experience of placelessness. But what is it, exactly, about being lost at sea that is so emblematic of atopia? According to Casey,

To be on the high sea is to be constantly exposed in the midst of something constantly changing. Enclosed only by the horizon that lures even as it obscures, we feel we could go anywhere, yet we may be nowhere in particular. Any stability we experience is precarious. Even though we know where we are in relation to other places, we lack a sure sense of where our own place is. What we lack, therefore, is twofold: *stabilitas loci* (‘stability of place’) and inhabitancy in place. (109)

It is precisely “‘*stabilitas loci*’” and “inhabitancy in place” that Baltimore and the settlers lack. In its “contested confrontation” with the landscape, the mansion—and by extension Baltimore and the settlers—are the losers (149). Not only is the house unable to dominate the landscape, but its design is also incapable of protecting its residents from the elements, and the result is that their bodies are “constantly exposed” to the vicissitudes of a harsh Newfoundland winter.

Employing the ship metaphor once again, Casey argues that “[t]o find stability and inhabitancy, it is not enough to disembark. On land we may gain stability underfoot, but we may still be exposed overhead. Unless we discover a hospitable cave or a very dense rainforest, we must take special action” (*Getting Back* 109). This “special action” involves building a place in which to dwell. But—as Baltimore’s mansion shows—not every built place constitutes a proper dwelling place. In creating buildings-as-dwellings, buildings must be “compromise formation[s]” in three key ways (112). First, “[b]uildings in places, buildings *as* places, serve as the mediatrix between the artless earth and the skillful body. Every building is in this respect a compromise formation: a middle ground
between nature and culture” (112). Second, “[t]hanks to such features as stability and enclosure, it arrests accelerated movement and allows the lived body to rest. If the same body reenters the open world, it often seeks to return to the habitation from which it set out” (112). The last “compromise is between buildings and dwellings themselves. A dwelling must be constructed well enough to be continuously habitable; a building must be accommodating enough to be a dwelling place” (112). But the mansion is not accommodating at all, and is completely inadequate as a “compromise formation.” Its thoughtless construction provides neither stability nor enclosure, and it is far from a restful abode. In addition to the incessant drafts, the house is almost suffocating: “Until they ran out of oil for their lanterns, it was barely possible to breathe in the mansion house there was so much smoke” (259). When this problem is solved, the colonists are faced with the terror of constant darkness: “After the oil ran out, the house was dark day and night except for the light from the candles that were rationed out” (259).

Furthermore, Baltimore’s mansion does not—to borrow Casey’s phrase—meet the “two necessary if not sufficient conditions that built places must meet if they are to qualify as places for human dwelling” (Getting Back 116). These conditions are, “[f]irst, such places must be constructed so as to allow for repeated return”¹⁴ and “[s]econd, a

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¹³ This is because “its material constituents are taken (directly or ultimately) from the natural world, while its exact shape and actual use stem from the world of human purposes” (Casey, Getting Back 112)

¹⁴ According to Casey, “This does not require permanency of structure or even sameness of implacement. The Bedouins continually change places, but they pitch their tents night
dwelling place must possess a certain felt familiarity, which normally arises from reoccupation itself. That to which one returns is increasingly inhabited by a spirit of familiaris, the indwelling god of inhabitation” (116). Aside from these two necessary conditions, Casey identifies no others. A “residential” dwelling place, says Casey, is fundamentally one that “encourages and facilitates staying for an appreciable period” (353). Indeed, Baltimore’s mansion does provide shelter, inadequate as that shelter proves to be. But the mansion is so inhospitable, so inappropriate for its setting, that it does not “facilitate staying” or “reoccupation” (353; 116). Baltimore and the colonists have been so ravaged by the elements that those who have survived the winter do not even consider the prospect of building a more appropriate dwelling.

As Johnston envisages it in Baltimore’s Mansion, the colonists’ belief that the house is uninhabitable extends to the entire island, and rather than risk staying another winter, they permanently abandon the settlement:

I have often imagined Baltimore and his family standing on the deck of their ship, watching with relief the land recede. Theirs was the first casting-off, the first abandonment, the first admission of defeat. They were the first to pack up after night in approximately the same configuration. Despite the marked transiency of their life-style, they continually reoccupy the same dwellings and can be said to reside in their tents. (They also return to the same areas of encampment year after year on a seasonal basis)” (Getting Back 116).

15 Perhaps surprisingly, he notes, “Even such a plausible candidate as ‘spatial interiority’ is a contingent feature, given the case of the anchorite, for whom residence atop an exposed column is a legitimate (and sometimes long-lasting) mode of dwelling. Both the anchorite’s perch and the open park teach us that not even something as basic as ‘shelter’ is intrinsic to dwelling” (Getting Back 116).
and leave everything behind. They blazed a trail of retreat that many after them would follow. They probably believed that not only Ferryland but all of Newfoundland was uninhabitable and they were taking what for all time would be the last look at the place that anyone would take. (260)

The colonists would sooner bear the hazards of another ocean voyage than spend another year in Newfoundland. Rather than “allow[ing] for repeated return” and thereby enabling a “spirit of familiaris,” Baltimore’s mansion incites the first leaving and precipitates what will become a pattern of colonial abandonment (Casey, Getting Back 353). The ruins of “the first ghost town of the New World” (260), and the name of the settlement—a stamp, not of attachment to place, but of ownership of space—is the legacy of this leaving: “[Baltimore] left Ferryland for good in the spring of 1629. The only thing of his that endured was the name he had chosen for the colony—Avalon, named after the birthplace of Christianity in England” (14). But of course, as the rest of Johnston’s memoir and Colony show, it is not just the name that endures, but also everything that the name—with its proclamation of ownership—signifies.

As Stan Dragland argues, Colony traces this proprietary tradition back to the early explorers’ discovery of Newfoundland:

Fielding’s ‘History,’ stretching from 1497 to 1929, is one long comedy of presumptuousness, of men in various states of illusion about ownership and administration of the land and various stages of defeat by it and by each other. In the long view, suggested to Smallwood by his experience of the Newfoundland interior (“It was impossible to speak of its history except in geological terms” [137]), most of these people look like tiny players on Shakespeare’s ‘great stage of fools’ (4.6.181). (201)

That colonial possession of the landscape is so entrenched in Newfoundland history, and that this mentality has proven so recalcitrant, is hardly surprising given that landscapes
are both physical realities and cultural manifestations. As Berleant maintains, “the cultural landscape becomes a repository over time of the values that each generation attaches to a specific region” (Living 17). It is not just our treatment of environment, but even our experience of it that is social, says Berleant: “aesthetic valuation is not a purely personal experience, ‘subjective,’ as it is often mistakenly called, but a social one. In engaging aesthetically with environment as with art, the knowledge, beliefs, opinions, and attitudes we have are largely social, cultural, and historical in origin” (Living 13). The social nature of our experience of environment often means that “[n]ational groups commonly possess a mystique about their land, and this may be distorted into a possessive claim over a geographical region” (Living 15). This distortion—the

16 According to Berleant, “Environment—and landscape with it—is not just our physical surroundings, not only our perception of this setting, our environmental ideas and activities, or the order that society and culture give them, but all of these together. An integral whole, environment is an interrelated and interdependent union of people and place, together with their reciprocal processes” (Living 14).

17 Indeed, Chafe critiques the Newfoundland tradition of romanticizing the human connection to the environment. According to Chafe, “Too often in literature about Newfoundland, the characters are described as somehow being mystically of the land” (97). He argues, moreover, “Johnston is not immune to this romantic mingling of human and environment and concludes The Colony of Unrequited Dreams by waxing poetic about Newfoundlanders’ oneness with the island of their birth” (97-98). The problem with these myths of “oneness” with the land, says Chafe, is that “they overlook the fact that Newfoundlanders are not of the island but in fact have worked against it for generations in an ongoing struggle to tame the island and the ocean surrounding it” (98). These destructive proclivities can be traced back to “the extinction of the Beothuk”: “Even Michael Harris in his investigation of the collapse of the cod fishery notes that the tradition of annihilation began when ‘The last Beothic Indian died in Newfoundland in 1829’” (96).
valorization of possession of and dominance over the landscape, which is a colonial legacy—can be seen in Charlie Smallwood’s choice of the House on the Brow as a new place for his family to live.

In its lack of place sense, the design and location of the House on the Brow are eerily reminiscent of Johnston’s description of Baltimore’s mansion. Smallwood’s apprehension en route to the new house, that his father has given no more thought to the family’s permanent residence than he would to pitching a tent, proves to be unfortunately close to the truth (13). The Smallwoods’ new house is “bigger and better maintained than the one [. . . they] had left,” and is located “at the very top [of the hill], in a saddle-like depression of the ridge on the height of the Brow so that, from the front, you could see St. John’s and from the back the open Atlantic” (14). The location of the building’s site, and its main architectural feature—the two decks, one on either side of the house—are completely impractical given the natural surroundings and the weather:

My father called it a double-decker because there was a deck on front and back, which would allow us, he said, to escape whichever of the two prevailing winds was blowing, the onshore east wind, which blew when it was stormy or foggy, and the west wind, which in winter made the sunny days so cold. The east wind would not have been a problem had the house been built in the lee of the Brow, but whoever had chosen the site had preferred the double view to being sheltered from the wind. (14-15)

Of course it is important to deconstruct place myths, especially when, as here, reality contrasts so virulently with mythology. But it is also crucial to acknowledge the benevolent side of these same place myths, as Berleant does: “Yet part of that mystique is an affection for their landscape and its beauty, and this is more innocent” (Living 15). Such a nuanced understanding will prevent us from throwing the proverbial baby out with the bathwater.
The double decks could have a certain amount of place sense—they would enable you to be outside on either one depending on the weather—but this, as Smallwood says, is only if the house were built using its surroundings—in this case the Brow—effectively. But, to return to Casey, the house, like Baltimore’s mansion, is built “unreflectively” in that it does not “heed the natural features of a region” (*Getting Back* 149). It fails to use the “lee of the Brow” as a boundary, and, as a result, it enters into a “contentious confrontation” with the landscape (Casey 149). In its “prefer[ence] for the double view” over adequate shelter, and in the way it looms over the landscape, the House on the Brow echoes the monumental tradition of Baltimore’s mansion, the first colonial settlement. And, like Baltimore and the settlers, Charlie Smallwood lacks the place sense to understand the house’s inadequacy as a dwelling place, or to find a more appropriate one.

The parallels between Baltimore’s mansion and the House on the Brow are even more striking in the passage where Smallwood describes the family’s first week of residence in their new abode:

> We had not been living there a week when there was an onshore storm with winds well above hurricane force. As I lay in bed, I felt the whole house shift in its foundation. I imagined it toppling end over end down the Brow and landing upright in the Harbour, bobbing about among the ships until someone climbed aboard and found us dead. When a gust subsided, the house would slowly right itself, creaking like a ship whose hull was rolling. (15)

To return to Casey, the ship metaphor illustrates that living in the Smallwood house, like living in Baltimore’s mansion, is analogous to being “on the high sea,” which means that the family is “constantly exposed in the midst of something constantly changing” (*Getting Back* 109). Because of the house’s shifting foundation, “[a]ny stability”
Smallwood feels “is precarious” (109). He has neither “\textit{stabilitas loci}” nor “inhabitancy in place” (109). Moreover, the House on the Brow’s monumental design, rather than being a “powerful integrative force,” fails to recognize the relationship between building and site and between person and place. The result is the same kind of “indifference,” “alienation,” and “outright hostility” that the colonists experienced centuries earlier (Berleant, \textit{Living} 117).

Furthermore, the house does not, as Casey says a dwelling place should, “allow [. . .] the lived body to rest,” nor it is “constructed well enough to be continuously habitable” (\textit{Getting Back} 112). During the windstorm, the family’s sleep is disturbed by their fear that they need to be able to leave at a moment’s notice, lest the house should become unsafe to inhabit:

Once, the house lurched more than usual and there was the sound of cracking boards. My parents came running from their room and got us out of bed [. . .] and into our coats and boots, then told us to go back to sleep on the kitchen floor. It was my father who fell asleep, however, for he had gone to bed drunk, and we who kept vigil, wondering how we would survive outside if we had to leave the house. (15)

Like the colonists, the Smallwoods feel as if they are on a sinking ship with no captain to guide them. Rather than providing the family with the reassurance that they will be safe, Smallwood’s father—in his drunken stupor—is a burden rather than a source of protection and stability. Consequently, Smallwood feels completely imperiled in what is supposed to be his new home.

In addition to the house’s poor design, Smallwood’s father’s alcoholism worsens the instability of the Smallwood household and threatens Smallwood’s sense of
homeliness. Even when the weather outside is relatively calm, Charlie’s drinking binges, during which he storms throughout the house, cause the house to feel vaguely threatening and unstable:

My father, when he was drinking, whatever the time of year, would pace back and forth through the house from deck to deck after I had gone to bed, sometimes forgetting to shut one door so that, when he opened the other, the wind tore unimpeded through the house, through the funnel of the corridor that ran from deck to deck, eerily howling and causing all the closed doors in the house (closed by my mother in case this very thing might happen) to rattle loudly in their frames. (15)

Whereas Charlie’s drinking threatens the security of the home, his brief stints of sobriety—coming as they do with the “suspense” of his impending fall off the wagon—make things even worse (12). As Smallwood says of one of their earlier homes, “Truthfully, the house did not seem right when he was sober, nor did he seem to know what to do with himself, but would wander around as though in imitation of sobriety, as if not entirely sure what it was that sober people did” (12). The threat of the return of the repressed—Charlie’s drinking—causes the home to feel unhomely, or unheimlich.¹⁸

In addition to threatening the security of the home, Charlie’s drinking endangers the stability of the family. Smallwood’s father’s dipsomania causes his mother to fear that his father will leave at any moment and break up the family: “My mother was always

¹⁸ According to Freud, “the uncanny is that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar” (“The Uncanny” 220). Freud applies Schelling’s definition of the unheimlich as “the name for everything that ought to have remained...secret and hidden but has come to light” (224). As I have argued in a discussion of Alice Munro, the “uncanny affect, for Freud, is implicitly linked to the process of repression and repetition” (15).
predicting his imminent disappearance. She had never known a drinker not to run, sooner or later. He would up and leave us someday, she was certain, she said; it would not be long now, she had seen men like him before, he was showing all the signs” (11-12). Although Charlie does not actually leave, Smallwood’s fear that he will eventually abandon the family contributes to his precarious sense of place attachment.19

Smallwood’s desire for rootedness and belonging is not to be found in the community either, where the House on the Brow’s location fosters his sense of displacement and exile. As I have argued earlier, MacLeod says that first solitude, environmentally deterministic texts, “interpret social space as impenetrably ‘natural’ or objectively ‘real’ and generally accept the assertion that society plays ‘no role in the process of spatialization’ (Chalykoff 161)” (74). However, the Smallwoods’ move to the House on the Brow illustrates precisely the process by which social divisions are constructed and then internalized as natural. In addition to fostering a false sense of detachment from the landscape, the House on the Brow’s location—as Smallwood relates—also reinforces the Smallwoods’ alienation from the city:

We were headed as far from the favoured part of town as it was possible to go, to the south side, the ‘Brow’ of which my mother often spoke as though it lay in outer darkness. It was the least desirable, most scorned of all the city’s neighbourhoods; the home, even those brought up like me had been led to believe, of people one step up from savages, the dregs, the scruff of society, a kind of company town whose single industry was crime. A Pariahville of ironically elevated bottom dwellers. (14)

19 Smallwood’s fear of abandonment also mimics the larger historical pattern of abandonments in the novel.
The Smallwoods’ social exile is mirrored in their physical separation from the rest of the community. They are “ironically elevated bottom dwellers” because their movement up the hill corresponds to their descent to the bottom rung of the social ladder.

Responding to Stuart Pierson’s scathing critique that the location of the Smallwood house in Colony is a geographical impossibility because no such locale exists in St. John’s, Dragland argues that Johnston positions the house where he does for its symbolic significance:

This is a symbolic setting, a pivot between two great physical realities of Newfoundland, the land and sea, and between the city, with its assertion of humankind, especially family, and the human-kind-negating sea. [..] Nobody in St. John’s actually lives in a house so situated, on such a stark edge between city and sea, but somebody ought to in a novel that dramatizes the human comedy against a huge backdrop of alien space and time. (203)

It is here, then, that the physical realities of the landscape and seascape meet the social realities of the city. Thus, the setting symbolizes the Smallwoods’ relationship with the landscape and with the city’s residents. In addition to fostering a false sense of detachment from the landscape, the House on the Brow’s site also exacerbates the social divisions between people. It enters into a “contentious confrontation” not just with its natural surroundings, but also with the city and its inhabitants (Casey, Getting Back 149). These spatial divisions, as Chalykoff calls them, far from “be[ing] ‘found’ in nature,” are,

20 Of course, the ocean does not actually negate humankind—in fact, until we exhausted it the sea was a source of abundance and nourishment—but, as I will discuss later, the ocean certainly poses a challenge to Smallwood’s place attachment and perception.
in fact, “produced” by the city’s design, in which the poorer residents like the Smallwoods are ghettoized on the hill (Chalykoff 161).

Berleant’s analysis of architecture illustrates the way in which the design of cities can either enhance social cohesion, or reinforce social divisions, just as a building’s site can emphasize or ignore our connection to environment. According to Berleant, there is an intimate relationship between architecture and the city: “Architecture and city not only display parallels, they cannot be kept apart. If the aesthetic of a building can be extended to include its site, its site is affected by contiguous sites, just as a structure cannot usually be regarded in isolation but is apprehended in relation to its neighbours” (Living 119). In this case, not only does the house look “[d]own below” on the city, which is so far away that it “look[s] like the night sky, the lights that marked the neighbourhoods like constellations of stars,” but even the Smallwoods’ neighbours are out of proximity: “the nearest house on either side of ours was two hundred feet away” (16). As a result, the House on the Brow—set apart from the rest of the city and distant even from the rest of the neighbourhood—reinforces Smallwood’s sense of discontinuity and detachment from place and community, and contributes to his perception that he is surrounded by “alien space and time” (Dragland 203).

Culture is formed in place and, as Danielle Fuller maintains, “the majority of cultural geographers” believe that “a space becomes a place when it is imbued with meaning by local cultures via stories, images, and memories (see e.g. Rose; Shields; and Tuan)” (23). Of course, many philosophers of place would argue that not all stories or
myths are created equal in terms of forming place attachment. As Charlie Smallwood illustrates, the stories and myths we tell, and the language we use to tell them, can foster a false sense of detachment from and animosity towards place. Berleant, who calls for “a major conceptual shift” in “the ecological conception of environment,” argues that much of our language is problematic because it implies our detachment from place (*Aesthetics of Environment* 4). He refuses to speak of “‘the’ environment,” for example, because although “this is the usual locution, it embodies a hidden meaning that is the source of much of our difficulty. For ‘the’ environment objectifies environment; it turns it into an entity that we can think of and deal with as if it were outside and independent of ourselves” (3-4). Our objectification of environment is problematic because it misguides us into thinking that we are separate from place when we are not:

‘The’ environment, one of the last survivors of the mind-body dualism, a distant place which we think to contemplate from afar, dissolves into a complex network of relationships, connections, and continuities of those physical, social, and cultural conditions that describe my actions, my responses, my awareness, and that give shape and content to the very life that is mine. (4)

And, as Berleant argues, this false perception of “environment as a place that is essentially opposed and hostile to human interests or at least separate and apart,” leads us to believe that it is “properly subject to domination and exploitation” (5).21

Rather than emphasizing connections and continuities, Charlie’s “soliloquies of rage and lamentation” perpetuate Joey’s belief that the family is detached from St. John’s

21 Hence, as Lawrence Buell argues in his landmark work, “environmental crisis involves a crisis of the imagination the amelioration of which depends on finding better ways of imaging nature and humanity’s relationship to it” (*Environmental Imagination* 2).
(16). Contrary to MacLeod’s assertions, the effect of these stories on Smallwood’s place perception illustrates society’s “role in the process of spatialization” (Chalykoff 161)” (MacLeod 74). Smallwood says that his father, in his drunken, nocturnal pacing from deck to deck, would “alternately extol and curse the city across the harbour, one minute bemoaning our exile from it and the next bidding it good riddance, one minute declaring it too good for us and the next declaring us too good for it” (15-16). Smallwood’s father here acts as the pathetic shadow of a colonial figure, for although the house looms over the city in the tradition of monumentality, its “reverential power” is not “transferred by association” to him (Berleant, Living 113). On the contrary, rather than providing either power over or place attachment to the city, as Smallwood says, “the view of the city we had been deemed unworthy to live in was affrontingly spectacular” (14). Moreover, Charlie’s attempt to dominate the city by naming each neighbourhood as the lights go out is a parodic reminder of the colonists’ failed attempts to master the landscape: “He would roar in triumph when the lights were put out in some house across the way, as if he had done it himself, as if, in the face of his blustering eloquence, the people who occupied the house had admitted their defeat and gone to bed” (16). Like the early colonists, however, it is Charlie Smallwood who feels a sense of defeat and exile.

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22 In his discussion of Crummey’s River Thieves, Chafe notes that the land resists the colonists’ attempts at mastery: “The land seems to begrudge the Europeans’ desire to know and claim it” (99). He argues, moreover, that naming does little to make them feel at home:
Far from showing Smallwood how to form place attachment, Charlie’s stories model concentric circles of place detachment: 23

On the front deck, he ranted and raved against mankind; his enemies; the Smallwoods; his father; his brother, Fred; my mother. But on the other deck, which faced the sea, the object of his wrath was more obscure. God, Fate, the Boot, the Sea, himself. He started out like he might go on for hours, but soon stood staring mutely out to sea, the sea he couldn’t see but knew was there, as if the sheer featurelessness of the sea had stifled him. Stuck for words, he looked up at the sky as if in search of inspiration, planning to let loose his fury on the moon or on the stars, but the sky was almost always dark. (17)

To play with Berleant’s terms, Charlie’s rantings might be said to exemplify an aesthetics of disengagement and his stories provide a model of detachment, separation, and estrangement from place, family, community, seascape and landscape, all of which he finds stultifying.

As I have argued, Casey maintains that “to refind place—place we have always already been losing—we may need to return, if not in actual fact then in memory or imagination, to the very earliest places we have known” (Getting Back x). Smallwood’s

Despite repeated journeys into the interior, naming and claiming rivers, rocks, and even any movement within the wilderness of this island is referred to as a ‘hard chafe’ near the end of the novel (317). The new natives of this island still get a sense of being ‘rubbed the wrong way’ as they move through ‘their’ country. Not even time can pass without a struggle, it seems. (100)

23 In his discussion of the “Five Dimensions of Place-Connectedness,” Buell argues, Perhaps the most familiar way of imaging place-connectedness is in terms of concentric areas of affiliation decreasing in intimacy as one fans out from a central point. This is the idea behind the whimsical list young Stephen Dedalus scribbles in his geography textbook near the start of James Joyce’s novel, A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man: ‘Stephen Dedalus / Class of Elements / Clongowes Wood College / Salins / County Kildare / Ireland / Europe / The World / The Universe.’ (Writing for an Endangered World 64)
father, however, is a man who seems never to have formed *any* sort of place attachment, even to his *ur*-place. Charlie’s aesthetics of disengagement and detachment are exemplified in the stories he tells of his birthplace, which he rarely speaks of other than as a marker of his—and his family’s—outsider status in St. John’s. In the middle of his drunken rants, he is apt to say, “We are baymen, a brood of baymen among a sea of townies” (16). In addition, although he identifies himself as a Newfoundlander, he implies that his birthplace limits his claim to Newfoundland identity: “I am a Newfoundlander, but not St. John’s born, no, not St. John’s born” (16).

Moreover, Charlie exemplifies the kind of false perception that Berleant critiques in that he perceives Newfoundland as a place that is not just “separate and apart” from himself—which is bad enough—but to make matters worse, he perceives Newfoundland “as a place that is essentially opposed and hostile to human interests” (*Aesthetics of Environment* 5). And his lack of placial attachment coincides with his lack of familial attachment. As Smallwood tells us, when his father is intoxicated, he speaks derisively

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24 Smallwood’s shame about and rejection of his birthplace, Gambo, reflects his father’s influence. During his train trip across the island, he eagerly anticipates viewing Gambo for the first time: “I had fancied, before the trip began, that when we stopped in Gambo, I would proudly announce it to my fellow passengers as the place where I was born” (139). When he finally gets a glimpse of it, however, he says, “I self-ashamedly thanked God we had forsaken the place and our lumber business there in favour of St. John’s” (138). Rather than announcing his connection to the place, he says, “I kept this information to myself and turned sideways in my seat, staring crimson-faced out the window and trying not to imagine the Smallwood that might have been, standing out there, staring in wonderment and longing at the train” (139).
about Newfoundland, and his derision of Newfoundland is matched only by his disparagement of the Smallwoods themselves:

When drunk, he wandered about the house, cursing and mocking the name of Smallwood. He had been told by someone, or had read somewhere, that the name was from the Anglo-Saxon and meant something like ‘treeless’ or ‘place where no trees grow.’

‘It wouldn’t have been a bad name for Newfoundland,’ he said. (9)

Instead of figuring St. John’s or Newfoundland as a space full of stories, landmarks and pathmarks—in short as place—Charlie figures all of Newfoundland as a barren space where nothing will take root or grow, and he compares this barren space to his family’s lack of rootedness. Furthermore, in the midst of his drunken laments, he says that Newfoundland is not just a barren space, but a lost space as well: “‘They should have called it Old Lost Land, not Newfoundland but Old Lost Land,’ he roared” (17). Rather than treating Newfoundland as a place, or a series of places, to which he is attached, he

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25 In his discussion of how we navigate the landscape and implace ourselves within it, Casey acknowledges that we often rely on the relation between our body and landmarks or pathmarks (marks of our own or of others’ making):

Whether guided by landmarks or one’s own pathmarks, I rely on my body as the primary agent in the landscape. Landmarks call for perception (typically, but not exclusively, visual), while the transaligns of my own trajectory are the concrete precipitates of my bodily movements on the land. In the latter case, my body marks its way through an otherwise unmarked landscape. To retrace the steps of one’s own making is to remake one’s own marks, and thus to find one’s way. (Getting Back 26)

Through this process, a landscape becomes a placescape:

The purpose of navigating and getting oriented is to transform an apparently vacuous expanse, a Barren Grounds of unmarked space, into a set of what can only properly be called places (even if these places still lack proper names).

‘What begins as undifferentiated space,’ says the geographer Yi-Fu Tuan, ‘ends as a single object-situation or place…When space feels thoroughly familiar to us, it has become place’. (28)

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speaks of it—to borrow a phrase from Casey—as “an apparently vacuous expanse” 
(Getting Back 28).

Moreover, Charlie prefers to think of himself as a man without familial 
connections—a man who comes from nowhere—and, as Smallwood speculates, he 
resents any bonds to family and place that challenge his notion of himself as a self-made 
man: “No one called my father Charlie. Everyone called him Smallwood, which he hated 
because, I think, it reminded him that he was a certain someone’s son, not self-created” 
(8). His obsessive fixation on the Smallwood Boot sign—the one landmark to which he 
does acknowledge his attachment—illustrates this resentment. To Charlie, the sign, 
“which hung suspended from an iron bar that was bored into the cliffs about ten feet 
avove the water at the entrance to the Narrows [. . .] to advertise to illiterate fishermen the 
existence of Smallwood’s Boots, a store and factory on Water Street,” represents the 
shackles from which he tried—and failed—to escape (8-9). As Smallwood relates of his 
father,

He could be flamboyantly eloquent when drunk, especially when the subject of 
his speeches was himself and the flagrant unfairness of his fate. ‘I should have 
stayed in Boston,’ he said. ‘What in God’s name was it that made me leave that 
land of plenty to come back to this God-forsaken city, where my livelihood 
depends on a man famous for nothing but having hung a giant black boot at the 
entrance to the Narrows?’ (9)

In the stories he tells Smallwood of his failed escape from and return to Newfoundland, 
“the Boot” functions as a symbol of the inexorable—and hostile—pull of the landscape.

Furthermore, rather than seeing “the Boot” as a symbol of the Smallwoods’ place 
in and attachment to the community, Charlie tells his son that it is a marker of separation
and class division: “My father hated every minute he spent beneath the Boot, partly because he had to work under his father, who had predicted he would come back to St John’s from Boston with ‘his tail between his legs,’ and partly because he believed business to be the least dignified way on earth to make a living” (9). Charlie is so haunted by his inability to sever his connection to the family business that he has nightmares in which “the Boot” symbolizes some unclear, yet foreboding fate:

To my father, the Boot was like the hag; he would have boot-ridden dreams that when recounted in the light of day seemed ridiculous, but that often kept him up at night, afraid to go to sleep. He would tell me about them, tell me how he had dreamed about the Narrows boot swaying in the wind on the iron bar like some ominously silent, boot-shaped bell. At other times, it was a boot-shaped headstone. (10-11)

Charlie’s fixation on escaping “the Boot”—and the fate it represents—is the family legacy that he hands down to Smallwood.

As Wyile observes, the boot is the “symbol that hangs (both literally and figuratively) over Smallwood [. . .] as a figurative sign of the station in life towards which Smallwood can reasonably be expected to gravitate. It is the image that hovers over him as he rebounds from life’s setbacks, alone in the belief that he will make something of himself” (Speculative 126). If Smallwood’s father had succeeded in establishing himself as a “self-created” man (8)—as Smallwood tells us he wished to be—then his stories might have provided Smallwood with a sense of belonging and rootedness, despite their emphasis on severing ties to family and place. But Charlie’s mantra, “The black boot beckons, boy” (66) has become a self-fulfilling prophecy of failure. Despite all of Smallwood’s chutzpah and determination, he is haunted by his
father’s stories of the boot, which not only fail to provide Smallwood with a positive connection to his family heritage, but also exacerbate his feelings of class shame and separation from the rest of society. That Smallwood’s first act following the second referendum is to have ‘the Boot’ removed illustrates how profoundly his father’s stories have influenced him (485-486; see Wyile 126).

Moreover, in his father’s stories of the Boot, we witness the seeds of Smallwood’s first-solitude perception of class division, because these stories suggest that his “station in life” is fated and thereby natural. It is this belief in the naturalization of social divisions that Smallwood struggles against, and that motivates his rise to power, but his desire to conquer what he perceives to be his fate is also the impetus for some of Smallwood’s most foolish and least place-sensitive decisions. That Colony reveals the disastrous results of these decisions, and that Smallwood’s faulty place sense stems from the rantings of a ne’er-do-well drunk, however, illustrates the text’s critique of Smallwood’s perspective, and leads us to question the naturalization of social divisions.

Johnston further links Smallwood’s faulty place sense to his education at Bishop Feild, where the English schoolmasters disparage local place knowledge. The students at the Feild mirror their teachers’ patronizing attitudes about the school—and by extension Newfoundland—and this mirroring reveals that perceptions of space and place are socially constructed. With the exception of Smallwood (33), all of the teachers and their pupils desire to be elsewhere:

Most of the masters were wittily scornful of Newfoundland, delighted in itemizing its deficiencies and the many ways it fell short of being England, and
were forever sending up local customs and traditions. [. . .] Like the boys, they went to great lengths to make it clear that they were not long for Bishop Feild, that they had wound up there because of some fluke or temporary set-back and would soon be moving on. (34)

Like the early colonists, the schoolmasters treat England and Newfoundland, not as distinct places, but as sites that can be exchanged. Such an attitude suggests that Newfoundland is merely a temporary and undesirable stopping space. Moreover, the teachers’ assessment—that in the comparison between England and Newfoundland, Newfoundland does not measure up—reflects the prioritization of space over place. Whereas spaces can be measured on a cartographic map, places are not commensurate, and so cannot be measured in an evaluative way. Smallwood’s lifelong ambition—to “live up to the land itself, the sheer size of it”—is a variation of this mistaken belief that places can be evaluated against each other; according to Smallwood’s misconception, people can fail to measure up to the places they inhabit (154). This fallacy similarly treats place as space, because unlike person and space, as Berleant argues, “person and environment are continuous” (Aesthetics of Environment 4).

Furthermore, Reeves, Bishop Feild’s headmaster, functions as a sort of double of Smallwood’s father. The stories Reeves tells—like Charlie Smallwood’s stories—describe Newfoundland as a place of exile, rootlessness, and disconnection: “He called Newfoundland ‘the Elba of the North Atlantic’ and told us his job was to undo the damage done to us by more than a decade of living there” (34). As a restorative
nostalgic—to employ Svetlana Boym’s term—Reeves’ stories of England provide the boys with a distorted—and pathological—picture of his primal place. According to Smallwood, Reeves was “easily diverted from his lesson to hold forth on the universal awfulness of things, especially things as they were in Newfoundland as opposed to England, and as they were everywhere now as opposed to how they used to be” (36). Thus, as Wyile argues, Reeves “provides his charges with a thoroughly colonial education” (Speculative 128).

Reeves’ privileging of cartographic knowledge over chorographic knowledge is a key component of this colonial education. In his discussion of the history of maps and landscape paintings, Casey argues that maps are often cartographic, whereas landscape paintings are chorographic; this distinction is key to his assertion that maps tend to represent space, while paintings attempt to represent place:

[M]aps represent places for the most part incidentally—for example, in the literally topographical images on their margins—whereas landscape paintings represent places centrally and essentially. In Ptolemean nomenclature, maps mainly belong to geography, which is largely indifferent to place, while paintings belong to chorography, which is devoted to the description of place. (Representing 167)

The reason for this distinction is that maps aim for comprehensive knowledge of the earth as a whole: “Even when a map zeroes in on a comparatively limited subject [. . .] the subject itself is viewed as merely part of a much more inclusive geospatiality: hence the virtually irrepressible construction of atlases, which put together (literally page by page)

26 See Chapter 3 for a detailed discussion of the distinction between restorative and reflective nostalgia.
closely concatenated sections of parts of a single geographical unit, be it a nation or the earth itself” (167). Landscape paintings, on the other hand, aim for local, particular, knowledge: “No such ideal of all-inclusiveness is presumed or sought in landscape painting, which is content with the particularity of place: even a panoramic painting presents a group of coherently connected places. What Heidegger says of the spatiality of ready-to-hand world holds true for the spatiality of landscape painting: here ‘space has already been split up into places’” (167).

