REVIEW ESSAY

# In Prowse's Shadow: The General Histories of Newfoundland and Labrador by O'Flaherty, Cadigan, and Major

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Patrick O'Flaherty. *Old Newfoundland: A History to 1843*. St. John's: Long Beach Press, 1999. ISBN: 978-0968099823

———. *Lost Country: The Rise and Fall of Newfoundland, 1843–1933*. St. John's: Long Beach Press, 2005. ISBN: 978-0968099831

———. *Leaving the Past Behind: Newfoundland History from 1934*. St. John's: Long Beach Press, 2011. ISBN: 978-0968099841

Sean T. Cadigan. *Newfoundland and Labrador: A History*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009. ISBN: 978-0802044655

Kevin Major. *As Near to Heaven by Sea: A History of Newfoundland and Labrador*. Toronto: Viking, 2001. ISBN: 978-0670882909

Between 1999 and 2011, the works reviewed here joined Frederick W. Rowe's underrated *A History of Newfoundland and Labrador* (Toronto, 1980) as modern-day general histories of the province.[1] The genre remains small, and there are good reasons why authors tend to avoid it. First and foremost, general histories take ages to write. D.W. Prowse devoted eight years to his *A History of Newfoundland from the English, Colonial, and Foreign Records* (London, 1895), and an even longer time — 12 years — elapsed between publication of the first and last installments of Patrick O'Flaherty's trilogy. Because the subject is so broad,

authors must venture outside their specialties, increasing the odds of missteps. Then there are those tricky decisions about what to include and what to omit, and the second-guessing they engender. Why, for example, did Sean Cadigan ignore the laying of the transatlantic cable in 1866, arguably the greatest engineering feat of the nineteenth century, and one in which Newfoundland played an important role? Finally, the French dimension of Newfoundland's past favours writers sensitive to that fact; otherwise, interpretations can be skewed. Undaunted, our three authors took the plunge, and with decidedly mixed results.

I have made many discoveries studying these books, none more surprising than the lingering influence of Prowse's *History*. Writing in the flush of colonial nationalism, Prowse spent the first part of his *History* extolling the ties between Britain and Newfoundland, and the last part touting Newfoundland's economic potential. While he occasionally scolded Britain for sacrificing Newfoundland's interests on the altar of international diplomacy, there was no disguising his need for imperial approval. The corollary of his worship of the Mother Country was a view of Newfoundland's French experience that was alternately hostile, dismissive, and patronizing. Myth-making was a specialty, hence his claim of English primacy in the early migratory fishery and the notion that Sir Humphrey Gilbert's fleeting visit to St. John's in 1583 was Newfoundland's "first great colonisation scheme."[2] Most memorable were his caricatures of the fishing admirals and the West Country merchants, whose opposition to settlement allegedly retarded development by forcing residents to live as fugitives — a thesis coined by John Reeves in 1793 and inflated into a staple of local lore by William Carson.[3] Prowse's biases, contradictions, and misconceptions embody what Benedict Anderson calls the "philosophical poverty and even incoherence" of nationalisms.[4] Regardless, Prowse gave them the gift of eternal life, because they are widely believed and have influenced the authors considered here.

As an expression of the nationalist vision, O'Flaherty's trilogy is a masterpiece; as a general history, major flaws deny it greatness. Based on archaeological evidence, O'Flaherty contends in *Old Newfoundland: A History to 1843* that Indigenous peoples were "finely adapted" to Newfoundland's natural environment and at times exercised "mastery" over it (3). This plays into his dubious argument that Newfoundland's "comparatively slow progress" as a European settlement area was more a function of "policy and attitude" than "climate and terrain" (29). Sounding for all the world like Prowse, he seems to accept at face value that people were actually affected by the clause in Sir David Kirke's 1637 charter forbidding settlement within six miles of the coast. But another of the charter's clauses allowed Kirke and company to fish, cut wood,

and build forts along the coast between Capes Race and Bonavista, an exception that according to Peter Pope "effectively nullified the paper ban on coastal settlement."[5] "Resistance to settlement," O'Flaherty plows on, "would characterize official English thinking about Newfoundland until well into the 18th century. Indeed, traces of it lingered into the 19th" (45). While this is technically correct, it is also true that in the 1670s, when the English government came closest to removing residents, it pulled back after realizing it would adversely affect the migratory fishery and simultaneously create opportunities for the French. Likewise, its aversion to fortifying St. John's — for fear it would encourage settlement — disappeared after the French military campaign of 1696–97. Insofar as the English government had a settlement policy, its essential quality was expedience, not resistance.

Other than recognizing France's leadership in the early migratory fishery, O'Flaherty's view of the French would have warmed Judge Prowse's heart. Quoting Newfoundland history neophyte George MacBeath, he labels Plaisance "a North American 'bastion of French power and influence'" (39), echoing Prowse's "the Gibraltar of North America." In reality, Plaisance was a military basket case, its reputation for strength derived from the failings of the English naval officers who tested its defences. O'Flaherty's account of the military campaigns of 1696–1709 is a low point for its depiction of French soldiers and the Indigenous warriors who accompanied them. Pierre Le Moyne d'Iberville et d'Ardillières "exhibited a soldierly ruthlessness, if not something beyond it" (49), while the Abenaki chief Nescambiouit was "a notorious scalper" (51). Other choice words include "vicious," brutal," and "atrocities," which compare with Prowse's "cruel," "stealthy," "brutal," "savage," "bloodthirsty," and "barbarities."[6] Given such language, it is no surprise to find O'Flaherty lamenting that while the Treaty of Utrecht established British sovereignty over Newfoundland and expelled the French from Plaisance, they "were not driven out altogether, though that might well have been appropriate in view of the barbarities they committed" (61).

