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**[Cadigan, Sean T. Newfoundland and Labrador: a history]**

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making a joke of his ethnicity, the story loses its moral centre, and any potential for social criticism,” adding that “George comes from a genre different from the story’s naturalistic Canadian characters.”<sup>1</sup>

The third large chapter in Kürtösi’s study also includes an analysis of Hungarian-Canadian literature, providing insightful observations on the literary output of a number of authors, while concentrating on the work of György Vitéz, Endre Farkas and Tibor Egerváry in more detail. Since George Bisztray’s *Hungarian-Canadian Literature* and John Miska’s *Literature of Hungarian Canadians*, published in 1985 and 1991, respectively, no comprehensive analysis has appeared on the work of Hungarian-Canadian authors, and by revealing new facets of this ethnic literature within

Canada, Kürtösi provides a welcome addition to the critical literature.

In summary, Kürtösi’s monograph is a fascinating study of the divergent and historically changing aspects of Canadian literary representations of difference. Owing to the substantial theoretical basis and knowledge incorporated in the book, it is an indispensable manual for scholars of Canadian literature in Hungary, while its style, refraining from the use of heavy jargon without proper explanation, makes it accessible to students and a wide readership as well. This is a major milestone in the author’s scholarly output and a promising start for Canadian Studies in Hungary at the outset of the second decade of the second millennium.

1) Richard Teleky, *Hungarian Rhapsodies: Essays on Ethnicity, Identity and Culture* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press; Vancouver, B.C.: UBC Press, 1997), 59

**Sean T. Cadigan**

### **Newfoundland and Labrador – A History.**

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Of all of Canada’s regions and territories, Newfoundland possesses arguably the richest yet least-known history. As distinct in its culture as the more-heralded (and vocal) Québec, the island of Newfoundland and its mainland territory of Labrador have suffered a greater number of slings and arrows, and the resulting outrageous fortune, than perhaps all of the ROC (Rest of Canada) combined. From the arrival of the first Inuit and Innu peoples through to Giovanni Caboto’s mercan-

tile expedition in 1497 to the contemporary administration of the neo-nationalist Danny Williams, Newfoundland has suffered the vicissitudes of climatic catastrophes, ignoble colonial administration, the humiliation of bankruptcy and a shotgun marriage with the Canadian federation, all the while cultivating a reputation as the home of Canada’s warmest, funniest and most musical citizens.

What Caboto observed and passed on to his British sponsors has come to define the one-

time colony, fleeting dominion, and current province's identity. Enormous schools of fish swarmed around his ship, a discovery which initiated a fishing industry run from Bristol by merchants who had no interest in centring the industry on Newfoundland soil or the necessary colonisation this would entail. The effects of this vociferous opposition and the British government's legal impediments to the region's settlement are well chronicled by Sean Cadigan, an Associate Professor at Newfoundland's Memorial University, whose Centre for Newfoundland Studies (CNS) archives the most complete set of documents available on Newfoundland's cultural and political history.

An accounting of the injustices visited upon Newfoundlanders is in itself not new. The cultural identity of Newfoundlanders is bound up, as Cadigan notes, in an historical sense of grievance directed variously, when convenient, at the British and Canadian governments, the merchants of Bristol and St. John's, and Hydro Québec (the villains behind the now-notorious Churchill Falls hydro agreement in Labrador, a territory Québécois still regard as their own). What is new, and refreshing, is Cadigan's thesis that this culture of victimisation, and the romantic myth of Newfoundland nationalism which is fed by it, has played a key role in undermining the development of the region and its people. This book will be sour beer to the faux-Celtic patriots of George Street, fond of declaiming how Newfoundlanders prospered running their own dominion from 1907 to 1934 (a fallacy) and how, flush from American military investment after the Second World War, they could have made independence viable but for the conspiracy and bullying tactics of the British and Canadian governments, who goaded them into an unfair agreement to join Canada as its tenth province (unlikely, given the lack of economic infrastructure).

