of the awful transition from childhood to adulthood, when we discover that things are not what they seem and that the dividing line between good and evil is obscure at best. Evie is attempting to understand this in herself, but also for society as a whole. When and why did we as a culture become afraid to allow our children to walk to school? Why do we fear the kindly stranger? How did we come to suspect even people close to us of being capable of evil? Do we live in irrational fear because we are bombarded by the media with sensational but unusual crimes? De Mariaffi catches the paranoia of contemporary life vividly, and never lets it go. Even more so, she grasps the state of mind that accompanies the foreboding that any moment any one of us, particularly women, could become a target of violence and even blame ourselves for it. Can we attract evil by thinking about it, as Evie's friend warns her? Is it possible to dress or to walk in a way that invites victimization? How much is the sense of the danger around us the product of the imagination? This is an excellent novel, excellently written. When Evie is afraid, the reader is afraid, recognizing not just the details of reality, but the familiar, palpable feeling of it, the warm breath on our necks of the devil we know.

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Michael Crummey. *Sweetland*. Toronto: Doubleday Canada, 2014.
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Sweetland is a haunting novel whose main character, Moses Sweetland, stays long in our mind. We may consider him to be the personification of the scarred, rocky, wounded geography of the Newfoundland outport, and still his relevance is not reduced to his capacity to become a symbol or a faithful representation of a traumatic and recurrent episode in Newfoundland history. What allows this novel to really add a potential of poetry and knowledge to a previous literary tradition are the special textual strategies that Michael Crummey brings into play in his narrative so that we can feel his world intensely.

We follow Sweetland's perceptions of his surroundings continuously, and what we see and hear is told to us as in whispers. We have the impression that

we have just woken up and it is still dark, and our sense of hearing becomes suddenly acute, perhaps detecting something unexpected. The first scene in the novel shows the way Michael Crummey makes us experience life: by listening to voices that urgently want to be heard above the ocean's noise, above the wreck of their lives. Sweetland's task is to figure out what human faces and words mean, to discern their contours and past histories, to ruminate on the strange way they have appeared to him sometimes. The past, his companion, assails him with the same destructive power of the weather and the sea.

Fortunately, the narrator retrieves the lost details from Sweetland's past, and *he*, the narrator, if I am allowed to choose this gender for a hypothetically anonymous figure, assists the reader at all times; he fills in the histories over which Sweetland muses and describes second by second Sweetland's thoughts and physical movements. One is almost reminded of the narrator's detailed scientific report on the desperate survival measures taken by the character in Jack London's story "To Build a Fire." Since the narrator in *Sweetland* is full of precision and clarity and provides the necessary context, we may take him for granted as a conventional omniscient narrator that ties things up for us. However, Sweetland's manner of being in the world remains difficult to dissect, intractable to summary and conclusion. And this is so because one of Michael Crummey's achievements is the creation of a narrator that becomes Sweetland's shadow twin, a voice that possesses such a flexibility of tone and vocabulary that, in spite of providing factual evidence of the kind of society Sweetland lives in, he is able to take on Sweetland's moods and act as an uncritical witness, or we may even say, as a friend. He becomes invisible, his words seamlessly integrated into Sweetland's flow of experience. This fluid narrative strategy imitates the texture of water; past and present become simultaneous in the text and permeable to each other. As a result, we get disoriented at times, not knowing whether it is the character's present or past that we are witnessing. The present moment produces bits of past life, "as though it was washing up on the beach like flotsam from a wreck" (314), resembling the ocean's arbitrary way of bringing objects to the surface.

These objects take the form of images in Sweetland's mind, photographs that make him look at death again and again when he plays and replays in his memory the last seconds in the lives of those who were swallowed by the sea. These images become powerful motifs in the narration and form part of longer, harrowing scenes that have not yet totally settled into understanding; they point to the fragile separation between life and death. Apart from these two inescapable realities, Sweetland seems to be always straddling wakefulness and

dream. When the "verifiable" reality of his difficult existence on the island comes dangerously together with the visions of his imagination, a crisis of evidence will be generated, his stance becoming a difficult balance between verisimilitude and legend, documentary and fiction.

Besides Michael Crummey's startling rendition of different dimensions of experience, another layer of complexity is added to the novel thanks to the rich connotations that the very idea of an island includes. Historically, islands have been used in literature as metaphors that illustrate the establishment of self-contained worlds as well as the struggle of men to survive alone. In this case, we can think of the island of Newfoundland as a palimpsest in its very physical sense of stone or rock on which something was written and was then erased and replaced by other messages. This obliteration of what was once there can be compared to the effects of weather and time on the outports after forced out-migration. In keeping with this simile, Sweetland's effort amounts to the rewriting of those erased words as literally as possible. He finds himself among a ruined disarray of shabby objects left behind by the island's former occupants and trying to decipher their strained relationships.

Like the narrator of John Steffler's *The Grey Islands*, Sweetland voluntarily decides to separate from friends and relatives to be exposed to bare nature. However, he unintentionally ends up turning into the madman Carm Denny, the last person to live on the island. Like both of these characters, he endures all kinds of hardships in order to be coherent. Sweetland forms part of a community of (usually) male characters in fiction (and elsewhere) who have engaged in projects of isolation, willingly throwing themselves into the unknown or the unmanageable in order to find some kind of honesty. He also forms part of another real and imagined community of men who have held onto a property against the pressures of progress in order to pay tribute to the past and keep a sense of dignity. Sweetland's scars come from the time when he was an immigrant, and he refuses to be one now. In this way, his island is not just a metaphorical geography that can used to ponder loss, a limbo of sorts, and the novel's implications do not only bear on the consequences of resettlement in Newfoundland. However far away Sweetland's island may seem to be from the rest of the world, it bears witness to the more and more numerous tragedies of human migration in our time.

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