As with the other teachers, Reeves values the cartographic knowledge of English space over both cartographic knowledge of Newfoundland space, and chorographic knowledge of Newfoundland as place:

We were taught next to nothing about Newfoundland, the masters drilling into us instead the history and geography of England, the country for which they were so homesick that they acted as if they were still there, denying as much as possible the facts of their existence. Every day in Lower Third history, which we took from Headmaster Reeves, we started class by drawing in detail a map of England. As the year went on, we got better and better at it, Reeves having us compete to see who could draw an acceptable likeness the fastest. (35)

Reeves figures Newfoundland as a space not worthy of mapping, and a place not worthy of historicizing. Like Smallwood’s father, he believes that nothing will take root or grow on the island. He imagines Newfoundland as so devoid of the characteristics of place that he views its culture as a nebulous blank: “Not just Newfoundland, but the New World in general was a cultureless outback, he believed, though for Newfoundland he reserved his greatest scorn. ‘It’s not that I’m blaming you,’ he said. ‘It’s not your fault your so-called country has no culture’” (37).
Concomitant with Reeves’ perception that Newfoundland is a space completely lacking in culture—a non-place—is his primitivistic assumption that Newfoundland is backwards in time: “‘It takes thousands of years to make a great culture, a great civilization,’ he said” (37). Moreover, his response to Smallwood’s plucky assertion, “‘Prowse’s grandfather wrote a great book [. . .]. It’s called A History of Newfoundland,’” reveals his problematic understanding that Newfoundland’s history, myths, and culture—if they exist at all—ought to be eradicated:

‘A history of Newfoundland cannot be great,’ Reeves said, ‘because there is no greatness in Newfoundland. I have not read, and will not read, the book you speak of, of course, but I have no doubt that it is a well-researched, competently written chronicle of misery and savagery, full of half-educated politicians and failures-in-exile like myself and their attempts to oversee and educate a population descended from the dregs of the mother country. (38)

Smallwood’s belief in Newfoundland’s greatness is not so easily shaken, however. Dissatisfied with his formal education, and determined to disprove Reeves’ assertion that the New World lacks culture, he “read[s] a lot of books that Reeves deem[s] to be improper, that is to say books written by non-Englishmen. [. . .] The Last of the Mohicans, Huckleberry Finn and Moby Dick,” but although these texts provide an alternative to his colonial education, they are all about American places, and therefore cannot satisfy his desire for an imaginative understanding of Newfoundland as a place (40).

Smallwood’s search for a local sense of place leads him to try to imagine himself into Newfoundland history, and it is precisely this imaginative relationship to place that Reeves regards as a fundamental character flaw:
He said I had a tendency for ‘romancing,’ by which he meant day-dreaming. The other teachers reported to him that I was often caught at my desk staring at lists of names I had composed that had my own name at the bottom. Convinced, for instance, that I would myself write a history of Newfoundland as Prowse’s grandfather had done, I compiled this list of Newfoundland historians: Judge John Reeves, the Reverend Lewis Amadeus Anspach, the Reverend Charles Pedley, The Reverend Philip Toque, the Reverend Moses Harvey, Judge Daniel Woodley Prowse, Joseph Robert Smallwood. (39-40)

Not content to be merely a chronicler of history, Smallwood imagines himself as one of the great historical figures of Newfoundland: “I compiled a list of Newfoundland’s prime ministers, a line of succession that ended with me: The Right Honourable Sir Joseph Robert Smallwood, K.C.G.M., P.C., MHA” (40). Reeves mocks these aspirations, however: “Reeves assured me, laughing at his own cleverness, that no one as ‘benighted’ as me would ever ‘be knighted’” (40), and he chastises Smallwood for his most romantic desire: to “write a book that did for Newfoundland what War and Peace had done for Russia, a great, national, unashamedly patriotic epic” (40). To Reeves, this is not just the worst kind of “romancing” (39), it also demonstrates pride, the worst kind of sin (42).

As Wyile argues, “Smallwood engages in a certain postcolonial clowning and goading of Reeves,” but “the latter’s condescension has debilitating and persistent effects. Smallwood later tries to reverse this psychological colonization by repeatedly drawing the map of Newfoundland (89-90)” (Speculative 128). However, Smallwood’s belief—that he can better understand his relationship to and place within Newfoundland by memorizing and reproducing its maps—mimics Reeves’ privileging of cartographic over chorographic knowledge:

27 Smallwood’s middle name was actually ‘Roberts,’ not “Robert.”
The first thing I did on moving into the boarding-house was tack up an oilcloth map of Newfoundland, not including Labrador, since it was not clear at that time, and would not be until 1927, where Labrador left off and Quebec began. I had bought it from a man who assured me that unlike paper maps, it would last forever and would never get dirty, for all you had to do was wipe it clean with a wet cloth. He cited as evidence of its durability and stain-resistantness the fact that its previous owners had used it as a tablecloth. (89)

That Smallwood sees the map’s durability and enduringness as one of its selling points reflects what MacLeod refers to as his desire for an “immobile” geography (73). But as the potentially shifting borders of Labrador illustrate, even constructions of space are impermanent.

Moreover, this scene reveals that Smallwood’s attempts to replace his knowledge of English space with a knowledge of Newfoundland space are futile; the map of England is indelible: “after I began drawing Newfoundland, it was the map of England I saw when I closed my eyes at night, as though my mind were sending forth this primary shape by way of protest—which it needn’t have bothered doing, since England had been so early imprinted on my brain that no amount of drawing other maps could supplant it” (89-90). Frustrated with his inability to substitute one map for another, he finally gives up: “I must have drawn the map of Newfoundland from memory a thousand times before I stopped, admitting to myself that I would get no better at it. My last maps, drawn when I was twenty, are nowhere near as good as the maps of England I drew when I was twelve” (90).

Smallwood’s belief that England and Newfoundland may be exchanged is a cartographic, or geographic, one, and reflects the influence of his flawed education at
Bishop Feild. According to Casey, “geography puts its representations of the earth within the embrace of a unitary space that reduces places to points or positions” (Representing 167). Such a reduction means that “the representational space of a map could in principle be occupied by any geographical entity—that is to say, any of several countries (or parts of countries) could fit into a given grid as determined by latitude and longitude lines on a modern conventional map” (157)—hence the movable borders of Labrador. But Smallwood is searching for the kind of knowledge—local place knowledge, or what Casey refers to as chorographic knowledge—that cannot be found on cartographic maps, which deal exclusively with space. Casey associates chorography with both landscape painting and topography, which he sees as a “middle term” between landscape painting and cartography (157). What links topographic maps and landscape

28 As Fuller argues, “Joey’s cartographic impulse is just one example of Johnston’s framing of Newfoundland as both an epistemological and an ontological problem: a place that is difficult to know, especially through the established regimes of looking (347, 452, 485), and virtually impossible to ‘live up to’(154)” (45).

29 According to Casey, chorographic mapping and painting “trac[es] or describ[es] […] particular regions, chōrai, Plato’s term in the Timaeus” (Representing 158), whereas cartographic mapping “meets rigorous criteria of representation, not only those of isomorphism but also consistency of scale, regularity of spatial layout, reliability of direction, and so on; measurement of distance is a central feature of cartographic mapping” (347).

30 In his discussion on the relationship between topography and landscape painting, Casey argues that in the United States, for example, in order to be considered a legitimate art form, landscape painting “had to win itself away from considerations of topography (as also of interior decoration)” (Representing 154). Nevertheless, “the question of topography, that is, of the precise representation of landscape features, would not go away,” and this is because “it remains of central significance in the paintings of several of
paintings, according to Casey, is their focus on particular locales: “Locality is a key word, because it designates not an indifferent site (as is the case with the featureless space of a sheerly cartographic map), but a quite unique place not to be found elsewhere on earth” (156). It is this concern with locality that accounts for the “considerable overlap between topography and landscape painting” because they “share [. . .] a common concern with the particularity of given places—with what makes these places the unique localities they are” (157). Consequently, concludes Casey, “Indispensable to both is the idea of the nonexchangeability of represented place” (157). Thus, Smallwood’s fundamental mistake is that he is searching for chorographic knowledge in a cartographic map, and a cartographic map will never provide him with the kind of understanding that describes what is particular, unique and nonexchangeable about Newfoundland.

Smallwood’s concern with precise replication and accuracy also reflects “the persistent effects” of Reeves’ education (Wyile, Speculative 128). Chorographic the greatest modern landscape artists. Further, it retains such significance in a manner that not merely allows but fosters a conspicuous alliance with maps” (154; 155). Casey concludes that With cartography—that is, ‘the drawing of maps and charts’ (O.E.D.)—topography shares a double concern for (a) drawing or tracing certain physical features of natural places (as the common stem, graphia, indicates by its allusion to graphic representation of any kind); and (b) describing these places in ways that are true about them in terms of their identity, history, and various qualitative characteristics” (156). However, “whereas cartography can map a region without representing any of its local features (it need only trace the correct overall shape and correct relative size in order to be considered minimally adequate [. . .]), topography aims at setting forth precisely those local features that comprehensive cartographic maps assume they can afford to neglect” (156).
representations of place, unlike cartographic representations of space, are not concerned
with such precise replication. Rather, according to Casey, “the chorography of place as it
is realized in a landscape painting is concerned with the morphology of these places, their
shapefulness”  

(Representing 168). However, these “shapes […] are not to be confused
with the formal shapes of geometry or even geography” (168). To convey a sense of
place, “chorographic shapes need not be precisely traced, nor are they prefixed or
measurable as such” (168). There is an important distinction to be made here, says Casey,
between representation and replication: “To represent is not to replicate such shapes but
to re-implace them: it is to create in the place-of-representation what has its place-of-
origin in the natural world: creation here is re-creation. What is thereby represented is the
morphic pattern of the landscape, its implicit eidetic or formal structure” (168).

Moreover, “[t]o grasp the morphic pattern of a place is to grasp its ch’I energy, its
internal dynamics, what makes it just this place and not another” (170). Therefore,
Smallwood’s search for a sense of place by attempting to replicate the map of
Newfoundland is doomed to fail. No matter how accurate the map, it will never give him
the knowledge of a particular locale—its “inherent form or material essence” to borrow
Casey’s expression (168)—because “[f]ar from being the case […] that ‘maps give us
the measure of a place and the relationship between places,’ we ought rather to say that
maps give us the measure of sited spaces” (169). As Casey notes, it is precisely because
“[s]ites [. . .] lack ch’I and thus an animating inner form” that “we can exchange sites for one another indifferently in cartographic space” (170).31

In his search to understand what makes Newfoundland a unique locale—a place that cannot be exchanged for another—Smallwood turns again and again to Prowse’s representation of Newfoundland in A History of Newfoundland. Ironically, however, in its desire for comprehensiveness, precise replication, and “all-inclusiveness,” Prowse’s vision of Newfoundland’s history is analogous to a cartographic one, and therefore provides Smallwood with an inadequate model of place (Casey, Representing 167). As Casey argues, whereas maps represent an all-encompassing picture of sites within space, the vision of chorography is a “microscopic” one, where “we see a very small part of a given space, but we see it in much more detail” (167). The advantage of this chorographic vision is that although “we lose the region as a geographic entity, [. . .] we

31 The failure of maps to “‘give us the measure of a place and the relationship between places’” (Representing 169) is illustrated in another of the novel’s key mapping scenes. According to Fuller,

Crucially for my consideration of the novel’s engagement with dominant place-myths of Newfoundland, Fielding’s journal entry in Colony introduces the tropes of emptiness and ‘unknowability’ that shape the representation of the island in the succeeding chapter. Even the map of Newfoundland fails to assist her imagination when Fielding is a girl, and she cannot envisage the island beyond St. John’s described by her father: ‘Almost all of it is empty. No one lives there. No one’s ever seen most of it’ (129). (29)

The island is not completely unknowable, however. But the kind of place knowledge that Fielding desires—like Smallwood—is not to be found on a cartographic map, which is even limited in its ability to provide Fielding with an understanding of the sheer size and space of Newfoundland.
grasp its material essence in terms of the discrete localities that are its integral parts” (167-168).

Moreover, Prowse’s obsessive desire to write an exhaustive *History of Newfoundland* coincides with his pathological fixation on time, and his faulty belief that—if there were time enough—his history would be complete: “the only impediment to the perfection he had set out to achieve was time and the availability of documents. Four centuries of island history were encompassable, the judge believed. A Hansard-like transcription of our past could be set down, if only there was time” (46). In his belief that mastery over time will enable him to orient himself in place, Prowse is the quintessential modern, atopic subject. Casey traces the history of space’s subordination to time—and place’s subordination to time and space—to the modern navigational efforts of Europeans, whose “many early sea voyages” often ended in disaster (*Getting Back* 3). Citing the 1707 British voyage led by Admiral Shovel, whose fleet got lost in fog and consequently “crashed into the Scilly Islands to the southwest of England” (3), Casey argues, “These losses meant in effect that place had been lost, dissolved in a soup of space. The way to avoid such situations in the future was, paradoxically, through the administration of time” (3).

This desire to master space through time precipitated the search for a device to determine longitude and thereby to avoid such catastrophes: “The British government responded to the disaster by passing a bill in 1714 ‘providing a publick reward for such person or persons as shall discover the Longitude’” (3). As Casey maintains, “To solve
the problem of longitude the exact measurement of \textit{time} at sea was necessary: time had to be brought to bear on space. For longitude is not merely a matter of spatial position. It is a matter of where one is \textit{at a certain time}” (4). John Harrison’s invention of a marine chronometer solved the longitude problem, but more importantly, notes Casey, it sowed the seeds for a new way of conceiving the world: “The winning logic was this: when lost in space, turn to time. In other words, \textit{where} one was became equivalent to \textit{when} one was. The determination of the latter allowed the specification of the former. The measure of space was taken by time” (6). Moreover, such logic enabled the birth of a new world order: “concealed within the triumph of [Harrison’s marine chronometer] No. 4 was a form of domination such as the Western world had never known: the subordination of space to time, or ‘temporocentrism’ […] In the modern world, to be ‘whenabouts in the name of space’ is to know one’s whereabouts in the form of time” (6).

But although the marine chronometer allowed the sailors to locate their position in space, it did not provide them with a sense of place: “For all its engineering brilliance, however, it did not actually give \textit{guidance} to sailors at sea (this only comes from the combination of destination with motivation), much less shrewd judgment” (\textit{Getting Back} 7). Our current preoccupation with time has similar limitations, and, as Casey notes, leads to extreme disorientation:

Faced with time, indeed in its very clock-face, the modern subject is unguided and disconsolate. It doesn’t take the poet to let us know that ‘time eats away our lives’ and that it is our most insidious ‘enemy.’ Modern subjects are thus in the desperate position of Admiral Shovel’s foredoomed sailors: lost on the sea of time as well as space, and still lost even after the invention of the marine chronometer.
We are lost because of our conviction that time, not only the world’s time but *our time*, the only time we have, is always running out or down. (7)

Moreover, in the absence of an understanding of our relationship to place, “we risk falling prey to time’s patho-logic, according to which gaining is tantamount to losing” (Casey 22).

It is this very “patho-logic” to which Judge Prowse “falls prey” in his compulsion to capture completely the events of history before he runs out of time. His project is doomed to failure, however, because during the time it takes him to record events, time keeps marching onwards: “It was, as Prowse confessed in his foreword, not complete, it could not be at even ten times its eight hundred pages, for the instant he finished writing it a moment of history went unrecorded and even in what was written there were gaps, implausibilities, unsatisfying explanations and conjectures” (45). The passing of time perpetually haunts the judge, who works so hard to beat the clock that he goes cuckoo: “the judge, because of a stroke his family believed had been brought on by his exhaustive labours on his book, thought he was back working on the first edition of *A History of Newfoundland*, a delusion that not even showing him a copy of the first edition inscribed with his name could shake for long” (49). According to Prowse’s mental delusions, he is not only stuck for time, he is also stuck *in* time; his desire to master time—to keep from losing it—causes him to lose his mind.\(^3^2\)

\(^{32}\) According to Casey the expression, *Time on the Mind* [. . .] epitomizes the occasion of the modern. It was hardly accidental that Descartes located successive time in the mind, putting ‘duration,’ or eventful process, outside in physical things. If time is monolinear, its natural
Prowse’s fixation on time and his obsession with progress are also evident within his narrative of Newfoundland’s historical development. As I mentioned in my introduction, according to Jerry Bannister, Prowse was a whig historian in the classic sense of the term, and his *History* is an account of how Newfoundland had triumphed in the face of adversity. For Prowse, a crucial break separated the past (backwardness) from the present (progress). In using the past to show how far Newfoundlanders had come in transcending a legacy of repression, he approached history as both a series of enlightening lessons and an entertaining narrative, dividing the past into two distinct periods which advanced teleologically. (125)

When Smallwood becomes premier, his legendary infatuation with progress reflects Prowse’s influence. According to Richard Gwyn, “Smallwood articulated his philosophy of building early in office. He was convinced that social welfare could be no more than a palliative, and that only industrialization could propel Newfoundland forward. ‘Newfoundland,’ he said on August 2, 1949, ‘must develop or perish’” (138). Johnston chronicles this incessant drive to industrialize Newfoundland at all costs. Trusting the advice of the now infamous sham-economist-from-away Valdmanis, Smallwood invests in a series of ludicrous schemes: “Frauds, shady businessmen, scam artists, shysters, impostors, opportunists, eccentrics, mountebanks, they proposed, and were given government grants for, the most unlikely, far-fetched, bizarre schemes for the economic development of Newfoundland, almost all of which flopped or never got off the ground”

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site is mental. The rapid emerging and evanescing of thoughts, their sudden appearance and disappearance in the thinking mind (*res cogitans*), is a prototype for the arising and demising of events in extended things (*res extensa*). (*Getting Back* 9)
Smallwood is so obsessed with progress and development that he pays no attention to whether or not these schemes have any place sense, and the result is a series of grand debacles.  

Whereas Prowse is obsessed with documenting history before time runs out, Smallwood is obsessed with being included in the history books—including Prowse’s—before it is too late. As he says before the first referendum on Confederation,

> It seemed to me that unless I did something that historians thought was worth recording, it would be as if I had never lived, that all the histories in the world together formed one book, not to warrant inclusion in which was to have wasted one’s life. It terrified me that if it were possible to extrapolate the judge’s book past 1895 to the present, I would not be in it. And I was forty-eight years old. (454)

Such statements reveal that, like his mentor, Judge Prowse, Smallwood “fall[s] prey to time’s patho-logic,” and that he too is “lost on the sea of time as well as space” (Casey, Getting Back 22; 7).

Tragically, not only is the judge “lost on the sea of time as well as space” (7), but in his History, a sense of place also gets lost in the vast space of the book itself, which is filled with facts at the expense of a coherent narrative. As Smallwood tells us of his father’s infatuation with the History,

> He was as awed by Prowse’s prowess with numbers, his tables, graphs, charts and columns of statistics, as he was by Prowse’s prose, which had the conviction and lucid eloquence of court decisions, judgments rendered and explained, effects

33 Highlights of these cockamamie schemes include: an eye-glass manufacturing plant that never got off the ground, an English chocolate factory, a rubber plant (524) and a plan “to manufacture gloves made entirely from the skins of gazelles” (502).
painstakingly traced back to causes. It read like some great argument written to confound appeals to higher courts, though the argument was often lost amid the mass of detail. (45)

Indeed, the History’s unwieldy size and attempts at inclusiveness are the first subjects of parody in Fielding’s Condensed History of Newfoundland, which whimsically proclaims its “virtues” to be “brevity and comprehensiveness,” and the fact that it does not contain “numbers, photographs, footnotes or illustrations” (18). In this way, Fielding’s Condensed History understands something Prowse’s History does not, namely, that “[t]o think of an area of the world as a rich and complicated interplay of people and environment—as a place—is to free us from thinking of it as facts and figures” (Cresswell 11).

Moreover, in his description of the judge’s office space, Johnston plays with Colony’s epigraph, from Prowse’s History, which declares, “‘The history of the Colony is only very partially contained in printed books; it lies buried under great rubbish heaps of unpublished records [. . .], in rare pamphlets, old Blue Books, forgotten manuscripts…’” In a clever reversal, it is the judge himself who is “all but buried in the detritus of scholarship, his desk a chaos of maps and charts” (47), and the judge who is “partially contained” by documents: “It seemed the walls were made of books; on top of the shelves books were piled until they touched the ceiling; slats of light came shining through the piles of books that blocked the window” (47). The judge is contained and confined in space, and he feels trapped by time, but he is separated from place. In barricading him from the outside world, the books disrupt “the very continuity, that fusion of self and place” that Berleant so eloquently argues begins at home (Living 123).
Prowse cannot contain place by mastering time because places are neither bound
by nor contained in time. On the contrary, as Casey argues, “Place is ‘prior to all things’
according to Aristotle for the very reason which Archytas gives: place’s indispensability
for all things that exist. To be is to be in place” (Getting Back 14). In addition to being
indispensable, asserts Casey,

place, by virtue of its unencompassability by anything other than itself, is at once
the limit and the condition of all that exists. It is the limit inasmuch as there is
nothing beyond the place of an actual occasion—except another place for another
occasion. In other words, there can be no other nonplacial entity, medium, or
container [. . .] into which place [. . .] could be deposited. Instead there is simply
the boundary of any given place and, at the limit, the boundary of the physical
universe, its own limit. (Getting Back 15)

Consequently, even “time is a place—its own kind of place,” and this, says Casey,
accounts for that fact “that almost all philosophical theorizing about time, from Plato to
McTaggart, is place-determined,” hence Augustine’s famous musing, “‘If the future and
the past do exist, I want to know where they are’” (19-20).

The judge’s metaphorical near-burial in his documents also foreshadows Mr.
Mercer’s literal burial in the following chapter, in an avalanche precipitated by Mrs.
Smallwood throwing Charlie’s copy of Prowse’s History off the “city-facing deck” of the
house (70). MacLeod cites this episode as a quintessential example of his assertion that
“[w]henever the power of history is challenged and/or questioned, the power of
geography is reinforced and/or acknowledged” (72). Furthermore, he contends that the
avalanche incident establishes a “pattern” of environmental determinism (72). According
to MacLeod, if the scene finished with Mrs. Smallwood throwing the book away, “with
such an overt denial of Newfoundland’s historical record, then it might be easy to fit Mrs.
106
Smallwood’s actions, and Charlie’s negotiations, into a standardized interpretation of *Colony* as a postmodern historiographic metafiction” (72). That these actions cause an avalanche, and that unbeknownst to Mrs. Smallwood, her son witnesses the incident, complicates matters, however. As MacLeod argues, in the morning when Smallwood learns of the avalanche, he “immediately establishes a connection between his mother’s rejection of Prowse’s book and the subsequent disaster. The avalanche is interpreted as a natural ‘judgement’ on her behaviour (73)” (72).

This scene certainly does solidify *Smallwood’s* first-solitude perspective, but in arguing that the text fails to question Smallwood’s perception—and is therefore environmentally deterministic—MacLeod’s reading is reductive. Contrary to MacLeod’s assertion that in *Colony*, “geographical determinism is endorsed rather than deconstructed” (80), I argue that the avalanche scene is a critical example of where a close reading of events suggests we might not wish to take Smallwood’s assessment at face value. Context is everything, as they say, and in this case the context urges us to question Smallwood’s interpretation. After being framed at school for a letter that he did not write, given an astonishingly low character mark of forty-five, and blackballed by Headmaster Reeves, who has been looking for an excuse to force Smallwood into the Commercial Stream, “a class for those judged to be unsuited for going on to university” (63)—in other words, for those who are lower class—Smallwood gives in to what he believes to be his fate and drops out of Bishop Feild. When his father learns of
Smallwood’s news, it is he who first makes the dubious connection between Judge Prowse’s *History* and his son’s troubles:

Later, roaring drunk, he started in. ‘You’re ruined, boy, you’re ruined,’ he said. ‘We’re both ruined, we’re *all* ruined, we’re done for now.’ And then, as if it was somehow responsible for my dropping out, he got going about Judge Prowse’s *History*, which he was now calling the Book. ‘That cursed Book,’ he said. ‘I wish to God I’d never seen that Book.’ (65)

“The Book,” once an object of Charlie’s veneration, has now become yet another symbol of fated failure, an impression he reinforces by chanting his mantra of impending doom, “The black boot beckons, boy” (66).

This exchange precedes the avalanche incident, and culminates the chapter, “Judges,” where we have been alerted to be suspicious when “effects [are] painstakingly traced back to causes” (45) in a muddled and convoluted way; whereas the judge is senile, Charlie is a sot, and his reasoning is similarly confused. For although it seems to Smallwood “as if the *History* contained not a record of the past, but the past itself” (46), it is not the physical book itself that is responsible for the discrimination Smallwood has faced, but the continuing history of class division itself, which the book records.

Moreover, it is not some mysterious fate that is responsible for Smallwood’s placement in the Lower Sixth Commercial Class, but Headmaster Reeves. That it is Reeves who effectively enforces class divisions through spatial division, first by separating Smallwood from the university stream, and second by inspiring him to leave Bishop Feild altogether, and that Johnston’s narrative exposes the process by which spatial divisions are constructed to maintain the status quo, once again runs contrary to MacLeod’s assertion that *Colony* unquestioningly exemplifies “First Solitude” “spatial thought,”
where, in Chalykoff’s words, “spatial divisions are not believed to be produced at all, but are rather thought to be ‘found’ in ‘nature’” (Chalykoff 161).

Although Charlie is unaware of the Book’s role in the avalanche, his response to the event—he refers to it as “‘An act of God’” (72)—is consistent with his understanding of “environment as a place that is essentially opposed and hostile to human interests” (Berleant, *Aesthetics of Environment* 5). In Smallwood’s synopsis of events, then, “My mother, [was] the inadvertent agent of Mr. Mercer’s death, the book bringing the avalanche down like a judgment on his, and her, head” (73), he reveals himself to be very much his father’s son. However, if the avalanche reflects the influence environment has on Newfoundland’s inhabitants, it also reveals that such an influence is not unidirectional, despite Smallwood’s beliefs to the contrary. To say that environment has a profound influence on us is not to say that environment is deterministic. Indeed, rather than implying the kind of separation and disconnection between person and place that an environmentally deterministic reading pre-supposes, this incident actually illustrates Berleant’s assertion that “person and environment are continuous” (*Aesthetics of Environment* 4). For if you read the sequence of events carefully, it is Smallwood’s mother throwing the book off the deck and “far down the slope” of a snow-covered hill that initiates the avalanche, which in turn causes Mr. Mercer’s death (70). If she had burned the book in the stove, as she told Charlie she did, the book would not have been the catalyst for the avalanche at all. Thus, Smallwood might perceive the avalanche to be “like a judgment” (75) on his mother and Mr. Mercer, but in so doing, he de-emphasizes
his mother’s “inadvertent” agency and thereby reveals that—like his mentors, his reasoning is flawed. The cause of the avalanche is natural enough—human action—but Smallwood’s interpretation that it is a judgment remains open to question.

Likewise, the relationship between history and geography in this episode is also far more complicated than MacLeod’s reading allows. Of course this scene symbolizes—to an almost ludicrous degree—the weightiness of history. But history here does not “move” in time only because geography is expected to remain steadfastly immobile and perfectly ‘natural’” (MacLeod 73). To state the obvious, far from being “immobile,” the landscape here is quite literally moving and, symbolically, its movement coincides with ‘the Book,’ with history’s movement. Such movement reflects Casey’s assertion that “[t]here is nothing like a completely static place, a place involving no movement, change, no transiency” (Getting Back 289). Moreover, this scene also illustrates that time is “place-determined” (Casey 20).

According to Casey, “In a notebook preparatory to Ulysses, Joyce wrote: ‘Topical History: places remember events’” (277). In this declaration,

The initial spatio-temporal equipoise of the phrase ‘topical history’ is subverted by the claim that the active agent is place and not historical events, the former actively remembering the latter. Joyce calls into question the characteristically modern conception of viewing memory as exclusively time-bound, i.e., as recollection of the past. The inherent localism of memory also obtains for narration, in which places, instead of being merely settings or scenes, are active agents of commemoration. (277)

Similarly, the avalanche, rather than indicating environmental determinism, subverts a time-bound narrative by suggesting that time moves in place, and that places are “active agents of commemoration” (277). In this case, the scar left in the hillside commemorates
the throwing of the book. If the book represents history, and history scars the landscape, then on a larger symbolic level, memory is indeed place-bound. Thus, this scene reflects, not a pattern of environmental determinism, but a pattern of reciprocity—to borrow Berleant’s expression—where human activity inscribes and imprints itself on the landscape, and where, in turn, humans themselves are inscribed and imprinted by environment.34 That Smallwood fails to recognize this reciprocity between person and place reveals his lack of place attentiveness and his faulty perception.

MacLeod identifies Smallwood’s time as a reporter on the sealing vessel the S.S. Newfoundland, when many sealers died in a storm, as another crucial moment in Johnston’s rewriting of Smallwood’s life. In fact, according to MacLeod, “Smallwood’s experience on board the Newfoundland is perhaps the most important moment in the entire novel” (77). But whereas MacLeod’s reading of the avalanche scene is incomplete, the logic of his analysis of the sealing disaster is puzzlingly inconsistent. Speculating

34 This pattern begins with the opening of the novel and culminates, as I will later discuss, in the novel’s ending. Fielding’s first journal entry following Confederation, which opens Colony, reflects her conviction that—to borrow Casey’s expression—“time is a place” (Getting Back 19); her sentiments, “The past is literally another country now” and “The past is a place I visit on Sunday afternoons” (3) challenge Prowse and Smallwood’s subsequent obsession with time, and assert that memory is bound by place rather than time.

Even Smallwood, in hiding the recovered copy of Prowse’s History and reading it almost illicitly, visits the past: “I took it home, smuggled it into the house, and tied it, lengthwise and crosswise, with a piece of ribbon, in the manner I had seen done with old books at Bishop Feild. Then I hid it in the shed out back. I would sneak out every day to check on it, as though I had some fugitive convalescent in the shed” (74).
about the reasons why Johnston places Smallwood onboard the ship during the disaster—when in fact he was not there—MacLeod surmises,

In his fictional recreation, the events onboard the *Newfoundland* are interpreted as the catalysts that push Smallwood into politics and into his muddled engagement with socialist doctrine. Smallwood, the political animal, is literally created by the brutal confrontations—both natural and social—he witnesses onboard the *Newfoundland*. For the young Smallwood, the sealers who die on the ice are the victims not only of a harsh Newfoundland climate but of an unjust society. He places the blame for their deaths squarely on the shoulders of the St. John’s upper class: the unscrupulous merchants, ship captains, and owners who send their employees out into extreme conditions without any concern for their welfare. (77)

Most horrifying to Smallwood is his discovery that during the storm, the sealers made it to another vessel, the *Stephano*, but were “sent back to their own vessel by Captain Abram Kean, father of the *Newfoundland*’s skipper, Westbury” (113). Although MacLeod acknowledges the impact of this discovery, and although his initial speculations demonstrate that Smallwood is shaped by environment—both social *and* physical—in his final analysis of the scene, he concludes, “In *Colony*’s definitive historiographic scene, the actions and motivations of an entirely imaginary Joey Smallwood are *directly determined by the physical environment*” (77-78 emphasis added). Such an assertion extricates the text’s social critique from its representation of the physical environment in a way that even Smallwood—as obtuse and as lacking in place sense as he is—does not do. In fact, unlike the avalanche, which he interprets as a “natural ‘judgement’ (73)” on his mother (MacLeod 72), when he recalls the sealing disaster, Smallwood tells us that he “thought mostly of old man Kean, who was too miserly to offer those men the safety of his ship and sent them off to find his son’s ship rather than have them sit on his, eating his provisions and using up his oil and coal” (114). In eliding Smallwood’s
acknowledgement of the social production and administration of space, and in focusing solely on the influence that the physical environment has on Smallwood, MacLeod’s conclusion falls into the very first-solitude reading of which he has been critical.

Whereas Smallwood’s journey on board the S.S. Newfoundland gives him a brief moment of insight into the relationship between people and place, his other major journeys in the novel—to New York, across Newfoundland’s interior, and to the outport communities—demonstrate the extent of his place pathologies. As I have argued earlier, journeys can evoke place sense if they help the traveller to recognize the “contrast between the virtues of lastingness and the values of transience, between remaining in place and moving among places, and to do both in ways that realize an intricate dialectic of space and time” (Casey, Getting Back 283). But in order to gain this kind of knowledge, we must travel with what Berleant calls an “aesthetics of engagement” (The Aesthetics of Environment 12). An “aesthetics of engagement” recognizes that “there is no outside world. There is no outside. Nor is there an inner sanctum in which I can take refuge from inimical external forces. The perceiver (mind) is an aspect of the perceived (body) and conversely; person and environment are continuous” (4).³⁵ Because

³⁵ According to Berleant, an aesthetics of engagement is different than our conventional understanding of aesthetics because the “usual tradition in aesthetics [. . .] claims that appreciation requires a receptive, contemplative attitude” (The Aesthetics of Environment 12). He argues, however, that “nature admits of no such observer, for nothing can remain apart and uninvolved” (12). In other words, to think of the aesthetic experience as one of detachment is a false understanding of our relationship to both real and painted environments; Berleant would argue that we are attached to and engaged with place whether we acknowledge it or not.
Smallwood travels with a flawed perception, his journeys serve chiefly to exacerbate his sense of transience and disorientation.