By "not driven out altogether," O'Flaherty is referring to the treaty's recognition of French fishermen's rights to fish and dry their catch in northeastern and northwestern Newfoundland. After the American Revolutionary War, the Treaty of Versailles reconfigured "the French Shore" to take in the entire west coast, and also recognized the legality of French settlement in St. Pierre and Miquelon. O'Flaherty attributes these "astonishing concessions" to economic conditions in Britain, forgetting that France and the United States of America had won the war and felt entitled to the spoils (103). The treaty also restored

American access to British North American coastal waters, although the Convention of 1818 later narrowed that to the coasts of Labrador, the Magdalen Islands, and western and southwestern Newfoundland.

The logic behind O'Flaherty's assumption of French illegitimacy escapes me. After 1713, French fishermen were present because of treaty rights; before it, Newfoundland was shared territory and the inhabitants of Plaisance were as much Newfoundlanders as their English counterparts. Cod fishing formed their livelihood; they clashed with migratory fishermen over waterfront access; they were few in number; and they had to trade with New Englanders to make ends meet. These similarities, incidentally, undermine O'Flaherty's stress on political factors as deterrents to population growth in Anglo-Newfoundland.

Where politics mattered was in legal and constitutional development. Newfoundland had to wait until 1832 to get representative government — which tiny and less populous Prince Edward Island had enjoyed since 1769 — and in 1843 even that belated gift yielded to the constitutional anomaly of an amalgamated legislature. Stranger things were yet to come, and O'Flaherty's assertion that "Newfoundland undeniably stands apart" is truly undeniable (29). That being said, he is generally sympathetic towards the fishing admirals and naval government, and views the fight for representative government as "not a contest with evil but, in part, a struggle for power" between resident politicians and the naval administration (116–17).

By opening the gate to sectarian hatred, representative government unleashed a new power struggle that rendered politics dysfunctional and helped to bring about the amalgamated legislature experiment. O'Flaherty is Solomonic in assigning blame, chastising reformers for being "driven by a sense of grievance rooted as much in Irish grudges as in Newfoundland history" (184), and merchants for seeking to "undermine the British government's confidence in the Assembly through petitions and lobbying" (204). Ironically, "British officials had more faith in Newfoundland's constitution than most of the leading 'tory' inhabitants. In time they lost it" (205).

In *Lost Country: The Rise and Fall of Newfoundland, 1843–1933*, O'Flaherty tunes the nationalist instrument to fever pitch, describing the French as "dangerous," "harassing," "threatening," "obstructing," and "sly." He bristles at France's use of bounties to aid its fisheries; at the presence of French fishermen on Newfoundland soil and on the Grand Banks; and at French fishermen's use of supposedly destructive seines and "bultows" (longlines). The advantages arising from Newfoundland's proximity to the resource were likely to have offset the bounties, which could only defray some of the costs of conducting

operations on the opposite side of the Atlantic. There is no proof that seines and longlines — which Newfoundlanders embraced soon enough — had permanent adverse effects, and French demand for bait (for their longlines) was an economic boon to the south-coast fishermen who supplied it. O'Flaherty knows this but weakly concludes: "Whether the bounties and seines and bultows and the sale of bait on the south coast really inhibited Newfoundland's progress might be argued. But they were believed to be damaging, and perhaps were" (83).

In 1888, targeting both the bounties and French competition in the Spanish salt-fish market — which were assumed to be related — Newfoundland won royal assent to legislation banning French fishermen from purchasing bait except on the French Shore. Citing Frederic F. Thompson, O'Flaherty wrongly maintains that the legislation reduced the French bank fishery "over time" (163). The inconvenience of having to sail to the French Shore for bait was short-lived, because in 1890 French fishermen discovered an alternative bait in whelks, which were abundant on the banks.[7] Nor did Newfoundland improve its standing in the Spanish market, where the French presence had more to do with geography than bounties — France and Spain were next-door neighbours, after all — and where the dominant player was not even France, but Norway.[8]

Like any commodity, salt fish was vulnerable to market gyrations. Downturns could last for years, and when they did poverty mushroomed, relief payments weighed on government finances, and political leaders looked for ways to get off the treadmill. In the 1860s, during virtually a decade-long downturn, confederation with Canada emerged as a possible solution. Businessman C.F. Bennett led the opposing forces, arguing that Newfoundland would lose control of its natural resources and would have few representatives in Canada's Parliament, and thus little influence. Bennett's prescience makes him a hero in O'Flaherty's eyes, but not so the confederate leader Frederick Carter, who in addition to wanting to "sell out to Canada" (104) was "soft on the French question" (105).

Confederation talk abated after Bennett's 1869 election victory, although it never entirely went away, and attention turned to diversifying the economy, a task now considered "urgent" (111). Based on the North American model, but also — as O'Flaherty sagely observes — on the faith in progress that characterized the age, Newfoundland eventually turned to railway construction to unlock its mineral, agricultural, and forest resources. These proved to be more modest than what expert advice had suggested, and the island's agricultural potential was an outright chimera. The railway added to a public debt that

Newfoundland attempted to unload during revived confederation talks with Canada in 1895. When they failed, Newfoundland turned "from clutching at the Canadian straw to face its problems on its own" (194). "Those problems," O'Flaherty continues, "though no doubt great, were not insurmountable." History bears him out, because the first decade of the twentieth century witnessed not only the end of French rights on Newfoundland soil, but also buoyant cod fisheries and advances in mining and forestry. The euphoria was marred only by a dispute over the commercial privileges of American fishermen in western Newfoundland.

The First World War delivered more than the ironic spectacle of Newfoundlanders fighting to save France. Salt-fish prices reached record levels, as did government revenues. However, the government had to borrow nearly $15 million to finance the war effort, and this, along with veterans' pensions, "would prove to be an enormous burden" (291). Despite the addition of a second pulp and paper mill in the 1920s, success in the mining and forestry sectors continued to be measured more in export earnings than in employment, so that, in O'Flaherty's telling understatement, "Much depended on the price of fish" (294).

