tion in the postwar era. The argument looms larger in some articles than others; he occasionally reads like a literary scholar struggling to locate the unifying motif in an eclectic mix of stories. But it is there, most powerfully, in MacLeod’s half-regretful indictment of *The Atlantic Provinces in Confederation* for its failure to integrate Newfoundland more successfully into the book’s portrait of the region. That well-known piece, first published in *Acadiensis*, provides a fitting bookend for the present collection. But it is in an earlier essay, connecting Newfoundland to the Halifax Explosion, that MacLeod best articulates his credo: “I study Atlantic Canada, or more precisely, Newfoundland’s adherence and membership in the region. At present, historians and others debate to what extent there was an Atlantic region including Newfoundland prior to the second half of the twentieth century. One approach suggests before that time, Newfoundland’s constitutional separateness signals how aloof from the mainland the big island was, how unconnected, in the important spheres of life. A contrary approach expects that the confederation of 1949 was the culmination or product of numerous strong linkages — social, economic, cultural — which already bound Newfoundland to the mainland” (221). MacLeod, clearly, is a contrarian.

It seems that historians of our region have begun to take heed of MacLeod’s arguments. One need no longer rely on Joe Smallwood’s Prince Edward Island ancestry to posit Newfoundland’s inter-connectedness with the mainland. Whether to the extent that MacLeod would prefer, the historical literature of our region increasingly recognizes Newfoundland’s North American roots. After a lifetime of persuasion, perhaps Malcolm MacLeod can rest his case.

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At the end of “Proof,” one of the nine stories in Mathews’s impressive debut collection, the narrator crosses a bridge: “it seemed, oddly, despite the gradually increasing brightness in the sky, that I was passing from one kind of darkness to another ...” Most of Mathews’s characters are similarly caught in a surreal, Arnoldian universe, merely existing between two equally dead worlds. In “The Fjord,” for example, Hanrahan (who appears in three stories), though a graduate student, is working as a night clerk in a cheap Vancouver motel; he’s “the right age and class to know that sooner or later the right job will come along, at more or less the right money. Hanrahan’s is perhaps the last generation of Canadians to be able to luxuriate in this belief.” The belief, however, is unfounded, as Hanrahan in the other stories is no less unfulfilled. At the end of “Fjord” he is “moving deeper into a continent, no doubt toward some archetypal dead end.” And at the end of the ironi-
cally titled “Hanrahan Saved” he knows that his attempts to find Sharon, an enig-
matic former student, “will hit dead ends.”

Few of Mathews’s characters, however, succumb to the bleakness of their con-
dition. They are “saved” from despair by a merciful bent for self-deception. Blind
to their own foibles, they are nonetheless trenchant observers of the idiosyncrasies
and possibilities of others: the rogues’ gallery of characters in “Proof” is a delicious

case in point. Silas Berry “never spoke of any desire to get a better job, to complete
his degree, to make for himself a life better than the one he was living.” He is a
“cheerful robot,” and so is the narrator. In “Flower Heaven,” Crystal is “salvable.

In “The Sandblasting Hall of Fame,” Angela Oregano is “redeemable.”

Two stories stand out from the others; they are gentler, less clothed in irony,
and somehow sadder than the rest. In both “An Absence” and “Baseball” the narrator
recalls time spent with his father. In the latter, the two travel to Montreal to
watch an Expos game (the Expos win, “sure sign of an apocalypse”); in the former,
the same narrator sleeps in his father’s apartment in Vancouver, after his father has
died. The narrator is himself a father by now, and the two stories present a deeply
contemplative essay on the nature of the father-son world, an examination of the
place “where absence begins.”

The Sandblasting Hall of Fame is about absence. Existence is about all there is
to hope for. Mathews’s characters are uniformly “disoriented and uncertain.” They
are advised to “Love not the world.” They are convinced that “There is no present.

And yet they survive. They are always stepping back to take stock, to see to what
extent some kind of analysis will help them through an impossible impasse. “I have
to make sense of my life,” says Hanrahan in “Hanrahan Agonistes.” “That justifies
pretty much anything these days.” It even seems to justify the dead ends.

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Robert Mellin. *Tilting: House Launching, Slide Hauling, Potato Trenching, and
other Tales from a Newfoundland Fishing Village*. Princeton Architectural Press,

THE HISTORICAL AGGREGATION of architecture and material culture in particular
places intimately weaves a community’s social fabric and mediates its relationship
with the natural world. At the dawn of the twenty-first century, this premise promi-
nently grounds a well-established tradition of architectural, landscape, and com-
munity studies. Understandably, a broad and sometimes daunting cohort —
ranging from academe to community members themselves — share in the outcome
of such work. Robert Mellin’s *Tilting* admirably embraces this challenge. Inspired
by the palpable texture of Tilting’s (on Fogo Island) enduring cultural landscape,
Mellin invites readers to follow his quest to better understand the collective ethos