"Adventures in a sea-girt Isle": Creating a Newfoundland-Labrador identity in early juvenile fiction

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Résumé: *Gordon Moyles étudie les revues pour enfants du 19e siècle et montre comment, peu importe leur origine britannique ou américaine, elles reflètent l'idéologie coloniale de l'époque; il s'intéresse tout particulièrement aux oeuvres de Patrick O'Flaherty et de Wilfred Grenfell, le premier fixant l'horizon littéraire de Terre-Neuve pour de nombreuses générations et le second créant l'image-type du Terre-Neuvien, celle de l'Anglo-Saxon façonné, voire raffiné par les éléments, mais foncièrement pauvre et vivant de l'assistance d'autrui.*

For more than three hundred years after its discovery in 1497, Newfoundland remained closed to settlement. Not until 1820 were the restrictions against permanent residence lifted, and not until 1832 was the colony granted its first representative assembly. Only then did it begin to acquire, at least in western European terms, a distinct human history and an identity. Soon after, historians, missionary zealots, political commentators, and lovers of the primitive, unexplored and undescribed, rediscovered the colony. In almost every major British journal, a Newfoundland article on such subjects as the French Shore question, the earlier cruel treatment of the Beothucks, the want of a strong religious presence, or the advantages available to the sportsman could be found. More and more, imaginative writers pictured the colony as a quaint and curious society existing in a land of hardship and adventure.

As British attention to Newfoundland matters began to wane at the turn of the twentieth century, a corresponding American interest developed, one that also attracted explorers to the Labrador territory. Descriptive journalists like Bayard Taylor came to Newfoundland's outports, and imaginative writers like Norman Duncan portrayed its hardships and its hardihood. As Patrick O'Flaherty in *The Rock observed* (1979) points out, "It might not be an exaggeration to say that the island and Labrador became in some sense an imaginative outpost of the Eastern United States, with authors recreating in this sparsely populated and primitive territory an image of their own diminishing frontier" (83).

Thus, there exists a body of polemical and descriptive literature about Newfoundland, written in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, that remains unrivalled in the colony's history. In the popular magazines of the day – *Harper's, Blackwood's, Fortnightly Review, Murray's Magazine, Argosy, Scribner's Magazine, Wide World Magazine* – the British and American rea-

ding publics were continually regaled with Newfoundland articles, variously titled "A day's excursion in Newfoundland," "Planting in Labrador," and "Deer stalking on the Newfoundland barrens." Missionaries depicted their ordained endeavours in books with such titles as *Some account of a sowing time on the rugged shores of Newfoundland* (1857); visitors, military and civilian alike, recalled their experiences in *After icebergs with a painter* (1861) and *Lost amid the fogs* (1879); explorers like Bryant and Hind (and later Hubbard and Wallace) delighted their armchair audiences throughout the world with graphic accounts of their Labrador adventures; and finally, a number of fiction writers like Robert Lowell, R.M. Ballantyne, Norman Duncan and Theodore Roberts found Newfoundland and Labrador imaginatively stimulating and rewarding. Both Newfoundland and Labrador acquired a literary identity in the eyes of the outside observer. And central to the creation and perpetuation of that "identity" was a considerable number of children's stories – most of them of the true-life adventure kind – that appeared both in the leading juvenile magazines of the day and as full-length novels.

To the youthful turn-of-the-century reader of *Boy's own, The Captain, St. Nicholas, Young England* and *Youth's companion*, Newfoundland was either a "fish-and-fog" land or (more romantically) a "sea-girt isle" offering the kinds of adventure that exposed human weakness and developed manliness. A simple (almost primitive) people, the Newfoundlanders of literature battled the sea, fog and ice as they fought for survival in their fishing and sealing endeavours. They – and sometimes visiting fictional characters – encountered (and triumphed over) savage natives, giant squid, menacing icebergs, unexpected storms and greedy merchants. In the accepted tradition that blended fact and fiction, writers like R. M. Ballantyne, Kirk Munroe, Dillon Wallace, Norman Duncan and Theodore Roberts created a "Newfoundland-Labrador mythology" through magazine fiction and later enshrined it in their novels.

In *Youth's companion*, for example, there are between 1882 and 1913 approximately forty Newfoundland stories and sketches typical of the genre of that time. That is, the magazine's editors, though among the first to feature a section for the "nursery," insisted that children should not be condescended to, that they were capable of reading factual literature and did not want merely fantasy or pure make-believe. Thus, it featured not only such acknowledged "children's" writers as Laura Richards and Frances Hodgson Burnett, but also many famous writers, like Jack London, Edith Wharton, Hamlin Garland, Charles G. D. Roberts and Marjorie Pickthall, whose writing bridged the gap between childhood and adulthood. And many of these writers produced juvenile literature not far removed from the adult world. Fact and fiction – especially in the adventure stories – were often indistinguishable.