As MacLeod contends, Smallwood’s interpretation of American geography and his understanding of the distinction between Canadian and American space is fundamentally flawed. MacLeod compares Smallwood’s perception of Canadian and American social space with that of Quoyle, from E. Annie Proulx’s *The Shipping News*, and asserts,

In both novels, the geographical portraits of the two countries are unambiguous. American social space, especially New York City, is entirely ‘made up,’ imaginary, lacking in substance, and unavoidably uncertain. Canada, on the other hand, and especially Newfoundland, is authentic, real, substantial, and metaphysically stable. [. . .] These two characters and these two novelists both fall back into spatial epistemologies consistently used to interpret Canadian and American cultural geography. In aesthetic terms, Canadian social space—even when it is presented in a postmodern novel—is almost always more securely realistic than American social space. (76)

Leaving aside the problem that while Smallwood is in New York, Newfoundland has not yet joined Canada and therefore cannot yet be emblematic of Canadian social space, such a clear alignment between author, protagonist and text—*particularly* in a postmodern novel—is extremely troublesome. 36 Given Smallwood’s difficulty in forming local place

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36 In this respect, Dragland’s caution against this very impulse to conflate Johnston and Smallwood is apt: Is the Smallwood in *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams* merely a Johnston in Smallwood clothing? No. The character born of the two men superimposed creates a third, who is both and neither. This is because fiction allows, even compels, a writer to think beyond himself or herself, to assume temporary identities that look real but are made of words and that must stand—ideas as well as clothing—on their own. Am I saying that there need be no identifiable place or
attachment, and given that even within Newfoundland he sees primarily separations, discontinuities and divisions between people and between people and place, it is hardly surprising that during his time in an entirely different country, Smallwood is not only unwilling, but also unable, to bridge the “gulf” “[b]etween us and them and here and there” (132). For the problem is not simply that he misunderstands his relationship to New York, or Newfoundland, or Canada; the problem is that he misunderstands his relationship to place period. His first-solitude interpretation of Canadian geography and his second-solitude perception of American geography are simply two symptoms of his underlying place pathologies. And although, as MacLeod suggests, “Smallwood’s sojourn in America only reinforces his commitment to home”(76), he returns to Newfoundland an uncured man.

Smallwood’s inattentiveness to place and his underlying place pathologies are illustrated in “his grand, momentous homecoming” (213). MacLeod refers to “Smallwood’s heroic walk across the interior of Newfoundland” where he “unionizes the sectionmen who maintain the rail line [. . .] (213),” as “Johnston’s other great scene”

opinion where Johnston is obliged to stand? Am I stating that an author of these inventions is off the hook of responsibility for everything and anything that he or she places in the world? If I were to answer yes, it would be to elevate and honour his partner, the reader. (197)

According to Dragland, “The reader’s role is not to be a passive consumer. The reader should take no fiction as definitive, not even be tempted to do so. [. . .] A real reader doesn’t shrink away from contingency and multiplicity; she accepts her responsibility for participating in the making of meaning, and she jumps into the tumble” (197).
As MacLeod contends, “‘The Walk,’ as Johnston calls it, has both a pragmatic and a symbolic function for Smallwood (211)” (78). According to MacLeod,

By sacrificing himself to the marginalized non-urban Newfoundlanders who will later make up the core of his confederation-minded constituency, Smallwood, literally, takes the first steps towards establishing himself as the political champion of rural Newfoundland. At the same time, The Walk again reinforces his connection to the physical environment. Like his experience on the Newfoundland, The Walk makes Smallwood into the politician he later becomes. His environmentally determined union with the landscape is consummated by this journey, by walking every step of the way from one end of the colony to the other. (78)

But if “The Walk” plays a role in creating Smallwood-the-politician, it also ominously foreshadows the kind of politician he will become: one with dubious motives, who pays little attention to the particularities of place, and whose lack of place sense often “leads to disastrous practical consequences” (Berleant, Living 12).

Rather than being attentive to and engaged with his surroundings, Smallwood tells us, “I walked with my suitcase flat in front of me, and with a book laid open on it, which allowed me to read while I was walking” (214). He is so preoccupied with reading and re-reading the History that he becomes almost entirely oblivious to environment:

I plodded wearily along, after a while no longer noticing the spectacular scenery, often near-delirious from hunger and exhaustion, reading, reading, retracing centuries of history until it seemed to me the judge’s whole book was written in the cryptic scrawl of his inscription to my father. I probably read the judge’s History twenty times. It began to seem that this, and not the walk, was the epic task that I had set myself, to read the history of my country non-stop, over and over until I had committed it, word for word, to memory [.] (214)

Smallwood is not just obsessed with memorizing history; he is also preoccupied with making history. According to Smallwood, “Near Gander, I was heartened when a sectionman showed me a copy of the Daily News, in which there was a small item about
what I was doing and why” (218). Although ostensibly the purpose of the Walk is to unionize the sectionmen and thereby improve their lot, such glimpses into Smallwood’s thoughts illustrate that much of his motivation is personal and self-serving.

Indeed, he seems to pay as little attention to the sectionmen and their families as he does to the landscape. Although he stays at the section shacks and accepts food, shelter and provisions from the sectionmen and their families, he makes little attempt to participate in their lives or to get to know them. Like the landscape, which he begins to perceive as “undifferentiated” (219), he sees the section shacks and their inhabitants as uniform; he frequently refers to the people merely as “the occupants” (217), “the section people,” and “the wives” (216). Moreover, he thinks only in passing of the impact his stay has on them, as for example when he describes throwing away one of the trout sandwiches that a sectionman’s wife has packed for him: “I felt guilty doing so, knowing how dearly come by the bread had been” (217). Little wonder, then, that a man who is too busy walking with his nose in a book to appreciate the place he is visiting or its inhabitants, “falls victim to his own misreading of geography” (MacLeod 78).

But MacLeod’s assertion that the two times “Smallwood throws himself against the brutal contours of Newfoundland’s geography [. . .] the landscape transforms him rather than the other way around” (77) and that these scenes illustrate Colony’s first-solitude, environmentally deterministic interpretation of geography, is surely a limited understanding of the text. For if Colony traces the impact that the landscape has had on Smallwood, it also chronicles the effect that Smallwood has had on the landscape and the
place. In her last journal entry, for example, Fielding reflects on Smallwood’s career and his various schemes—cockamamie and otherwise—and concludes,

_The country is strewn with Come by Chance-like monoliths, the masterpieces of some sculptor who worked on a grand scale and whose medium was rust. Quarries, mines, mills, plants, smelters, airports, shipyards, refineries and factories, to all of which paved roads still lead, though no one travels on them any more._

_You all but gave away Churchill Falls, which you had hoped would crown your career as Confederation had crowned MacKenzie King’s._ (555)

Even Smallwood himself has brief moments of insight where he recognizes the lasting imprint he has made on the landscape. On his train ride across Newfoundland, on the way to New York, for example, he acknowledges, “Fifty years later, after the train had ceased to run, travellers on the highway would be able to see from there the ruins of my refinery at Come by Chance; after it was mothballed, small amounts of crude oil would still be sent there for refining so that, at night, you would be able to see the flame from the highest of the stacks from forty miles away” (138). And on one of his other great trips across the landscape, during his ill-fated scheme to unionize the outport fishermen, he visits “the community of Garia, abandoned since 1873” (345), and thinks, “The day

[37] As Chafe argues, Fielding’s nostalgia serves as a counterpoint to Smallwood’s drive to industrialize:

Sheilagh Fielding’s voice not only subverts accepted Newfoundland history, it also rivals Smallwood’s voice of progress and industry. In Fielding Johnston creates a truly poco narrator, a Benjaminian ‘angel of history’ who is propelled ‘into the future to which [her] back is turned’ (Benjamin 258). Fielding is a romantic bound to the ever-progressive Smallwood yet consumed by what Gayatri Spivak calls ‘a nostalgia for lost origins’ (Spivak 87). Smallwood’s industrialize-or-perish attitude is tempered by Fielding’s lament for the Newfoundland his modernizing threatens to destroy. (33)
would come when, because of me, there would be hundreds of such places around Newfoundland, abandoned islands and coastal settlements, ghost ports whose populations had been forcibly transferred to employment centres” (345-346). Such moments illustrate Berleant’s assertion that “[l]andscapes, too, bear the mark of their inhabitants,” (Living 11) and that the Newfoundland landscape and its inhabitants bear the marks of Smallwood’s legacy.

Although Smallwood frequently misreads the landscape and his relationship with it, his preoccupation with the land — and his desire to do “something commensurate with the greatness of the land itself” (433) — is one of the novel’s central motifs. More profound than his misunderstanding of the landscape, however, is his intense fear of the ocean. For Smallwood, whereas the land, particularly the interior, represents the possibility of Newfoundland’s existence as a separate nation, “the unfoundland that will

38 Richard Gwyn’s Smallwood: The Unlikely Revolutionary, one of Johnston’s key sources, documents Smallwood’s unusual aversion to the ocean:

It is one of the many paradoxes of Smallwood’s character that his passion for his island has never encompassed the sea around it. The barren Grecian grandeur of Newfoundland’s coastline holds little charm for him. Instead, he talks with longing of the lush green fields of England, and it was not by happenstance that when he came to build his dreamhouse he built it in a valley four miles out of sight of the Atlantic. Nor, unlike virtually every other Newfoundland male, is he so much as a sport fisherman. (170-171)

Furthermore, according to Gwyn,

This lack of affection for things maritime is reflected in what is perhaps the largest puzzle of Smallwood’s administration: its lack of attention to the fishery. Although the fishery supports one Newfoundlander in three, right down to the late 1960s it had been the most neglected industry in the province. For twenty years, Smallwood has sought to turn his people away from the sea. (171)
make us great someday” (141), as Fuller argues, the ocean threatens Smallwood’s notion of a land-bound identity:

Ironically, given Newfoundland’s economic dependence on the sea for five hundred years and the political support that Joey wins for Confederation among the fishers, his fear of a boundaryless ocean prompts a reimagining of his homeplace ‘as landlocked in the middle of some otherwise empty continent’ (131). For Johnston’s Joey, a lack of physical limits and boundary markers produces anxiety because it evokes the threat of continuity with other spaces and a concomitant loss of place-bound identity. (26)

Moreover, as Fuller maintains, “Joey requires the physical environment to provide markers that delimit both the geography of home and a psychic space of cultural difference from mainlanders” (27).

Even within Newfoundland Smallwood is unable to overcome “the psychic space of cultural difference” between people, and nowhere is this more apparent than in his perception of the outport communities—the very places on whose support he relies for Confederation. Just as Smallwood fails to understand the lives of the sectionmen who inhabit the Newfoundland interior, he cannot fathom the lives of the outporters, whose existence centers on the ocean he fears. Rather than trying to gain some insight into their lives, he spends his trips to the outports bemoaning the outporters’ reliance on the sea:

It struck me more forcefully than it ever had before that virtually the whole population lived on the coast, as if ready to abandon ship at a moment’s notice. The shore was nothing but a place to fish from, a place to moor a boat and sleep between days spent on the sea. Of the land, the great tract of possibility that lay behind them, beyond their own backyards, over the farthest hill that they could see from the windows of their houses, most Newfoundlanders knew next to nothing. Just as I, who knew nothing about it, feared the sea, though I believed my ignorance and fear to be more justified than theirs. (139-140)
Smallwood believes that this dependence on the sea is foolish because, unlike the land, the sea resists human mastery: “Here was all this land and they had not claimed an inch of it as theirs, preferring instead to daily risk their lives, hauling fish up from a sea that would never be theirs, and to kill seals walking on ice that could not, like land, be controlled or tamed” (140).

Citing Buckminster Fuller’s seminal essay, “Fluid Geography,” Berleant argues that our experience of coastal environments can help us to gain a better understanding of all environments: “The world from the water is a world of constant motion and change, features that are less apparent on land, where the built environment gives us a deceptive sense of stability and control. Yet motion and change are as incessant and inevitable on land as on water” (*Aesthetics and Environment: Variations* 64). Moreover, Berleant maintains that our experience of water should enable us to perceive that “every environment we inhabit is continuous, fluid, and ephemeral, and we are immersed in its flow” and he argues that “[b]y returning perceptually to our origins in the sea, then, we can better understand who we are and where we are” (55). In traversing the ice-fields to get from one outport to another, Smallwood experiences the fluidity and ephemerality of the coastal environment as he is literally “immersed in its flow”:

I discovered that it was possible while walking on the ice to become seasick. One second you were walking uphill, the next downhill. The water below moved shorewards but the ice did not; you rose to a crest on the ice, then felt and saw that crest move on ahead of you while another swell began beneath your feet. It was like walking on the skin of a massive animal. (350)

He is unable to translate this experience into a broader understanding of his relationship with the land or the ocean, however.
Moreover, rather than seeing the continuity between these outport communities, the rest of Newfoundland, and Canada, he views the outports with the same primitivist and patronizing lens that Headmaster Reeves viewed Newfoundland: “Their homes were worlds unto themselves. The fishermen were not nationalists of any sort, defined themselves as neither Newfoundlanders nor colonials, but as residents of chthonic origin, sprung from the earth of whatever little island or cove they had grown up in” (454). But in fact, Smallwood has very little knowledge of how these fishermen define themselves, and it is he who interprets their geographical remoteness as indicating that they are disconnected from the rest of the world, “cut off from the world in both space and time” (355). This understanding not only fails to recognize that these people participate in a global fish market, but also shows Smallwood’s very limited and problematic understanding of the effect his presence has on the community. Indeed, although he acknowledges the negative impact his failed unionizing campaign has had on the Bay of Islands, when he says, “Explaining to fishermen that they would have been no poorer if they had given their fish away or never caught it in the first place had been difficult, though not so difficult as getting out of the Bay of Islands unharmed after doing so” (359), he does not fully comprehend the impact of outside influences, or recognize the continuity between inside and outside.

The evidence of Smallwood’s blindness to place is particularly egregious and appalling during his Confederation campaign visits to the outports. Deeming the people too ignorant and unsophisticated to comprehend political systems, he says, “I did not
speak to them about Canada. What could they know about Canada, these people who had never seen St. John’s? For these people, there would be no dilemma. To them, voting for Confederation would be no great sacrifice” (453-454). He sees Confederation as the only viable solution to the indigence of the outport communities:

Confederation would not make them think of themselves as Canadians. All they knew or would ever know of Canada was that it was some nebulous place from which, somehow because of me, money trickled in to them. They would vote for Confederation to get the mother’s allowance and would live after Confederation exactly as they had before, only richer by about twenty dollars per month.

That I was doing what was best for them I was able to satisfy myself just by looking at the way they lived. (454)

But Smallwood does not really understand the way the outporters lived before Confederation, nor does he ask them, so he can have no real comprehension of the effects of Confederation on these people and their way of life. His pragmatic assessment that these communities “would live after Confederation exactly as they had before, only richer by about twenty dollars per month” (454) is therefore shortsighted and it mimics the understanding of the early colonials who thoughtlessly traded Newfoundland land grants, “‘as one pawns off a worthless horse on a friend’” (1). In this respect, Smallwood’s participation in Newfoundland’s Confederation with Canada places him in the history books alongside those “men in various states of illusion about ownership and administration of the land” (Dragland 201) who have treated Newfoundland as a site that can be “easily exchanged or merely manipulated” with little or no consequence (Casey, Getting Back xiii).
In his analysis of *Colony*'s ending—Fielding’s “final Field Day column, written after Smallwood’s victory” (80)—MacLeod argues that “geographical determinism is endorsed rather than deconstructed” because “[e]ven Fielding, Smallwood’s consistent critic and herself a master practitioner of historiographic metafiction, shares in his awe before the colony’s topography” (80). Fielding’s awe of Newfoundland geography here serves as a counterpoint to Smallwood, for unlike Smallwood, she finds consolation in the landscape, and in the fact that “[i]t doesn’t matter to the mountains that we joined Confederation, nor to the bogs, the barrens, the rivers or the rocks” (560) because “[t]hese things, finally, primarily, are Newfoundland” (562). According to MacLeod, “In this formulation, Newfoundland is clearly not a nationalist ideology, nor a cultural entity, nor an imagined community. Though the colony is free to transform itself into a province, it remains, resolutely, a Rock, a ‘hard’ Canadian place where the forces of environmental determinism continue to shape the subjectivities of its inhabitants” (80). But Fielding utters the line, “These things, finally, primarily, are Newfoundland” (562), as she watches “the dark shape of [a] train” pass through the hard, rocky landscape: “I have often thought of that train hurtling down the Bonavista like the victory express. And all around it the northern night, the barrens, the bogs, the rocks and ponds and hills of Newfoundland. The Straits of Belle Isle, from the island side of which I have seen the coast of Labrador” (561; 562). In this context, Fielding’s protest sounds futile, for as the avalanche, the train, Churchill Falls, and the “Come by-Chance like monoliths, the masterpieces of some sculptor who worked on a grand scale” (555) illustrate, if this is “a
‘hard’ Canadian place” that “shape[s] the subjectivities of its inhabitants” (MacLeod 80), it is also a place that has been—and will continue to be—shaped, carved, and imprinted by the sculptors who call Newfoundland their home.
Chapter 3

“Nothing but a place to fish from”: Catastrophe and the Politics of Nostalgia in Kenneth J. Harvey’s *The Town that Forgot How to Breathe*

I will bring my people again from the depths of the sea.

~ *Psalms*

For storytelling is always the art of repeating stories, and this art is lost when the stories are no longer retained. It is lost because there is no more weaving and spinning to go on while they are being listened to. The more self-forgetful the listener is, the more deeply is what he listens to impressed upon his memory. When the rhythm of work has seized him, he listens to the tales in such a way that the gift of retelling them comes to him by itself.

~ Walter Benjamin

Kenneth J. Harvey is one of Newfoundland’s most prolific and adventurous writers, and his work has received an increasing amount of recognition—both nationally and internationally—in recent years.¹ *The Town that Forgot How to Breathe* (2003) explores what happens to the outport residents of Bareneed, Newfoundland—a people for whom, to borrow the words of Johnston’s Smallwood, “[t]he shore was nothing but a place to fish from, a place to moor a boat and sleep between days spent on the sea” *(Colony* 139)—when two hundred years of policies that “neglect[ed] Newfoundland and Labrador’s dependence on marine resources” *(Cadigan* 4) and that treated Newfoundland

¹ According to Harvey’s blog, “He has won the Rogers’ Trust Fiction Prize, the Thomas Raddall Fiction Award, the Winterset Award, Italy’s Libro Del Mare, and has been nominated for the Books in Canada First Novel Award, and twice for both the Giller Prize and the Commonwealth Prize.” In his introduction to Essays on Canadian Writing: Newfoundland Literature, Lawrence Mathews does not select any of Harvey’s novels for his list of the ten most important works of Newfoundland “fiction of the past twenty-five years” (2), but he does include Harvey on his list of contemporary writers that you would have to discuss if—“using the work of Horwood and Janes as the standard for inclusion”— you were to write an addendum to Patrick O’Flaherty’s *The Rock Observed.*
as a site to be “exchanged or merely manipulated” (Casey, Getting Back xiii) culminate in the collapse of the fisheries. As Herb Wyile suggests, The Town that Forgot How to Breathe is “a magic realist allegory,” and like “many magic realist texts,” it uses a “plague” to examine “profound social and cultural changes” (“Going” 171):

‘Forgetting to breathe’ serves as a succinct metaphor for the fundamental existential crisis Harvey chronicles as well as for the shift from independence to dependence, as the afflicted must be kept on artificial support while the authorities struggle to remedy their condition—a physiological parallel to the province’s social and economic plight in the wake of the 1992 moratorium. (172)

As if the epidemic breathing disorder were not bad enough, further environmental chaos and destruction loom at the hands of external forces: the novel is structured around the approach of a tsunami, which threatens to annihilate the community.

In its nostalgic response to loss and environment, and in its tendency to blame many of the community’s problems on outside interference, The Town that Forgot How to Breathe fits squarely into Newfoundland’s “tradition of Romantic rebelliousness,” to recall Terry Whalen’s description of O’Flaherty’s division of Newfoundland literature into two opposing traditions: “the Romantic” and the stoic (58). But although the novel, like many of its predecessors, “recreat[es] the outport as a pastoral idyll” (O’Flaherty 152), its vision is far from the overly simplistic, uncritical version of nostalgia that scholars like O’Flaherty, Ian McKay, and James Overton have so scathingly indicted in their assessment of East Coast culture.

According to Svetlana Boym, while the current inclination among scholars is to disparage nostalgia, it was not always viewed in such a negative light. Boym argues that we must understand nostalgia as “a historical emotion,” which has to do with both
“dislocation in space” and “also with the changing conception of time” (7). The term was originally “coined by the ambitious Swiss doctor Johannes Hofer in his medical
dissertation in 1688,” and it described the condition of homesickness among “various
displaced people of the seventeenth century, freedom-loving students from the Republic
of Berne studying in Basel, domestic help and servants working in France and Germany
and Swiss soldiers fighting abroad” (3). The condition, notes Boym, was said to be “the
disease of an afflicted imagination” (4), and it manifested itself in various psychological
and physical symptoms, which doctors believed could be cured by “opium, leeches and a
journey to the Swiss Alps” (xiv).

Our understanding of nostalgia changed in the eighteenth century, however, when
the “impossible task of exploring nostalgia passed from doctors to poets and
philosophers,” and the “symptom of sickness came to be regarded as a sign of sensibility
or an expression of new patriotic feeling” (Boym 11). Rather than being perceived “as a
tale of putative convalescence,” nostalgia became seen more positively “as a romance
with the past” (11). “[N]o longer” considered a disease “to be cured,” it was now an
emotion that was “to be spread as widely as possible” (11). But this unmitigated
celebration of nostalgia was not to last. According to Boym, although there was an
“early-nineteenth-century memory boom” that saw the establishment both of the heritage
industry and the privatization of nostalgia in the bourgeois European home, which
manifested itself in the “souvenirization of salon culture,” “the word [nostalgia] itself was
acquiring negative connotations because it conflicted with the discourse of progress”
(16). On one hand, says Boym, it was seen as a “European disease” by newer nations like America (16). But on the other hand, as John Frow asserts, nostalgia’s meaning was becoming more diffuse: “By the nineteenth century it had been extended to describe a general condition of estrangement, a state of ontological homelessness that became one of the period’s key metaphors for the condition of modernity” (135).

Several factors account for this general feeling of homelessness in the nineteenth century, but Boym says that the most important factor, which was concomitant with the industrial revolution, was the secularization of time: “From the seventeenth to the nineteenth century, the representation of time itself changed: it moved away from allegorical human figures [. . .] to the impersonal language of numbers: railroad schedules, the bottom line of industrial progress. Time was no longer shifting sand; time was money” (9). Simultaneously, says Boym, time became “more individual and creative” (9). She cites anthropologist Reinhart Koselleck’s two concepts, the *space of experience* and the *horizon of expectation* to explain the way that modernity changed the way that we internalize time. According to Boym, the “space of experience allows one to account for the assimilation of the past into the present. ‘Experience is present past, whose events have been incorporated and could be remembered’” (10). Conversely, the “[h]orizon of expectation reveals the way of thinking about the future. Expectation ‘is the future made present; it directs itself to the not-yet to the non-experienced, to that which is to be revealed’” (10). When progress became the “new global narrative,” the distinction between the space of experience and the horizon of expectation collapsed: “Progress ‘is
the first genuinely historical concept which reduced the temporal difference between experience and expectation to a single concept.’ What mattered in the idea of progress was improvement in the future, not reflection on the past” (10). Consequently, argues Boym, “nostalgia, as a historical emotion, is a longing for that shrinking ‘space of experience’ that no longer fits the new horizon of expectations. Nostalgic manifestations are side effects of the teleology of progress” (10).

As I argued in Chapter 2, “[n]ostalgic manifestations” are also “side effects” of Western discourse’s subordination of place to both time and space, which—as Edward Casey contends—means that “this world ha[s] become increasingly placeless, a matter of mere sites instead of lived places, of sudden displacements rather than of perduring implacements” (Getting Back xv). In misunderstanding the “reciprocity of person and place” (307), and in failing to recognize “the lived body as the principal locatory agent of implantation” (110), we have made ourselves sick, and—ironically—the symptoms of this illness parallel those of the indigenous peoples whom we “European Americans displaced in the first place” (38):

It is a disconcerting fact that, besides nostalgia, still other symptoms of place pathology in present Western culture are strikingly similar to those of the Navajo: disorientation, memory loss, homelessness, depression, and various modes of estrangement from self and others. [. . .] the sufferings of many contemporary Americans that follow from the lack of satisfactory implantation uncannily resemble (albeit in lesser degree) those of displaced Native Americans [. . .]. Those natives have lost their land; those of us who are nonnatives have lost our place. (38)

According to Casey, “Natives and nonnatives alike are embroiled in a shared predicament of placelessness and its aftermath, and the only way out of this predicament is to regain
living contact with place itself, to remember that place is a remarkable thing” (39). Like many academics, Casey contends that “[n]ostalgia (as well as the exoticism with which it is so often allied) is part of the problem, and it does not contain the solution” (39).

However, in accordance with American historian Jackson Lears, I ask whether it might be time “to use nostalgia as something more than a mere pejorative” (“Looking Backward” 66). Although Lears acknowledges “that nostalgia can cripple serious thought” (61), he asks, rather provocatively, whether there might be “a version of nostalgia that is informed by critical judgment, honesty to evidence, respect for reasoned argument? A version that even professional historians might be willing to respect?” (61). He argues that if such a version of nostalgia existed, it “could provide a powerful antidote to linear notions of progress” (62). Boym contends that such a version of nostalgia does exist; she distinguishes between two kinds of nostalgia, restorative and reflective, which “are not absolute types” (41), but rather ways of viewing the past.² Restorative nostalgia is the kind of nostalgia that critics like McKay and Casey and other nostalgia-bashers would challenge—and rightfully so—because this type of nostalgic vision presupposes a past that is static and enduring, and asserts that the past can be fully reconstructed and

² Boym elaborates,

In my view, two kinds of nostalgia characterize one’s relationship to the past, to the imagined community, to home, to one’s own self-perception: restorative and reflective. They do not explain the nature of longing nor its psychological makeup and unconscious undercurrents; rather, they are about the ways in which we make sense of our seemingly ineffable homesickness and how we view our relationship to a collective home. (41)
restored (see Boym 41-43; 49-50). Reflective nostalgia, on the other hand, “reveals that longing and critical thinking are not opposed to one another” (50). Rather than positing an enduring past, “reflective nostalgia cherishes shattered fragments of memory and temporalizes space” (49). Moreover, reflective nostalgia allows us to have a creative relationship with the past; it is “nostalgic not for the past the way it was, but for the past the way it could have been” (351). I argue that Harvey’s novel makes an important distinction between the restorative nostalgia of the tourists, in which the residents of Bareneed are viewed through the lens of what McKay calls “The Simple Life of the Folk” (xvi)—an interpretive frame that perceives these people as being “released from the iron cage of modernity” (xv) and transforms them into “inert essences” (xvi)—and the reflective nostalgia that is necessary for the Bareneed residents to come to terms with, and even to challenge, the loss, catastrophe and environmental havoc wrought by conditions of modernity.

*The Town that Forgot How to Breathe* opens with what can only be described as a ‘salty’ description of a local elderly woman, Miss Eileen Laracy. We see her “Smacking her toothless gums together” (9) as she sings a lament in a thick Newfoundland brogue for a fisherman lost at sea, while gathering a bouquet of lilacs, which she believes to be “a favourite of the spirits” (10). She is superstitious and believes in old wives’ tales: “As a rule” she “kept a piece [of hardtack] in the front pocket of her dress when near the woods [. . .] a gift for the fairies should the tiny creatures appear fluttering before her” (10). This description seems to replicate what McKay describes as the “construction of
the rural Folk within and for an urban gaze” (136), wherein the rural Folk are described in picturesque terms, through the framework of “Innocence” (30), as having “a ‘simple life’ by the sea, untroubled by urban stresses” (xvi). Within this antimodernist framework, McKay says that the rural Folk are celebrated for embodying “‘primitivism,’ ‘isolation,’ [and] ‘distance from modernity’” (xv). When Miss Laracy encounters a tourist, Joseph Blackwood—a government fisheries officer from St. John’s—and his daughter, Robin, who are moving into the “old Critch house” (11) for the summer, our expectations are set: this is going to be the quintessential story of the city dwellers’ nostalgic journey to a small backwater town to find themselves, and we are going to have one more outport pastoral idyll to add to our bookshelves. Despite the somewhat clichéd opening, however, there are also hints early on that this is not going to be a simple, or typical, narrative of return.

Joseph is still recovering from his separation from his wife when he decides to take his daughter away for a summer vacation. When they first arrive in town, they discover everything the country has to offer: “fields and wide-open spaces, houses and barns with huge country yards separating them, old lanes barely wide enough to drive a car through” (41-42). Joseph’s belief that the beautiful countryside will cure what ails him reflects a “tourist gaze,” and—in his observations about the landscape—he participates in what Frow calls “the economy of looking” (144). According to Frow, “It is this economy, the ‘belief in the restorative effects of happily constituted scenes, and an increasingly romantic orientation to aesthetic sightseeing’” (23), that forms the basis of
modern tourism and of what John Urry describes as the tourist gaze” (144). As Joseph perceives it, Bareneed is like a tourism advertisement come to life:

Bareneed was everything he had expected, full of charm and character—a perfect place for a summer vacation. When he had first discovered the advertisement in the St. John’s Telegram stating that the old two-storey fisherman’s house was for rent in Bareneed, a nostalgic smile had visited his lips. At once, Joseph had thought of his late father, Peter, and then of the black and white photographs of his Uncle Doug who still lived in Bareneed. […] Joseph hoped he would get to see his father’s homestead, where he assumed Doug still resided. (42)

In a sense, Joseph has become a tourist of his own family history, and the “nostalgic” lens through which he views that history here is undoubtedly restorative. He describes his desire to give his daughter “a heaping taste of the outport way of life. A bit of family history. A link to the past” (42), as if he and his daughter can consume their family history like a food or beverage. In Arjun Appadurai’s terms, Joseph might be described as having “armchair nostalgia, nostalgia without lived experience or collective historical memory” (78), because Joseph himself has very little connection with the community or lifestyle for which he is nostalgic.

However, Joseph’s nostalgic desire to reconnect with the outport way of life reveals a profound disconnection from his family and family heritage, which was precipitated by his father’s move to the city many years before:

Uncle Doug, a hardy fisherman like his father and grandfather before him, had disowned Joseph’s father when Peter resolved to pack up his family and head to the city. Joseph had been an infant at the time. Peter had declared he was through with fishing, didn’t care for the lifestyle, wanted better for his family. Better! That was the word that had exacted the damage. A life on land. Joseph’s mother said that Uncle Doug accused Peter of going after the easy life, turning soft, becoming a townie. A nasty racket had ensued and the two men never spoke to each other again. (42)
Ironically, however, like the Newfoundland expatriates who moved to the mainland in the 1960s, who, as I have noted, “found the reality of adjusting to life in the industrial cities of Ontario much different from the idealization set forth by Smallwood and the Confederates” (Cadigan 251), Joseph’s family finds that city life in St. John’s is fraught with its own difficulties, and we are left to wonder whether it is any easier or any better than the outport life. City people, it seems, die of city ailments: “Joseph’s parents had both passed away, his father first, of brain cancer thought to have been caused by toxins in the building where he worked for thirty years as a government clerk in the tourism department. His mother had died six months later. Natural causes, the doctor had said. A smothered heart, Joseph assumed” (44). Joseph’s father’s death at the hands of the tourism industry, and his mother’s consequent death of a broken heart, symbolize the toxic nature of modern urban existence, and also foreshadow Harvey’s critique of the tourism industry’s potential destructiveness—one of the first hints that this novel’s antimodernist vision is not as reductive or essentializing as it first appears.

Bareneed, as it turns out, is not an idyllic haven isolated from the forces of modernity, and the novel’s poignant portrayal of tourism emphasizes the community’s dependence on tourist dollars now that the cod fishery has collapsed. Doug Blackwood, Joseph’s “hardy fisherman” (42) uncle, recognizes this dependency on outside resources and bitterly resents it, and he is nostalgic for the days when the fishery flourished. But rather than mystifying class relations and concealing the material circumstances of tourism—which, as I noted in my introduction, is the problem with nostalgic, antimodern
visions according to McKay (xvi)—the narrative as it is focalized through Doug’s eyes actually “exposes the coercive conditions behind the performance of culture for tourist consumption” (Wyile, “Going” 171).

Doug exemplifies his understanding of the power dynamics of tourism one day on his way to catch a few cod illegally, when he spots a large crowd of people down by the wharf. Although he is mistaken in his belief that they are tourists witnessing a festival, his observations about the effects of tourism in Bareneed are still apt:

> It was probably just the commencement of some sort of stunned celebration. The town was always holding fairs and festivals and soirees and jamborees and jubilees. Might even be a celebration of wharfs, lorded over by some bunch of snotty monarchists. The Royal International Day of the Imperial Wharf or some other brand of nonsense. The frigging council was always trying to drag in a crowd of tourists to show them the beauty of Bareeed. Like anyone needed to be convinced. Christ, this was always the most glorious spot on Earth. God’s country. [. . .] Why did they assume they had to peddle the beauty to everyone, try to make a fortune from it when the fortune was already here? (148-149)

According to Boym, irony and humour are two strategies that distinguish reflective nostalgia—which is capable of “critical thinking” (50)—from restorative nostalgia, which “takes itself dead seriously” (49). In his ironic (and reflective) assessment of tourist festivals, Doug reveals that—in the words of Frow—tourism involves the “commodification of reciprocal bonds, of the environment, and of culture” in which the “logic of contemporary capital [. . .] extends private appropriation and ownership from material to immaterial resources” (151). Uncle Doug is no simple fisherfolk, blissfully

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3 Although he does not refer to Doug as antimodern, or nostalgic, Wyile suggests that Doug’s criticism of tourism is part of Harvey’s “resistant reading” of tourism (“Going Out” 171; see also 172).
unaware of and unaffected by the logic of capitalism and modernity; on the contrary, he recognizes the perversity of commodifying the natural environment and local culture for the benefit of outsiders. His snide remark that he might even be witnessing “a celebration of wharfs” (149) shows the way in which local culture is manipulated for a tourist audience.