Fish prices fell during a post-war recession but gradually recovered and were favourable from 1924 to 1929. Ominous clouds were nonetheless gathering. In the 1920s Newfoundland amassed deficits totalling $23.8 million, of which 27.5 per cent was incurred in the 1920–21 fiscal year, largely because of relief payments to unemployed fishermen.[9] The recession badly shook national self-esteem, and the corruption scandal that caused the resignation of Prime Minister Sir Richard Squires in 1923 does not bother O'Flaherty as much as the anti-democratic sentiments that surfaced during the recession and refused to go away. Businessman Walter Monroe suggested that Newfoundland should be a Crown colony instead of a Dominion, and it was Newfoundlanders' misfortune that he became their Prime Minister in 1924. He increased the public debt through an ambitious roads program, and at the 1926 Imperial Conference in London, where Arthur Balfour famously declared Britain and the dominions to be equals, he meekly avowed that "we are entirely satisfied with the status under which we exist and we do not even require to be consulted as to questions of foreign policy" (335). O'Flaherty describes this as "startling" in view of earlier administrations' efforts "to influence British policies on the French shore and other questions." I would add, parenthetically, that what happened in Newfoundland in the interwar years underscores how misplaced its francophobia had been.

While nationalists elsewhere in the Empire were battling tooth and nail for independence, many Newfoundlanders were trying to be more British than the British. They eventually got their wish. In 1932, under the weight of the Great Depression, Prime Minister Frederick Alderdice proposed to reschedule the interest payments on government bonds. Dominions Secretary J.H. Thomas refused on the grounds that it would damage the Commonwealth's prestige and its members' credit ratings; this set in motion events leading to the appointment of a Royal Commission into Newfoundland's finances, and ultimately to Newfoundland being ruled by a British-appointed Commission of Government until it could get its financial house in order.

O'Flaherty does not see Britain's intervention as sinister, but says that, "like any great power, she would of course put her own interests first" (394). This the British assuredly did, as shown by their decision of June 1932 to pay the United States only a fraction of the interest due on war bonds that year. Onto hypocrisy they heaped ingratitude, for as O'Flaherty notes, $38.4 million of Newfoundland's total funded debt of $96.6 million in 1933 was traceable to the war it had fought by Britain's side. He rightly dismisses the Royal Commission's attempt to blame Newfoundland's predicament on mismanagement by corrupt politicians, and feels that "surely Newfoundland could have withstood the onslaught of the Depression . . . if its leaders had valued their hard-won constitution more and the blandishments of Whitehall less" (409). Still, he concludes, "We have to try to see the world as they saw it" (409). They saw it through British eyes, and reaped a sycophant's reward.

The final volume of O'Flaherty's trilogy, *Leaving the Past Behind: Newfoundland History from 1934*, is largely a history of the Commission years and Newfoundland's decision to join the Canadian confederation in 1949. Although the Commission was non-democratic, it met little opposition. There were, rues O'Flaherty, only a handful of patriots among "the coopted intellectuals of the day" (12), and the bulk of the population believed "that Empire epitomized the right and the good" (34). Even during the Second World War, when Newfoundland was self-supporting and sending money to Britain, people felt the timing was wrong to push for independence. Indian nationalists had no such scruples, but Newfoundland was, in James Morris's words, "the most thoroughly British of all the Dominions," and it continued to behave as such.[10]

The Commission was no match for the Great Depression and was saved only by the war, which accelerated Newfoundland's exposure to North American influences. I am surprised that O'Flaherty uses the endnotes to discuss important aspects of pre-war contacts between Newfoundland and Canada.

His claim that "taking over" Newfoundland was on Canadian Prime Minister Mackenzie King's mind "throughout" the war is improbable (61). A noted isolationist, King resisted Canadian military involvement in Newfoundland until it was unavoidable. Construing Canada's land requirements for Goose Bay airport as revenge for the 1927 Privy Council decision on Labrador is at best fanciful and at worst paranoid.

The war opened Canadian eyes to Newfoundland's economic and strategic value, but it nearly bankrupted Britain, which seized upon Canadian interest as a chance to unload Newfoundland onto a fellow Commonwealth member. Despite using the words "secret" (119) and "backroom deal" (120) to describe pivotal talks between Ottawa and London in 1945, O'Flaherty rejects conspiracy theories. He notes that the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines conspiracy as "a combination of persons for an evil or unlawful purpose," and therefore prefers to describe the British–Canadian relationship as "collaboration" or "collusion" (207). Perhaps more importantly, he makes clear that Newfoundlanders of the period were aware of the British government's intentions. After participating in fruitless discussions with Treasury and Dominions Office officials in London, Peter Cashin informed the National Convention on 19 May 1947 that the British were party to "a conspiracy to sell . . . this country to the Dominion of Canada" (153). Since the Convention's proceedings were broadcast via radio and given blanket coverage by the press, voters in the 1948 referenda were the best informed in Newfoundland history.

O'Flaherty's comments on confederation and its aftermath are sobering. The arrangement between Britain and Canada was "sneaky and repellant, something the Newfoundland people didn't deserve," not least because of their contributions during both world wars (208). As for Newfoundlanders' loyalty, it "went west to east, and not the other way round. It was a lesson about the nature of colonialism" (208). By joining confederation, Newfoundland "was handing control of its main industry to one of its chief competitors. It takes some searching through history to find an equivalent benefaction" (189). The Supreme Court of Canada's 1984 decisions against reopening the Churchill Falls contract and rejecting Newfoundland's claim to jurisdiction over offshore oil and gas were "an illustration of how Canada worked" (230). Echoing C.F. Bennett, O'Flaherty reminds us that Newfoundland and Labrador's seven Members of Parliament constitute "a pitifully small caucus," something that is truer today than when he wrote those words.[11] Given his dismay that there has been "no move of any consequence to establish a nationalist or separatist political party" (236), his conclusion that "Newfoundland seems fairly well

positioned both economically and culturally as it heads into the second decade of the 21st century" (237) rings hollow.