In terms of its overall "Newfoundland" content, therefore, *Youth's companion* made little distinction between fictional adventures, such as "Adrift on an ice-field" (1883) and true-life adventures such as "Among the Labrador eg-

gers" (1885); nor did its editors make apology for "instructing" their youthful readers in short descriptive articles called "Newfoundland" (1882) and "Adrift on a dead whale: a sketch of Labrador life" (1882) or in political articles on "Newfoundland's troubles" (1891) and "The 'French Shore' question" (1900). And even in the seemingly acknowledged fictional literature itself, we find that curious (and sometimes happy) blend of "instruction and delight" which typifies much of the literature of the period.

An excellent example of this is C.H. Turner's "Tales of the Newfoundland coast" in the November and December 1887 issues of *Youth's companion*. Issued in four parts, its titles promised to satisfy curiosity and create excitement: "A strange cry" (Nov. 10), "Cast adrift by a rorqual" (Nov. 17), "The kraken's den" (Dec. 1), and "Stranded monsters" (Dec. 8). And this it most certainly does, the opening paragraphs being typical of the whole and of many other stories like it:

> Fifteen years ago, when I was a boy and lived on the bleak coast of Fish-and-Fog-land, among the seal-hunters and salmon-fishers who were my kith and kin, took place the event which of all others, I think, made the deepest impression upon my mind as a lad. It was a strange cry that we heard to seaward, one dark, stormy night in October, and a singular ocean harvest which followed it.
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> But perhaps I ought first to relate something of the manner in which we lived in that out-of-the-way quarter of the world, though it would be almost impossible to depict it clearly to readers in the United States.
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> My people resided on the north shore of a little bay called by the fishermen Dotard's Cove, from a species of seal which is often seen upon the coast of Newfoundland. The bay lies a few miles to the north of the better known Hall Bay, itself an indentation of the larger Notre Dame Bay....
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> Our houses, situated a little back from the beach and sheltered on the east and north-east sides by yellow crags and low spruce woods, was built of fir-timbers hewn square and laid one upon the other to form the walls; while the roof was made of "splits" also from fir-logs. Near by was a low, warm shed for our cow and five sheep; and we had a little enclosed plot of ground, of perhaps a quarter of an acre in extent, at the foot of the crags, for potatoes and turnips.

Eventually, Turner returns to his story of the "strange cry" heard "shortly after midnight on one of the last days of the month of October." But before doing so, he offers other facts of intrinsic and extrinsic value. Like most Newfoundlanders then and since, he says, his family would move to an inland lake during the summer, near the remains of a Beothuck encampment (*Boo-thicks* is Turner's pronunciation of the word). He then gives his readers a brief but accurate history of those unfortunate natives, relating the story of William Cull's alleged cruel treatment of the female Beothuck he had captured in 1804: "Cull took her to St. John's, where she was kindly treated and sent back to her tribe loaded with presents.... It was afterwards feared that she never reached her tribe, but was murdered by Cull for the presents she had received."

Naturally, the reader expects that the "strange cry" might be that of the ghost of the poor Beothuck woman, a view which Granny Minna inclines towards after she rejects the notion that it might be that of a "marmaid or a seabogy." She says, "I wod mair think it's the ghaist of the pore Boothick woman they wickedly shot, years agone, out on the ice o'the bay. They say the pore thing nae raised her hand in defence, nor said a word to beg for her life, but just crooched down on the ice, and crossed her arms on her breast." The fact that the cry is not so ghostly after all, but one that emanates from the wreck of an American ship with a cargo of cattle, does not in the least render the factual material irrelevant. Far from it. The value of a good story was measured not merely by how much you learned about yourself (through the actions of the central character) but how much you learned about society and nature. In his remaining three stories, which are difficult to establish as either fact or fiction, Turner manages to create exciting adventures (whale hunting, discovering a giant squid) while imparting some useful knowledge.

Turner was not alone in his belief that "imparting knowledge" was a necessary concomitant of children's stories. He was merely at the tail end of a long line of Sunday School moralists – from Thomas Day to Sarah Trimmer – whose Mr. or Mrs. Teachums sought to improve the youthful mind. One of their late disciples, Miss Cecilia Brightwell, who had experienced missionary life in Newfoundland, decided that one of her venues would be a story about the colony that she called *Georgie's present; Or, tales of Newfoundland* (1872). It is fairly typical of the kind of story the Sunday School moralists loved to tell.