Furthermore, as this passage continues, Doug reveals his understanding that tourism can be both voracious and violent:

Put the people of Bareneed on display like they were museum pieces, the last of the fisherfolk done up in period costumes for some arse-backward reenactment. Have a good look, ladies and gentlemen. Step right up. See how they wiggle like fish on the ends of a hook, gasping their final breath. Bait for you to nip at. See how their boats are rotting and their children don’t have a clue what a codfish even looks like. No more children going out to sea with their fathers, no more passing of the trade. It was a crime against existence itself. (149)

Here too Doug’s assessment is savvy: reenactment is “arse-backward” because all reenactments for tourists are, by their very nature, distorted and destructive. As Frow argues, the “structure of the tourist experience involves a paradoxical relation [. . .] to the cultural or ontological Other [. . .]. It is tourism itself that destroys (in the very process by which it constructs) the authenticity of the tourist object” (146). The metaphor of the tourist audience as fish who are nipping at the bait that is local culture illustrates this destructive process and might also prod the conscience of Harvey’s urbanite readers: we are witnessing not fishing, but ersatz fishing. In fact, the locals are no longer fishing at all: in this metaphor they are bait waiting to be consumed by the bigger fish—the

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4 Appadurai’s other name for “armchair nostalgia” (78) is “ersatz nostalgia” (79).
The people of Bareneed are not mannequins in a museum, but in participating in various reenactments they might as well be because, as Doug astutely notes, they are committing a “crime against existence itself”: their performance is pure simulacrum, in Platonic and Baudrillardan terms, “the copy of a copy” (Frow 126). Doug’s vision might be said to be the Newfoundland equivalent to Baudrillardan melancholy. According to Frow, Baudrillard’s “is a melancholy vision of the emptying out of meaning (that is, of originals, of stable referents) from a world that is henceforth made up of closed and self-referring systems of semiotic exchange. [. . .] His is a historical vision: there was a referent; it has been lost; and this loss is, as in Plato, the equivalent of a moral fall” (126). The reenactment is tragic because there is no reality behind it: in the wake of the collapse of the cod fishery, there are no fish to be caught by the locals, and there is no traditional occupation to pass on to the children.

Doug’s belief that he is witnessing a spectacle put on for tourists is juxtaposed with his own memory of going out in “his father’s skiff to fish for the very first time” (149). This memory of what he describes as a “community afloat” (150) is nothing like the performances that the Bareneed locals put on for the tourists, and this stark juxtaposition illustrates that—as Frow suggests—the simulacrum’s “untruth is defined by

5 As Wyile suggests, “Here Harvey, like Ian McKay, stresses the irony of performing a seafaring way of life that has been eradicated, so that tourism becomes a kind of cultural necrophilia—getting off on the corpse of the departed, as it were” (“Going” 173).
its distance from the original” (126). Doug’s reminiscences are interrupted by his disgruntled realization that, even if the fisheries were still alive, his own lineage has already cut themselves off from their inheritance:

Now Doug was the last man left in his immediate family. The only fisherman. And to make matters worse, his nephew, Joseph, his last living kin, had mustered up the unmitigated gall to land himself a job as a fisheries officer. What sort of frigged-up thing was that? And now Joseph was in Barenreed, right up the road from him. He’d heard the word from Aida Murray who’d heard from the woman who bought the house and rented it out to townie gawkers every summer. Doug’s nephew, Joseph—a government fish spy. (150-151)

As a “townie gawker” and government “fisheries officer,” Joseph is not just an outsider. In Doug’s eyes he is one of the worst kinds of outsiders; he is one of “a bunch of pasty-faced bureaucrats” who told people, “Tie up your boats. Simple as that,” and whose response to the devastating loss of the local fishery was to tell fishermen to “[s]tay on land and learn a new trade. Train in Technology. Train in Business Administration. Train in Pet Grooming” (151). These solutions sound like a Sally Struthers advertisement for distance education and, not surprisingly, are unsatisfactory compensation for the loss of a way of life. As Doug pictures himself “styling the fur on a poodle,” he thinks of the compensation packages provided by the government as “[b]loody handouts [. . .]. No better than welfare” that are supposed to help people “get through the transition from life to no life” (151). In Doug’s eyes, a life without fishing is no life at all.

Of course, the tourists themselves are not responsible for the collapse of the cod fishery, but as Frow argues, the “logic of tourism is that of the relentless extension of commodity relations and the consequent inequalities of power between center and periphery” (151). That is, tourism is part of the same logic—capitalist logic—that has
exploited the environment to the point where the fisheries have collapsed. The government’s response to the collapse has been to develop the tourist economy as a replacement for the fisheries, and this is how—to borrow David Creelman’s assessment of tourism in the Maritimes—a “genuine sense of loss was subsequently reworked by provincial tourism industries into a marketing tool” (11). As I noted in my introduction, this kind of institutional nostalgia is paradoxical, however, because “this new obsession with the past reveals an abyss of forgetting and takes place in inverse proportion to its actual preservation” (Boym 16).

In *The Town that Forgot How to Breathe*, Joseph’s relationship to his family heritage illustrates this paradox. As a tourist from St. John’s he represents the exploitative gaze of the center, and the kind of “armchair nostalgia” (Appadurai 78) I have discussed earlier, but as a figure who is one generation removed from the fishing industry and outport culture, he also represents the changing way of life that is part of the “genuine loss” and forgetting of—as well as nostalgia for—local culture. Uncle Doug recognizes this loss, but so does Joseph himself. Awakening from a dream in which his estranged wife has slept with a “burly exciting man” (86), Joseph thinks,

6 Moreover, like the resource economy, the tourist economy treats people and places as exchangeable; hence, tourism “‘is ethically troubling because it exemplifies the transformation of living people (and their customs and beliefs) into articles of exchange’(41)” (McKay, qtd. in Wyile “Going Out” 173).

7 Although Creelman does not include Newfoundland in his study, many of his observations are applicable not just to the Maritimes, but to the Atlantic region as a whole.
Kim had once thought that Joseph was such a man. A man of the sea, a man of rugged fisherman stock. When they were first dating he had proudly detailed his lineage. Kim had expected outlandish stories from him, but beyond the tales he had been told of his Uncle Doug, Joseph could offer nothing more, seemingly stripped of historical significance in his move from outport to city. (87)

Here Joseph laments that he has nostalgia without lived memory, or in the words of Appadurai, “nostalgia without lived experience or collective historical memory” (78).

One of his professed purposes for returning to Bareneed is to recover some of his family’s past from Uncle Doug: “Uncle Doug was Peter’s only brother and the last living member of that family, and so Joseph felt a need and obligation [sic] to get to know him before he was gone, taking his stories and family folklore with him to the grave” (43).

The question that the novel poses is whether or not this past can be recovered.

The collapse of the fisheries also causes the Bareneed locals to feel as if they have been “stripped of historical significance,” and results in profound feelings of displacement, which manifest themselves in a series of symptoms. These symptoms bear a striking resemblance to seventeenth-century doctors’ accounts of nostalgia. According to Boym,

Nostalgia was said to produce ‘erroneous representations’ that caused the afflicted to lose touch with the present. Longing for their native land became their single-minded obsession. The patients acquired a ‘lifeless and haggard countenance,’ and ‘indifference towards everything,’ confusing past and present, real and imaginary events. One of the early symptoms of nostalgia was an ability to hear voices or see ghosts. (3)

Aside from the emotional effects and psychological symptoms, nostalgia was also accompanied by physiological symptoms. In fact, says Boym, doctors believed that it “incapacitated the body”: “Longing for home exhausted the ‘vital spirits,’ causing
nausea, loss of appetite, pathological changes in the lungs, brain inflammation, cardiac arrests, high fever, as well as marasmus and a propensity for suicide” (4).

When we first encounter a former fisherman Muss Drover and his mother, Donna—the first Bareneed residents whose afflictions are described in some detail—their profound despondency and despair sound pathological. Donna has stopped taking care of her physical appearance and her “countenance” is definitely “haggard”: “The dark roots of her blonde hair showed plainly in the sunlight. She hadn’t bothered having her hair done that month [. . .]. The perm had grown out completely. Her hair’s want of style emphasized the rough chunkiness of her face, and the brown bags under her eyes were made more apparent by her recent paleness” (16). While Donna is haggard, her son Muss is almost catatonic. As she approaches his house with a load of groceries, she anticipates the scene inside:

She knew what awaited her behind that door: Muss would be seated in the parlour, a frightening violence eclipsing his eyes whenever he dragged his stare away from the television to regard her. His anger seemed to have compounded each time Donna visited. Ten days ago, when she suggested they take a shot up to the Caribou Lounge for a beer and a bit of video lottery, Muss had refused to leave his home, claiming there was nothing left for him out in the world. (16)

Muss’s complete apathy is interrupted only by brief eruptions of violence, which frighten his mother. And aside from these long periods of gloom and brief spurts of rage, he appears unable to muster up any sort of emotion; he “refus[es] to look at” his mother “when she sp[eaks]” to him, and he remains fixated on the television (17). He has even stopped eating and—like his mother—he has not been taking care of his physical appearance: his hair is “tangled” and “dishevelled,” he is unshaven, and he wears “the
same black jeans and blue denim shirt he’d been wearing for weeks” (17). This despondency, despair, loss of appetite and want of care for personal hygiene—all believed to be symptoms of nostalgia in the seventeenth century—could perhaps be symptomatic of any sort of depression. The difference with this disease, however, is that it is accompanied by ghostly visions and severe breathing difficulties—two of the key symptoms of nostalgia noted by Hofer—and it proves in Muss’s case, and for many Bareneed residents after him, to be fatal.

However, there is one key difference between the symptoms of seventeenth-century nostalgics and the symptoms of the Bareneed residents: for the seventeenth-century nostalgic, loss of homeland caused chronic longing (Boym 3). It was the fixation on the past—whether real or imaginary—which was perceived to be pathological. In The Town that Forgot How to Breathe, on the other hand, it is forgetting itself that is pathological. Whereas seventeenth-century nostalgia was precipitated by the loss of the homeland, in Bareneed the residents have lost their central occupation, and their raison d’être—the cod fishery—and this loss seems to have prompted an existential crisis and a crisis of meaning. In the absence of the fisheries, the residents of Bareneed have lost their way of life and have forgotten how to live. It is not simply that they cannot breathe, it is that they have forgotten how. Yet rather than longing for their past life, those with the illness seem intent on obliterating all signs of it. Donna’s vehement response to seeing the barn nearby her house, which she sees as symbolic of her history, illustrates her desire to destroy all connections with the past: “Donna would burn the barn to the ground if she
had a match. It was cluttered with old things, things she would never use, things that reminded her of her past life, her husband, long gone, her job, long gone, her life…No, burning the barn was insane. What was she thinking? She would hack it to bits with an axe” (20).

Her desire to destroy the past is not satisfied, however. The more she tries to repress the past, the more her body deteriorates, and the more she is haunted by uncanny visions. As she is driving through Bareneed, for example, she notes,

Two crab boats were tied up at the wharf where three children cast lines out into the calm water, trying to catch their deaths. No, not their deaths, but fish. Why had she thought such a thing, she wondered. Why? The children were catching tomcods, flatfish or sculpins. But what were they really catching, what unheard of forms lay secreted away beneath the fish scales? Why did the children catch fish at all? Didn’t they just let them go again, throw them back? Pure futility. And why the desire in the first place to snag and pull living things from the sea? (18)

This passage recalls Doug’s assessment of ersatz fishing. But whereas Doug finds solace in juxtaposing ersatz fishing with the original—his critique of tourism is followed by his recollection of going out with his father to fish for the first time—Donna is unable to make such a juxtaposition. As her disease progresses, she loses all memory. Moreover, the simulacrum of fishing becomes, for Donna, an object of uncanny terror, a sign of the death of fishing. Her Freudian slip—that the children are “catch[ing] their deaths”—illustrates that the simulacrum, as Baudrillard would say, does not require the real in order to reproduce itself. The real, argues Baudrillard, is irrelevant (167). Rather than experiencing Baudrillardian melancholy or nostalgia for the real, like Doug, Donna can only see simulacrum fishing as, in Freud’s terms, “the uncanny harbinger of death”—the death of the original (“The Uncanny” 235).
As the mysterious illness progresses, its victims become consumed with a rage that manifests itself in violent outbursts. Andrew Slade, one of the locals who has been stricken with the disease, directs his rage at Joseph and his daughter Robin, who—in Andrew’s mind—represent the problems caused by “Stupid arsehole tourists,” “Townies” and “Outsiders” (108). He believes that tourists and outsiders “just ruin things, coming in here and changing everything” (108) and so, in his feverish rage, he decides to try to drive Robin and Joseph away:

Bending down, he picked up a good-size rock. It was warm in his hand. A proper weight to do damage. He squeezed it and fear clutched in his chest. He noticed he wasn’t breathing. It was as though the air had been sucked out of his lungs. [. . .] Pulling in a harsh breath, he heard his older brother’s voice in his head, ‘Everything’s ruined by people comin’ into Bareneed, ruined by foreigners takin’ all our fish in their giant factory boats offshore, stealin’ from us, takin’ all the jobs. Ruinin’ everythin’, ruinin’ our lives. I’d murder the whole lot of ‘em if I could.’ (108)

On one hand, Andrew’s thoughts hearken back to the tradition—begun by the nineteenth-century nationalists, Patrick Morris and William Carson—of constructing Newfoundland as a place that is “deprived and oppressed by outsiders” (O’Flaherty 56). It is easy to blame outsiders for economic collapse and, when resources are scarce, it seems that our impulse is to protect what we have from outside invasion. Indeed, in his assessment of overfishing, Charles Clover notes that the “ban on catching cod for the foreseeable future has sharpened the fishermen’s resentment of seals and foreigners—usually, but not always, in that order” (127). On the other hand, however, Andrew’s vitriolic thoughts reveal his innate understanding that the logic of tourism is, as I have already noted, capitalist logic, which—to borrow Frow’s words—expresses itself in the “relentless
extension of commodity relations and the consequent inequalities of power between center and periphery” (Frow 151). The collapse of the cod fisheries is just one example of the fact that, in the age of late capitalism, there is not just one center, there are many centers, and Andrew’s outburst is an expression of the powerlessness he feels about the exploitation of resources that seems to be coming from all sides at once.  

Uncle Doug, a former inshore fisherman who is not sick, shares Andrew Slade’s bitterness towards foreign factory boats, which is not surprising given the historical strife between local inshore fishermen and the offshore fisheries in Newfoundland. If foreign trawlers are still allowed to fish outside Canada’s two-hundred-mile limit, then Uncle Doug and other local fishermen believe that it is their prerogative to continue fishing inshore as well:

There were still others in the community, besides him, who fished for cod. There were plenty of cod still in the water and plenty of them being robbed from the waters by foreign trawlers anchored outside the two-hundred-mile limit. Foreigners sucking up all the fish. They were the worst kind of thieving bastard cheats. Perfectly legal for a bunch of foreigners to drain our waters, but not legal for decent folk to catch a single codfish from the waters that had provided sustenance to generations of their forefathers. (152)

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8 Citing the work of John Urry, Wylie notes that a key consideration in tourism is the ‘extent to which tourism can be identified and blamed for supposedly undesirable economic and social developments’ (53). Such an impulse, furthermore, is usually more evident when there are significant economic, cultural, and ethnic differences between tourists and visitors and ‘when the host population is experiencing rapid economic and social change’ (Urry 53), as is the outport Newfoundland of Harvey’s novel. Thus the resentment of the residents is directed in part at tourists because they are seen as exploiting the vulnerability of a society in dire circumstances. (“Going Out” 172)
Although Doug’s perception that there are “still” “plenty of cod” left is debatable, his assessment that foreign trawlers are “drain[ing] our waters” is not. According to the David Suzuki Foundation website, “Bottom trawling has been acknowledged as the most destructive form of fishing commercially practiced.”

The reason trawling is so destructive is aptly illustrated by journalist Charles Clover, who says that trawling the sea floor would be analagous to “industrial hunter-gatherers” (1) hunting in the African Sahara with massive nets: “Imagine what people would say if a band of hunters strung a mile of net between two immense all-terrain vehicles and dragged it at speed across the plains of Africa. This fantastic assemblage, like something from a Mad Max movie, would scoop up everything in its way,” including “predators,” “lumbering endangered herbivores,” and “herds of impala and wildebeest, family groups of warthogs and wild dogs” (1). The ramifications of this kind of mass, catch-all kind of hunting technique, says Clover, would be monstrous:

Picture how the net is constructed, with a huge metal roller attached to the leading edge. This rolling beam smashes and flattens obstructions, flushing creatures into the approaching filaments. The effect of dragging a huge iron bar across the savannah is to break off every outcrop and uproot every tree, bush, and flowering plant, stirring columns of birds into the air. Left behind is a strangely bedraggled landscape resembling a harrowed field. (1)

To add insult to injury, “[t]here are no markets for about a third of the animals they have caught” (1) and so the “corpses [are] dumped on the plain to be consumed by scavengers” (2). According to Clover, “This efficient but highly unselective way of killing animals is known as trawling” (2). Described in this way, with this analogy, it is easy to see why
inshore fishermen like Doug would perceive trawlers as voracious “thieving bastard cheats” (152).

The conflict between the inshore and offshore fisheries in Canada dates back to the 1980s, in the wake of the Canadian government establishing the two-hundred-mile limit “as a protectionist measure for the national fisheries” (181), says journalist Mark Kurlansky, when Canada was trying to save the fledgling industry by “investing in a Grand Banks fleet” (181). According to Kurlansky, “Under a government bailout plan, the Newfoundland seafood companies were merged into a conglomerate called Fishery Products International, and government funds were used to resuscitate the Nova Scotian company called National Sea Products” (181). In the short term, the plan appeared to be a success and “the Canadian government could, and did, claim that it had taken possession of its banks and turned the Atlantic fishery around into a profitable sector of the economy” (182). But the success of the corporate and federal government backed offshore fisheries was not felt by the inshore fishermen. In fact, the booming offshore

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9 According to the David Suzuki Foundation, Unlike the common ENGO position on bottom trawling, DSF does NOT believe bottom trawling is comparable to “clear-cutting” the ocean. DSF believes there are habitat types and areas where bottom trawling may be an acceptable method to catch fish. Our concern, however, is that there is no comprehensive federal policy in place to properly zone this type of fishing method. Consequently, bottom trawling in many circumstances occurs over areas that are sensitive (e.g., deep sea) and not well-suited for the disturbance imposed by the fishing method. On the other hand, there are some areas (e.g., shallow, wave-disturbed sandy banks) where bottom trawling is perfectly acceptable. Areas that have never been trawled before (frontier areas) should be immediately closed to any exploration until comprehensive studies have taken place.
fisheries seemed to be matched by the decline of the inshore fishery: “[W]hile the new, offshore all-Canadian fishery was prospering, the inshore fishermen found their catches dropping off. They suspected the reason was that the offshore draggers were taking so many cod that the fish did not have a chance to migrate inshore to spawn” (183).

Although the inshore fishermen registered their complaints with the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, their concerns were ignored:

> The inshore fishermen complained to the regulatory agency [. . .] but the government had invested in offshore fishing, not inshore, and its political priority was to make its investment a success story. As the inshore stocks dwindled, the debate became increasingly acrimonious. On the one side were the inshore fishermen; on the other side were the fishermen’s union, the trawler workers, the seafood companies, and the government. (183)

Finally, the local inshore fishermen formed an association and in 1989 they “decided to sue the government in the hope of getting an injunction against bottom dragging. They charged that the Department of Fisheries and Oceans was not following environmental assessments” (183). Ironically, and tragically, the “court ruled against an injunction, saying it would have a negative impact on the economy and force National Sea’s Plant in St. John’s to close down for several months a year” (183-184). The rest, as they say, is history: the cod fisheries collapsed a mere three years later, at which point the government “moratorium on fishing the northern cod stock” resulted in “30,000 fishermen [being] out of work” (186).
Given the complexity of the fishing industry, and the number of factions involved, the blame for the collapse of the fisheries cannot be said to be one-sided. Yet the Canadian government’s accountability—especially considering their refusal to account for the interests of the inshore fishery—is surely high. As Kurlansky maintains, “That the government was not listening to the inshore fishermen is an understatement. The government was euphoric about Atlantic cod stocks and the future of the fisheries. Catches were rising, and fishermen who could not meet their quotas of redfish were given supplemental quotas of cod to make up the difference” (184). If the government had considered the assessment of the inshore fishermen that the hype about the fisheries rebound was ill-founded, and that “[i]n reality catches were increasing not from an abundance of fish but because the efficiency of a modern trawler fleet made it possible to

10 As Cadigan contends,
To be fair to federal Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) officials, the long-term process of fisheries modernization had divided communities and created complicated and often contradictory political pressures. For example, small-scale inshore fishers who used cod traps, long lines, and/or handlines, resented the higher incomes of the newer dragger owners and their crews. When overall fish catches had begun to drop by the mid-1980s, such resentment focused on the likely ecological damage the more intensive otter trawls were inflicting on fish stocks and on dragger skippers’ use of small-meshed nets, which increased cod catches by preventing the escape of small fish through the larger mesh of the trawl nets. (280)
locate the sectors with remaining cod populations and systematically clean them out” (185), it is possible that the collapse of the cod fisheries might have been circumvented.\(^\text{11}\)

Given this historical background, it is not hard to see why an inshore fisherman like Doug Blackwood would lump the Canadian government in with the group of foreigners, along with townies and tourists, who are not to be trusted. Doug’s resentment about “Bloody handouts” (151) is matched by his mistrust of any sort of government management:

> He’d be damned if he’d let those bastard government clerks, sitting in offices all day turning peskier and paler by the moment, have a file stuffed full of personal information about him. None of their goddamn business. He refused to take any of their stinking money. They couldn’t tell him what he could or couldn’t do. If he wanted to fish for cod, then he’d fish for cod. Who in the name of Christ were they to tell him different? Who gave them the high-and-mighty right? (151)

At first blush, Doug’s lack of compliance with government regulations seems to confirm Kurlansky’s observation that “[f]ishermen rarely consider regulations their responsibility. As they see it, that is the duty of the government—to make the rules—and it is their duty to navigate through them. If the stocks are not conserved, government mismanagement is to blame” (171). I would argue, however, that what makes Uncle Doug an idealized character—despite his contentious assumption about the wealth of cod still left in the ocean—is that his argument for eliminating bureaucratic interference is not matched by a lack of regard for conservation measures and the environment.

\(^{11}\) Even now, Canada refuses to agree to a moratorium on bottom trawling, despite international campaigns (see “Canada will not join call” and the Canadian Wildlife Foundation website).
On the contrary, Doug’s environmental ethos might best be described as one of “propriety”—to borrow an expression used by American writer and conservationist Wendell Berry. According to Berry, although propriety may be “an old-fashioned word” that is “not much in favor,” it is a concept worthy of reviving because it reminds us “that we are not alone” (Life 13). In other words, an understanding of propriety forces us to recognize our place in the world and our relationship to others: “The idea of propriety makes an issue of the fittingness of our conduct to our place and circumstances, even to our hopes. It acknowledges the always-pressing realities of context and influence; we cannot speak or act or live out of context” (13). Nor can we refuse to appreciate that “[o]ur life inescapably affects other lives, which inescapably affect our life” (13). Doug is acutely aware of the interdependence among people, and of the effects of his actions on the place—and the people—around him. He believes, for example, that nature is here to provide for us, but that we should only take what we need to sustain the local community. This belief is illustrated in his comparison between fisheries regulations and hunting licenses, which follows his assertion that he has the right to fish for cod:

The same went for hunting moose. What did a fellow need a moose license for, or a hunting season for, when the moose walked right into your backyard? You could shoot it with a 12 gauge pointed out your window, the barrel steadied on the sill. Boom. And the beast would fall over. There was your moose for the year. A fellow only needed one. Cut it up and freeze it, hand it out to family and friends who enjoyed a bit of moose meat, and that was that. That’s why nature was there, to provide for the people of the community. (151)

The idea—that we should take only what we need from nature, and that we should share nature’s bounty with others—reflects a kind of propriety, for as Berry says, “[p]ropriety
is the antithesis of individualism. To raise the issue of propriety is to deny that any individual’s wish is the ultimate measure of the world” (14).

Uncle Doug’s claim that we should only use nature’s abundance to provide for our community’s needs goes hand in hand with an ethos that we should interfere with nature as little as possible. He reveals this belief system, for instance, when he considers the consequences of people eating genetically engineered food:

That’s why the Lord Almighty put animals and fish on earth and in the oceans. For us to fill our bellies with. What was the Christly point of living otherwise, eating things out of cans made by scientists? They were making animals now. They were playing God and if a fellow ate these things made by scientists then what would happen to the fellow who ate them? What would he become? (151)

Doug believes that no good will come from man altering nature and that, in acting like God, we are only asking for trouble. Similarly, Berry argues that recognizing “our proper connection to the earth” requires the opposite of hubris (“Conservation” 35): “Good work is always modestly scaled, for it cannot ignore either the nature of individual places or the differences between places, and it always involves a sort of religious humility, for not everything is known” (35-36).

Doug’s concern that we are perverting the food chain is accompanied by feelings of disgust about man’s inappropriate use of technology, especially technology that is not “fitting” to “place and circumstance” (Life 13), or that lacks place sense, to recall Casey’s favorite expression. While fishing, he has a virulent reaction to a passing “speedboat,” for example, which he believes to be inappropriate because it disrupts and is oblivious to the natural surroundings:
A low pesky whining, like a mosquito, but too mechanical, sounded near him. He suspected a speedboat. [. . .] What sort of retarded fellow would drive a thing like that on the water? Someone who had no respect for the sea. Someone who was looking to get killed. Why did the boat need to go so fast and make so much noise? The sound increased and then receded as the boat turned back the way it came. Doug wished it was a mosquito so he could reach forward and bat it out of the water. (153)

This conviction, that it is generally wrong for humans to interfere with nature in such profound ways, may sound like the rantings of a layman, but it is a stance that is shared by early environmentalists like Aldo Leopold, who developed the idea of a “land ethic”—a concept to which I will later return. Suffice it to say here, the fundamental premise of Leopold’s philosophy is: “A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends to do otherwise” (224-225).

In contrast with Doug’s position that meddling with nature is potentially disastrous, and with his belief that—to borrow Berry’s words—“[g]ood work is always modestly scaled” (“Conservation” 35), the Canadian government has traditionally treated the ocean as a resource to be managed for our maximum benefit, and maximum benefit equals maximum profit. Seemingly ignoring the problem of supply, the government has assumed that the only limit is demand. The understanding that the ocean’s bounty is limitless, and the use of this theory in government policies, dates back to Thomas Huxley’s use, or abuse, of Darwin’s theory of natural selection. According to Kurlansky, The indomitable force of nature was a fashionable nineteenth-century belief. The age was marked by tremendous optimism about science. The lesson gleaned from Charles Darwin, especially as interpreted by the tremendously influential British scientific philosopher Thomas Henry Huxley, was that nature was a marvelous
and determined force that held the inevitable solutions to all life’s problems. (121-122)

The only limits, according to this ideology, are those of the human imagination, and so our progress and development are assumed to be without bounds.

Huxley played a crucial role in establishing Britain’s fishing policies in the latter half of the nineteenth century. As the age of steam was supplanting the age of sail, fishermen expressed reservations about the limitations of the fish stocks (Clover 102). However, according to Clover, their concerns were pooh-poohed by scientists like Huxley:

In Britain, where fishing was first industrialized with steam trawlers working out of Hull, Grimsby, and Aberdeen around the 1860s, it was the fishermen, not scientists, who first pointed out that fish populations in parts of the North Sea were being systematically wiped out. The absence of fish in their old grounds required them to steam further out to find new ones. The scientific establishment, in the shape of Thomas Huxley, met this observation with contempt. (102)

Clover says that after chairing a commission to look into the fishermen’s complaints, Huxley’s response was to argue that “it may be affirmed with confidence that, in relation to our present modes of fishing, a number of the most important sea fisheries, such as the cod fishery, the herring fishery, and the mackerel fishery, are inexhaustible” (102). The consequences of Huxley’s assessment were dire, especially in Canada where, says Kurlansky, “[f]or the next hundred years, Huxley’s influence would be reflected in Canadian government policy” (123).\(^{12}\)

\(^{12}\) In an “1885 report by L.Z. Joncas in the Canadian Ministry of Agriculture,” for example, Joncas argued,
Huxley’s dubious conclusion— that the resources of the ocean are limitless— was influenced by a somewhat faulty comparison between fishing and farming; like Smallwood’s cockamamie schemes, which I discussed in Chapter 2, his conclusion was based on the faulty premise that places are sites to be “exchanged or merely manipulated” (Casey, Getting Back xiii). According to Clover, “Thomas Huxley famously declared that an acre of good North Sea fishing ground produced a ton of fish a week and an acre of land a ton of grain a year” (62). As Clover observes, there are major problems with this analogy; chiefly, Huxley’s “comparison with farming overlooks a crucial difference between farming and hunting-gathering: fishermen reap but they do not sow. Investment in new technology has the opposite effect in farming to that in fishing. […] Increased effort produces less catch” (63). In other words, as technology increases our capacity for

‘As to those fishes which, like cod, mackerel, herring, etc. are the most important of our sea fishes […] I say it is impossible, not merely to exhaust them, but even noticeably to lessen their number by the means now used for their capture, especially if, protecting them during their spawning season, we are contented to fish them from their feeding grounds.’ (qtd. in Kurlansky 123)

As Clover argues, Huxley’s model also influenced subsequent scientific models, which became the basis for international policies. The “maximum sustainable yield” (MSY) model, for example, which was the product of European and North American research, “encouraged fishermen to drive down the original population to a lower level—taking up to half of the total spawning stock every year—in the belief that this would boost the productivity of the population” (105). Although the “concept of fishing to provide maximum sustained yield” has been “comprehensively discredited,” it “remains the unaltered objective of several international conventions, such as the one governing tuna stocks in the Atlantic, which was negotiated in the 1960s” (106). The MSY model has also been employed as recently as 2002: “it was included in the part of the declaration of the 2002 Johannesburg summit on sustainable development that applies to fisheries” (106).
catching fish, the fish population declines and then, as a result, more technology is needed to catch fewer fish: this is the vicious cycle that Clover is describing. Models of fishing that are based on practices of farming thus demonstrate a keen lack of place sensitivity, with disastrous results.

Like *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams*, *The Town that Forgot How to Breathe* is also concerned with the loss of local place knowledge—a phenomenon that is attributed to our use of technologies that, to recall Casey’s terminology, privilege *cartographic* knowledge, which “gives us the measure of *sited spaces*” (*Representing* 169), over *chorographic* knowledge, which is concerned “with the particularity of given places—with what makes these places the unique localities they are” (157). Sonar, which is used to locate fish and to navigate the ocean floor, is analogous to cartographic knowledge, and it is another form of technology that the novel treats with disdain because—in its lack of place sensitivity—it disrupts the natural environment and has a detrimental effect on marine life. This time it is not a local Bareneed resident, but a marine biologist from St. John’s—Kim Blackwood, Joseph’s estranged wife—who critiques the effects of sonar use in a paper she is attempting to write for *BioJournal*: “‘The behaviour of sea life is constantly affected by the intrusion of environmental factors, such as toxins, overpopulation, underpopulation, water temperature fluctuations and electronic signals. Sonar, for instance has been linked to inactivity in whales, a decrease in game playing and whale song’” (159).
Electronic signals have wrought havoc not only on marine life: electronic technology has also disrupted human play, communication and place attachment. The reason that Kim is separated from her husband and daughter in the first place is partly because of the disruptive forces of technology in their lives. When Kim thinks about what it would take for her and Joseph to reconcile, she realizes how modern technologies have affected their family’s interactions with each other:

Of course, she knew there were obstacles that required sorting out. When Kim and Joseph had lived together, they had each had separate offices in the house, each with their own computer. They worked whenever they could steal a free moment. Robin was often left to draw or watch a wildlife video by herself. Not that she was neglected—they did plenty of fun stuff together—it just seemed that computers were gradually nudging the fun time out of the picture. (113)

Rather than sharing her experience of nature and her knowledge of wildlife with her daughter personally, Kim plunks Robin in front of a television set. Robin is only two generations removed from her Great Uncle Doug, but in such a short time, the means of one generation passing knowledge down to the next has changed completely: cartographic knowledge of homogenous space—transmitted by the television—has replaced chorographic knowledge of local, particular places, transmitted through storytelling.

This marked shift becomes more obvious if one compares Robin’s interactions with her parents to the way in which Doug’s father teaches him how to fish. Rather than learning about the ocean on his own, through books or television, like Robin, Doug is taught how to fish through experience: experience not just with his father, but with the entire community of local fishermen. Recalling his boyhood days on the water, Doug
remembers being a part of this community, in which each member was an integral part of the larger whole:

The voices of the men in the dark air, the dialect of fellowship was something Doug had never forgotten. It was as though they were in a huge casual room, yet unlike in a room, the voices were softened by the cushion of the velvety sea. The voices all around him spoke briskly to one another, joking, laughing. They were all waiting to fish and there was no sense of animosity or competition among them. They each had their own space and they were content to be a single part of the community afloat. (150)

When Doug, as a result of his inexperience, begins to whistle, he learns that whistling and fishing do not mix. The other boats gradually depart and his father warns Doug that “‘Tis da worst sort o’ luck ta whistle on water’” (150). The result of his whistling is that the “catch had been less than expected” and “Doug’s carelessness was singled out and blamed” (150). Although this sort of folk knowledge—that whistling on the water is bad luck—seems to be merely superstitious, it is actually based on an intimate chorographic knowledge of the ocean, gained both from personal experience and from the experiences handed down from one generation to the next. Like the superstitious saying, “Red skies at night, sailor’s delight. Red skies at morning, sailors take warning,” this myth about whistling has its foundation in a profound understanding of place: whistling scares away fish. And although Doug is admonished for his mistake, he is not banned from the community. On the contrary, “[h]e had remained a fisherman all of his life” just like his “father and his father’s father” (150).