O'Flaherty's nationalist stance may give his trilogy thematic coherence, but in my opinion nationalist history is a contradiction in terms. Contrast, for example, O'Flaherty's demonization of Iberville with the judgment of Quebec historian Bernard Pothier, who said that he was "beyond doubt the first truly Canadian hero."[12] They cannot both be right, and I would argue that the distortions of nationalism make both of them wrong. As Prowse's *History* showed, anti-French feelings were a cornerstone of nineteenth-century nationalism. There is no doubt that the French Shore slowed development of the west coast, although by how much is debatable. Bonne Bay, Bay of Islands, and Bay St. George — the best on the coast — were all settled despite French rights. Ultimately, the French were scapegoats for problems that were not of their doing, and Newfoundlanders would have done better to look in the mirror. I am surprised that O'Flaherty has made nineteenth-century sentiments his own, especially when the conditions that caused them have passed. His antipathy towards the French and his mishandling of the settlement issue are his trilogy's greatest weaknesses.

From Mount O'Flaherty we descend to the realm of lesser mortals, beginning with Sean Cadigan, a product of the "new" social history movement that reached Atlantic Canadian universities in the 1970s. In the esoteric prose that social historians favour, Cadigan advises that *Newfoundland and Labrador: A History* "examines and interrogates the logic of a peripatetic Newfoundland nationalism that claims that the province can survive as a separate economic and political unit" (11). More clearly, he proposes that Newfoundland's attempts from the nineteenth century onward to develop land-based natural resources were "ruinous" (11), entailed neglect of marine resources, and "ignored the basic ecological constraints that had defined previous societies" (3–4). Readers familiar with David Alexander's work will recognize its imprint on Cadigan's thesis.

Cadigan's narrative begins with an account of the terrestrial environment that is so grim you might think he and O'Flaherty are describing different places. This approach is necessary to back his contention that "marine and aquatic fauna were much more bountiful and, to a much greater extent than land-based ones, sustained the area's human populations" (10). The extent to which humans relied on marine resources is not as important as Cadigan claims. Most Indigenous peoples spent temperate seasons on the coast exploiting marine resources, and winters in the interior hunting terrestrial ones. This seasonal round was necessary, Ralph Pastore explains, "because despite the

rich resources of the sea, prehistoric human populations in Newfoundland have always been vulnerable to changes in the availability of [marine] animal stocks."[13] But Cadigan must downplay the seasonal round in order to attack later "nationalist" governments for attempting to develop terrestrial resources — principally forests and minerals — as complements to fishing and sealing, which emulated the Indigenous experience in its own way.

Cadigan's account of the migratory fishery is alarmingly mistake-filled, and a few examples will have to suffice for purposes of this discussion. Although he says that the fishery was "well under way by 1502" (29), that date marks the first documented transatlantic fishing voyage to Newfoundland — a single ship from Bristol.[14] He states that the early Portuguese fishery "was small but still greater than that of the English," whereas in fact its size is unknown.[15] His claim that Portuguese fishermen "may already have been using" Newfoundland in 1497 lacks any credible proof (31). Cue the Basques, who "might have sighted Newfoundland or Labrador before Cabot" (32). Michael Barkham, however, dates the earliest Basque voyage to 1517.[16] Cadigan also maintains that the Basques "had dominated the European cod fishery since medieval times because they had access to plentiful supplies of salt" (32), seemingly unaware that Norway and Iceland had been exporting dried, unsalted cod (stockfish) to the Hansa and England since the twelfth and fourteenth centuries respectively.[17] Any Basque dominance would have been regional and unconnected to salt supplies.

The chapter titled "Migrants and Settlers: The Development of a Fishing Society, 1610–1775" is Prowse-like in its dismissiveness towards the French; it is also, like the chapter on the migratory fishery, very sloppy. Cadigan dates Iberville's campaign to 1695–96 instead of 1696–97, and claims that after the 1709 French campaign "the English used their naval superiority to blockade Plaisance," when they did no such thing (55).[18] He would have us believe that "Although there were never more than eight hundred or nine hundred people at Plaisance, the French base protected the French fishery" (52). If he means the population of seasonal, migratory fishermen, which sometimes exceeded 1,000, he should have said so. Otherwise, Plaisance achieved a peak of 265 inhabitants in 1710.[19] The fortifications defended the neighbouring fishery only, and Plaisance was incapable of doing more without a naval squadron, which it never had — thus the unopposed British raid on the French fishery in northeastern Newfoundland in 1707. Perpetuating yet another myth, he writes: "Anxious to protect their fortified fishing port, the French encouraged more Mi'kmaq to come to the south coast, and many settled close by Plaisance" (54).

Although small numbers of Mi'kmaq lived in southern Newfoundland in the period, they were there of their own accord; in 1705 no one was more surprised than the governor of Plaisance when some 20 Mi'kmaw families suddenly appeared there.[20]

Cadigan seems to be in a hurry to get to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, spending less than a quarter of his text on the earlier period. Unfortunately, once he reaches the nineteenth century, he lets loose with social history jargon. He is overly fond of using "paternalism" when describing social relations, and any discussion of women's issues is apt to include "patriarchal," hence this ungainly use of alliteration and assonance: "Their pivotal role in the production and reproduction of outport society and economy gave women a public life and a prominence which defied the official, patriarchal proscriptions for behaviour of the period" (92). After Newfoundland achieved civil government in 1824, "the bourgeoisie of St. John's soon began a fight for more representative colonial institutions" (97). Reformers William Carson and Patrick Morris were "part of a new St. John's bourgeoisie of small merchants, doctors, lawyers, and other urban professionals" (106). No one, however, was more bourgeois (or busier) than the reformer John Kent, who was a member of both the "St. John's aspiring shopkeeper bourgeoisie" (111) and the "newer Waterford bourgeoisie" (112).