Not often nowadays do we hear the youthful protagonist of a children's story asking his grandmamma (who had been the wife of a Newfoundland missionary) to regale him on his birthday with accounts of life in a faraway land. But Georgie, like most fictional children of that era, was that sort of child. "You know, dear grandmamma," he said, "this is my birthday, and I have come to spend half of it with you and aunt; and, first, we are to have a walk, then to take tea together, and, to finish up, you will tell me all about Newfoundland and what you have seen there, ending with the history of the wonderful [Newfoundland] dog [who sits devotedly nearby]."

Cleverly allowing Georgie to interject questions, Brightwell, through Grandmamma Ward, informs her readers of what missionary life was like in Newfoundland in 1835. Not only do we learn of the hardships of the settlers and the natives and the courage of the Newfoundland dog, but also of how snowshoes were made and worn and of how fires were started by rubbing two pieces of wood together. The now-familiar tale of the dog's gallant rescue of endangered men and women from a wrecked vessel becomes the pièce de résistance of the story, giving added value to Georgie's birthday present, a Newfoundland pup. It is all ingeniously done and not as boring as might be expected, though it now remains more interesting for its historical and social significance than its imaginative pleasure.

Even when imaginative pleasure began to inveigle its way into children's stories, as it certainly did in the many adventure stories of the 1880s and 90s, there were still some didactic elements which their adult writers were reluctant to discard: religious advice, imperialistic (or nationalistic) fervour, and moral intensity. While writers might now be able to provide plenty of action and adventure, they were still obliged to bring Christian ideals to the aid of their heroes and ensure that they manifested a sense of fair play in keeping with British tradition. For such a blend – adventure that built character – a Newfoundland/Labrador setting was ideal. Not only did it provide a place rife with adventurous possibility, but it was uncivilized enough to bring out the best in the fictional visitors. As Norman Duncan later observed, the nature of life in Newfoundland was itself an adventure – "the conditions of life are such that every Newfoundland lad intimately knows hardship and peril at an age when the boys in cities still grasp a hand when they cross the street." Such a place, in an age of growing industrialization and urbanism, was certain to teach self-reliance and build a manly character.

British writers were more insistent on (or somewhat more blatant in) the inclusion of the didactic than the Americans, a case in point being R. M. Ballantyne's *The crew of the Water Wagtail: A story of Newfoundland*, first published as a serial in *Young England* in 1888 and as a book in 1889. In essence, this story runs along like most of Ballantyne's forty other books for boys, the central narrative consisting of the "episodic and often picaresque adventure of a tenderfoot hero, whose manly courage and good moral sense, [take] him safely through a series of adventures, usually pitted against overtly characterised enemies, usually assisted by obviously good men like missionaries" (Hannabuss 55). But instead of being set in Hudson Bay or the Sudan or Oregon or the Andes or Madagascar, the story is set in Britain's oldest colony, Newfoundland, in the sixteenth century. The teen-age hero, Oliver Trench, is making his first ocean voyage in a ship of which his irascible father is the captain and whose crew, with one exception, is intent on mutiny. That exception is the ship's naturalist, Paul Burns, "a six-footer in his socks, a horse in constitution, a Hercules in frame," and with a firm belief in Divine Providence which he took every occasion to declare. Just as they near the coast of Newfoundland and the crew prepares to make the three walk the gangplank, Fate intervenes, sending a storm to destroy the ship and eventually maroon the whole company on the barren shores of Newfoundland.

Barren? There is ample food, and the land itself is described as a veritable Eden: "A wide undulating country, studded with lakelets and rich with verdure, stretched away from their feet to the horizon, where a range of purple hills seemed to melt and mingle with cloudland, so that the eye was carried, as it were, by imperceptible gradations from the rugged earth up into the soft blue sky; indeed, it was difficult to distinguish where the former ended and the latter began. The lakes and ponds were gay with water-lilies, and the air

was musical with the sweet cries of wild-fowl, while the noon-tide sun bathed the whole in a golden glory" (72). But more significantly, Ballantyne, like Turner and most other juvenile writers, felt obliged to lecture. As Stuart Hannabuss remarks, for Ballantyne, "story qua story, as a creative product, was not enough. It has to be underpinned with reliable factuality" (Hannabuss 57). Ballantyne chooses, among other things, subjects that would capture his reader's attention: the Beothucks (called by Ballantyne "Bethucks"), the Great Auk, and the notorious devil-fish, the last of these written about voluminously in the adult magazines of the era. Indeed, so factual is he that he authenticates the existence of the giant squid in the following manner: "Lest any reader should imagine we are romanticizing here, we turn aside to refer him to a volume entitled Newfoundland, The Oldest Colony, written by Joseph Hatton and the Rev. Moses Harvey, in which (pp. 238-42) he will find an account of the giant cuttle-fish, or devil-fish, or squid, very similar to that which we have now described" (157).