As The Town that Forgot How to Breathe laments, however, this kind of chorographic folk knowledge tends to be devalued in the age of sonar, trawlers and television sets. The result of new technologies, notes Kurlansky, is the death of the
traditional forms of knowledge that required fishermen to be intimately acquainted with
the seascape. According to Kurlansky,

For centuries, fishermen have had to study the lay of the ocean’s floor and the
skies. Nova Scotian fishermen used to look for what they called ‘cherry bottom,’
a type of red gravel floor favored by cod. They would drop a weighted line with a
piece of tallow and bring it up to look at the color of gravel it had picked up. Or
fishermen searched the horizon for a fast-forming cloud of seabirds. (141)
The reason that the fishermen looked for “clouds of seabirds” was that “herring or
capelin” would gather near the surface when the “cod and other groundfish [were]
attacking from below” (141). The birds would wait for the herring and capelin and, in
turn, the fishermen would wait for the cod—an example, says Kurlansky, of “the food
chain in all its violence, showing itself before the ultimate predator, who then knows
where to cast his lines or nets” (141).

However, in the last half-century or so, “[a]ll of these techniques are vanishing,”
and have been replaced by various technologies (Kurlansky 141):

Schools of fish are now located by sonar or by spotter aircraft, equipment
developed during World War II to locate enemy submarines. Once the fish are
located, the trawler can move in and clean out the area, taking not only the target
catch but everything else in the area, the by-catch. As the 1950s Gorton’s
advertisement put it, ‘Thanks to these methods, fishing is no longer the hit-or-miss
proposition it was 50 years ago.’ (141)

It is also hardly the same kind of community enterprise that Doug remembers in his
nostalgic visions of youth. The use of sonar means that fishermen no longer need to
possess knowledge of local seascapes in order to navigate the waters safely and
productively. Take for example what Clover calls “the latest development” in “trawler
technology”: “seabed-mapping software, such as Piscatus 3D” (80). As Clover explains,
“This [software] combines modern computer technology with the traditional echo sounder to extract even more information from the sounds it sends to and receives from the seabed. The result is that fishermen can see into the depths in virtual reality” (80). Provided the fisherman knows how to operate the software properly, he does not have to exchange wisdom with other fishermen about the local features or local dangers because he can see them for himself.

In this way, sonar technology eliminates many of the dangers of fishing (see Clover 80-84), but it also eliminates the necessity for remembered knowledge of and intimate acquaintance with particular locales—in other words, for chorographic knowledge. As I noted in Chapter 2, according to Casey, chorographic knowledge requires an understanding of and a connection to localities: “Locality is a key word, because it designates not an indifferent site (as is the case with the featureless space of a sheerly cartographic map), but a unique place not to be found elsewhere on earth” (156). By using sonar technology to map the sea floor, foreign trawlers can fish off the coast of Newfoundland without having to be connected to or knowledgeable about locales, and local fishermen can fish without having to communicate with each other. Thus, the modernization of the fishing industry—and its attendant use of technology—has changed the relationship of fishermen to place. Fishing techniques that rely upon sonar are part of an ideology that looks at the environment entirely for its value in monetary terms, and these techniques treat the ocean as space rather than place. The history of the place, or the
location’s particular characteristics and sensitivities are regarded as irrelevant, except to the extent that they help or hinder fishing productivity.

Trawling for fish with sonar is also a manifestation of what environmentalist Bill McKibben calls the “efficiency revolution” (7). In order to support the ideology of growth, businesses had to become ever-more efficient and, says McKibben, “By the early twentieth century, increasing efficiency had become very nearly a religion, especially in the United States, where stopwatch-wielding experts like Frederick Taylor broke every task into its smallest parts, wiping out inefficiencies with all the zeal of a pastor hunting sins, and with far more success” (6). The efficiency revolution was not confined merely to business operations either: “Soon, as Jeremy Rifkin observes, the efficiency revolution encompassed everything, not just factory work but homemaking, schoolteaching, and all the other tasks of modern life: ‘efficiency became the ultimate tool for exploiting both the earth’s resources in order to advance material wealth and human progress’” (7). Nor was the worship of efficiency and growth confined to the United States: “As the new millennium began, growth had become the organizing ideology for corporations and individuals, for American capitalists and Chinese communists, for Democrats and Republicans. For everyone” (10).

The use of sonar in fishing is just one example of efficient technology that is used to promote maximum growth and productivity, while exploiting the ocean’s resources for maximum profit. In fact, according to one fisherman Clover consulted, Michael Derosière, sonar makes areas that were once too dangerous to fish quite accessible: “It
means I can update the data in real time – so we can fish areas we used to avoid, whatever there might be down there, even the most treacherous shelves or rock formations” (82). It also means, as Derosière marvels, that trawlers can go-it-alone and thereby catch more fish: “‘This is a great new tool which soon pays for itself because there aren’t many others fishing where we go, so we can be sure of hauling in much bigger catches’” (82). This type of fishing thereby fosters a more competition-based model of the fishing industry than does the co-operative fishing of the inshore locals that Doug fondly recalls. Trawling with sonar also illustrates McKibben’s assessment that, although the efficiency revolution contributes to the accumulation of wealth for certain individuals, it does not contribute to the development of communities.13 On the contrary, by this century we have become “not just individualists; we are hyper-individualists such as the world has never known” (McKibben 96). Moreover, “growth, at least as we now create it, is producing more inequality than prosperity, more insecurity than progress” (McKibben 11).

In *The Town that Forgot How to Breathe*, Blind River exemplifies a community that prospered when foreign capital invested in its resource industry—in this case mining iron ore. But it also illustrates the “insecurity” and “inequality” fostered by an economy

13 As Creelman notes of the Maritimes, although the changes in fishing technology have led to benefits for some, these changes have also had detrimental effects on local communities: “As their numbers have dropped and their unions solidified, some fishermen have seen their wages rise and their general standard of living improve. But the process of modernization has taken its toll on the culture, for the locally based, labour-intensive, inshore fishery” (9).
focused primarily on the principles of growth and efficiency. Following his assessment that foreign trawlers are “thieving bastard cheats” (152), Uncle Doug compares the consequences of offshore trawling to the results of foreign investment in the Blind Iron mines, and the comparison is revealing:

Blind Island had once been one of the most prosperous iron-ore-mining towns in the world. Doug had been over there a few times in the 1950s and seen how cosmopolitan it was. They even flew famous singers in from the States. Iron ore ships had been torpedoes by Nazi submarines during the Second World War, just off the coast. They were still resting on the bottom of the ocean. But now the mines on Blind Island were shut down and the town was a mere shadow of its former self. The island’s riches had been sucked dry by foreigners too. (153)

Although the locals prospered while the mines were in operation, corporations, whose commitments to Blind Island lasted only until the mines dried up, made the real profits. Corporations, whose primary commitment is to growth rather than to place, are free to move about as they like, to exploit resources until they are gone, and to leave crumbled communities in their wake. Thus, the negative impact of the boom and bust economy is felt chiefly by local places.

As I have suggested, in *The Town that Forgot How to Breathe*, the loss of local resource control is accompanied by the loss of traditional knowledge, which is partly tied to the death of storytelling. Harvey links the death of storytelling to the “efficiency revolution” (McKibben 7) and its attendant technologies, which supplant the necessity for human interaction and communication. In his examination of the consequences of this loss, Harvey’s vision is analagous to Walter Benjamin’s assessment of the death of storytelling in his essay, “The Storyteller” (1936). Benjamin laments that “the art of storytelling is coming to an end,” and that “something that seemed inalienable to us, the
securest among our possessions, [has been] taken from us: the ability to exchange experiences” (83). Whereas storytelling, like chorography, focuses on conveying our experience of place, information—“the new mode of communication” (88)—like cartography, does not require experience; like chorographic knowledge, experience “has fallen in value” (83-84). Unlike storytelling, the main priority of information is that it be efficient, and that it “lay[. . .] claim to prompt verifiability,” and the “prime requirement is that it appear ‘understandable in itself’” (89). Moreover, as with the demise of traditional knowledge, the death of storytelling results in a loss of intimacy among people, as human touch is replaced by the electronic machine, and this transformation has a deleterious effect on our relationship with place.

The death of storytelling—and consequent loss of intimacy among people and between people and place—does not just affect the city folk in the novel. Like Joseph, whose inability to tell his wife Kim any “outlandish stories [. . .] beyond the tales he had been told of his Uncle Doug” (87), and who feels “stripped of historical significance in

14 According to Chris Bongie, “Benjamin [. . .] consistently stressed that the modern era was a time constituted by ‘the increasing atrophy of experience’ (‘die zunehmende Verkümerung der Erfahrung’)” (9). However, as he notes, “opinions vary greatly as to when this decline set in. Benjamin himself at times dated the loss of a capacity for experience from the First World War” (9). At other times—in his “essays on Baudelaire,” for example—“the ‘atrophy of experience,’ and the consequent disappearance of what he termed ‘aura,’ is pushed back a half-century to the time of Haussmann’s Paris, if not before. The choice of a date and a place depends largely upon which version of modernity, or which reaction against it, is under consideration” (9). As I noted in my introduction, Newfoundland has experienced a series of antimodern movements, but the kind of outport nostalgia and the lament for the “‘atrophy of experience’” that Doug describes here became particularly acute after World War II (see O’Flaherty 146-152).
his move from outport to city” (87), Brian Chase—one of Bareneed’s RCMP officers—is unable to relate his experiences to his wife and feels a sense of alienation from her as a result. Before he came to Bareneed, he worked in “Native communities in Saskatchewan” (59). In order to deal with the violence he encountered in his work there, he tried to confide in his wife Theresa, but

His talk of rapes, child abuse, suicides and murders had seemed to actually wound her. Theresa was unable to buffer herself against the grimness the way that Chase had learned to. Even after he vowed not to talk about crime of any sort, it appeared as if Theresa was still absorbing the bleakness that Chase’s body had faced and somehow retained. In her sluggish, medicated tone, Theresa had said: ‘I can feel it coming off you, Brian. The terrible end of things.’ (59)

To keep the aura of violence away from his wife, Chase represses the need to reflect on his experiences. But he feels profoundly isolated from her: “The way she regarded him made him feel like an outsider in his own home” (59). To make “matters” worse, like Joseph, he feels displaced from his community: “Being half-Native, he was viewed with animosity by many Natives. It didn’t help matters that he had chosen to be an RCMP officer, to walk in the shoes of the white man, to inflict white man’s laws upon the people of the First Nations” (60). Just as Joseph is regarded as a traitor by his Uncle Doug for being a fisheries officer, and for exercising the laws of outsiders—the federal government—on the locals, so too is Chase regarded with suspicion by fellow Natives, who perceive him to be enforcing laws that do not jibe with local culture.

Considering the degree to which the intimacy between Chase and Theresa has deteriorated, it seems as if a move might be the fresh start that they need to reconnect with each other. In fact, a move to the country is just what the doctor orders: “when
Theresa’s doctor proposed that her depression might be largely situational, living as they were on the edge of the reserve, there was no other choice. Chase felt compelled to seek a transfer to a detachment with a low crime rate, in a region rural and remote” (60). The move to Port de Grave—a community near Chase’s new job in Bareneed—appears to do Theresa some good, at least initially. She and Chase buy an old country house, a fixer-upper, and Theresa “wean[s] herself off of medication and no longer lay[s] on the couch alone all night, mindlessly ingesting whatever happen[s] to be on television” (60). But in the wake of the collapse of the cod fishery,

Chase had started to catch the nip of violence in the air in Bareneed. The recent shutdown of the cod fishery had left half the town unemployed. [. . .] Chase had learned all about Bareneed’s plight over his seven months stationed in Port de Grave. Job loss created idleness and all that went with it: shifts in morals, alcohol becoming solace, abuses born of frustration and powerlessness, and suffering turning so severe it manifests itself as rage. (62)

And, as Chase has feared, Theresa’s depression and despondency return. She is haunted by dreadful nightmares, “dreams that always worsened and portrayed such repugnant acts of horror that she would not even repeat them to Chase” (61). As she returns to taking anti-depressants, which put an end to her nightmares but also “kill[. . .] her passion” (61), Chase retreats once again to cyberspace: “When he could steal a few minutes of free time, he was on the internet. He had upgraded his computer before leaving Saskatchewan, figuring he’d need it to keep in touch with the guys” (61).

Yet Chase still desires to come to terms with his experiences by sharing them with others. But like Theresa, he is unable to relate his past experiences to anyone, even his “fellow officers”:
He’d often have the urge to trade stories with his fellow officers at the Port de Grave detachment. The guys would swap their tales and Chase would start picturing what was left of the murder victims, the barbaric rapes, the mutilations, the frightened beaten children. [. . .] Plenty of stories to tell. Regardless, he chose not to say a word, had no idea how to pick the right words. Speaking about such tragedies would seem like empty-headed bravado. And it was anything but. It was human anguish and sorrow: nothing to be made light of. (61-62)

Chase’s focus on the gory details and on the evidence of the crimes reflects his obsessive preoccupation with information—all of these details are indeed “prompt[ly] verifiab[le]” (Benjamin 89). But what Chase really needs to help him cope with the magnitude of these tragedies is to share his experiences in a narrative; because he is unable to share his stories, however, he remains disconsolate and isolated.

Like Chase, many of Bareneed’s locals—and its visitors—deal with their grief in isolation, in ways that are portrayed as being as inadequate and as ineffective as Chase’s obsession with the internet. While some characters, like Rayna, drown their sorrows in the bottle, others use prescribed medication to deal with their sadness. The novel is wary about what I—borrowing an apt phrase from amazon.com’s review of Elizabeth Wurtzel’s Prozac Nation—will refer to as the “psychopharmacology of an era.” Chase’s wife Theresa is not the only character in the novel who medicates her emotional distress. Before Joseph arrives in Bareneed for vacation, he experiences a variety of symptoms, which are strikingly similar to the mysterious illness that has broken out in Bareneed itself. He feels like “a man divided within himself, parts of who he once was anesthetized and detached” (35). One day, he has a frightening episode: “An inner wavering, a sense of being at sea for days and then abruptly put up on land, came fully over him. Alarm surged through his body. He broke out in a sweat as his heartbeat lurched to rise out of
him. It was an effort to swallow, his throat shut a muscle” (36). In addition to this feeling of alarm, “[h]e had difficulty drawing breath, and was stricken with tumultuous panic” (36). In an effort to determine the cause of this strange incident, he visits his family doctor who, without hesitation, proclaims a diagnosis and proposes a quick fix solution:

‘Panic attack,’ his doctor had matter-of-factly pronounced, while scribbling out a prescription for Ativan. ‘Nervous system overload. Probably from stress due to the separation. It’s amazing how common they are.’ Joseph had wondered if the doctor was referring to separations or panic attacks as being common. His doctor was always speaking quickly, in a hurry, double-booked. He tore the small sheet from the pad and leaned across his desk, handed it to Joseph between two fingers. ‘One or two of these under the tongue when needed. They work fast.’ The doctor nodded. A done deal. Pills would fix him. Science would stabilize him. (36)

Like information, science’s solution to Joseph’s emotional problems focuses on efficiency: the doctor believes that the pills are effective because they work fast. But Joseph’s misunderstanding—whether “separations or panic attacks” are “common”—illustrates the potential ineffectiveness of communication based solely on speed. And the pills may work quickly, but they relieve symptoms for only a brief time. Once the chemicals leave the bloodstream, their effect ends. The result is that the doctor has failed to uncover the root of Joseph’s problems, and so the prescription finds Joseph no closer to connecting intimately with his wife or to understanding his own emotions.

In this way, the value of science’s fast-acting, efficient, approach is analogous to Benjamin’s assessment of information: “The value of information does not survive the moment in which it was new. It lives only at that moment; it has to surrender to it completely and explain itself to it without losing any time” (90). Real communication, for Benjamin, involves telling stories, and storytelling does not prioritize speed or efficiency.
Although storytelling is not fast-acting, its effects are long lasting: “A story is different. It does not expend itself. It preserves and concentrates its strength and is capable of releasing it even after a long time” (90). The result of the decline of storytelling and the rise of information is that “the communicability of experience is decreasing. In consequence we have no counsel either for ourselves or for others” (86).\(^1\)

Kim and Joseph’s inability to counsel one another—both in the sense of providing wisdom and in the sense of assisting each other with emotional difficulties—is also reflected in the way that they deal with the loss of their first baby. The difficulty of coming to terms with this tragedy is compounded by the fact that the pregnancy was unwanted in the first place, but it is also made more difficult by Joseph’s inability and unwillingness to narrate his experiences. When the baby is a stillborn, Joseph refuses to see her corpse, because he cannot handle the idea of remembering his first child that way: “after leaking amniotic fluid for a month and being confined to a hospital bed, Kim had been sitting on the toilet when the baby slid out. ‘She was perfect,’ Kim later told Joseph. ‘I wish you had seen her.’ But he had not wanted to see her. It would be too painful to embrace that memory” (87). Joseph’s reaction to the baby’s death reflects a larger

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15 As Benjamin observes,
After all, counsel is less an answer to a question than a proposal concerning the continuation of a story which is just unfolding. To seek this counsel one would have to be able to tell a story. (Quite apart from the fact that a man is receptive to counsel only to the extent that he allows his situation to speak.) Counsel woven into the fabric of real life is wisdom. (86-87)

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cultural phenomenon; according to Benjamin, people have become increasingly reluctant to deal with the physical process of death:

It has been observable for a number of centuries how in the general consciousness the thought of death has declined in omnipresence and vividness. In its last stages this process is accelerated. And in the course of the nineteenth century bourgeois society has, by means of hygienic and social, private and public institutions, realized a secondary effort which may have been its subconscious main purpose: to make it possible for people to avoid the sight of dying. Dying was once a public process in the life of the individual and a most exemplary one. (93)

Sanitizing death in this way may be terribly efficient, but it also eliminates the reverence for, and physical intimacy with the process of dying.

Although (or perhaps because) Joseph has refused to view the baby, he is nevertheless dismayed and angered by the callous, businesslike manner in which the hospital morgue deals with the baby’s body:

He had picked up the baby’s body from the morgue in the hospital’s basement. The business-as-usual attendant wrapped her in a cloth that Joseph had brought along, a special fabric that was to be made into a bed covering for the baby. And Joseph had carried her out to the car, tears welling in his eyes from the weight in his hands [. . .]. He was terrified, broken hearted and deeply angered by the fact that, without formality, he was able to leave the hospital with his dead baby in his hands. (87)

The unceremonious nature of the baby’s exit from the hospital is matched by her perfunctory burial: “They had buried the baby in a too-small hole cut in the earth. No priest, only the gravedigger standing respectfully in wait to cover over the petite box that Joseph’s father had crafted. No words were spoken. Language would have choked them” (87). The tiny, hand-crafted coffin is the only personalized touch in the entire funeral, and the rest of the burial seems very procedural. The only other sort of acknowledgement of the baby’s memory is that, “[s]ixteen months after the stillbirth, their second baby was
born. They had called her Robin, the name they had chosen for their first child” (88). Yet in a way, even in this naming the memory of the baby becomes an absent presence. In naming their second child Robin—the name intended for the stillbirth baby—they do not even have a name by which to refer to their first baby, thus exacerbating their inability to speak of the loss.

Years after the baby’s death, Joseph is still struck by the very private, unceremonious way that he and his wife dealt with their loss. His memories of the baby’s death seem to be prompted by the encounter that he and his daughter Robin have with a funeral procession when they first arrive in Bareneed:

Up ahead, there was a gathering of cars along both sides of the road, the afternoon sun glinting off windows and chrome. People, outfitted in old-fashioned dresses and suits that reminded Joseph of his high school graduation, meandered toward a church. An ache of nostalgia. He eased up on the accelerator as Robin took an interest in the activity. As they neared the church’s steps, Joseph spotted the black hearse.

‘Is that a funeral, Daddy?’ Robin asked.
‘Yeah, I think so.’ (49)

That he is still thinking about the funeral the next morning, and that his memory of the baby’s burial is juxtaposed with his recollection of the community funeral procession, reveals that it may not be merely the old-fashioned, high school graduation for which he is nostalgic: “the funeral from yesterday came to mind, the town gathered to bid farewell. [. . .] Everyone knew when someone died out here. And, no doubt, the entire community turned up as a show of respect” (88). This desire for collective grief, and collective memory, says Boym, is particularly symptomatic of the globalized world. If it was the “new understanding of time and space that made the division into ‘local’ and ‘universal’
possible” (11), it was also this new understanding that, during the period of globalization, resulted in “stronger local attachments” and “a global epidemic of nostalgia, an affective yearning for a community with a collective memory, a longing for continuity in a fragmented world” (Boym xiv). The disruption of the grieving process and of communal memory symbolizes the larger trope in the novel: the disruption of communication between people, which is the result of information supplanting storytelling and space supplanting place.

Death rites and rituals of loss are arguably one of the most important ways that we identify with community. Loss itself, in fact, has redemptive qualities. As I argued earlier, Stephen Harper’s by now infamous notion that the Atlantic has traditionally fostered a “culture of defeat” reinforces an understanding of the East Coast as a melancholic culture fixated on moments of loss. Like Freud—and, as I noted in my introduction, like most Newfoundland academics—Harper sees this fixation as pathological. However, David L. Eng and David Kazanjian astutely argue that loss does not need to have “a purely negative quality” and that there could be “a politics of mourning that might be active rather than reactive, prescient rather than nostalgic, abundant rather than lacking, social rather than solipsistic, militant rather than reactionary” (2). Although I take issue with their pejorative use of the word nostalgia, I think that their framework provides the means to counter Harper’s claim, which is to say that a “culture of defeat,” or a culture of loss, might also be a very productive culture. As Eng and Kazanjian maintain, “in describing melancholia as a confrontation with loss
through an adamant refusal of closure, Freud also provides another method of interpreting loss as a creative process” (3).

The distinction that Freud makes between mourning and melancholia lays the foundation for their argument about the regenerative uses of melancholia. They say that mourning, for Freud, “is a psychic process in which libido is withdrawn from a lost object” (3). Although “[t]his withdrawal cannot be enacted at once,” through a slow process “libido is detached bit by bit so that eventually the mourner is able to declare the object dead and to invest in new objects” (3). Melancholia, on the other hand, is “an enduring devotion on the part of the ego to the lost object” (3). Whereas mourning implies a final detachment and closure, melancholia is “[a] mourning without end” and it “results from the inability to resolve the grief and ambivalence precipitated by the loss of the loved object, place, or ideal” (3). In a rhetorical move that they admit seems “counterintuitive” (2), Eng and Kazanjian argue that it is this lack of closure and resolution that is useful to grieving subjects: “By engaging in ‘countless separate struggles’ with loss, melancholia might be said to constitute, as Benjamin would describe it, an ongoing and open relationship with the past—bringing its ghosts and specters, its flaring and fleeting images, into the present” (4). For Eng and Kazanjian, it is precisely this closure which allows us to depathologize, and even to valorize, melancholia and its possibilities: “we find in Freud’s conception of melancholia’s persistent struggle with its lost objects not simply a ‘grasping’ and ‘holding’ on to a fixed notion of the past but rather a continuous engagement with loss and its remains” (4). They contend, moreover,
that “[t]his engagement generates sites for memory and history, for rewriting of the past as well as reimagining of the future,” and that it “allows us to gain new perspectives and understandings of lost objects” (4).

Miss Eileen Laracy, the elderly Bareneed resident whose ballad of lament opens the novel, illustrates the potential for melancholia to foster “a continuous engagement with loss and its remains,” and to “generate[. . .] sites for memory and history” (4). Unlike Joseph, who struggles to repress or avoid his feelings of grief over past losses, Miss Laracy continually revisits the various losses she has experienced in her long life, and she cherishes both joyful and painful memories. Her photo album is one of the ways that she preserves memories of family and friends, and she is devoted to examining and re-examining it on a regular basis: “The pages of the photo album were so worn it seemed as if one more turn might break them loose from their beloved sequence. For decades, they had typified the exquisite fragility with which Miss Laracy cradled her captured memories” (68). Her house too becomes a sort of living memorial to all those she has loved and lost: “Her small parlour was cluttered with knicknacks from her life, and her parents’ and grandparents’ lives before hers, each item an integral link in the chain that once led the spirits to her. The particles of love in those objects. The scents of love. The calm-handed love of the departed absorbed through touch and breath” (68). Miss Laracy’s attachment to these objects represents her attachment to lost loved ones. She uses these mementoes and photographs to stir her memories, and these memories prompt her to recall stories of the past.
She repeats these personal narratives to herself, and reviewing the family photo album causes her to recollect the story of her fiancé, Uriah Slaney, who survived the Second World War by the skin of his teeth—he lost a leg in battle—but who died an untimely death at sea not long after returning home (68-72). The ritual of flipping through the album and viewing the photographs in a precise sequence could perhaps be viewed as an attempt to fix the past; however, the series of photographs prompts a variety of memories, each photograph stimulating different recollections and provoking different emotions. During one viewing of the album, for example, Miss Laracy recalls: nursing Uriah back to health; a fall “boil-up” in which she and her young lover picked berries and picnicked together; her father taking a photograph of her and Uriah; the ecstasy of physical relations with Uriah; the sweater that she made for him; his friend Edward Pottle with whom he fished and eventually perished; the way that he overcame the loss of his leg in order to continue fishing; and finally, his tragic end and the vigil that she held in the hopes of his return (68-72). The photo album and its various pictures thus elicit a series of memories that interact and blend with each other, to form a sort of make-shift narrative. Miss Laracy’s photo album and her feelings of melancholia for the people in it thus exemplify Eng and Kazanjian’s argument that melancholic objects are not necessarily fixed ones:

The ability of the melancholic object to express multiple losses at once speaks to its flexibility as a signifier, endowing it with not only a multifaceted but also a certain palimpsest-like quality. This condensation of meaning allows us to understand the lost object as continually shifting both spatially and temporally, adopting new perspectives and meanings, new social and political consequences, along the way. (5)
In turn, Miss Laracy shares the photo album and the stories that she recalls with visitors in her home, thus making her own meanings out of loss. When she meets Joseph’s estranged wife, Kim, for example, she brings her back to her house to share her photo album and tells Kim the story of her sister, Tamer, who had second sight, and who became ill after giving birth to her first child. After Tamer’s death, Miss Laracy says, her spirit used to come and visit, like a sort of guardian (203-204).

As Miss Laracy has learned from her father, storytelling serves an important function in connecting people with their past, but also with place. In fact, there is an intricate relationship between place and memory, such that becoming disconnected from place means disrupting memory and, in turn, disrupting memory causes a disconnection from place. Miss Laracy’s father’s stories illustrate this fragile dynamic among place, memory and narrative. Place itself, however, must be understood as being in flux. Casey argues that we must acknowledge “the inherent plasticity and porosity of place itself, its nonconfinement to precise spatial or temporal parameters, its continual capacity to overflow (and sometimes undermine) these limits” (274). Moreover, the flux of places can inspire memory and narrative, just as the lasting qualities of places can. A change in weather—a rainy evening, for example—prompts Miss Laracy to recall the bedtime stories that her father told her when she was a child:

From the time she was a child, she had loved the sadness of the rain. The weeping quality, the great outdoors saturated and going soft. On nights like these, she would eagerly anticipate being tucked in her bed, already warmed by two heated beach rocks from the top of the stove, and gaze up at her father, who would tell her stories or sing songs while the rain roused memory itself. (123)
This idea—that it is the rain that evokes memory—illustrates Casey’s insightful assertions about the relationship among memory, narrative and place. Like the avalanche scene in *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams*, Miss Laracy’s memories suggest that the “inherent localism of memory also obtains for narration, in which places, instead of being settings or scenes, are active agents of commemoration” (*Getting Back* 277). A storyteller must therefore be immersed in place and in people.

Accordingly, Benjamin argues that there are two groups, or types, of storytellers, and these types are identified according to their relationship with place:

‘When someone goes on a trip, he has something to tell about,’ goes the German saying, and people imagine the storyteller as someone who has come from afar. But they enjoy no less listening to the man who has stayed home, making an honest living, and who knows local tales and traditions. If one wants to picture these two groups through their archaic representations, one is embodied in the resident tiller of the soil, and the other is the trading seaman. Indeed, each sphere of life has, as it were, produced its own tribe of storytellers. (84-85)

However, these types of storytellers are not distinct from one another. The exchange of stories relies on an interaction between the man who journeys and the man who stays home: “The actual extension of the realm of storytelling in its full historical breadth is inconceivable without the most intimate interpenetration of these two archaic types” (85). What unites these men as storytellers is their ability to share experience: “The storyteller takes what he tells from experience—his own or that reported by others. And he in turn makes it the experience of those who are listening to his tale” (87).

Like Benjamin, Casey sees motion as an essential component of what he calls place sense. Although his analysis does not refer specifically to tourism, Casey’s argument provides the means to distinguish between travel as journey, and travel as
tourism. I would argue that in Casey’s terms, what separates the tourist from the journeyer (for lack of a better word) is sensory engagement, or what he calls “engaged motion” (Getting Back 280): “Journeys thus not only take us to places but embroil us in them. For this reason they cannot be reduced to superficial visitations, or ‘day trips,’ in which we careen or cruise between stopping places considered as arbitrary stopping points” (279). Although Casey argues that “[m]ovement is…intrinsic to place” (280), engaged motion does not necessarily involve travelling great distances or moving between places. Rather, it incorporates “both the more conspicuous motion of moving-between-places and the more subtle motion of being-in-place” (280).

Miss Laracy’s father—though a fisherman rather than a “trading seaman”—represents the man who journeys and exchanges stories with other travellers and adventurers: “Her father would go on to tell tales about the men he had sailed with, men from distant outports who believed in incredible superstitions” (123). He also brings stories of remembered places home to his daughter: “He would tell her about his voyages to Labrador, the Eskimaw and their strange behaviours” (123). What makes him a true storyteller, however, is his ability to make his experience of place the experience of others—a quality that Miss Laracy fondly recalls from his bedtime stories:

At such times, there would come a pause in her father’s storytelling and he would commence singing, in a high, velvety, boyish voice, a voice so unlike the one he used for speaking. And while he sung to her, the room would seem to gently rock, up and down to the sway of the verse, as though she were in a boat out at sea and her father’s voice was the abiding waves that would carry her through anything. (123-124)
His song here actually replicates the motion of the place he is describing, and illustrates that he has been an “engaged” traveller. And through his voice, Miss Laracy feels as if she is not in her bed, but “out at sea.” Although she has not travelled to the parts of the ocean that her father describes, it is through her father’s story that she becomes intimately acquainted with the places her father has been. As Casey argues, “memorable journeys consist of events in places. Hearing of such journeys, we come to know places with as much right and insight as we know the time in which they transpired” (Getting Back 277). This process, of place inspiring narration and simultaneously being conveyed through narration, demonstrates Casey’s argument about the relationship between narration and place knowledge: “In learning of narrated times and places—times of places and places-in-times—we acquire a distinctive form of local knowledge” (277).

Storytelling also helps us to acquire a sense of belonging in and connection to community, both past and present. As I discussed in Chapter 2, this emphasis on connection and continuity is crucial in helping people feel implanted, to use Casey’s expression for homeliness, because it helps us to counter “separation anxiety”—an emotion we all experience beginning in infancy:

Separation anxiety sets in early, by most accounts before twenty-four months of life. Thereafter, for the rest of our life we suffer from a series of separations, all of which involve aspects of place: separations from caring parents, from siblings and childhood friends, from a native region and its characteristic beliefs and dialect, from the things we have done and witnessed. (Getting Back x)

Consequently, Miss Laracy feels a great deal of comfort in hearing her father tell the story of her grandfather because it provides her with a sense of familial connection:

“Thomas Laracy, [was] a man Miss Laracy loved and knew only through verse. A dead
man gone all these years, yet alive in her thoughts with a clarity that somehow mended her heart” (126). Although the tale of his death “on an ice pan while hunting harp seals in 1897” (124) is tragic, and although upon hearing the story, she “would never fail to weep” (126) and to “imagine her grandfather laid out on the eternally white ice, the wind howling around him like those abandoned beasts on Dog Island” (126), Miss Laracy finds solace in the lesson the story of her grandfather’s death provides: “Plummeting tragedy, so heartbreaking and yet so comforting in its affirmation of the inherent grimness in human nature” (126). That she extrapolates wisdom about the nature of human existence demonstrates Eng and Kazanjian’s claim that “melancholia’s continued and open relation to the past finally allows us to gain new perspectives and new understandings of lost objects” (3-4).

Moreover, like her photo album and the memories it evokes, Miss Laracy’s family stories have a “palimpsest-like quality” (Eng and Kazanjian 5). In each of these stories, the memory of her grandfather mingles with the memory of her father, whose “lingering presence, the glow that outlined his body, that remained from the telling of the story, would distill as the ghost of Thomas Laracy, who would stand at the foot of her bed, not frozen and horribly bent out of shape, but warm and smiling” (126). That the presence of her father dwells within the story itself illustrates the special form of communication that is storytelling:

The storytelling that thrives for a long time in the milieu of work—the rural, the maritime, and the urban—is itself an artisan form of communication, as it were. It does not aim to convey the pure essence of the thing, like information or a report. It sinks the thing into the life of the storyteller, in order to bring it out of him
again. Thus traces of the storyteller cling to the story the way the handprints of the potter cling to the vessel. (Benjamin 92)

Indeed, “traces of” Miss Laracy’s father are imprinted, or to put it in Casey’s language, *implaced*, in his stories, and these traces, in turn, connect Miss Laracy to the history of her people—the history of her people in place.