The reformers are Cadigan's original sinners, being guilty of striving for "representative colonial institutions, but in a manner that would lead the colonial government to turn its back on the sea" (97). He subsequently berates generations of politicians for ignoring the fisheries and pursuing a "ruinous program" of landward development that was tied, after 1880, to railway construction. He nonetheless contradicts himself with examples of leaders who attempted to improve the fishery's prospects. To name but a few, Frederick Carter and Sir William Whiteway used bounties to foster a native Newfoundland bank fishery, and Sir Robert Bond spent the better part of his political career trying to open the American market to Newfoundland fishery products. Cadigan also speaks of "[p]ersistent poor conditions in the fishery" (108), "persistent low prices in the fishery" (117), and "hungry and starving" (117) fishing families. Under such circumstances, any government that did not try to broaden the economic base would have been morally negligent and perhaps even criminally so.

Cadigan calls this pursuit of landward development the "national policy," which he takes from the Canadian model (133). Although the term was never used in Newfoundland, he employs it indiscriminately, as he does "economic

nationalism" and "nationalistic." When he says that Bond "hoped that the national policy would trigger a new immigration of skilled workers," you can be certain that Bond thought no such thing (165). When he says that confederation was "inconsistent with the economic nationalism of many of Whiteway's supporters," the adjective "economic" is redundant (148). And when he says that C.F. Bennett had a "powerful nationalistic appeal" in the 1869 confederation election, the usage is inappropriate for the time (132).[21] Bennett was a patriot, not a nationalist. As O'Flaherty and others have correctly observed, the push for landward development was known in its day as "the policy of progress" and was most closely identified with Whiteway, who was known as "the Apostle of Progress."[22] This is simultaneously more legitimate and more revealing than Cadigan's "national policy," since according to one authority, "In the nineteenth century, on both sides of the Atlantic, the belief in progress attained the status of a popular religion among the middle class, and was widely declared by intellectuals to be a fixed law."[23] To have escaped the force of that law, Newfoundlanders would have had to bury their heads in the sand.

Already in a hole with his "national policy," Cadigan digs deeper by claiming that "Dramatic cyclical declines in Newfoundland salt cod exports, together with steady population increases throughout the nineteenth century, suggest that a basic ecological problem resulting from the overexploitation of cod stocks underlay the poor catches" (121). There were no dramatic cyclical declines, no basic ecological problem, and cod stocks were not overexploited. Salt-fish exports — and thus catches — were relatively consistent from 1811 to 1914, even trending slightly upward after 1855.[24] Cod populations were sustainable while catching technology remained pre-industrial, and even under industrial trawling the turning point did not occur until the late 1950s and early 1960s.[25] Cadigan also posits an equally false ecological problem in the seal hunt by referring, in the 1860s no less, to the "remaining herds" (137), and stating that, "By the early years of the twentieth century it became apparent that seal herds were in such bad shape that even the investment in steamers could no longer be justified" (170). To the contrary, in 1906 the sealing companies acquired the first of what by 1914 would be nine powerful new steel steamships, which constituted the most advanced ice-breaking fleet in the world. Like cod stocks, northwest Atlantic harp and hooded seal populations were in no danger until the mid-twentieth century.[26]

The problem in the inshore fishery was not so much ecological as demographic: too many fishermen — 60,419 of them in 1884 — were chasing a finite number of fish. Other than emigration or landward development, the only

alternatives were to find new sources of fish and/or new markets, or to industrialize the fishery, something that no pre-confederation government except the Commission was fully prepared to do. Cadigan's opinions on industrialization and its post-confederation twin, household resettlement, are predictable and couched in jargon. Among other things, they "encouraged consumerism" (247) and "strongly reinforced social patriarchy" (251).

His conclusion compares modern-day "Newfoundland neo-nationalism" (287) with "the older neo-nationalism of D.W. Prowse and Robert Bond" (288). (Yes, he actually uses the oxymoron "older neo-nationalism.") Unlike "older neo-nationalism," "which promised that Newfoundland would become a modern industrial nation," the current strain "has a more negative tone," fixated as it is on grievances attributed to confederation and fisheries industrialization. Lest anyone think that "older neo-nationalism" was a good thing, he hastens to add that it was "out of step with the long-term experiences of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador," because it "ignored the obvious dependence of the colony on marine resources" (291). In making such claims, Cadigan again fails to acknowledge that, for the majority of Indigenous peoples, survival entailed exploitation of marine and terrestrial resources in a seasonal round. Landward development, he continues, was just a "nationalist myth" that in the long run "undermined the basis of colonial competency" — never mind that over a third of Newfoundland's debt in the early 1930s was traceable to the war, or that a more benevolent imperial power could have extended financial assistance without attaching the humiliating condition of suspending democracy (290). Far from being neglectful, Newfoundland politicians recognized the need to exploit marine and terrestrial resources in tandem, just as Indigenous peoples did before and after contact. The politicians unquestionably made mistakes, but, like Carter, Whiteway, and Bond, they never turned their backs on the sea, and they were motivated by what was best for their country and latterly their province. Before confederation, economic diversification gave us Grand Falls, Corner Brook, Deer Lake, Bell Island, Buchans, St. Lawrence, and Gander; and after it, Wabush and Labrador City.[27] It would be hard to imagine Newfoundland and Labrador without them.