But Ballantyne, much more than Turner or most American writers, was also concerned that his protagonists instilled moral integrity. His heroes and his readers together must learn to live in harmony with nature, respecting all its creatures as God (so Ballantyne believed) intended. In nearly all his stories, therefore, he includes a mentor, usually one who takes the hero and reader by surprise. Making their way through the Newfoundland forest after they have again been deserted by the ship's crew, Oliver, Paul and Captain Trench come upon "a tall, noble-looking man of middle age. He was dressed in the garb of a hunter. Long yellow curls hung on his shoulder, and a heavy beard and moustache of the same colour concealed the lower part of a bronzed and handsome countenance." He is not a native, some mix of Viking and aborigine, but British, speaking perfect English. He himself has been marooned on the island since before Cabot's visit (of which he knows nothing) and has, like Robinson Crusoe, made for himself a little paradise. The actual natives are his Fridays, one of them his wife, and some children mark the beginnings of a new and powerful race of people.

At first, Hendrick is loath to share his paradise with men "whose ruling ideas seem to be war and gold," feeling that "if white men now come to Newfoundland, I fear that the poor Bethucks will be exterminated." But he relents, partly intrigued by Paul's expostulation of the gospel of St. John, and is soon their teacher and guide. When introduced to his Beothuck companions, all "well-disposed and kindly in disposition," Oliver especially begins, like the children in Catharine Parr Traill's *Young naturalists*, to appreciate the bounty of nature and how to "live off the land." While the mutinous crew struggle for survival, killing the Great Auk and encountering cruel nature in the form of the great devil-fish with eleven hundred suckers, Oliver is learning conservation and self-reliance from the example of Hendrick and the Beothucks.

And that, primarily, is Ballantyne's message. The crew represent humani-

ty at large, Oliver and Paul those few individuals who seek to preserve a harmonious relationship between nature and man. That the former will be more successful is not only borne out by Ballantyne's oblique and forthright statements about modern society but in his assessment of Newfoundland's future. The land abounds with "lakes and rivers which swarm with fish and are alive with waterfowl; the woods, which are largely composed of magnificent trees, give shelter to myriads of animals suitable for food to man; the soil is excellent, and the grazing lands would maintain thousands of cattle – what more could man desire.... This will be a great country some day, you take my word for it [says Captain Trench]." But, Ballantyne interjects, "that prophecy, like many other prophecies, has only been partly fulfilled. It has come true, indeed, that Newfoundland now possesses the most valuable cod-fishery in the world, and that her exports of salmon are considerable, but as to her being a great country – well, that still remains unfulfilled prophecy; for, owing to no fault of her people, but to the evils of monopoly and selfishness...her career has been severely checked" (100). That is hardly an objectionable view, even today. Though Ballantyne's religious interpolations are cloying, his lessons overbearing, and his descriptions so often inaccurate, his pronouncements are so often correct, his blend of action and reflection so adept, and his style so engaging that one tends to forgive him his failures. *The crew of the water Wagtail*, mediocre compared with *Hudson's Bay* or *Snowflakes and sunbeams*, is still an enjoyable book to read.

"Too often," writes Eric Quayle, "the action in Ballantyne's stories is braked by the gum of piety" (302). That might be said of most of the Newfoundland stories in early children's magazines, even of those peripheral stories of the Grand Banks such as Rudyard Kipling's well-known *Captains courageous* (1896) and Kirk Monroe's *Dorymates* (in *Harper's young people* 1888, as a book 1889). But at the turn of the century and increasingly thereafter, there is a noticeable tempering of overt Christian piety in favour of a more humanistic emphasis on self-improvement. Indeed, even in *Captains courageous* and *Dorymates* it is man's awareness of his own inner resources (when face to face with hostile nature) and his ability to take responsibility for his actions that become thematically dominant. And in terms of the juvenile fiction about Newfoundland/Labrador, this change coincides nicely with two important individualistic enterprises that spurred a renewed awareness of the "northern fortress" and an interest in fictional accounts of life there: Wilfred Grenfell's much-publicized endeavours as a missionary in northern Newfoundland and Labrador and several flamboyant expeditions into the interior of Labrador itself.