Most of the Bareneed locals, however, have lost their connection to the past, and this loss is related to their use of forms of technology that are supposed to connect us with each other and with place, but do not. In his insightful review of the novel, John Domini says:

> The trouble began when the cod fishery closed down a few years earlier and the community lost a piece of its soul, developing a need—a bare need—for ‘visions…manifested as a coping mechanism.’ But the secondhand vitality of conjuring spirits, in this town, must compete with the canned visions of the twenty-first century, the electronic storytelling of TV and the internet. Thus Harvey’s drama comes to embody a classic theme, the search for a locus of spirit in a world dominated by the machine.

I would argue that the people of Bareneed have always needed spirits and visions, but that they particularly need them in times of distress. And although the current disaster is precipitated by the collapse of the cod fishery and the locals’ inability to cope with this loss, the trouble began more than a few years ago. Although Miss Laracy could see spirits when she was a child, something changed around the middle of her life, and even she can no longer see the spirits of her ancestors: “shortly after her forty-fourth birthday, on a brisk fall night, the spirits no longer came to simply sit and stare while she lay in bed [. . .]. Their serene fellowship had been a comfort. Miss Laracy had spoken with them of infants and of generations passed on, for they were filled with the blaze of their
ancestors” (10). She deeply laments this lost connection and believes it to be the result of new technologies that have disconnected us from the spirits. When Joseph’s wife Kim responds to Miss Laracy’s story about the ghost of her sister by saying, “‘No one sees ghosts any more,’” Miss Laracy tells Kim that the trouble began in 1952: “‘Twas da year da television came. Black ’n white. Da spirits were aplenty den, every’n had dere own ghost story ta tell. But da spirits, dey kept vanishin’ more ’n more as da television went t’rough every ’ousehold in Bareneed. Sometin’ in da air’” (204).

One of the few remaining spirits to visit the Bareneed residents is Jessica, the daughter of Claudia, a local artist. Jessica’s spirit haunts her mother, Bareneed local Donna Drover, and Joseph’s daughter, Robin, who we are told possesses second sight. Jessica’s various conversations with Robin and Claudia help to explain why the spirits have gone missing, and to illuminate the cause of the mysterious illness afflicting the Bareneeders. Jessica tells Robin that electric wires interfere with the spirits: “‘The wires, you know, they cut through everything. They make us blind, whip us to pieces. They send us screaming’” (77). When Robin asks, “‘What wires?’, ” Jessica replies, “‘The ones that connect the world for all the wrong reasons’” (77). Not only do the wires interfere with the spirits of the dead, but, as Jessica tells her mother, they also disrupt the sense of belonging felt by the living: “‘The water in your body moves the wirewaves all through you. The wirewaves make you sick. They make you feel like you’re never at peace, you don’t belong, and you never know why’” (233). It is no surprise, then, that most of the victims of the illness find themselves listlessly watching television, and unable to connect
with those around them. Unlike storytelling, in which locals exchange place knowledge and develop a sense of community belonging, television directs us away from local places. McKibben links diminishing local knowledge to the ubiquity of television: “Almost all of us now take our cues about how to live less from the people around us than from the people we see on television; we live not in our own cities and towns but in the generic Southern California nowhere that streams through the coaxial cable” (126).

This sense of placelessness is experienced by Joseph, the tourist, whose feelings of disorientation become increasingly worse as the novel develops: his feelings of separation anxiety progress to hearing television-like static in his head, and his symptoms culminate in his inability to recognize either himself or his family. But like Joseph the tourist, the locals also find themselves, in the words of the inside-front cover blurb, “Out of place and time.” The illness that has afflicted the Bareneed residents causes them to ask not only, “‘What am I?’” (211), but, even more significantly, “‘Where am I?’” (282). The course of the illness, as the town doctor, old Dr. Thompson, notes, is “aggressive violent behaviour. Loss of breath. Loss of sense of self” (284). The novel suggests that in our interference with the environment and disconnection from our past, we have become profoundly disconnected from place. In this sense, Frow’s argument, that from the nineteenth century onwards, nostalgia’s use “had been extended to describe a general condition of estrangement, a state of ontological homelessness that became one of the period’s key metaphors for the condition of modernity (and which is one of the central conditions of tourism, where the Heimat functions simultaneously as the place of safety
to which we return and as that lost origin which is sought in the alien world)” (135) might be usefully supplemented with Casey’s argument that modern discourse, which focuses on the primacy of time and space, means that “this world has become increasingly placeless” (xv), and that, as a result, “[w]e can feel out of place even in the home, where Unheimlichkeit, the uncanny anxiety of not feeling ‘at home,’ may afflict us” (Representing Place x). He says that the “Greek word atopos (literally, ‘no place’) means ‘bizarre’ or ‘strange’ ”(x), and that the “emotional symptoms of placelessness—homesickness, disorientation, depression, desolation—mimic the phenomenon itself” (x). In this sense, the residents of Bareneed who have been stricken with the epidemic might be said to be suffering, not merely from nostalgia, but from atopos.

The idea of atopos foregrounds the way in which Harvey employs the uncanny as an environmental aesthetic, where the home of the unhomely is extended beyond the domestic sphere to include home in the largest sense of the word: place itself. The consequences of our disconnection from, interference with, and exploitation of the environment, done in the service of progress and capitalism, have been repressed, and this repression is returning with a vengeance. Strange things rise from beneath the surface of the ocean, beginning with Joseph and his daughter catching a red sculpin with a doll’s head in its mouth, which Joseph “kick[s] . . . ] back into the ocean after commenting that it might be full of toxins” (78). What really haunts him, however, is not the doll’s head, but the fact that the red sculpins are mythical creatures, the sighting of which, in traditional lore, prophesies trouble ahead: “Joseph felt compelled to open his eyes,
intuiting danger. A red sculpin. There was no proof of the existence of such a thing. Of course, there had been stories. Red dragon sculpins. But they were merely stories.

Fishermen’s lore. A myth passed on through generations. A portend \textit{sic} of approaching calamity” (79). The bad omens continue with, among other things, the strange surfacing of an albino shark—another sight of bad times ahead (181-182). Although these visions might sound fantastical, Kurlansky notes that the depletion of the cod fisheries to the point of exhaustion has resulted in “[f]ishermen seeing many strange things that are a sign that things are not right” (202), like cod spawning in cold waters at younger ages (203). That these visions of strange sea creatures are accompanied by the ghost of Jessica, who appears before locals and whispers in their ears, “‘Fish in the sea’” (20) and sings, “‘Myyyyyy fawww-ther went to sea-sea-sea to see what he could see-see-see, and all that he could see-see-see was the bottom of the deep blue sea-sea-sea’” (21), emphasizes the most terrifying thing of all: the extraordinary fact that there are very few cod left to see.

The most literal realization of the uncanny as the return of the repressed is the resurfacing of the bodies of long-lost, and not-so-long-lost, ancestors of the sick Bareneed locals. These bodies are stored—with great symbolic resonance—in the closed fish plant, which has been turned into a morgue. If the absence of cod is the most terrifying absence in the novel, the fish plant—the symbol of the industrialization of fishing—is arguably the most ghostly presence. The bodies from different generations are placed side by side in the fish plant morgue, an indication, as RCMP officer Chase notes, that this is no ordinary disaster, but rather “[a] disaster that had taken centuries to evolve”
Miss Laracy, who has been brought in by various authorities, including the military, to identify the bodies, observes that their spirits are “disjointed” and “forlorn,” and are unable to enter their bodies (327). She wonders why they have returned in the first place: “What were they missing that they desired shelter in their useless bodies? Why didn’t they seek out their relatives instead, their living loved ones?” (333). This mystery troubles Lieutenant Commander French as well, who struggles to reconcile his rational beliefs with the fantastical visions he has seen while in Bareneed. As he tells Dr. Thompson, his research has uncovered a similar sequence of events decades before in Burin, Newfoundland: “Close to seventy years ago, when electricity was first introduced to the Burin area,” “when radio was introduced,” and “fish stocks dwindled,” local residents also began to see fantastical sea creatures and to experience breathing problems (423). That the Burin disaster culminated in a tidal wave leads French to predict similar calamity in Bareneed. To compound the mystery further, and to challenge French’s reason, the victims of the illness seem to recover when they are visited by Tommy Quilty, a local artist, who is somewhat of a simpleton, but is renowned for having second-sight, and whose drawings prophesied the disaster. Tommy regales the sick with tall tales, tales that tell the stories of their friends and relatives.

Meanwhile, French’s struggle to reconcile rational, scientific knowledge with folk prophecy and fantastical visions comes to a head in his confrontation with Miss Laracy, who objects to the military’s solution to the problem. French argues that the disturbances they have detected offshore have “something to do with electromagnetic fields” which
have caused a “mass of energy” to “gather[. . .] out at sea” (424), and his solution is to erect massive discs and spotlights, which are supposed to intercept the energy and thereby stop the tidal wave (434). Miss Laracy believes that French is ignoring what he knows deep down, and pleads with him to stop the military’s interference: “‘Tis about da spirits, I tell ye. Yer all as stunned as me arse ta be deaf ta da trute. [. . .] ’Tis about da spirits being shut out by all da crap in da air. I knows it. Ye let them loose ’n ye’ll see. Frenchie, ye got da sight, fer Christ’s sake use it’” (432). French fails to listen to Miss Laracy, and turns on the military’s machines. Not surprisingly, this interference does not mitigate the strength of the tsunami or cause it to change course, and it heads directly for Bareneed as feared.

But rather than causing complete annihilation of the community, the disaster brings people closer together. Before it hits, Kim and Joseph seem to reconnect with each other (435-436), and Chase erases all of his internet files, and awaits the tsunami with his wife Theresa in his arms (462-463). The novel ends generations after the tsunami and is narrated in an “Epilogue,” which we are informed is “told by Robin Harvey (née Blackwood) to her grandchildren: Jordan, Katherine, and Emma Sarah” (469). The fish plant has washed away, and, although the electricity was turned back on, “[i]n time, every last person reverted to lamplight and wood stove, and a special sitting of council was convened to order the removal of the new power lines and poles from the community” (470). The tradition of storytelling is re-established—which is confirmed by the fact that it is Robin who tells the story—and, although the residents are never sure “what had
caused the illness, and what had taken it away” (469), they believe that it is “through the turmoil of calamity” that they “reclaimed their lives as their blessed own” (471).

I read the novel’s ending as the characters’ attempt—in Casey’s terms—to “reinhabit” place. To reinhabit place means to “draw [. . .] on ‘a past which has never been a present.’ The habitus comes from a local tradition that preexists the present moment of its habitation, and the habitat contains the geo- and bio-history of the place” (Getting Back 295).16 Turning off the electricity and returning to tight-knit communities may seem like a manifestation of the nostalgia that McKay objects to so heartily, a nostalgia that imagines the Newfoundland as fixed in pre-modern times, but I argue that—although perhaps an extreme fantasy—this kind of provocative move imagines a future where, in the words of Leopold, we “see a law of diminishing returns in progress” (vii). The return to community is typical of East Coast fiction. Indeed, as Creelman argues, “If there is a common ethos in the Maritimes, it lies not in a ‘sense of shared community’ but in the memory of a shared community” (11). According to Creelman, “whatever the actual historical experience, the memory—or the reconstructed memory—

16 According to Casey, “re-inhabitation obtains on two conditions”: First, the re-inhabitants must take up life in the region in a manner that echoes (though it need not imitate) the ‘placeways’ of the original occupants. Such place-sensitive mores include a dextrous pursuit of agriculture, a caring relationship to animals, a special respect for plant life, etc. Here what matters most is the adoption of the appropriate habitus, the right set of local practices, the special skills that make not just bare inhabitation but co-habitancy possible. Second, the land itself has to hold open the opportunity to pursue these placeways and practices in its very midst. The habitat determines what kind of life is viable there. (295)
of an idyllic/lost continuity has become a powerful driving cultural force in the Maritimes of the twentieth century” (11). But Creelman contends that this memory of the past is accompanied by the ethos of “fear or hesitation about their tenuous future” (14)—an ethos that sounds eerily similar to Harper’s notion of the culture of defeat. 17 The ending of *The Town that Forgot How to Breathe*, however, imagines not just an idyllic past, but also an idyllic future, and one that—in its closing of the fish plant and shutting off of electricity—expands the idea of community to include the land and water around us. This call for a return to community is one advocated by McKibben and Berry, but it was also proposed by Leopold, who, as much as half a century ago, advised us that we needed to embrace a land ethic:

> All ethics so far evolved rest upon a single premise: that the individual is a member of a community of interdependent parts. His instincts prompt him to compete for his place in that community, but his ethics prompt him also to cooperate (perhaps in order that there might be a place to compete for).

> The land ethic simply enlarges the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively: the land. (203-204)

In the face of environmental collapse, we need to consider that Bareneed’s antimodernist response is not necessarily a naïve mystification of the capitalist discourse of progress and its attendant inequalities, but may in fact be a nostalgic re-envisioning of the past, in the words of Boym, “not for [. . .] the way it was, but for [. . .] the way it could have

17 Although Creelman’s analysis is focussed on the Maritimes, which do not include Newfoundland, his assertion that the Maritimes share an ethos of fear about the future—as I noted in my introduction—is echoed in most academics’ assessments of Newfoundland and Atlantic Canadian culture, and so I take the liberty of referring to it here.
been” (351). For nostalgia, in its most reflective sense, “is a longing for a home that no longer exists or has ever existed” (xii).
Man and the sea are age-old adversaries; man covets the riches of the oceans but the oceans are jealous guardians of their wealth. For centuries the Northwest Atlantic has been harvested for its live bounty; now man seeks a newer treasure—hydrocarbons—the fossilized remains of the ocean’s ancient life. Those who lead this uncharted venture are equipped with the most sophisticated means yet devised to combat the forces of wind and wave. But they have had to learn the lessons of our seafaring past: the sea cannot be conquered; it must be endured.

~ *(Royal Commission on the Ocean Ranger Marine Disaster: Report Two)*

One must wonder how a technology that protects man as he ventures to the moon and back cannot protect him from his ancient enemy, the sea. The answer lies not in logic, but in the modern science of economics. Drilling rigs could indeed be fabricated to resist any environmental force known to man; but so to construct them would render the venture that they are designed to service economically unfeasible. Thus the sea continues to claim its toll in lives, and those who seek to diminish that toll recognize that any progress that they make will merely be relative to the higher costs that might have been.

~ *(Royal Commission on the Ocean Ranger Marine Disaster: Report Two)*

Though not as prolific as Johnston or Harvey, Newfoundland’s Lisa Moore has been a much-heralded and anthologised writer; both her second short story collection, *Open* (2002), and her first novel, *Alligator* (2005), were nominated for the Giller Prize.¹

The reception of Moore’s *February* (2009), which chronicles the grief of a family whose father died in the *Ocean Ranger* disaster of 1982, ² has resparked the discussion about the

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¹ Moreover, “*Alligator* won the Commonwealth Prize for the Canadian Caribbean Region and the ReLit Award, and *Open* won the Canadian Authors’ Association Jubilee Prize for Short Fiction” (Anansi “Lisa Moore”). Lawrence Mathews also includes Moore’s *Open* in his top-ten list of Newfoundland “fiction of the past twenty-five years” (2).

² As the Royal Commission *Report* summarized,
value of the “Romantic tradition of Newfoundland writing” (Whalen 35). Like O’Flaherty, February’s detractors have shown “little willingness to learn from the Romantic tradition” (Whalen 35), and have treated any trace of sentimentality in the novel with skepticism and derision. The most prominent debate took place in the pages of The National Post in July 2009, when columnist Barbara Kay (who, incidentally, had not read the novel at the time) was inexplicably incensed by Katherine Laidlaw’s “‘gushy’ profile of Moore” (Stuart Woods), and was inspired to write a vociferous response, “Unreadably Canadian.” Perhaps not surprising in a national newspaper, Kay suggests that February’s preoccupation with the past is not a Newfoundland trait, but a Canadian one and—as the title of her editorial indicates—for Kay, the adjective “Canadian” does not evoke positive connotations:

Early on the morning of February 15, 1982, the semisubmersible drilling unit Ocean Ranger capsized and sank on the Grand Banks, 170 nautical miles east of St. John’s, Newfoundland, Canada. The entire 84-man crew was lost in this disaster. Of the 69 Canadian crew members, 56 were residents of Newfoundland and the shock wave created by the loss was felt particularly throughout the province. (Report One iii)

In its “Conclusion and Recommendations,” the Royal Commission argued that the loss of the Ocean Ranger was caused by a chain of events which resulted from a coincidence of severe storm conditions, design inadequacy and lack of knowledgeable human intervention. The design weaknesses included a failure to specify portlights of adequate strength, and to provide a ballast control panel with components that were suitable for operation in an environment where there was a risk of exposure to sea water. (Report One 139)

As I noted in my introduction, Whalen identifies the “Romantic tradition” with sentimentality. In other words, he treats “Romantic” and “romantic” as synonymous terms.
I’m chary about experimenting with any Canadian author who gets a good review, especially for a novel that’s up for the Giller Prize. I’ve been burned several times by Giller-endorsed, but virtually unreadable CanLit. They’re all jumbled together in memory as feminized paeans to a sepulchral past, mired in poetically lyrical, but navel-gazing narrative stasis.  

Perhaps more disturbing than Kay’s pretensions to review a novel she has not read, and to assess the politics of literary prize-giving and canon-making based partially on that novel, are the barely-concealed misogynistic undertones of her piece; according to her logic, CanLit is “unreadable” because it is fixated on the past, which is a feminine (read, boring and unworthy) topic for literature.

For Kay, the masculine adventure novel is a more fitting genre for a disaster such as the Ocean Ranger: “Such a disaster is a natural fictional platform for an enthralling blockbuster along the lines of Sebastian Junger’s 1997 book The Perfect Storm.”

Unfortunately, says Kay, “In February, typically, it serves instead as background for the novel’s actual subject: the feelings generated by the tragedy in the male victim’s relations.” She refers to Helen—the widowed protagonist—as a “surrogate victim” whom she says Moore employs to “deflect[. . .] attention from the tragedy and its male victim,” and she asks us to “[i]magine if, instead of narrating the actual drama of the 1917 Halifax explosion in his riveting 1941 novel, Barometer Rising, Hugh MacLennan had chosen to

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4 Although two of Moore’s previous books were shortlisted for the Giller—and although the cover of February proclaims that Moore is the “Scotiabank Giller Prize finalist for Open and Alligator”—February itself did not make the Giller 2009 short list.
focus, as we are told February does, on the ‘swelling loneliness and eventual letting-go’ of one woman bereft of a beloved husband in the conflagration. Zzzzzz.”

In sum, although she does not employ the word, Kay’s criticism of February is that it—and by extension all CanLit—is not stoic enough: “CanLit [. . .] it’s all about nobly suffering women or feminized men: men immobilized in situations of physical, physiological or economic impotence (that is when they’re not falling through ice and nearly drowning), rather than demonstrating manly courage in risk-taking or heroic mode.” Instead of the novel Moore did write, Kay would rather read,

a sympathetic narration focused on the ‘lonely and terrifying deaths’ of strong, psychologically unconflicted men nobly attending to work no woman would do, the appalling cataclysm of the oil rig’s collapse, an exploration of the individual lives that were cut short so horrifically and, of course last and least, the impact of their loss on survivors. (emphasis added)

As Woods suggests, “it’s impossible to take seriously a critic whose pre-judgements are so ingrained and politically charged,” and it’s true: Kay’s analysis would be easily dismissed as uninformed, polemical tripe, except that in her tendency to privilege the stoic, and in her insinuation that the victims should just get over it already, her rhetoric echoes—and is echoed by—both popular and literary critics.

In Canadian Notes and Queries, for example, Nathan Whitlock acknowledges “[t]hat ‘feminized’ is a bit of a giveaway that Kay had more on her agenda than mere

5 Apparently Kay has not read Barometer Rising either, or else it has also become “jumbled together in [her] memory,” since she neglects to mention that it actually is a romance, much of which focuses on the feelings of a woman who is unsure whether or not her lover died in the war.
literary engagement, and indeed Kay’s hobbyhorse rocks furiously into action,” and he contends that her article “makes you wonder if Kay sees MacGyver novelizations as the apex of literary achievement.” Yet he too asks, “must every single character be so drowned in memory? Must every scene be so thoroughly haunted by the past?” (Whitlock). Like Kay, Whitlock maintains that February is just too emotional, and because of the abundance of emotion, he concludes that it is a “Highbrow Harlequin”:

“February is a deeply sentimental, even corny novel at its heart. You should never judge a novel by its bare plot, but Moore can’t quite conceal the fact that her novel is about a widow who learns to accept her husband’s death—and even finds new love!” Similarly, Emily Donaldson notes, “Although Moore writes with an almost brash economy, she cannot prevent February from coming off as an overly sentimental love story. Cal was the great and only love of Helen’s life, and she spends the 25 [sic] years after his death rather tediously reliving their time together and speculating about his final moments.”

Even some of the novel’s admirers accept the terms of the debate. In her praise of the novel, for example, Carla Maria Lucchetta says, “Loneliness is hard to write about without becom[ing] maudlin or clichéd. But Moore never errs on the side of sentimentality.”

In part, this shockingly callous dismissal of “a widow who learns to accept her husband’s death”—and the implication that Moore should try to “conceal” this plotline (Whitlock)—is an unfortunate continuation of the tradition of disparaging “female” subject matter by suggesting that it is just too emotional to be fit for great literature. In
one of the more sensitive and nuanced reviews of the novel, Gabriel Weston makes this very case:

In her excellent recent essay, ‘Shakespeare’s Daughters’, Rachel Cusk bemoans that novels about home life are still considered inferior to those tackling supposedly weightier matters like war, and calls on those who fictionalise ‘domesticity and motherhood and family life’ to champion their subject with renewed honesty. Lisa Moore’s *February* is a glowing example of just how ably this may be done.

As I mentioned in Chapter 3, however, our discomfort with death and with prolonged public mourning is also part of a larger cultural shift in Western society.

According to Meghan O’Rourke, “Until the twentieth century, private grief and public mourning were allied in most cultures.” Citing the work of Philippe Ariès, she notes that “[e]ven at the turn of the twentieth century, ‘the death of a man still solemnly altered the space and time of a social group that could be extended to include the entire community’” (O’Rourke). But shortly thereafter, “mourning rituals in the West began to disappear, for reasons that were not entirely evident” (O’Rourke). According to Priscilla Uppal, Peter Homans’ survey of the literature on mourning surmises that “this decline is due to the erosion and fragmentation of community caused by the processes of modernization” (qtd. in Uppal 11). Summing up Homans’ work, Uppal contends, “The decline of community-based mourning rituals is traced to the effects of privatization, individualization, and psychologization. The great influences of Darwin and Freud on the Western world, Homans concludes, have encouraged ‘mourning without mourning practices’” (11).
Kay and Whitlock’s claim that *February* is *just* a boring story about a widow—a “surrogate victim” to use Kay’s phrase—and Kay’s insistence on establishing a rigid hierarchy of victimization, reflects this cultural shift towards the “individualization” of “mourning practices” and the “fragmentation of community.” In itself, her championing of the masculine adventure tale is not particularly problematic—rollicking adventure stories do have their merits after all; however, to recall Arnold Berleant and Edward Casey, Kay’s desire to isolate victims from survivors is based on the faulty assumption that we are separate from place, and disconnected from each other, and that therefore when we lose someone in the community, we should be able to detach ourselves and move on with our lives quite easily.

As Moore argues in an interview with Suzannah Showler, however, a tragedy of this scope is imprinted in place, and its ramifications last “for generations”: “I wanted to show that this is not the kind of disaster that just hits the headlines and then goes away. This is the kind of thing that continues to affect people who are left behind for generations. It wasn’t just the loss of those men, awful as that was, it was also that their families were scarred. In fact, the whole province was.” As a result, *February* does not just focus on “female grief and loss” (Kay) in isolation; it alternates between Helen’s grief and that of her son, John. As Lucchetta contends, “Each of the children has been marked by the loss of their father, none more so than her eldest, John, a looming presence.” To borrow Sarah Crown’s apt—and eloquent—place metaphor, “Grief flows
through the book like a river, carrying all before it. Its tributaries flow out from the past into the present.”

The impetus to treat the Ocean Ranger disaster with stoic acceptance is also tied to the fear that if it becomes “a debilitating psychic wound”—Brian Peckford’s expression for Newfoundland’s obsession with the past (Bannister 132)—it will impede future economic development and progress. In But Who Cares Now? The Tragedy of the Ocean Ranger (1987), sociologist Douglas House maintains that “the corporate reactions of companies and governments cannot be dismissed as being motivated only by greed and economics,” because they sincerely “felt compassion for the families of the victims” (88). According to House,

There was a genuine feeling within Mobil that some kind of compensation was due to the families of the victims; there was a genuine sense of corporate guilt that had to be assuaged. Similarly, within the federal and provincial governments there was a genuine concern to discover the true causes of the accident and to introduce measures to improve safety conditions offshore in the future. (88)

However, once the Royal Commission reports were finished, and once the legal settlements were concluded, both governments and corporations expected closure: “They saw the Ocean Ranger disaster as extremely unfortunate but, like any other crisis, it was something that had to be dealt with and put out of the way. It was a chapter to be closed. Closed for the companies by the financial settlements in 1984 and 1986; closed for the governments by the final report of the Royal Commission on the Ocean Ranger Marine Disaster” (88). As a result, “corporate and governmental leaders [felt] frustrated and
angry by those family members who have been attempting to keep the issue alive” (88).6 In turn, many families felt that the federal and provincial governments, and Mobil and ODECO, treated them as an inconvenience to be dealt with efficiently and expediently, so that business could continue as usual. In her account of the disaster’s aftermath, Patricia Hickey, for example, argued: “They want to get on with the job of making big bucks and we are an irritant to them to be disposed of as quickly as possible. When it comes to human life and dignity, it seems they don’t care a great deal. [. . .] when it comes down to the basics, to human life, they seem to brush that aside in order to get on with their daily affairs” (qtd. in House 28). Yet another family member observed, “A man is nothing to an oil company; he is only a number” (qtd. in House 71).

Over two decades later, efforts to “close” the “chapter” on the Ocean Ranger disaster have, unfortunately, proven to be rather successful. Moore notes, “When I went to research the book there was very little material information available. There was almost nothing written: just the Royal Commission and a few books and documentaries. It was astonishing how little material there was about an event that had left such a mark

6 House notes that “ODECO has even had the nerve and bad taste to sue two families of Ocean Ranger parents who insisted upon taking their cases to court, while both governments [. . .] show[ed] reluctance in providing the funding needed to allow the Ocean Ranger Foundation to continue its work as a disinterested watchdog upon offshore safety and family life” (88) According to House, “All funding ceased in December 1985” (88).
In a rather lengthy front page *Globe and Mail* column that examined offshore drilling in Newfoundland, and assessed the history of the industry’s safety record, Shawn McCarthy contended that the suspension of “deep-water exploration well [. . .] operations” in the U.S. in the wake of the recent Gulf of Mexico oil spill has meant that “Canada’s well [now] faces scrutiny,” but he failed to discuss the *Ocean Ranger* disaster. Instead, McCarthy quoted “Max Ruelokke, chair of the Canada-Newfoundland Labrador Offshore Petroleum Board,” who said, “‘it appears BP employed questionable drilling methods that would not be condoned in the Canadian offshore.’” Ruelokke maintained that “‘the sector has an outstanding safety record, with only 1,100 barrels of oil spilled over the course of 13 years of production, during which 1.1 billion barrels of crude have been produced’” (McCarthy). But he did not mention either the number of injuries in the last thirteen years, or the deaths of the men on Cougar Flight 491 in 2009.

Moreover, there is a great deal of speculation about whether the industry *does* have a good safety record, and—as McCarthy’s article suggests—about whether they are prepared to stymie future disasters. In “Myths and realities about petroleum-related

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7 As Moore observes, however, there seems to be some interest in the disaster as of late: “Then this year another book came out at the same time as my own—a piece of non-fiction by Mike Heffernan called *Rig*—and a sociologist named Susan Dodd is writing a book about the *Ocean Ranger* as well. It feels to me like people have come to a point in the process of grieving or working through trauma where it’s possible to tell the story. And absolutely necessary to tell the story” (Showler).
development: Lessons for British Columbia from Atlantic Canada and the North Sea” (2003), House argues that

For British Columbia, occupational health and safety should be a first priority, along with the environment. Regrettably, this has not been the case in either the North Sea or Atlantic Canada (Carson). Furthermore, and this is the most damaging of accusations, it is still not the case. Regulatory confusion combined with both governments’ and industry’s greed to get the oil and the money flowing has meant that occupational health and safety are not given the priority they deserve (Hart). The risk of serious industrial accidents offshore is constant, and requires an attitude of zero tolerance by industry and regulatory agencies.8

Furthermore, although Ruelokke claims that Canadian regulations are far stronger than American ones, according to Thomas Walkom, “American regulation of the offshore oil industry has been revealed as a sham. Our regulation of drilling in the far harsher North Atlantic and Arctic is said by experts to be even weaker.”

All of these observations suggest that the mentality that led to the Ocean Ranger disaster—the pursuit of profit at all costs—is not ancient history. In this chapter, I argue that such a mentality treats people and places as abstractions that can be valued and exchanged for money. But in her refusal to just simply get over the death of her husband efficiently and expeditiously, Helen resists the kind of corporate amnesia that treats man as “‘only a number’” that can be exchanged (House 71). Moreover, employing Pat Rae’s

8 House acknowledges,

There has been some progress on this issue in recent years. Progressive leaders within the industry have adopted a more systematic risks-assessment approach to offshore safety (Rolstad), and some companies cite their relatively low accident-rate with pride (Hibernia Management Development Company). Nevertheless, anecdotal evidence from offshore workers suggests that the real rate may be much higher than the official rate. Non-unionized employees are reluctant to report accidents for fear of being laid off. (n. pag.)
summary of the “‘resistant strain of mourning’” (18), whose major proponents include R. Clifton Spargo and Jacques Derrida, I argue that the ethics of Helen’s “refusal to accept the acceptance of loss” (Rae 16), and of Moore’s portrayal of the continued effects of the disaster, lie precisely in reaffirming that “‘the death of a man still solemnly alters’” the place of “‘a social group that can be extended to include the entire community’” (Ariès, qtd. in O’Rourke).

The development of the offshore oil industry in Newfoundland may be seen as a continuation of the history of governments and corporations treating Newfoundland as a site that can be “easily exchanged or merely manipulated” (Casey, Getting Back xiii). Like the fishing industry, whose policies and technologies, as I discussed in Chapter 3, often lacked place sense because they were based on models of farming, “[o]ffshore drilling [. . .] is an extension to the oceans of a land-based industry” (Royal Commission: Report Two 13). In other words, offshore drilling “is predominantly an industrial activity taking place in a marine environment rather than a marine activity taking place for industrial purposes” (13). That it is “an extension to the oceans of a land-based industry” means that the industry’s technology has been adapted from land-based drilling, rather than designed particularly for marine environments (Royal Commission: Report One viii).9 Moreover, because the offshore oil industry believes that the “key element in the

9 According to the Royal Commission, “By the 1930s, drilling equipment and techniques used for exploration and production on land were successfully adapted to sites for water. Initially these were in swampland and in shallow sheltered waters inland or inshore” (Report One viii).
operation is the drilling,” in their manning of the rigs, companies prioritize a knowledge of drilling over an understanding of marine environments: “Unless the coastal state decides otherwise senior industrial personnel on rigs of the United States registry are in charge of the rig regardless of their knowledge of ships or the sea” (viii).

The design of offshore oil rigs is also predicated on the assumption that marine environments are interchangeable with one another. The Ocean Ranger, for example, was built by Mitsubishi in Japan (Royal Commission: Report One 5), “designed for, and tested in, the waters of the Gulf of Mexico ” (Cadigan 268), and “[p]rior to moving to the Grand Banks area in November 1980, it [. . .] operated off the coasts of Alaska, New Jersey and Ireland” (“Ocean Ranger”). Yet, according to the Royal Commission’s Report Two, “withdrawal and evacuation procedures” (21) are the basis of the industry’s safety policy, and the efficacy of these procedures depends upon an intimate knowledge of particular conditions in particular locales:

There are two key criteria which control the success or failure of this strategy. First, industry must know with precision what environmental conditions are to be anticipated at a given drilling location. Only then can rigs be designed to surmount these forces and environmental limitations be established for the evacuation of the rig. Second, forecasting procedures must be developed so that accurate and timely warning is afforded of those approaching extremes which may warrant precautionary action. (22)

10 According to the Royal Commission, “From the perspective of industry [. . .] withdrawal and evacuation procedures form a responsible compromise between the often conflicting ideals of human safety and economic feasibility” (Report Two 21).
Given the difficulties of operating an oil rig on the Grand Banks of Newfoundland, the Royal Commission concluded that a “solid foundation of environmental knowledge and its perspective analysis form the only logical bases for sound decisions affecting all aspects of design, construction and operation” (32).

That the *Ocean Ranger*’s “ballast control operators,” the men who “were in charge of maintaining [the rig’s] stability” (Moore 150), had *neither* technical expertise *nor* any particular knowledge of or experience with marine environments was one of the Royal Commission Report’s findings, and is one of the central criticisms of the oil industry in *February.*¹¹ In one of the key scenes where Moore reconstructs the disaster, which is focalized through Helen’s eyes, we learn that

> There was a policy concerning who got promoted to the ballast control room, but the company didn’t follow it. One fellow didn’t have any drilling or marine experience at all. But he had a good attitude. It helped if you had a bit of university education. Or an education went against you. It was all about whether

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¹¹ According to the Royal Commission’s *Report One,*

> Despite the failure of the portlight and the malfunctioning of the ballast control panel, the loss could have been prevented by knowledgeable intervention on the part of the crew. Indeed, had the crew only closed the deadlights, shut off the electrical and air supplies to the panel, cleaned up the water and glass and then retired for the evening, the *Ocean Ranger* and its crew would have survived the storm that night. (139)

Cadigan contends that

> Although the royal commission that investigated the tragedy was unwilling to say that the Newfoundland government’s local hiring preference had led the rig’s operators to hire untrained workers, it suggested that hiring ‘guidelines requiring a very rapid phase in of local residents can affect the overall level of safety of the drilling operations’ and recommended more careful hiring and training to ensure safety. (269)
you wanted to learn. If you expressed interest. It depended on your attitude. (150-151)

The emphasis of the word “or” suggests the conditional—and uncertain—nature of the qualifications required for promotion, which essentially amount to one rather nebulous attribute: a certain “attitude.”