In a book littered with contradictions, a fundamental one occupies centre stage. The opening sentence, in which Cadigan quotes Joey Smallwood, asserts that Newfoundlanders "were not a nation" (3), and the conclusion, in case you miss the point, is subtitled "Not a Nation." Despite elevating the "national policy" to the status of holy writ, and despite using it to bludgeon politicians, Cadigan would, in the final analysis, have us believe that Newfoundlanders

and Labradorians "are defined far more by their class, gender, and ethnicity than by the mythical nationalist identities invented by political elites" (296). Thus we are left with the incoherence of an author who trumpets a "national policy" among a people he simultaneously insists were "not a nation."

Both Patrick O'Flaherty (in his own words) and Sean Cadigan (in his publisher's) seek a general audience for their books. While O'Flaherty is more accessible than Cadigan, even he is outdone by Kevin Major, whose *As Near to Heaven by Sea: A History of Newfoundland and Labrador* contains 36 breezy, well-illustrated chapters that are further divided into easily digestible sections. The approach is personal and inclusive, as shown by a text peppered with "I," "we," and "our," and by references to contemporary people and subjects. The latter, unfortunately, are not only gratuitous but also give the book a dated feel. For example, he mentions Leif Eiriksson's sister Freydis, apparently for the sole purpose of suggesting that "perhaps she's been reincarnated. What do you think, Mary Walsh — or should I say, Marg, Princess Warrior?" (24). Although there is no discernible thesis, Major has axes to grind, and ugliness and contradiction lurk beneath the cheerful exterior.

Best known as a novelist, Major dabbled in history early in his career and shows genuine historical ability.[28] His consideration of Indigenous peoples is sensitive and thorough, he seamlessly integrates Labrador into the narrative, and he discusses women without resorting to jargon. He rejects the retarded settlement thesis, rightly observing that "we weren't hiding out in the deepest recesses of the bays, furtively clinging to a few squares of turf" (124). He embarrasses O'Flaherty and Cadigan by his comprehensive treatment of the French, and O'Flaherty in particular could learn from his insight that Plaisance's challenges "echoed those of the English colonies" (106). Alone among our authors he incorporates the pioneering work of Olaf Janzen on the renegade French settlements of southwestern Newfoundland, and unlike some people he knows the difference between Bay St. George and St. George's Bay. There is, then, a great deal to like here.

For all that, Major's inexperience keeps intruding. His discussion of the eighteenth-century justice system accepts Prowse's discredited stereotype of lawlessness, and he quotes as gospel Prowse's infamous caricature of a fishing admiral, which Prowse got from Patrick Morris, who did not know an admirals' court from a tennis court.[29] He repeats the myths that Sir Humphrey Gilbert's proclamation in St. John's harbour in 1583 marked "the colonization of Newfoundland, and what some claim to be the very beginning of the British Empire," when it was neither (62). The first English colony in Newfoundland — Cuper's

Cove, or Cupids — dates to 1610, by which time colonies had already been established in Virginia and Bermuda, and informal settlement had begun in Ulster. Nor is there any truth to his assertion that after Gilbert's visit, "Newfoundland was officially English" (64). That did not happen until 1713, when the Treaty of Utrecht said so. He describes the Harbour Grace Affray of 1883 as having "all the potential of turning Newfoundland into a second Northern Ireland," which would have taken some doing given that Northern Ireland did not exist until 1921 (256). During the Second World War, the British were supposedly "embarrassed . . . to be fighting a war over democracy in a place where democracy had been suspended" (382). Actually, despite signing the Atlantic Charter in Placentia Bay in August 1941, Winston Churchill informed the House of Commons a month later that it did not apply to the British Empire, only to German-occupied countries. The British government knew no shame.

Such missteps can be dismissed as accidental, but the same cannot be said of certain of the book's motifs. Religion, Major maintains, "was a person's defining feature, more often than class or occupation" (171). But class differences were all too real, as were differences in gender, ethnicity — think Indigenous peoples — and region. Religion's effects are easily exaggerated, and Major is prone to doing so, hence his claims that the "sectarian bitterness" of the general election of 1832 "left an imprint on Newfoundland that has never been fully erased" (250), and that it "retarded" (257) Newfoundland's development by saddling it with denominational schools. He fails to mention the eminently reasonable desire of the Roman Catholic community for a fair share of civil service jobs, which before the 1840s were held almost exclusively by Protestants. And while the funding of denominational schools was a burden that Newfoundland could have done without, there is no evidence it impeded economic development.

Education — except, that is, the denominational variant — is Major's cure for all manner of ills. The economic woes of the cod fishery, he alleges, resulted in greater numbers of poor in Newfoundland "than one would expect of a North American society of the mid-1800s" (244), begging the question: what numbers should one expect? Citing the "economic stagnation" of much of rural Newfoundland, he opines that "This state of affairs is closely tied to a general lack of good schooling and the resultant high rate of illiteracy." On this point I defer to O'Flaherty, who argues that higher literacy rates are less likely to have made people better catchers and curers of fish than to have facilitated their exit from the fishery and, owing to a paucity of alternative employment, their departure from the country.[30] Major himself acknowledges exactly this when

discussing the gains in education after confederation, which "did lead to greater chance at employment, though in many cases the jobs took the children even farther away. . . . They became part of the continuing stream of Newfoundlanders driving U-Hauls over the new highway to mainland Canada" (420).