It was not that Labrador had been unheard of before Grenfell's time. Quite the contrary. Though only a few readers would have known much about the work of the Moravians, many would have been aware of the several attempts by Hind and Bryant and members of Bowdoin College to penetrate Labrador's

vast hinterland. Others might even have read such factual accounts as Alphaeus Packard's *The Labrador coast* (1891) or the less interesting true-life adventures of C.A. Stephens and W.A. Stearns entitled *Left on Labrador* (1872) and *Wrecked on Labrador* (1888). But when the "Grenfell movement" (lectures, stories, interviews, fund-raising) was at its peak and the somewhat poignant stories of Wallace and Hubbard captivated the world, Labrador and, by association, Newfoundland became the subject of unprecedented curiosity for both adults and children.

Wilfred Grenfell, an English convert of D.L. Moody, came to Labrador in 1892 as a young medical doctor on a fact-finding tour and returned a year later to establish what became known as the "Grenfell Mission." In time there would be a string of hospitals and nursing stations, a number of co-operatives, orphanages, sawmills and other self-help agencies. Thousands of people, many in destitute circumstances, had their lives vastly improved by the benevolence of Grenfell and his team of physicians and assistants. To finance such an immense undertaking, Grenfell, ever an astute publicist, undertook a campaign which blanketed the English-speaking world. He proclaimed that life was a "field of honour" on which "knightly deeds" were waiting to be done, and he made Labrador familiar to Londoners and New Yorkers. In thousands of speeches and articles and in numerous books with such titles as *Vikings of today* (1895), *Adrift on an ice-pan* (1909), and *Down to the sea: Yarns from the Labrador* (1910), Grenfell invented and sometimes exaggerated Labrador life – the peculiarities and folkloric beliefs, the hardships and perseverance, the simple joie de vivre of the people, and the rewards and the fun to be had in serving them.

Not forgotten in all this were the knightly aspirants, the juvenile readers who might someday join the crusade, or at least support it with their money. In nearly every juvenile magazine, there are articles on, chats with, and stories by Wilfred Grenfell. A cursory examination reveals that in *St. Nicholas*, Grenfell himself wrote a couple of true-life adventure stories called "Brin" (1911) and "Jim Wilson's chum (1916), while Mary Parkman described the work of "The deep-sea doctor" (1917) and Alice Kendall depicted life "In Dr. Grenfell's town" (1917). In *Youth's companion* Grenfell reported "From the log of the hospital ship 'Athabasca'[sic]" (1903) and on "Reindeer vs dogs in the subarctic" (1911); in *The young man* P.T. McGrath wrote on the heroism of "Grenfell of Labrador" (1907), and Grenfell himself followed with an answer to the largely rhetorical question "Who wouldn't be a missionary?" (1910). In addition to all this, Grenfell's best-selling survival narrative *Adrift on an ice-pan* (1909) became a favourite of school anthologists. Later, a number of biographies, notably Fullerton Waldo's *Grenfell: Knight errant of the north* (1924) and Dillon Wallace's *The story of Grenfell of Labrador* (1922), were written specifically for children. All in all, the Grenfell legend alone was enough to engage a considerable number of juvenile readers over many years and to make Labrador a

household word.

Between 1903 and 1908, however, readers strove to keep abreast of the journalistic commentaries and book-length accounts of three of the most arduous, controversial and celebrated explorations into the Labrador interior. In July 1903, Leonidas Hubbard undertook with boyish enthusiasm to traverse what was then one of the last blank spots on the map of North America, the land between North West River, Labrador, and Ungava Bay. With him were Dillon Wallace, his close friend, and George Elson, a Cree guide. Unprepared for the unremitting harshness of the land, they were forced to retreat just short of Lake Michikamau: Hubbard starved to death, while Wallace and Elson, walking skeletons, barely made it back to civilization.

In 1905, after Wallace in his *Lure of the Labrador wild* seemed to settle some of the controversy surrounding Hubbard's death, he resolved to attempt the trek again. This time, however, he was challenged by Hubbard's widow, Mina, and in a race described as "unique in the annals of wilderness exploration," they raced each other across the Labrador barrens. Their exploits, vividly recreated in Wallace's *The long Labrador trail* (1907) and Hubbard's *A woman's way through unknown Labrador* (1908), became best-sellers, the former going through six printings in the first year alone. The "Labrador sensation," along with Grenfell's promotional efforts, glamourized the challenge of rugged Labrador and northern Newfoundland. And among the first to take advantage of its fictional possibilities were writers of juvenile literature.