It becomes apparent that the attitude prized by the oil industry—and the attitude they demand from their workers—is one of blind, unquestioning deference:

The company liked you to learn on the job because that way you learned the way the company wanted you to learn. They wanted you to learn a certain way, and that way can loosely be called, or referred to, or otherwise spoken of as their way. You learned their way. The company’s way. Which was: Don’t answer back. Which was: Do you want a job or not? (150).

The idea that the industry requires men to learn “their way,” and that what is meant by “their way” is unquestioning deference to authority, is repeated throughout the novel. John’s interview with an oil executive, for example, which takes place over two decades after the Ocean Ranger disaster, suggests that the attributes and qualifications prized by the oil industry have changed very little since his father’s death. According to John, “Oil was like the military—they trained their own, and they wanted you to learn their way” (137). The comparison is apt because, as Wendell Berry suggests, “Armies, by the necessity and purpose of military organization, are abstractions. We think of battles not
of individuals but of ‘units’” (“American Imagination” 23). Like the military, what matters to the oil industry is not the individual, but the overall machine.

That self-forgetfulness is still considered to be fundamental to working on the rigs is also illustrated—rather ironically—during John’s obligatory survival training. Considering how terrifying even the “simulated helicopter crash[es]” (185) can be, John thinks, “It was what they were to strive towards: simplicity. As far as he had understood it, simplicity entailed a kind of forgetting. Forget that you matter. Or that anything matters” (183). But to forget the danger—and to forget that he matters—is a task of such magnitude that John refers to it as “a forgetting equal to the glacial scraping [. . . he] had learned about in geography” (183). Yet the men on the Ocean Ranger stoically accepted the risks and repressed them, not because of any sort of blind loyalty to the company, or because they were ignorant of the dangers, but out of economic necessity. And, as Helen recalls, the company repeatedly reminded the men that they had better be careful not to rock the boat because—like cogs in a wheel—they were easily replaced, and there were many waiting in line to take their place:

The men broke bones or lost a finger. That was common. They were expected to keep on working if it was just a bad sprain or a minor break. A severed pinkie didn’t get a lot of sympathy. That was an occurrence they saw every month.

There are men who would kill to have this job: that was the wisdom they worked under. (97)

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12 According to Berry, “Only in the aftermath of battle, on the nighttime battlefields horribly littered with the dead and the dying, do the individual soldiers begin to enter our imagination in their mere humanity” (“American Imagination” 23).
The company exploited the fact that the men were more afraid of losing their jobs and of being unable to provide for their families than they were of injury or death.

Berry argues that there is an explicit link between treating places primarily as sites for resource extraction and treating people like exchangeable parts. This kind of “commodified speech,” says Berry, is the “chief instrument of economic and political power,” and it is problematic because it “can distinguish neither general from particular, nor false from true” (“American Imagination” 21). Like Casey and Berleant, Berry argues that to treat people and places as equivalent and exchangeable skews our values:

As [American writer] Guy Davenport saw it, nothing now exists that is so valuable as whatever theoretically might replace it. Every place must anticipate the approach of the bulldozer. No place is free of the threat implied in such phrases as ‘economic growth,’ ‘job creation,’ ‘natural resources,’ ‘human capital,’ ‘bringing in industry,’ even ‘bringing in culture’—as if every place is adequately identified as ‘the environment’ and its people as readily replaceable parts of a machine. (21)

Of course, speaking in generalizations and abstractions is not inherently a bad thing. As Berry concedes, “Historians and scientists work toward generalizations from their knowledge, just as all of us do. We must do this, for generalization is a part of our means of making sense” (33). But for Berry, generalization without particularization is unethical: “But generalization alone, without the countervailing, particularizing power of imagination, is dehumanizing and destructive” (33). In February, Helen’s response to inquiries about the compensation she received for her husband’s death is a poignant reminder of the “dehumanizing” potential of “commodified speech,” and of the violence of a rhetoric of abstraction that is not balanced by particularization: “People who want to know about the settlement seem to think a life has a figure attached to it. A leg is worth
what? An arm? A torso? What if you lose a whole husband? What kind of money do you get for that? They think a husband amounts to a sum. A dead husband does not add up to an amount, Helen is tempted to tell these people” (20). These graphic images of dismemberment make it clear that people are not the sum of their parts, and that to speak of people as “readily replaceable parts of a machine” is morally repugnant.

However, the idea that people and places are exchangeable—like parts of a machine—has become common parlance in an age where we prioritize efficiency and profit as values in their own right. As I mentioned in Chapter 3, the subordination of place to time and space led to what McKibben refers to as “the efficiency revolution” (7), or what Janice Stein calls “the cult of efficiency” (7). Stein maintains that “[e]fficiency, when it is understood correctly as the best possible use of scarce resources to achieve a valued end, is undoubtedly important” (6). The problem with current discussions of efficiency, however, is that they confuse means and ends: “Efficiency, or cost-effectiveness, has become an end in itself, a value often more important than others” (3).

We started thinking of efficiency as a value in its own right “in the twelfth century and continu[ing] through astronomical thinking in the sixteenth century, when Galileo’s examination of time and motion sowed the seed for the idea of the human being as machine” (18). According to Stein, “This picture of the human as machine developed in tandem with the invention and multiplication of machines such as the mechanical clock and the printing press, which had finely measured, standardized and replaceable parts” (18). With the invention of machines came a whole new lexicon, “a language of
the measurable, the quantitative, and the productive,” which, by “the industrial revolution,” evolved into “the new language of the factory” (18). The “language of the factory” was not confined to the factory floor, however: “Gradually,” it “spilled over into our description of ourselves, our management of our work, and eventually the state itself” (18). Nineteenth-century physiologists, for example, began to think that “[t]he human body [was] like a machine,” and not just any old clunker, “but [a machine] more efficient than any machine that humans had yet made” (20). According to Stein, “Once we began to think of people as naturally efficient machines, it was not a large step to the science of management, so central to the development of contemporary society” (20).

Stein argues that this transformation of efficiency from a means to an end “misuses language,” and that this “misuse” “has profound consequences for the way we as citizens conceive of public life” (3): “When we define efficiency as an end, divorced from its larger purpose, it becomes nothing less than a cult. A cult is a system of religious worship that engenders almost blind loyalty in its members” (3-4). Moreover, the “misuse” of language has a moral component; to put it in Berry’s words, “the reclassification of the world from creature to machine must involve at least a perilous reduction of moral complexity” (Life 8). In her tongue-in-cheek portrayal of John’s interview with Shoreline Group—“an efficiency agency” that works for corporations like Shell and Mobil (136)—Moore satirizes the tendency of the oil industry to treat efficiency with a cult-like reverence, and she critiques the “perilous reduction of moral complexity” that results from its “misuse” of language:
Shoreline Group specialized in risk assessment, organizational restructuring. They specialized in all the touchy-feely stuff from the 1980s: lateral thinking, creativity in the workplace, psychological support during downsizing or natural disaster, pink slips, sweater-vests and distressed denim, a bold new self-generating speak that boiled over and reduced to a single, perfect word: *efficiency.* (130)

Although the “sweater vests,” “distressed denim,” and “touchy-feely stuff” are supposed to convey a sense of humanity, they really amount to corporate-speak for one value and one value only: efficiency. Moreover, like a cult, Shoreline Group combines “the incantation of central dogmas” with “mystical rites and ceremonies” designed to “foster [. . .] a sense of belonging and reverence” (Stein 4) in employees. As John imagines it during his interview, “At Shoreline there would no doubt be weekend retreats, role-playing, diagrams, sharing, massages. Flip charts identifying personal goals and company goals, with asterisks where they intersected” (130).

Similar to a cult, Shoreline Group also has a proselytizing leader— an American named Ronnie McPherson, who goes by the nickname, “Red.” As John sees him, Red cuts a ridiculous figure; he is a man who gives a handshake with “a too-tight grip that besp[eaks] the motivational speaker circuit” (129), and who wears a stupid tie with “pineapples wearing sneakers and riding skateboards through white clouds lit with silver lightning” (131). In short, everything about him—like his tie—seems disingenuous, distasteful, and out of place: “What was distracting was the guy’s tie. John knew the oil industry inside out. Ontario, they might wear a tie like that. Or somewhere in Texas. A man who was colour blind” (137). Even Red’s moniker, John observes wryly, is a misnomer: “Ronnie McPherson had black hair, longish for his age, streaked silver, curling over the collar of his shirt. There was nothing red about him” (129).
Given Red’s proclivity to think of the bottom line over and above worker safety, his nickname really ought to be ‘Scrooge.’ For underneath his buffoonery and gauche sartorial sense lies a callous single-mindedness that borders on malevolent indifference: in the very same conversation where Red asks John if he “had a father on the Ocean Ranger” (137), Red unapologetically informs John that these days, in the oil industry, “there [i]s a culture of safety [. . .] that [i]s detrimental to efficiency. That’s what we want to trim” (138). That—after all Red’s callousness—John accepts the job offer anyway illustrates the troubling extent to which money talks. But that John actually starts spouting Red’s corporate gobbledygook himself—and at a family party, no less—demonstrates just how insidious this cult-like rhetoric truly is, and just how easily it spreads: “What I was saying, John said, is that the trouble now is a guy doesn’t have to think any more. And this can be a danger. It’s not good for the industry, the culture that has developed around safety. They’re like a crowd of old women” (178). As Red’s large financial offer to John indicates, however, when the industry says that they “want [. . .] men who [. . .] think for themselves” (139), they really mean men who will do their jobs, cash their paycheques, and stay quiet—men who will “Shut up out of it” (136) as John says.

Stein contends that one effect of “extend[ing]” the “language of the market […] to the public arena” is that, in recent years, the rhetoric of efficiency has been increasingly used “to promote values that lie largely outside the parameters of the market,” and this shift has profoundly altered our notion of community (13). Citing Robert Putnam’s work
on “civic engagement,” in which he refers to community as “‘social capital,’” Stein notes a disturbing trend: whereas efficiency was once understood as a means to achieve community, the logic has been reversed—community is now perceived as a means to achieve efficiency (14). According to Stein, “The language is instructive: the dense network of associational ties that create the fabric of community becomes social ‘capital,’ a resource that can be depleted or accumulated, invested efficiently or dissipated. As a measure of the public temper, the imagery is revealing: the language of efficiency is used to justify community” (14). Perhaps even more troubling, “[i]t is somehow more acceptable to use the language of the market than to speak the language of community and public space” (14).

It is this same perversion of language that Helen questions in her critique of the oil companies’ rhetoric of “risk assessment” and “the public good”:

There would follow, after the rig sank, a lot of talk about risk assessment. The oil companies held a symposium.

The oil companies were all about acceptable levels of risk and they always had been. They spoke of possible faults in the system and how to avoid them. [. . .] They asked the public to consider the overall good to be achieved when we do take risks. They spoke in that back-assed way and what they meant was: If you don’t do the job, we’ll give it to someone who will.

They meant: There’s money to be made.

They meant: We will develop the economy.

They meant there isn’t any risk, so shut the fuck up about it. Except they didn’t say fuck, they said: Consider the overall public good. (118)

Moore’s use of apophasis—listing what the companies do not say—and her repetition of “they meant” emphasizes the discrepancy between what the oil companies say and what their sanitized speech actually signifies. In their discussion of “public good,” the oil companies are not speaking “the language of community,” they are speaking “the
language of the market,” which means that—in reality—their rhetoric has nothing to do with the public or with the good. For the oil companies, “public good” equals profit, and this rhetoric of profit reinforces their cult-like dogma of economic growth as an end in itself. Moreover, their calculations of “acceptable levels of risk” are based on the arrogant assumption that we can determine the value of human life—an assumption that amounts to the “perilous reduction of moral complexity” of which Berry speaks (*Life* 8).

This passage is followed by Helen’s memory of discovering her pregnancy, which is described, ironically, using the language of “risk assessment”: “Helen had not for a minute thought she was pregnant. She hardly knew Cal (although she knew everything important). She hadn’t thought it was at all probable that she would fall in love. Love was a fault she could easily have avoided if she (1) hadn’t been tipsy; (2) knew about risk assessment then and all the ways to avoid risk; (3) wasn’t in love already” (118-119). Such a jarring juxtaposition between the language of love and the language of efficiency emphasizes the inappropriateness of using “the language of the market” outside of the marketplace, and leads us to question whether this type of rhetoric ought to be used “to promote values that lie largely outside the parameters of the market” (Stein 13). Furthermore, it compels us to ask what it is that we do value, and suggests—to borrow the words of Edward Luttwak—that “because everything that we value in human life is within the realm of inefficiency—love, family, attachment, community, culture, old habits, comfortable old shoes,” we really “ought to have only as much market efficiency as [we] need” (qtd. in Stein 1).
In addition to changing the way we perceive ourselves and our relationships with others, Stein argues that the “mechanical worldview” also profoundly changed our relationship with place: “The development and refinement of machines extended the horizon of human possibilities, first to control and then to master nature, and enabled a discussion of efficiency as increasing productivity, as an almost limitless capacity to produce more and more at the same cost” (18). John’s comparison between Shoreline Group and his previous employer, an oil industry sales company, highlights the connection among the “mechanical worldview,” the desire to dominate nature, and the incessant drive to maximize efficiency and minimize costs. In his previous job, “John had sold a shitload of drill bits, and the line his company gave was all about penetration. The terminology was sexual and violent: The bits were hard and the sea floor was wet and it resisted and finally gave, and there was nothing a good bit couldn’t penetrate” (139). As ecofeminists like Annette Kolodny argue, “gendering the land as feminine” (8) allowed early American colonists “to experience the New World landscape” as “an object of domination” (5), and it was one way of making the land less “threatening, alien, and potentially emasculating” (9). Likewise, the oil industry’s rapacious rhetoric of violent penetration represents an attempt to dominate and subdue the newest frontier of exploration: the seascape.

Although Shoreline Group is a consulting firm rather than a sales company, their discourse of risk assessment is similarly predicated on the idea that nature can be
managed and mastered, and that the more we can dominate nature, the more profit we will yield:

Shoreline Group, on the other hand, worked to eliminate redundant safety procedures. They offered a cost-benefit analysis of the safety procedures in place and drafted modification plans, Mr. McPherson said, that impacted directly on waste and redundancy, and the general good for communities at large, and profit margins, and there were stakeholders to consider. There were safety procedures that did nothing but tie the hands of the people looking to make things run smoothly out there. (139)

The rhetoric of Shoreline Group is less overtly rapacious, but it is equally voracious and, as John’s introjection following this spiel—“Yes, my father died on the Ocean Ranger”—reminds us, the consequences of this rhetoric are just as violent (139).

For Berry, “the idea that the world, its creatures, and all the parts of its creatures are machines” is problematic precisely because it “institutionalizes the human wish, or the sin of wishing, that life might be, or might be made to be, predictable” (Life 6). And as the loss of life and limb on the oil rigs in February illustrates, our belief that we can manage nature efficiently, or make it “predictable,” is hubris. As John observes during his helicopter crash simulation, even with the advances in technology and safety training since the Ocean Ranger disaster, working on an oil rig in the middle of the ocean, and travelling to get there, is still incredibly perilous: “No man would ever survive the North Atlantic for more than five minutes without a survival suit that fit properly, even if he could swim. And the chances of surviving a helicopter crash, even with the suit, were next to nothing. Every man knew that” (185). The real-life crash of the Cougar flight 491 helicopter on March 12, 2009, while on its way to the Hibernia platform, which resulted in the death of seventeen men—all but one of the men who were onboard—was an
unfortunate reminder of the truth of this sentiment. According to the *Fifth Estate* website, this crash was the “story of hope and hubris”: “the hope of ordinary working people trying to make a living, and the hubris of professionals who boasted that they had designed and built the safest helicopter in the world” (MacIntyre). In this sense, any Newfoundlander who presumes to have mastered the risks of the ocean might be appended to Fielding’s “History” in Johnston’s *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams*, which, as Stan Dragland notes, “is one long comedy of presumptuousness, of men in various states of illusion about ownership and administration of the land” (201) and, I might add, of the ocean.  

As I discussed in Chapter 2, this illusion of mastery over nature is predicated on the faulty notion that we are separate from environment and, according to Berleant, our false perception that we are detached from place leads to the “domination and

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13 As I noted in Chapter 1, Paul Chafe makes an analagous observation about Michael Crummey’s *River Thieves* (2001). According to Chafe, Crummey represents “the land as something that breaks down and claws at those who dare to try to tame it” (101). In *River Thieves*, Chafe notes, even the brash Harry Miller, “a friend of John [Peyton] Senior, describes the land as a valuable but vindictive whore” (100). Similarly, at the end of John Steffler’s *The Afterlife of George Cartwright* (1992)—a novel Steffler says is based on the eighteenth-century explorer’s *A Journal of Transactions and Events During a Residence of Nearly Sixteen Years on the Coast of Labrador* (1792)—the ghost of Cartwright is quite literally clawed to death and devoured by a white bear he has been determined to kill. In the final scene, Cartwright is completely emasculated while “he watches”; “Then it plunges its snout between Cartwright’s legs, up through his hips, burrowing under his ribs. The bear’s white head is a wide pointed brush, moving from side to side, painting him out, painting the river, the glittering trees in” (293). In the final image, Cartwright is obliterated by the bear and by the landscape he has tried so hard to dominate.
exploitation” of environment (*Aesthetics and Environment* 5). Moreover, this false perception influences not just our treatment of environment, but also our treatment of each other: “Because of the central place of the human factor, an aesthetics of environment profoundly affects our moral understanding of human relationships and our social ethics” (12-13). According to Berleant, as opposed to an aesthetics of detachment, an “environmental aesthetics of engagement” is also an ethics of engagement because it suggests deep political changes away from hierarchy and its exercise of power and toward community, where people freely engage in mutually fulfilling activities. It implies a humane family order that relinquishes authoritarian control and engages cooperation and reciprocity. It leads toward acceptance, friendship, and love that abandon exploitation and possessiveness and promote sharing and mutual empowerment. (13)

In other words, our ethical treatment of each other is grounded in our *implacement*, to use Casey’s expression.

The idea that ethics are grounded in place is not a new one, Casey argues: “Both ‘politics’ and ‘ethics’ go back to Greek words that signify place: *polis* and *ethea*, ‘city-state’ and ‘habitats,’ respectively. The very word ‘society’ stems from *socius*, signifying ‘sharing’—and sharing is done in a common place” (*The Fate* xiv). In its original conception, efficiency—and its ethical foundation—was also rooted in place and community. Tracing the etymology of the word back to the ancient Greeks, and to Plato’s belief that the ideal state was achieved by a division of labour that enabled each citizen to “perform [. . .] the most efficient role in society,” Stein contends,

In Platonic thinking, the purpose of efficiency is virtue: efficiency is the achievement of virtue by government through reason, and the ends of efficiency are virtue and justice. Embedded in this concept of efficiency produced by the division of labour is a concept of the accountability of citizens to the *polis*, to the
political community, and of the *polis* to its citizens. Thinking about efficiency is tied to values—and to accountability. No concept could stand in sharper contrast to the modern cult of efficiency. (17)

To put it in Berleant’s terms, “embedded in this concept of efficiency” is the notion of *reciprocity* between people (the citizens) and place (the *polis*). In other words, Plato’s model of efficiency, which incorporated accountability, was predicated on place attachment, and on the idea that we are connected to one another *in place*.

Oil corporations are as obsessed with efficiency as were the governments of Plato’s day, but unlike the *polis*, which was accountable to its citizens, multinational corporations have no local place attachment and—as a result—they lack a sense of reciprocity with and accountability to local citizens.\(^{14}\) That the oil industry’s lack of place attachment “profoundly impacts” their “moral understanding of human relationships and social ethics” and disrupts their sense of accountability is illustrated in Moore’s portrayal of the way that “the families were informed”—or rather *not* informed—of the death of their loved ones on the *Ocean Ranger*:

That’s the way the families were informed: It’s on the radio. Turn on the radio.

Nobody from the oil company called.

What must have happened was this: the men had not been dead an hour and the company had public relations on it. They had lawyers. Helen can imagine

\(^{14}\) The lengthy legal battle over the *Exxon Valdez* spill, and the current “blame game,” as many journalists are calling it, among British Petroleum, Transocean and Haliburton over the Gulf of Mexico oil spill are just two recent illustrations of the lack of accountability that the oil industry feels toward local places. (See for example Carl Gutierrez, “The BP Blame Game Hits Capitol Hill,” and Reuters “Obama slams oil companies for spill blame game.”)
the meeting in the boardroom. Or maybe it happened all on the phone. She can imagine the kind of language employed.

Or there was horror. Of course there was horror and it had numbed them. When did words like *situation* enter the vocabulary? Because Helen believes they thought of it that way. She believes they all wanted to *manage the situation.* (268)

Helen tries to imagine various reasons why the company failed to inform the families personally, but each time she does, she is stumped: “But Helen can get no further. Because how did they get to the idea *Let’s not phone the families.* / How did they come up with that? / And further: How was such an idea spoken aloud, given form, enunciated?” (269). That the company made no effort to make human contact with the families—and that they dealt with the death of their employees at arm’s length through lawyers, public relations people and management rhetoric—is so appalling that it is impossible for Helen to fathom.

As *February* illustrates, however, the oil industry perceives this absence of local place attachment not as a lack, but as an attribute. Red McPherson’s claim to John, that Shoreline Group is an “independent arm,” epitomizes the industry’s celebration of its detachment from local places (136). Given that, as I have already suggested, “the lived body is the principal locatory agent of implacement,” the image of the disembodied, detached arm is revealing (*Casey, Getting Back* 110). Whereas John finds the image of the severed arm unsettling—he wonders “what an independent arm might be,” and worries that “the situation was not full of the sort of legitimacy he had imagined, and for
which he had hoped”—Red conceives of this detachment from place as a source of
legitimacy: “Impartial, Mr. McPherson said” (136-137).\textsuperscript{15}

In “\textit{Business Luncheon in New York, November 2008}”—a scene in which “Natalie
Bateman from Neoline Inc.” (222) meets with a number of oil executives, including John,
to “present [. . .] an advertising campaign to promote offshore drilling development on a
global scale” (222-223)—Moore parodies the oil industry’s propensity to treat its lack of
place attachment and its relentless mobility as a selling point, and to distort language in
the process. Although Natalie rebrands globalization as exemplifying “connectedness,”
her rhetoric is entirely contradictory:

\textsuperscript{15} The lack of local standards, and the jurisdictional nightmare of regulations, were key
factors in the \textit{Ocean Ranger} disaster, according to the Royal Commission’s \textit{Report One}:
When the \textit{Ocean Ranger} arrived on the Grand Banks, Canada had no standards of
its own to assess the rig. Consequently Canadian authorities accepted the ABS
[American Bureau of Shipping] classification of the rig and its approval of the
\textit{Booklet of Operating Conditions} and did not conduct their own assessment of the
rig and its operating procedures. Officials of COGLA [Canada Oil and Gas Lands
Administration] and the Petroleum Directorate stated in evidence that they did not
give priority to the safety of the marine operations and assumed that the
certificates of the Flag State and the approval of the classification society
provided the necessary assurance.

The regulations and guidelines of the Province of Newfoundland did not
address the marine operations of the rig. Since there were general COGLA
regulations in the area, the Petroleum Directorate relied upon COGLA and
COGLA inspectors to enforce them. COGLA, however, did not enforce its
regulations because they overlapped with regulations that were the traditional
responsibility of the Flag State and with the rules of the classification societies.
COGLA and the Petroleum Directorate acted on the incorrect assumption that
ODECO would comply with the requirements of the 1979 \textit{Certificate of
Inspection} which required modifications to the lifesaving equipment on the rig.
Neither did they monitor the marine crew requirements set out in the \textit{Certificate}
or maintain any check on its expiry date. (143)
Natalie says, We’re planning a series of ads from all over the world, specifically indigenous, acutely indigenous, showing high-powered cocktail parties, parties on rooftops, beach parties. We’re looking at Bondi Beach, and subtitles, just very, very international, speaking to that thing, that ethnic thing, that thing, connectedness. Zoom, we’re in Thailand; zoom, we’re in Alaska; zoom, Nigeria. Do you know what I’m saying, zoom, zoom, zoom, the camera flits all over the world in an instant, this is everybody partying together, yada yada, it’s gritty, it’s arty, and we end with a sunset shot. [ . . . ] Wait, wait, wait, she continues: The thingies, the derricks or whatever, the rigs on the ocean fade to silhouette, music of course. Something Wagnerian. (224)

As I noted in Chapter 2, Casey maintains that mobility is not inherently a bad thing; it may provide us with a better understanding of place if it “present[s] a contrast between the virtues of lastingness and the values of transience, between remaining in place and moving among places” provided it “do[es] both in ways that realize an intricate dialectic of space and time” (Getting Back 283). The kind of “zoom[ing]” between places Natalie is talking about is a far cry from “realiz[ing] an intricate dialectic of space and time,” however. On the contrary, her celebration of speed and instantaneity reflects the oil industry’s prioritization of time and space over place.

Moreover, her suggestion that this ad—with its series of decontextualized cultural signifiers mashed together like a bad shepherd’s pie—represents anything “specifically” or “acutely indigenous” is as laughable and as disconcerting as Red’s pineapple tie. Her proposed ads symbolize not connectedness, but the simulacrum of connectedness, and they portray not local place, but space, “an abstraction from place” (Casey, Representing Place 350). Such advertising exemplifies the oil industry’s proclivity for treating places as homogenous, exchangeable sites. That the meeting ends with John checking “his watch” to determine whether he has time to buy an “I Heart New York” t-shirt—the
quintessential tourist souvenir—before catching a plane to Toronto emphasizes the irony of Bateman’s claim that the oil industry has anything to do with “that thing, that ethnic thing, connectedness” (227; 224).

As I argued in Chapter 3, John Frow suggests that for Plato, the simulacrum’s “untruth is defined by its distance from the original” (126). Like Harvey, who underscores the distance between fishing and ersatz fishing by juxtaposing a tourist spectacle of fishing with Doug’s childhood memory of fishing with his father, Moore accentuates the distance between connection and ersatz connection by interrupting the business meeting with a flashback from John’s youth: “Natalie reminds him of a nun who taught him in high school. Natalie has the same kind of goodness, he thinks, despite the advertising crap” (224). Natalie’s uncanny resemblance to the high school teacher prompts John to feel nostalgic for a moment of genuine human connection he and the teacher had in—of all places—a high school math class. Seeing “that she had lost him,” the nun reached out—“[s]he put her hands flat on the desk and leaned in”—and although she could not transform John into a math whiz, she taught him about kindness, compassion, and community: “She could not teach him math: John was impermeable. But in her he saw how kindness was generated. That is what she had blasted through his skull. She had blasted the will to be good, to take care of his sisters, his mother, the dog” (225).

One of the novel’s main criticisms of the oil industry—and the economy on which it is based—is that it disrupts genuine human attachments between people and place. The trauma of losing her husband, for example, causes Helen to feel displaced and exiled
within her own home: “She was outside. The best way to describe what she felt: She was banished. Banished from everyone, and from herself” (13). In the midst of her grief she feels detached and disconnected from “the world”: “By outside Helen meant that there was a transparent wall, a partition between her and the world. She could be yelling her head off—Stop with the goddamn ball—but nobody heard her” (20). Despite her grief, however, she makes every effort not to fall into complete despair, and she tries her best to be present for her children: “Helen did not take tranquilizers. Her children would never know it, but this was her approach to parenting: she was there for them. Her doctor had said pills, she had said no. Helen was there, morning, noon, and night. [. . .] She had wanted to die. She did not die” (204). Moreover, she makes every effort to make a normal home for her children, and to mitigate their feelings of grief and displacement:

Because of the children Helen felt a great pressure to pretend there was no outside. Or if there was an outside, to pretend she had escaped it. Helen wanted the children to think she was on the inside, with them. The outside was an ugly truth she planned to keep to herself.

It was an elaborate piece of theatre, this lying about the true state of where she was: outside.

She pretended by making breakfast and supper (though she often relied on chicken nuggets and frozen pizza) and she did the children’s homework with them. (13-14)

For all her best efforts, however, Helen is unable to keep the “ugly truth” of “the outside” all “to herself”; her children all—to varying degrees—reveal signs that they too feel displaced by the loss of their father.

Although Helen tries to provide a stable home for the children, Cal’s death has a profound effect on John, and—not surprisingly—it disrupts his sense of order and stability. He is haunted by nightmares: “Every night, for a long time, a presence would
seep through his bedroom door. An evil presence, in the form of a cloud, wet and cold” (92); he suffers from chronic stomach aches: “He always had a pain in his tummy. Rub my tummy, he’d say. It was stress. A little kid with stress. Nobody said stress back then. Growing pains, they said” (17-18); and he develops nervous habits: “He started chewing things after the rig went down. His teacher said John ate his pencils during class. [. . .] He also chewed the cuffs of his shirts until they were in rags” (14). Moreover, his mother tells us, at the tender age of ten, John believes that he needs to become the man of the house: “Johnny got a paper route and on winter evenings she and the girls followed him, waiting on the street while he banged on doors collecting change. [. . .] John had the idea that he should support the family” (16).

Like Smallwood’s childhood instability in *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams*, John’s childhood instability disrupts his sense of rootedness in and attachment to home, and leads to a pattern of transience in his adult life. That John’s frequent travel exacerbates his feelings of disorientation and displacement, however, is illustrated in the phone call he makes to his mother from the Singapore airport: “Johnny called last night to say the sun was rising over Singapore. Rising or setting, he did not know” (5). Moreover, like Smallwood, whose childhood feelings of *atopia*—in the words of Hans Bak—“induce a lifelong fear of entrapment in domesticity and marriage” (224), John has a deep-seated fear of settling down and having children. Referring to his relationship with Sophie, for example, which ended because she wanted to have a baby and he did not, he says, “the cry for a baby was like a haunting. John had thought they needed a priest or
some holy man of another stripe to exorcise it. [. . .] She was looking for an enslavement that would chain them both” (192-193).

That John fears having children is hardly surprising given that one of his most poignant—and traumatic—childhood memories after his father’s death is of his sister’s birth. Because nobody else is around when his mother goes into labour, John accompanies her in the cab to the hospital. Seeing her in labour, “He’d thought that his mother was possessed by the devil, or something more ordinary and worse” (40). Even more traumatic, however, is that when they get to the hospital, she and John become separated, and he fears that—like his father—his mother has abandoned him: “And she’d left him in the elevator. It was unforgivable. John’s father had already done the impossible: His father had died. What he had thought, moving towards his mother’s hospital room with his Aunt Louise: His mother must have died too” (42). After the loss of his father, John does not think he can handle his mother’s death as well:

If the death of his mother was behind that curtain, John realized, he was unequal to it. He knew he was just a kid and that he should not understand about being unequal to anything. Most people didn’t have to face that kind of realization until they were well out of childhood; he knew all that. But he had learned too early that you could be unequal to your situation. (42)

John is amazed to find that his mother is not dead after all, and he develops a strong attachment to his newborn sister: “Gabrielle had been his from that moment. She belonged to John. The little baby had been his to protect and love” (43). However, although his mother is “restored to John” (43), and although he is devoted to his sisters, particularly the youngest, John’s fear of abandonment—and of losing control—leaves a lasting impression on his romantic life.
Having witnessed his mother’s grief following the loss of her husband, John believes that allowing himself to fall in love is too dangerous: “How foolish his parents were to love like that. How foolish to have so many children. They had no money. He wants to ask his mother, What were you thinking? [. . .] Why did you love each other so much? It destroyed you. Don’t give that much, he wants to say. People don’t have to give that much” (107). Like his mother, he thinks of romantic love in terms of risk assessment but—unlike his mother—he does not use this language ironically: “His parents had believed what people said about risk back then. They had believed there was a new science devoted to the assessment of it. Risk could be calculated and quantified. The risk, they had believed, was worth it” (108). He is so devoted to the idea of averting heartache and remaining in control of his emotions that he dodges fatherhood like the plague:

John has avoided being a father all his adult life. It has taken stealth and some underhandedness. It has taken clarity of purpose when the moment called for dreamy abandon. He has practised withdrawal. He has kept what he wants, what he actually wants for his life, in the centre of his thoughts even while in the throes of orgasm. He’s kept a tight fist on the reins of himself. (238)

That, while on a business trip to Iceland, he impregnates a graduate student (who, ironically, studies homelessness) illustrates that the “withdrawal” method is as ineffective as a model for human relationships as it is as a form of birth control. And the idea that we can master and control nature is proven yet again to be an illusion.

As I have argued, the actions of the oil industry are unethical not only because they lead to displacement and to detachment among people, and between people and place, but also because they disregard the particularities of people and place. For Berry, ethics are grounded not just in place, but also in the recognition that people, places, and
events are unique and nonexchangeable: “Recognition of the uniqueness of creatures and events is the reason for the standing we humans grant (when we do grant it) to one another before the law, and it is the reason we ‘return thanks’ (when we do so) for food and other gifts that come to us from the living world’” (“American Imagination” 32-33). Moreover, he claims that imagination is the “particularizing force” that enables us to acknowledge this uniqueness and its relationship to ethics: “Without imagination there is no right appreciation of these rarities—no lenity, amity, or mercy” (33).