Major's views on outport Newfoundland are offensive, contradictory, and shallow. He suggests that Water Street merchants were opposed to educating outport children because it might cost them "the child labour force on which the family-based fishery had come to depend" (259). "Left isolated and in ignorance," outport residents "didn't think to expect anything different" (259). He expresses amazement that "settlers didn't forsake Newfoundland and Labrador in droves, that people held to such isolated coves and inlets" (268). It is rich indeed when he adds that "Newfoundland is often depicted as being isolated and out of the mainstream of world affairs" (323), something he is repeatedly guilty of himself. Despite his frequent references to rural poverty and isolation, he offers abundant evidence to the contrary. Brigus "prospered in the nineteenth century" (301); as the western terminus of the transatlantic cable, Heart's Content "flourished" (310); the outports on Flat Islands, Bonavista Bay "were as thriving as any in Newfoundland" (418). Not only that, but in Conception Bay and along the entire northeast coast, sealing complemented the cod fishery and "kept poverty away from the door" (294). Major should know that he can't have it both ways.

How did our ancestors endure so much hardship? According to Major, it was partly through humour, which "offered a refuge, a way of making it through when there was little to be cheerful about" (268). Mostly, though, they were just plain ignorant. In a section entitled "Led or Leading?," which marks this book's nadir, Major resorts to balderdash, explaining that outport Newfoundlanders were followers, "a trait for which we must account. For it bears on many calamities that were to befall Newfoundlanders, not only at the seal hunt, but in other, equally perilous, arenas" (296), by which I assume he means, among other things, politics. Fishing culture did not lack for leadership positions. Every schooner that sailed to Labrador or the Grand Banks had a captain, every vessel that went to the ice had one, too, and among the sealing crews the master watches exercised leadership roles. No one, however, can escape the aim of Major's pet theory, not even Bob Bartlett, whose role in the *Karluk* disaster has been adjudged "the finest feat of leadership in Canadian marine history."[31] Determined to drive a square peg into a round hole, Major nonetheless says that Bartlett, too, was "a follower" (304) because Peary took a fellow American on the last leg to the North Pole. This is absurd.

There is another nefarious force in Major's black-and-white universe,

namely St. John's. Even though William Carson and his fellow reformers sought noble things for Newfoundland, they were mostly from the St. John's elite, causing Major to agonize over "just how many of the reformers were out to advance the lot of the impoverished outport fishing men and women" (209)? He suggests that St. John's had "an innate sense of self-importance" (232), which would be a first for any city. Thanks to eccentric personalities such as Charles Henry Danielle, late nineteenth-century St. John's "was able to cast off some of the sectarian ugliness that had tarnished its society. It regained its sense of humour" (273). That is correct: nobody had a laugh until Danielle arrived, and the place was a hotbed of sectarian strife. After confederation, out-of-town students at Memorial University had to deal with "[c]ondescension from the more privileged middle-class 'townies'" (450). As a Ganderite who attended Memorial in the early 1970s, I can testify that this is news to me. Thanks to highway construction, "Townies were discovering there was more to the province than could be had from a Sunday excursion to Brigus" (426). Yes, and as the Trans-Canada Highway ran in both directions, non-townies like me were discovering what a magical place the old capital was.

It is not a big leap from badmouthing St. John's to blaming it for the loss of responsible government in the 1930s, which Major does. The problem, you see, was that government "still had the upper classes of St. John's at its centre, rife with political nepotism. While the outport voice had been strengthened, it was still relatively weak" (333). Major must not have heard that Sir Richard Squires, who was Prime Minister in 1919–23 and 1928–32, was born and raised in Harbour Grace, represented both Trinity and Humber districts in the House of Assembly, and was the driving force behind the deal that landed a pulp and paper mill in Corner Brook, which became Newfoundland's second largest community and anchored the west-coast economy. So much for gratitude.

Typically, Major views the 1948 referenda results as the outports' revenge against St. John's. The prospect of a return to responsible government, he lectures, held few attractions for baymen and nothing to make them "think they could rise up out of the poverty that the merchant class had inflicted on them" (392). O'Flaherty offers the sounder judgment that the main divide was not St. John's versus the outports, but the Avalon Peninsula versus everywhere else. Newfoundland, he concedes, "didn't seem to be one country," and the Avalon was a separate "country in the east."[32] In his cheerleading for confederation, Major is the anti-O'Flaherty. In the 1860s the "affable" Frederick Carter was one of the "more enlightened leaders" who favoured confederation (279). C.F. Bennett, on the other hand, was "a merchant workhorse whose style sharply

contrasted with Carter's statesmanlike approach" (280). As for the decision to join Canada, "To have been beholden still to Britain, with a fake hold on our own destiny, would have been a far uglier sight than going into partnership with Ottawa" (392). How an independent Newfoundland would have been beholden to Britain he does not say, and calling confederation a partnership implies an equality that does not exist. Yet in western and southern Newfoundland, people "saw confederation as a chance at equality. Besides, they knew Canadians not to be such a bad lot" (398). The material improvements that followed confederation were "startling" (406). And while admitting that confederation has brought its challenges, Major concludes that "if there was anyone about to reshape the province, it would be these dogged few of the new generation of rural Newfoundlanders" (450–51). God's chosen people. Of course.

For all that our authors have to say about nationalism and national identity, none of them has come to grips with the concepts. Cadigan's flimsy "national policy" and his bewildering "older neo-nationalism" speak volumes. O'Flaherty overlooks the pioneering work of Benedict Anderson and instead uses a definition of nationalism from a *National Post* column by Tom Flanagan! Meanwhile, Major's zombie nation of townie-hating followers rescued by confederation substitutes amateur psychology for lucid thought. As Prowse's boosterism showed, one of nationalism's central tenets was a belief in progress in the understood sense of improvement.[33] This was as marked in Whiteway's "policy of progress" as it was in the 1948 referenda campaigns, where confederation's chief appeal was the promise of economic or material advancement. Smallwood might publicly declare that Newfoundlanders "were not a nation," and Cadigan might accept it at face value, but Newfoundland's first Premier skilfully exploited the people's very real nationalism for his own purposes. None of our authors has grasped this essential point, although O'Flaherty comes close. I will take his trilogy, warts and all, over the Cadigan and Major books, which now join Prowse's *History* in the vicinity of fairy tales.