By now, the fictional in juvenile literature was beginning to outweigh the factual; delightful adventures were taking precedence over informative discourse. In the 1906 *Boy's own*, for example, we find only a short factual account of the "Boys of Newfoundland and Labrador" but a serialized novel by George Ethelbert Walsh, "The mysterious beacon light: The adventures of four boys in Labrador," which extended over thirty consecutive issues. Similarly, in *Youth's companion*, while there is still a commendable urge to inform in such articles as "The French Shore question (1900)," the decided preference is for pure adventure, as exemplified in the contributions of Theodore Goodridge Roberts and Norman Duncan, the latter becoming the best-known and most popular exponent of the Newfoundland tale.

Between 1902 and 1924, *Youth's companion* featured some twenty Newfoundland stories by Duncan and Roberts (more than two-thirds by Duncan), and the difference between them is obvious. Those by Theodore Goodridge, the brother of Charles G. D. Roberts, never managed to evoke the Newfoundland ethos, even though Roberts spent three years on the island, and only rarely are his tales convincing. Those by Norman Duncan, however, though informed only by three summer visits to the island, reveal the talents of the true storyteller, one who knew how to breathe life into the Newfoundland outport in adventures that are realistic and believable, set in a human environment that is full of humour, tenderness and pathos.

Theodore Roberts's chief weakness was his inability to reach a juvenile audience: he didn't seem able, in that age of transition when writers were consciously striving to "write for children," to distinguish between adult and juvenile fiction. This was a serious drawback. With his inability to create a "Newfoundland" atmosphere, it resulted in a series of juvenile stories so insipid that it is surprising they were accepted by *Youth's companion*. In "Out of the fog" (1906) and "Fitzgerald's luck" (1908), there are casual references to "Harbour Grace men" and Newfoundland schooners but little else distinctive of outport life. And though "Mother Cary" (1908) is set in a fictional Newfoundland outport called Brig Tickle and is perhaps more correct in tone, with its approximation of Newfoundland dialect, it does not seem to be a children's story at all. Rather, it depicts a proud woman being humbled and an unforgiving village being mellowed by the rescue of stranded sealers. The same is true of the ten-part serial "Figgy duff pot" (1924), a complicated, twisted tale of Newfoundland outport life, the conflict between greedy merchants and harbourmen and the struggle to become "master o'the harbor." It is now interesting for its colloquialisms, as in this passage: "He sweetened his tea with molasses, which old Norman called 'long sweetenin', and when Norman said that there were lashings of 'short sweetenin', meaning sugar, if he could but lay his hand on it, the stranger looked as if he believed it." It is hard to imagine a juvenile reader enjoying such a story now.

About the only magazine story of Roberts's enjoyed by the readers of *Youth's companion* must have been "An affair of the floe" (1912), which accurately and effectively captures a sealing adventure. It is a typical "stranded on ice" kind of story, but the representation of actual sealing practices ("Each [man] equipped with a strong gaff or 'bat', a towline and a sculping knife") and Newfoundland instincts make it appear authentic. "I knowed," says one of the sealers to an American doctor on board, "de skipper were on de scent o'de swile last night." The notion that the sealing Captain can "smell" the seals is scoffed at, until the doctor himself, stranded and freezing, is "smelled" out and rescued. He then accepts the possibility that "Skipper Garge Norman do have de keenest nose for swile nor any skipper sailin' to de ice." It might be mentioned, however, that though this story is quite engaging, it falls far short of the excitement of George Allan England's superb nine-part sealing adventure "Lost from the fleet," also published in *Youth's companion* in 1926.

Curiously enough, it has also been suggested that some of Roberts's adult novels, particularly *Brothers of peril* (1905) and *The red feathers* (1907), were meant for juvenile readers. Nevertheless, the same criticisms apply. Among his "Newfoundland" works, only one, *The harbor master* (a decidedly adult novel), deserves critical acclaim. His so-called "Beothuck" novels (*Brothers of peril* and *The red feathers*) are historical romances that deal with the actualities of Beothuck life or of their impending extinction only in passing. And even though Roberts asserts that he has "drawn the wilderness of that far time in

the likeness of the wilderness as I knew it, and loved it, a few short years ago" and pictured the "hearts of men and women...in this romance of olden time, as I know them to-day," the setting could just as well have been Nova Scotia or Ontario, the natives Micmac or Huron, and the non-natives any variety of early English settler. Both novels are ill-suited to a juvenile audience and only curiosities for modern-day adults.