The belief in the uniqueness of “creatures and events” is also one of the key justifications for what Rae, employing Spargo’s terminology, refers to as “‘the resistant strain of mourning’” (18), and it forms the basis of Helen’s ethics of mourning in February. Like David Eng and David Kazanjian’s work on melancholia, which I discussed in Chapter 3, Spargo’s writings, says Rae, are part of a body of scholarship that contests Freud’s pathologization of melancholia, or “a mourning without end” (Eng and Kazanjian 3). Rae contends that this scholarship has “appeared in many variations,” but fundamentally, it all “ask[s] whether the completed ‘work of mourning,’ or the successful conclusion of the project of freeing oneself emotionally from the lost beloved is possible and, beyond that, whether it is ethically and politically desirable” (16). “Ironically,” as Rae suggests, the seeds of this school of thought may be found in “Freud’s own later work” (16). She contends that in “The Ego and the Id” (1923) and Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety (1926), Freud revised his original assertion in “Mourning and Melancholia” (1917) that melancholia is pathological: “Freud retreats from the position that the mental
health of the mourner depends on severing all ties with the lost beloved, acknowledging instead that melancholia is an inevitable part of ego formation” (16). According to Freud’s new model, says Rae, continued attachment to, rather than gradual detachment from, “lost loved ones” is a healthy part of the grieving process: “An ongoing relationship with lost loved ones, who are resurrected within the self, or ‘introjected,’ constitutes an essential part of every healthy person’s identity. [. . .] In introjection, the ego identifies with the lost object, and continues to love it as part of itself” (16).

Although “[t]his naturalization of melancholia implicitly challenges Freud’s initial program for healthy mourning by rendering it impossible,” proponents of “the resistant strain of mourning” argue that this challenge does not go far enough (Rae 18; 16). Rather than simply acknowledging that in the grieving process, there will be “inevitable lacks,” they make “a deliberate decision about how not to respond to loss” (16). In other words, says Rae, their work “might be characterized, in general, as a resistance to reconciliation, full stop: a refusal to accept the acceptance of loss, whether through the severing and transference of libidinal ties or through the successful expansion of identity through introjection, or through any other kind of compensatory process” (16-17). According to Rae, Spargo incorporates “both Levinas’s ethics of alterity and Bernard Williams’s analysis of the role of agent-regret” to argue that “ethical mourning [. . .] involves an acute and stubborn retroactive sense of responsibility for the loss” (18). For Spargo, “resistance to reconciliation” (16) is an essential part of assuming “responsibility”: “To mourn in a resistant way is to repudiate consolation in favor of a
fantasy about agency, in which the mourner might have possessed advanced knowledge of the other’s death and ‘achieved a proper state of preparedness,’ so that harm might never have come to him” (Rae 18).

In her obsessive recitation of the events leading up to the sinking of the rig, Helen “repudiates consolation in favor of a fantasy about agency” and “‘preparedness’” (Rae 18). She repeatedly imagines what happened the night of the disaster: “A wave of ice hit the window and it smashed. The metal lid had not been drawn shut over the glass, as it should have been, and the window smashed and water got over the electric panel and short-circuited it. The men had to operate the ballast doors manually and they didn’t know how” (148-149). But she also repeatedly envisions what might have happened to Cal and the other men on board had things been done differently: “Helen has memorized the ifs and she can rhyme them off like the rosary. If the men had the information they needed, if they had lowered the deadlight, if the water hadn’t short-circuited the control panel, if Cal had had another shift, if Cal had never gotten the job in the first place” (293-294).

Moore’s complex narrative technique also compels her readers to picture alternative scenarios, and draws us into Helen’s “fantasy about agency” (Rae 18). Moore alternates between a third-person, limited-omniscient narrative—focalized through Helen’s eyes—and a disarmingly direct, second-person narrative that is also focalized through Helen. After recounting the sequence of events the night of the disaster, for example, Helen asks us to envision that one of the operators was going to read the
manual, and so would have known what to do when the portal smashed: “Imagine instead a man with his feet up—for the sake of argument—and a cup of coffee cradled near his crotch, and maybe he’s reading the manual. For the sake of argument: he has a manual open on his lap, and he’s going to place a call later to his wife, and he’s also got a book. It’s a long shift. Later on he will read the book” (149). By addressing the reader directly, and by continually demanding that “we” need to reconstruct the disaster—“Do we know what they had on the rig for supper that night?”; “we should think about the manual. We should think about the portal”—Moore encourages us to assume collective responsibility for the disaster, and for imagining alternative possibilities (149 emphasis added).

Yet Moore also makes it clear that no matter how many alternative scenarios we might imagine along with Helen, we cannot save the men on the Ocean Ranger, or prevent the negligence that has already occurred:

The man in the control room has got the cup of instant coffee and he’s reading the manual, but here’s the thing: the manual didn’t say how to control the ballast if there was an electrical malfunction. So he can read the manual all he wants. He can read it backwards if he wants. Or he can read it in Japanese. It’s never going to tell him what to do. And so the water from the broken portal hits the electrical panel and short-circuits it. (152)

That we acknowledge the limitations of the fantasy is important, because it is impossible to bring the men back from the dead. As Rae suggests, the “fantasy of retroactive agency is, of course, unrealistic” (18). Nevertheless, it is “meaningful” and ethical “because it typically persists beyond this case to analogous cases in the future: it translates into a commitment to preventing others from meeting a similar fate” (18).
In her dedication to reading the Royal Commission reports, and to memorizing where the brass rods go, Helen illustrates how the “fantasy of retroactive agency” might “translate [. . .] into a commitment to preventing others from meeting a similar fate” even though it is “unrealistic” (18):

Those brass rods. Nobody knew how to use the brass rods. If they’d known, the rig wouldn’t have sunk. She has learned. Helen has read the reports; she has studied the diagrams; she knows where the rods go and why and how. Because those men didn’t know and they didn’t know, they didn’t know, and it could happen to any one of us.

You might get attacked by a fist through a window and you can bet Helen is ready. (152)

Helen’s preparation is hypothetical “of course,” since it is highly unlikely that she will ever find herself on a sinking oil rig and—even if she did—the odds that the sinking would recur in exactly the same way are slim to nil. But her “fantasy” serves an important rhetorical function nevertheless; Rae argues that “for Spargo even the most ‘esoteric’ and ‘subjective’ experiences of resistant mourning can serve the larger interests of society: they amount to ethical protests against ‘a dominant cultural pathology that trivializes death’ and ‘symbolic social structures that contain and reduce the meaning of the other’” (18). Likewise, Helen’s efforts to imagine a different ending to the Ocean Ranger disaster “amount to an ethical protest” against an industry—and an economy—that treat people and places as objects that can be valued and exchanged.

According to Rae, Jacques Derrida was another key “advocate” for the ethics of the “‘refusal to mourn’”: “In a series of works dating back to the mid 1980s, Derrida repeatedly rejects the imperatives of ‘so-called normal mourning,’ including the line of thinking that accepts and affirms the introjection of lost loved ones” (17). For Derrida,
“such reconciliation to loss [. . .] [is] unethical, an act of infidelity toward lost loved ones and a failure to respect what death really means” (Rae 17). Although we might find it comforting to imagine that the dead have become a part of us, “‘It would be unfaithful,’ he says, ‘to delude oneself into believing that the other living in us is living in himself’” (Rae 17).

In order to remain faithful to the dearly departed, we must acknowledge the impossibility of fully “interioriz[ing]” “the other” (Derrida 35). Rae claims that for Derrida, then, “The only true way of honoring the dead is to sustain a relationship with them that fuses a sense of intimacy with a very real sense of the finality of their deaths” (17). This fusion means, paradoxically, that the “failure” to complete “‘the work of mourning’” is actually a “success” (Rae 16). According to Derrida,

> We can only live this experience in the form of an aporia: the aporia of mourning and of prosopopeia, where the possible remains impossible. Where success fails. And where faithful interiorization bears the other and constitutes him in me (in us), at once living and dead. It makes the other a part of us, between us—and then the other no longer quite seems to be the other, because we grieve for him and bear him in us, like an unborn child, like a future. And inversely, the failure succeeds: an aborted interiorization is at the same time a respect for the other as other, a sort of tender rejection, a movement of renunciation which leaves the other alone, outside, over there, in his death, outside of us. (35)

The process of Helen’s incomplete mourning, which begins with her attempts to “interiorize” Cal, and ends in “an aborted interiorization,” reflects this kind of successful failure. Moreover, in her stubborn assertion, “Let me tell you something: There are things you don’t get over” (68), Helen’s mourning might be characterized as resistant in the Derridean sense.

Unlike many of the family members of the Ocean Ranger victims, Helen believes her husband to be dead as soon as she learns that the rig has sunk: “It took three days to
be certain the men were all dead. People hoped for three days. Some people did. Not Helen. She knew they were gone, and it wasn’t fair that she knew” (7). She cannot stay at the community mass, which “[t]hey didn’t call [. . .] a memorial service” and where “no reference was made to the men being dead” (7), because she cannot bear to be around the hope of the other families, which she believes to be delusional: “Here’s why Helen left the church in the middle of the mass: Some of those people were full of hope. Insane with it, and the lore is that hope can bring lost sailors home. That’s the lore. Hope can raise the dead if you have enough of it” (13).

Although Helen rejects the notion that “[h]ope can raise the dead,” and although she believes in the “finality of” (Derrida 35) Cal’s death—“Helen knew, absolutely, that Cal was dead and she would be lucky to get his body back” (13)—she remains devoted to him and to his memory: “That must be part of what they decided: If Cal died out there on the rig, Helen would never forget him. That was the promise. She will never forget him” (302). This devotion manifests itself in two key ways: first, in a desire to recover his body: “She wanted his body. She remembers that. She knew he was dead and how badly she wanted his body” (13), and then in a recurring desire to embody Cal during the disaster: “But she wants to be in Cal’s skin when the rig is sinking. She wants to be there with him” (70). In a slight twist on Derrida’s idea that when we lose somebody, “we grieve for him and bear him in us” (35), Helen imagines herself becoming “a part” of Cal, but she also imagines that the fear Cal felt while the rig was going down has become “a part” of her: “Helen is in his skin. She is Cal and she lives through this every night, or
sometimes in an instant as she cleans the dishes [. . .]. it is an absolute terror that she wakes to every night. A terror that has invested itself in the microfilaments of her being, in every strand and particle of thought” (300). In embodying Cal’s fear, Helen “bears the other and constitutes him in” her (Derrida 35).

Moreover, in her portrayal of Helen’s imagined conversations with Cal, Moore also employs “‘the figure of prosopopeia’” (Derrida 27). Quoting the work of Paul de Man, Derrida says that prosopopeia is “‘the fiction of the apostrophe to an absent, deceased, or voiceless entity, which posits the possibility of the latter’s reply, and confers upon it the power of speech’” (qtd. in Derrida 27). For example, even though “Helen had not believed in an afterlife before Cal died and she still did not think of it,” she did “listen[. . .] for Cal after he died. She listened for his tread on the stairs; she listened for his advice. [. . .] She asked him what he thought of the girls” (291). And during significant life events—such as the birth of her daughter—she imagines “the possibility” of his “reply”:

And then a murmur, a collective gasp went up, and it turned out her baby girl was fine, just fine, what a big girl, and Helen found herself thinking, Look, Cal, look. She would have liked him to tell her certain things, and she knows exactly what they are:
   I’m not afraid.
   Tell Helen thank you.
   Tell the children I love them. (292)

Imagining his presence gives her comfort, and makes her feel—in some small way—as if Cal is still part of her life. Ultimately, however, to recall Derrida’s words, Helen “can only live this experience in the form of an aporia [. . .] where the possible remains
impossible. Where *success fails*” (35). In other words, Helen’s “interiorization” of Cal and her conversations with him must inevitably result in successful failure.

According to Derrida, “interiorization” of “the departed other” is a successful failure because the “movement of interiorization keeps within us the life, thought, body, voice, look or soul of the other, but in the form of those hypomnemata, memoranda, signs or symbols, images or mnesic representations which are only lacunary fragments, detached and dispersed—only ‘parts’ of the departed other” (37). Likewise, in her attempts to interiorize Cal, Helen succeeds in “keep[ing]” Cal “within” her, but her memories of him are “detached and dispersed,” and they are capable of representing only “fragments” of him and his life:

She remembers the time he poured boiling water on his foot and the blister was as big as the palm of her hand [. . .] but she doesn’t remember if that happened before or after the children.

She will never forget his face. She won’t forget the green cotton scarf he had. Or the time he patched the canoe and there was the smell of Varathane.

To remember his voice she has to think of him speaking to her on the phone. She could feel if the phone was going to ring. [. . .] Helen thinks of Cal on the phone and she hears his voice perfectly. Or she can remember his voice if she thinks of him singing.

If they were in the car she’d say, Sing me a song. (69)

On one hand, Helen vehemently insists upon listing all of the things that “[s]he remembers” about Cal. But on the other hand, she is forced to acknowledge that her memory is full of gaps; for all of the things that she remembers, there are just as many things that “she doesn’t remember” (69 emphasis added). And this passage illustrates that even her memories of parts of Cal are conditional upon other things: “To remember his voice, she has to,” “she can remember his voice if” (69 emphasis added). Furthermore,
that Moore modifies Helen’s affirmation, “She remembers,” to variations on the negative and synonymous phrase, “She will never forget,” emphasizes that Helen likely will forget some things, and casts doubt upon her claim to remember anything “perfectly” (69). As Helen concludes, memory is fleeting, fragmentary, and unreliable: “You needed a strong memory to love the dead, and it was not her fault that she was failing. She was trying. But no memory was that strong. This was what she knew now: no memory was that strong” (247).

At best, suggests Derrida, memories are stand-ins for those we have lost; they represent both more and less than the person for whom we are grieving: “the figure of this bereaved memory becomes a sort of (possible and impossible) metonymy, where the part stands for the whole and for more than the whole that it exceeds” (37). For Helen, her memories of Cal “become” this “(possible and impossible) metonymy”:

The dead are not individuals, she thought. They are all the same. That’s what made it so very hard to stay in love with them. Like men who enter prison and are stripped of their worldly possessions, clothes, jewellery, the dead were stripped of who they were. Nothing ever happened to them, they did not change or grow, but they didn’t stay the same either. They are not the same as they were when they were alive, Helen thought.

The act of being dead, if you could call it an act, made them very hard to love. They’d lost the capacity to surprise. (246-247)

By losing the ability to “change or grow,” those we have lost are stripped of what makes them human: their particularity. Moreover, as signifiers of what we have lost, our memories can only be abstractions of “the dead.”

Helen’s attempts to “interiorize” Cal, to “bear […] him in” her, ultimately end in the “sort of tender rejection” of which Derrida speaks (35). Although she believes that
she “is in his skin” (300), and although “[s]he lives through the disaster every night of her life” (70), Helen realizes that, paradoxically, she “is there with him. / But she is not there, because nobody can be there” (300). For Helen, that Cal was alone when he died is the most difficult thing to accept:

What Helen cannot fathom or forgive: We are alone in death. Of course we are alone. It is a solitude so refined we cannot experience it while we are alive; it is too rarefied, too potent. It is a drug, that solitude, an immediate addiction. A profound selfishness, so full of self it is an immolation of all that came before. Cal was alone in that cold. Utterly alone, and that was death. That, finally, was death. (292)

For Derrida, however, it is this “movement of renunciation which leaves the other alone, outside, over there, in his death, outside of us” (Derrida 35) that—to borrow Rae’s words—“fuses a sense of intimacy with a very real sense of the finality of [. . .] death,” and that makes the “refusal to mourn” an ethical act (Rae 17).

In her attempts to reconstruct the disaster, Helen comes to realize that it is not just Cal’s death, but all death that is incomprehensible and unfathomable. In her comparison between death and the wave that smashed the Ocean Ranger’s portal, which precipitated the “fatal chain of events” (301), Helen concludes that death is unspeakable, even as we try to speak of it: “This wave is death. When we say death we mean something we cannot say. The wave—because it is just water after all, just water, just naked power, just force—the wave is a mirror image of death, not death itself” (299). We cannot speak of death because it is such a unique, individual experience that we cannot know it until we experience it ourselves: “A great guzzling of itself is death, or whatever the end of life
may be called, or referred to as, or spoken of. But we don’t know how to name it because it is unknowable. / Except those men know it. / Cal knows it” (299).

Just as Helen’s efforts to imagine Cal’s death ultimately result in her realization that there will always be an aporia, so too do her attempts to reconstruct the disaster:

The Royal Commission said there was a fatal chain of events that could have been avoided but for the inadequate training of personnel, lack of manuals and technical information. And that is the true story. It is the company’s fault. But there is also the obdurate wall of water, and because of it Helen will finally give up her careful recital of the fatal chain of events. (301)

There is no doubt that the company is responsible for their negligence. As Berleant would say, there is a reciprocal relationship between people and place, and the company’s actions—and inactions—contributed to the disaster. However, to blame only the company for the sinking of the rig would be to succumb to the illusion that complete mastery over environment is possible. But the “obdurate wall of water”—the image of the wave that smashed the portal window and also a metaphor for death—illustrates the fallacy and hubris of this illusion; as the Royal Commission observed, “the sea cannot be conquered” (Report Two 31).16 Alternatively, to blame only the water without accounting for human error would be to fall into the trap of environmental determinism.17 As Moore suggests, “the true story” is that “it is the company’s fault. But there is also the [. . .] wall of water.” Like the avalanche scene in Colony of Unrequited Dreams, human agency cannot

16 Unfortunately, as my epigraph illustrates, in their use of the rhetoric of man versus nature, the Royal Commission does fall into the trap of environmental determinism.

17 I am indebted to a conversation with Sean Burgess for this observation.
be separated from nature; to recall the words of Berleant, “person and environment are continuous” (*Aesthetics of Environment* 4).

Although Helen “finally give[s] up her” attempts to reconstruct the disaster, and although the final scene suggests that Cal’s death will always “leave a definite shadow” over their lives, *February* is neither a novel of despair, nor of stoic acceptance (306). In the words of Tennyson’s Ulysses, “Tho’ much is taken, much abides” (65). As a homeless man tells Jane of his novel, in a rather playful (and pointed) metafictional moment, “This is a book about redemption” (264). It is also, as Sylvia Brownrigg contends, a book about “renewal”:

By 2008, the metaphors of renewal are finally at hand. Helen has been urged by one daughter to take a yoga class, so in a slyly comic scene we see her trying to achieve gratitude and balance. Earlier, learning how to drive, she is told by her instructor, ‘Helen, we have to go forward.’ She has an adventure in Greece with her widowed sister. And then there’s her house—and the man who is reshaping it for her. (8)

Indeed, the ending—with Helen’s wedding to Barry, the man who renovates her house, their honeymoon in Mexico, and the birth of John’s baby—more befits the conventions of a comedy than a tragedy, a move Moore says was deliberate: “When someone dies, in order to honour their life you have to live joyfully” (Showler).

The ending, with its emphasis on the motif of cycles of return—of the sun, of the waves, of Barry to Helen, and of John, Jane, and their baby to St. John’s—also suggests that sometimes “to go forward,” you have to go back. According to Berry, “in all our attempts to renew or correct ourselves, to shake off despair and have hope, our starting place is always and only our experience. We can begin (and we must always be
beginning) only where our history has so far brought us, with what we have done” (Life 4). It is only by returning to the Ocean Ranger disaster, then, and only by reflecting on “where [. . .] history has so far brought” Newfoundland, that Newfoundlanders might find the answer to the question posed by John to his mother at the beginning of the novel: “Have you ever tried to figure out the difference between what you are, he said, and what you have to become?” (5).

Moreover, February suggests that “[t]o refind place” (Casey, Getting Back iv), we may need to reorient ourselves and our values. To be ethical, this reorientation—to recall the words of Berleant—necessitates “deep political changes away from hierarchy and its exercise of power and toward community” (Aesthetics and Environment 5). In other words, we need to move “away” from an understanding of people and places as abstractions to be exchanged in the market economy, and “away” from efficiency as “an end in itself, a value often more important than others” (Stein 3), and “toward” those things Luttwak suggested were invaluable—the very things about which we are sentimental—“love, family, attachment, community, culture” (qtd. in Stein 1).
Conclusion

Re-imagining Littoral Places

Louisiana isn’t the only place that has shrimp.

~ British Petroleum Representative Randy Prescott, following the Gulf of Mexico Oil Spill, 2010 (qtd. in Brett Michael Dykes)

We act like the ocean is merely a source of materials and a sink largely because we lack an ethical framework encouraging us to see otherwise. An ethic is not simply a strategy or a prescription or remedy. An ethic is a concept of relationship—one we wish to acknowledge or one we seek to forge.

~ Carl Safina, “A Sea Ethic: Floating the Ark”

Lawrence Buell argues that “[i]f, as environmental philosophers contend, Western metaphysics and ethics need revision before we can address today’s environmental problems, then environmental crisis involves a crisis of imagination the amelioration of which depends on finding better ways of imaging nature and humanity’s relation to it” (Environmental Imagination 2). In revealing the adverse ecological, economic, and social consequences that result when “place [is] reduced to location and position in space,” and treated as a site that can be “easily exchanged or merely manipulated” (Casey, Representing 353), Johnston’s The Colony of Unrequited Dreams, Harvey’s The Town that Forgot How to Breathe, and Moore’s February highlight the need for Newfoundlanders to re-imagine their relationship with place.

As a littoral region, and one that includes vast and varied landscapes, Newfoundland has posed particular challenges for the Western imagination. As I have noted, Sean Cadigan contends that “by the late nineteenth century,” “colonial leaders” began to turn their backs on the ocean; rather than focussing on ocean resources, they
“embraced a landward, often nationalist policy of industrial development which ignored the ecological constraints that had defined previous societies” (3-4). After Newfoundland’s Confederation with Canada, says Cadigan, Smallwood’s focus on landward industrialization was an extension of the nineteenth-century tradition of “neglect[ing] Newfoundland and Labrador’s dependence on marine resources” (4), and of modeling its development on “industrial and urban transformations that occurred elsewhere” (3), and this tradition continues to the present day. Even when Newfoundland politicians and policy-makers have focussed their attention on ocean resources, they have often treated the ocean as though it could be “easily exchanged” (Casey, Getting Back xiii) with the land. As I discussed in Chapter 3, for instance, for over a century, fisheries policies were based on Thomas Huxley’s dubious comparison between fishing and farming (Clover 62-63); and, as I argued in Chapter 4, in its use of land-based technology, “[o]ffshore drilling [. . .] is an extension to the oceans of a land-based industry” (Royal Commission Report Two 13).

In the long view, however, this bias towards large-scale landward development, and this tendency to “neglect Newfoundland and Labrador’s dependence on marine resources” (Cadigan 4) is an aberration: “For thousands of years Newfoundland and Labrador’s cold-ocean environment had supported relatively small-scale, local populations spread out along a vast littoral and heavily dependent on the harvest of marine animals such as cod, seals and whales” (Cadigan 3). Such a lengthy tradition suggests that a different way of inhabiting Newfoundland—a “reinhabitation,” to recall
my discussion of the ending of *The Town that Forgot How to Breathe* (Casey, *Getting Back* 295)—is conceivable. But although *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams*, *The Town that Forgot How to Breathe* and *February* are—to varying degrees—nostalgic, melancholic, and even (that oft-disparaged word) ‘sentimental,’ they all acknowledge that no simple return is possible: the Beothuk are extinct; the men of the *Ocean Ranger* have long been in their graves; and much doubt remains about whether the cod stocks will ever recover. As I have argued, the expressions of loss in these novels do not, as many scholars have worried, represent pathological fixations; on the contrary, they provide necessary reflections on how Newfoundlanders lost their place sense—to recall Casey’s expression—in the first place. Moreover, in their “longing for a home that no longer exists or has ever existed” (Boym xiii), they illustrate the potential for the “Romantic” tradition of Newfoundland writing to “generate[. . .] sites for memory and history, for rewriting of the past as well as reimagining of the future” (Eng and Kazanjian 4). Given the “scarce leeway”of “the resources of a largely cold-ocean coastal environment” (Cadigan 296) like Newfoundland, such a “reimagining” undoubtedly necessitates a turn back towards the ocean.

This turn back to the ocean will not be an easy one, however. As many environmentalists and philosophers have argued, the “crisis of imagination” (Buell 2) in Western thought is particularly acute when it comes to our understanding of and relationship to ocean environments. According to Carl Safina, though we might have difficulty imagining ourselves as connected to the land, we have an even greater
difficulty imagining our connection to the ocean: “Of course, we [. . .] inflict disregard upon the land, but we consider the sea even further outside us, rather than seeing ourselves within the ocean’s life-sustaining envelope of breathable atmosphere and stabilized temperature” (1). And, Safina contends, if the concept of the ocean’s fluidity provides an apt image of connection, it is also that fluidity that tends to conceal the magnitude of the human imprint on the ocean: “The same fluidity that generates so much metaphor about life and time also closes the ocean’s skin instantly to hide the tracks of vessels and the scars inflicted by humanity” (3). Thus it is possible for a stoic—and an environmental determinist—like Patrick O’Flaherty to declare that “the sea [. . .] shows no mark of human labour and savagely reduces the subtlest contrivances of man to garbage on beaches” (100). Ironically, however,

[the] very same fluidity that makes the ocean look untrammeled actually smears and spreads the geographic footprint of people—our contaminants, trash, and alien species, the climate consequences of our combustion, and the largest commercial hunting of wildlife on Earth, which has already taken, on global average, 90 percent of the populations of big fishes. (Safina 2)

As Safina concludes—and as the horrifying images of the recent Gulf of Mexico Oil Spill remind us—the “ocean may be uncolonized by people, but it is hardly untrammeled wilderness” (2).

O’Flaherty is not alone in failing to recognize our reciprocal relationship with the ocean, and in perceiving the ocean as a hostile force. According to Christopher Connery, “thinking the oceanic poses distinctive problems, particularly in [W]estern discourses” (495). In his examination of the ocean’s figuration in the Judeo-Christian tradition, and of the recent “scholarly turn to the ocean,” he argues that “the conceptual difficulty with the
ocean, the ease with which it is subsumed by the engine of dematerialization, reflects a much longer and more enduring history of ocean-annihilating vision” (498). Thus O’Flaherty’s difficulty in conceptualizing the ocean, and Smallwood’s fear of the ocean, which I discussed in Chapter 2, might be traced to “the particular difficulties that the Biblical heritage bequeaths to [W]esterners, in their thinking of the ocean as a space, or as place” (Connery 495).

Even Casey, whose trilogy on place Connery characterizes as “the most sustained analysis to date of place” (495), is forced to admit that the ocean “is a place which is conceptualized with difficulty, and where one is easily lost” (Connery 506).

1 According to Connery, “The ocean as connector is a motif common to much of the new maritime perspective, and promises in many cases a way out of the older ideological or civilizational divides” (496). For example, the “Atlantic’s capacity to allow a re-imagination of the location of African, North American, and English/European black culture informed Paul Gilroy’s The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness,” and it was “a study which not only gave a new geography to modernity, but intervened in discussions of the ‘national’ character of black culture” (496). But in many of these visions, contends Connery, scholars still have difficulty acknowledging the ocean’s materiality: “The ocean, in these various oceanic turns, figures in very different ways. The ‘oceans connect’ vision resembles cultural studies of the borderlands: a line previously reified as a barrier is revealed as malleable, porous, thick, and connective. Yet here, the ocean qua ocean, as space or as a place, does not figure so significantly: its status as non-barrier is its salient feature” (497).

2 For Connery, phenomenology’s “return to the body, and the body’s emplacedness and emplacing character” might actually “highlight some of the conceptual difficulties in thinking the oceanic” (495). According to Connery, “Phenomenologists are notoriously earth-bound,” and they often prioritize walking in their discussions of “emplacement” (507). However, Arnold Berleant’s work on imagining coastal environments, in which he discusses the somatic experience of both swimming and sailing, suggests that imagining ourselves as emplaced (and embodied) in water environments may not be as difficult for
And yet, despite the difficulties, Newfoundlanders—and indeed all of us—must begin to re-imagine the ocean because, as Buell argues, “[f]or one thing, oceans are the closest thing on earth to a landscape of a global scope. They are also incomparably the largest commons: if there is to be a ‘tragedy of the commons,’ this will be the biggest” (Writing 199). For another thing, “our connection with the sea is more intimate” (Safina 2) than our connection with the land: “Most of the oxygen we breathe is made by ocean plankton. And when animals left the seas in which life arose, they took saltwater with them, in their bodies—an internal environment crucial for cellular survival. We are, in a sense, soft vessels of seawater” (Safina 2). Furthermore, “[a]bout a third of humanity now lives within fifty miles of a coast” (Safina 1). According to Safina, “Were it not for the fact that we are such visual creatures, our sense of community with the ocean should be easier and more intuitive to grasp than even our sense of the land” (2).

Recalling Aldo Leopold’s “Land Ethic,” which was “a famous call to extend our sense of community beyond humanity to encompass the whole living landscape” (Safina 2), and which was “a revolutionary idea [. . .] that has since become the implicit core of environmental thinking” (Safina 2), Safina laments, “Leopold seemed to land-lock his great idea by its title. From Leopold’s Wisconsin farm, oceans lay distant, out of sight and generally out of mind, as for most people. Even for many nature lovers, oceans seem distant, vague” (2). As Leopold did some sixty years ago, Safina urges us to enlarge our phenomenologists to imagine as Connery supposes (See Aesthetics and Environment: Variations).
conception of community, but this time, he contends, we must include the oceans: “It now seems desirable that we should extend our sense of community below high tide—complementing the Land Ethic with a ‘Sea Ethic’—including all life on Earth in our concept of community” (2).

Art and literature play a key role in envisioning a “‘Sea Ethic’” because—as Casey says—the “truth is that representation is not a contingent matter, something merely secondary; it is integral to the perception of the landscape itself—indeed, part of its being and essential to its manifestation” (Representing xv). Art is also “integral” to our “perception of” the seascape, one might add. And given the crucial link among our representation, experience and treatment of environment, there is much scholarship still to be done in analyzing the interdependence between our cultural representations of the oceans and policy-making.³ As Philip Steinberg suggests in The Social Construction of the Ocean (2007), “Analyses of the processes behind the images of socially constructed spaces is crucial, in part because every image suggests a social policy” (207).⁴

³ Although Connery, for example, believes that the recent scholarly turn to the ocean is promising, he acknowledges that it is “still nascent” and “hardly dominant in any field” (496).

⁴ Steinberg elaborates,

If the ocean is a friction-free transport surface outside society, then it should be managed with as few rules as possible to allow for maximum utilization. If the ocean is a set of developable places, then these places should be captured by sovereign states so that political authorities can institute regulations that will facilitate development through the placement of spatially fixed investments. And if the ocean is a resource-space too valuable to be squandered away by competitive states and their enterprises, then it should be stewarded (whether by
Although there is much work to do, “a different perspective of the shore is possible,” according to Berleant, who has begun to explore our aesthetic experience of coastal environments (Aesthetics and Environment: Variations 62). As I noted in my discussion of Smallwood’s difficulty in imagining the ocean, Berleant’s recent work is inspired by Buckminster Fuller, a “visionary designer” and “life-long sailor” (62), whose writings completely turned our conventional understanding of the coast on its head: “Fuller regarded the shore as the edge of the water instead of thinking of the shore as the edge of the land. Knowing the land from the vantage point of the sea gives us a remarkably different sense of the nature of our world. For the sailor, motion is unceasing and universal” (62). Fuller’s perspective, as Berleant describes it, is analagous to that of the outport residents Smallwood visits in Colony, and of the fishermen like Uncle Doug in The Town that Forgot How to Breathe—a people for whom “the shore was nothing but a place to fish from” (Johnston 139).

As I discussed in Chapter 2, Berleant maintains that viewing the world from the water necessitates an entirely different way of viewing the world entire: “our experience is transfigured when we consider the land from the standpoint of the water. We realize not only that we are continually part of a constellation of motions but that, because of our ever-changing position, we must certainly reconsider how we stand in relation to everyone else” (Aesthetics and Environment: Variations 62). Such a perspective prevents individual states, the community of states, or civil society) so that all nations (or individuals) may be given an opportunity to benefit from its resources. (207)
us—in contrast to Johnston’s Smallwood—from perceiving ourselves as detached from the world. When we are on the water, says Berleant,

The constant activity of perceiving, understanding, and responding to the situation gives us a rich and valuable lesson in living within the processes of the natural world. In particular, it exemplifies the reciprocity of natural forces and conditions, how these are not discrete objects and events but are interrelated and continuous. Most of all, the water environment forces us to see ourselves as an inseparable part of those processes. We are immersed in the world, which is at the same time a world transmuted by human agency. (66)

This call for us to “reconsider how we stand in relation to everyone else” (62) is strikingly similar to landlubber Wendell Berry’s notion of propriety, which I discussed in my assessment of the oil industry in February. Whether we like it or not, water environments essentially enforce a kind of propriety: “Because water environments are largely not human-made and so are not in the image of human culture, we are forced to recognize the limits of our power” (Berleant, Variations 66). Moreover, as with the collapse of the cod fisheries and the sinking of the Ocean Ranger, time and again, water environments “give us a sober sense of human proportions and limitations” (Berleant 66).

Now that we view the ocean as the newest frontier of resource development, it behooves us to remember the lesson of the Ocean Ranger: in the words of the Royal Commission, “the sea cannot be conquered; it must be endured” (Report Two 21). It must also, I would add, be better understood. Such an understanding, in the words of Safina, entails “[r]ecognizing the ocean’s importance to life and to human futures” and—more than endurance—it requires “a sense of moral engagement” (2). True “moral engagement” “mean[s] showing and sharing our sense of connectedness, dependence, gratitude, and commitment to the sea, whose gifts”—beyond supplying our incessant
demand for hydrocarbons—“include making this planet capable of supporting Life itself” (Safina 2). This dissertation argues that true “moral engagement” also means that Newfoundlanders and literary critics alike must “forge” a new “concept of relationship” (Safina 1), in which Newfoundlanders are understood not as passive victims of a fixed and deterministic environment, but rather as active participants in an ever-changing littoral place.
Works Cited


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