## NOTES

1 Although the province of Newfoundland officially changed its name to Newfoundland and Labrador in 2001, I will be using the old form when referring to the period before that date.

2 D.W. Prowse, *A History of Newfoundland from the English, Colonial, and Foreign Records* (London: Macmillan, 1895), 72–73.

3 Keith Matthews, "Historical Fence Building: A Critique of the Historiography of Newfoundland," *Newfoundland Studies* 17, 2 (2001): 145–47. [Originally published in 1978.]
4 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991 [1983]), 5.
5 Peter E. Pope, *Fish into Wine: The Newfoundland Plantation in the Seventeenth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 133.
6 Prowse, *History of Newfoundland*, 214–20.
7 Charles de la Morandière, *Histoire de la Pêche Française de la Morue dans L'Amérique Septentrionale . . .* (Paris: G.-P. Maisonneuve et Larose, 1966), III, 1094.
8 Ibid., 1213; Santiago Piquero and Ernesto López, "New Evidence for the Price of Cod in Spain: The Basque Country, 1560-1900," in David J. Starkey and James E. Candow, eds., *The North Atlantic Fisheries: Supply, Marketing and Consumption, 1560–1990: Studia Atlantica 8* (Hull: University of Hull, 2006), 198.
9 Great Britain. *Newfoundland Royal Commission 1933 Report* (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office), 47.
10 James Morris, *Farewell the Trumpets: An Imperial Retreat* (London: Penguin Books, 1981), 215.
11 Newfoundland and Labrador's share of total seats declined from 2.3 per cent to 2.1 per cent in the 2015 election, for which 30 new seats were added in Ontario, British Columbia, and Alberta to reflect population growth in those provinces.
12 *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1969), vol. 2, "Le Moyne d'Iberville et d'Ardillières, Pierre."
13 Ralph Pastore, "The Collapse of the Beothuk World," *Acadiensis* 19, 1 (1989): 53.
14 Alwyn A. Ruddock, "The Reputation of Sebastian Cabot," *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research* 47 (1974): 98.
15 Darlene Abreu-Ferreira, "Portugal's Cod Fishery in the 16th Century: Myths and Misconceptions," in James E. Candow and Carol Corbin, eds., *How Deep Is the Ocean? Historical Essays on Canada's Atlantic Fishery* (Sydney, NS: University College of Cape Breton Press, 1997), 38.
16 Michael M. Barkham, "The Offshore and Distant-Water Fisheries of the Spanish Basques, c. 1500–1650," in David J. Starkey et al., eds., *A History of the North Atlantic Fisheries: Volume I: From Early Times to the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (Bremen: Verlag H.M. Hauschild, 2009), 236.
17 Alf Ragnar Nielssen, "Norwegian Fisheries, c.1100-1850," in Starkey et al., eds., *History of the North Atlantic Fisheries: Volume I*, 84; Jón Th. Thór, "Icelandic Fisheries, c. 900–1900," ibid., 329.
18 James E. Candow, *The Lookout: A History of Signal Hill* (St. John's: Creative Publishers, 2011), 33.
19 Nicolas Landry, *Plaisance (Terre-Neuve) 1650–1713: Une colonie française en Amérique* (Québec: Septentrion, 2008), 137.
20 Charles A. Martijn, "Early Mi'kmaq Presence in Southern Newfoundland: An Ethnohistorical Perspective, c. 1500–1763," *Newfoundland Studies* 19, 1 (2003): 73.

21 Awareness of Newfoundland nationalism and use of the word date to the 1890s. See Patrick O'Flaherty, *Lost Country: The Rise and Fall of Newfoundland, 1843–1933* (St. John's: Long Beach Press, 2005), 167.

22 O'Flaherty, *Lost Country*, 136; James K. Hiller, "Whiteway and Progress," *Newfoundland Quarterly* 68, 4 (1972): 15–18.

23 Robert A. Nisbet, "The Idea of Progress," *Literature of Liberty* 2, 1 (1979): 24.

24 Shannon Ryan, *Fish Out of Water: The Newfoundland Saltfish Trade 1814–1914* (St. John's: Breakwater, 1986), 39.

25 Jeffrey A. Hutchings and Ransom A. Myers, "The Biological Collapse of Atlantic Cod off Newfoundland and Labrador: An Exploration of Historical Changes in Exploitation, Harvesting Technology, and Management," in Ragnar Arnason and Lawrence Felt, eds., *The North Atlantic Fisheries: Successes, Failures, and Challenges* (Charlottetown, PEI: Institute of Island Studies, 1995), 55–56.

26 James E. Candow, *Of Men and Seals: A History of the Newfoundland Seal Hunt* (Ottawa: Supply and Services Canada, 1989), 113.

27 I am excluding Goose Bay because it began as a Canadian initiative.

28 Kevin Major, *Terra Nova National Park: Human History Study* (Ottawa: Parks Canada, 1983).

29 Jerry Bannister, *The Rule of the Admirals: Law, Custom, and Naval Government in Newfoundland, 1699–1832* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 26.

30 O'Flaherty, *Lost Country*, 212–14.

31 Thomas E. Appleton, *Usque Ad Mare: A History of the Canadian Coast Guard and Marine Services* (Ottawa: Department of Transport, 1968), 263.

32 Patrick O'Flaherty, *Leaving the Past Behind: Newfoundland History from 1934* (St. John's: Long Beach Press, 2011), 192.

33 Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (London: Fontana/Croom Helm, 1981), "Progressive."