When we turn to look at the stories of Norman Duncan, however, we come at last to the first writer of fiction to make, as Patrick O'Flaherty puts it, "ordinary Newfoundlanders the leading characters in his stories and to see in their routine, everyday activities a fit subject for literature" (96). Clearly, Duncan knew how to write specifically for juveniles when he wanted to. His fifteen Newfoundland stories in *Youth's companion*, his two in *The Congregationalist* (1904), and his two famous books derived from those stories (*The adventures of Billy Topsail* (1906) and *Billy Topsail and company* (1910)) not only feature "red-blooded and manly" juvenile protagonists but bring forth their adventures in a style realistic and fast-paced and in a Newfoundland context that is quite genuine.

Norman Duncan, born in Brantford in 1871, began his writing career in the United States as a descriptive journalist with the *New York Evening Post*, garnering material for his first set of "true-life" short stories about life in the Syrian quarter of New York. In the summer of 1900, McClure's magazine sent him to Newfoundland to gather material for a series of articles on outport life and, in particular, Dr. Grenfell's work there. That first summer, seasickness and late boats prevented Duncan from reaching his ultimate destination but fortunately placed him in an ideal outport community whose people and practices kept his pen busy day and night. For the next two summers, he returned to Exploits to live with the family of Jabez Manuel and to absorb the Newfoundland mystique. In the summer of 1903, Duncan finally succeeded in visiting Wilfred Grenfell and spent several weeks sailing along the Labrador coast in the hospital ship *Strathcona*.

The results of these summer sojourns constitute the first body of literature that dramatically and truthfully conveys, as O'Flaherty says, the ways of the Newfoundland people: "He reproduced their eccentricities of speech..., explored their superstitions, revelled in the odd nomenclature they attached to the coast and offshore fishing grounds, investigated their peculiarly intimate acquaintance with God, questioned their children (with whom he had a particular empathy), and pondered on the harmony of their lives" (O'Flaherty 101). He did so in numerous articles and short stories in *Harper's, McClure's*, the *Idler, Ainslee's*, and *Atlantic monthly*. He also wrote several full-length fictional "studies," *The way of the sea* (1903), *Dr. Luke of Labrador* (1904), *The cruise of the Shining Light* (1907), *Every man for himself* (1908), *Battles royal down north* (1918) and *Harbor tales down north* (1918). And, perhaps most successfully in terms of popular appeal, he wrote the Billy Topsail stories.

In all these, Norman Duncan depicts with wonderment and sometimes perplexity the love-hate relationship between men and the sea that remains at the heart of the Newfoundland outport myth. In his adult fiction, this sense of the meaningless existence of life becomes thematically dominant. Faced with merchant greed and an implacable ocean, fishermen such as Solomon Stride and Job Luff, always hopeful of a "gran' season for fish" and never entirely defeated, end their lives in seeming futility. "As it is written," Duncan intones, "the life of man is a shadow, swiftly passing, and the days of his strength are less; but the sea shall endure in the might of youth to the wreck of the world." The only dignity, it seems, can be derived from the struggle itself.

In his juvenile stories, Duncan understandably modifies his thematic position, emphasizing human courage and downplaying nature's superiority; yet he wisely retains a realistic view of life in the Newfoundland outport. There are no heroes, just ordinary boys. The sea is still enigmatic. There is fear to be conquered and death to be faced. It is, in fact, this depiction of human fallibility that makes the Billy Topsail stories so appealing. Though Billy nearly always "comes through," he, like most boys, succumbs to fear in the face of danger:

> Billy Topsail caught the skipper by the arm in a strong grip.
>
> 'We're lost!' he cried.
>
> The roaring wind, the hiss of the seas, the shock and wreck, the sudden, dreadful peril, had thrown the lad into a panic. The skipper perceived his distress, and acted promptly to restore him to his manhood.
>
> 'Leave me free!' he shouted, with a scowl.
>
> But Billy tightened his grip on the skipper's arm, and sobbed and whined. The skipper knocked him down with a blow to the breast; then jerked him to his feet and pointed to the pump.
>
> 'Pump for your life!' he commanded, knowing well that what poor Billy needed was work, of whatever kind, to give him back his courage.

It is this sort of practicality, coupled with everyday adventures (getting stranded, dealing with a leaky punt, encountering a surly hood seal), that makes the Billy Topsail stories popular with juvenile audiences far removed from the Newfoundland outport.

They were, as well, told with an economy that Duncan never did manage in his adult works, where his love of the grandiloquent, of whole paragraphs of Newfoundland place names, and of philosophical interpolation often impeded his narrative. Not so in his juvenile work, where it seems he consciously strove to achieve consistency of tone and on the whole did so successfully, as this beloved passage in which Skipper tries to save Billy from drowning clearly shows:

> It was plain that the dog was not to be bidden. Billy threw himself on his back, supported himself with his hands and kicked at the dog with his feet.
>
> Skipper was blinded by the splashing. He whined and held back. Then blindly he came

again. Billy moved slowly from him, head foremost, still churning the water with his feet. But, swimming thus, he was no match for the dog. With his head thrown back to escape the blows, Skipper forged after him. He was struck in the jaws, in the throat, and again in the jaws. But he pawed on, taking every blow without complaint, and gaining inch by inch. Soon he was so close that the lad could no longer move his feet freely. Then the dog chanced to catch one foot with his paw, and forced it under. Billy could not beat him off.

When Duncan writes about the everyday Newfoundland experience, he makes it for the first time the subject of juvenile investigation and wonder. When Billy Topsail reads about the giant squid in an American magazine, he becomes fascinated by the subject, hoping to find one. Duncan is at his finest when he describes Bobby Lot's reaction to Billy's graphic depiction of the "devil-fish":

As together they drew the writhing-armed, squirting little squids from the water, he told of the 'big squids' which lurked in the deep water beyond the harbour; and all the time Bobby opened his eyes wider and wider.

'Is they just like squids?' Bobby asked.

'But bigger,' answered Billy. 'Their bodies is so big as hogsheads. Their arms is thirty-five feet long.'

Bobby picked up a squid from the heap in the bottom of the boat. It had instinctively turned from a reddish-brown to a livid green, the colour of sea-water; indeed, had it been in the water, its enemy would have had hard work to see it.

He handled it gingerly; but the ugly little creature managed somehow to twine its slender arms about his hand, and swiftly take hold with a dozen cup-like suckers. The boy uttered an exclamation of disgust, and shook it off. Then he shuddered, laughed at himself, shuddered again. A moment later he chose a dead squid for examination.

The deftness with which Duncan creates that moment, the vividness of the scene and of Bobby's revulsion, and the unsuspected presaging of a future encounter with giant tentacles, are sufficient in themselves to illustrate his mastery of narrative and his ability to adapt it to juvenile expectation. Norman Duncan had indeed created a Newfoundland that was recognizable to all the boys who lived there and accessible to those far removed from its shores.

"To explore the whole of Newfoundland's printed literature," writes Patrick O'Flaherty, "is to become aware of the richness of a body of writing long neglected" (186). When we focus our exploration on the island's early juvenile literature, especially on what lies hidden in the many magazines of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, we begin to realize how much it has contributed to our sense of the place. This brief survey has shown something of the quality and conventionality of that literature, but it remains for others to examine it more closely. Several aspects need more thorough examination. Nearly all the writers mentioned above were non-residents, some poorly acquainted with the colony, others having made a gallant attempt to know the

country and its people in a way typical of much of North America's early juvenile literature. What does this tell us about popular conceptions of Newfoundland and Labrador?

The bulk of the literature is written by and intended for male juvenile readers. Again patriarchic dominance is not untypical, though there seems to be no reason why a writer like Jessie Saxby or Bessie Marchant could not have set one of their novels in Newfoundland. Clearly, there was a tendency to feature the Newfoundland outport as a place for hardy people: fishing, for example, and the culture that supported it, appears more suitable for males. Why did not the *Girl's own paper* carry any Newfoundland articles or stories? Or was Billy Topsail popular with girls as well as boys? Certainly, the depiction of masculinity and feminity in the literature seems to accord with that codified by children's fiction as a whole; but the issue, in terms of Newfoundland society, needs further study.

And finally, it seems that the juvenile literature of Newfoundland and Labrador is not as imperialistic as that written about, say, western Canada. Unlike most who wrote about the prairies, those writing about Newfoundland did not seem to consider colonial expansion an important topic. It would be difficult to find mention of the advantages of Newfoundland to the prospective immigrant and little regarding the colony's imperial purpose. Even Ballantyne, whose "message of Empire" is blatant in most of his novels, is distinctly quiet on the subject in "The cruise of the Water Wagtail," a fact which causes it to be ignored in many articles on the subject. Could it be, therefore, that the British policy of non-settlement, only abandoned in the middle of the century, set Newfoundland outside the usual imperial discussions? Or were there other reasons for the perceived difference between the thematic core of Newfoundland juvenile literature and that of mainland Canada?

While awaiting the answers to these and other questions, one can still happily occupy oneself with the literature itself – revisit the remarkable Wilfred Grenfell, go sealing and punting with Billy Topsail, explore hidden Labrador with Hubbard, or relive the adventures of *Boy's own* and *Youth's companion*. Newfoundland and Labrador in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries becomes terra incognita again, but this time in a way far removed from the life of the present day.

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