Cadigan's thesis, backed by extensive research and documentation of the disastrous effect of land-based agricultural and industrial planning by Imperial and local elites, is persuasively presented. Newfoundlanders have always tied their sense of identity to the sea which surrounds them; the island's geography has seldom rewarded attempts at agricultural development or permanent residence away from the island's coastline. Yet the fishery has been consistently mismanaged, left open to predation from rival nations and sucked dry by the avarice of the Bristol fish merchants. A viable long-term means of survival along the lines of Iceland's fishing industry is now impossible. This has left the region's inhabitants, metaphorically, between a rock (Newfoundland is referred to by locals as *The Rock*) and a hard place. With only the off-shore oil industry and the promise of economic benefit from the new Lower Churchill hydro development to offset the permanent decimation of the fish stocks, the receding population of half a million faces a demographic alarm clock that is ticking loudly.

This book, then, should not be read simply as a niche-history of a lesser-known area. Newfoundland and its sister region Labrador offer lessons to other territories beset by colonial mercantile interests, and to smaller nations and cultures suffused with the addictive rush of nationalism. The region's history is also a testament to what can be achieved through sheer obstinacy, having produced against all odds a vibrant culture the equal of any in the world.

Cadigan begins with pre-history, typically the weakest aspect of most histories of the region. Borrowing heavily from ecological and environmental analyses, Cadigan doesn't entirely succeed in creating a readable account, larding his introduction and first chapter with unpacked bio-jargon such as "massive num-



bers of dicotylenodonous herbs...” (9). It reads a little like a graduate student’s keen effort to impress. Yet there are salient facts here which alter the conventional view of the region’s development: over a third of the island’s land, for instance, is bereft of soil, and most of the soil that does exist is superficial. The efforts of successive governments to pursue a “National Policy” based on land-based development seem doomed to defeat when placed in this context.

The early history of the region involves the migrations of its earliest settlers, nomadic bands of Innu and Inuit who walked thousands of kilometres from Siberia across the Bering Strait. The Maritime Archaic people have left few traces (mostly on the island’s west coast), and Cadigan’s conjectures, while plausible, are not verifiable or truly useful in relating to the later history of the region: “while the company of friends and kin must have warmed them against icy winds and cold nights the early spring was a welcome time” (25). The lack of sub-headers in the initial chapter adds to the confusion caused by the mention of so many peoples and eras. More pertinent is the experience of the

now-extinct Beothuk people (posited as the descendants of the first Innu tribes), driven from their habitat by European settlement beginning in the early 1600s and resulting, finally, in the death of the last Beothuk, the Europeanised Shanawdithit, in 1829.

The European phase of Newfoundland history begins with the ill-fated visit of Norse Vikings around the year 1000 ACE to the tip of the island’s Northern Peninsula. Discovering the presence of red-ochre aboriginals, the first Europeans apparently decided that what the area offered in the way of commercial product – berries that could be made into wine, fish, timber – was not worthy of the travails of permanent settlement. The modern history

of Newfoundland and Labrador begins with the first colony, established by John Guy at Cuper’s Cove in 1610. Cadigan’s deep affinity with, and affection for, the land and its people are more evident throughout this section as he demonstrates his close knowledge of Newfoundland geography and the effect of Imperial policies on the eventual failure of Guy’s settlement.

The years between 1700 and 1949 are so packed with riotous events – political chicanery, violent sectarianism, Anglo-French battles, feudal labour practices and awe-inspiring natural and man-made disasters – that many writers would focus on this period in an effort to maximise the entertainment value of their research. To his credit Cadigan positions the several distinct phases in economic and social development which make up this 200 year period in the larger context of his thesis that Newfoundlanders have never in their history possessed the enlightened governance, either from afar or within, required to rise above parochial or venal considerations. That Newfoundland has been considered more commodity than colony is clear from one of the more famous quotes in Newfoundland Studies (from William Knox, an American Under-Secretary of State): “The island of Newfoundland has been considered as a great ship moored near the Banks...for the convenience of English fishermen”.

Of particular value in this history is Cadigan’s account of the years following Newfoundland’s entry into Confederation. Scattered individual accounts exist, most focusing on the legendary (or notorious) reign of Premier Joseph (Joey) Smallwood, the architect of the Confederation campaign and Newfoundland’s first provincial premier, who governed with an inimitable combination of political shrewdness and economic naïveté from 1949 to 1972. Cadigan’s meticulous ac-

count of Newfoundland's struggles within the Canadian federation, from the calamitous land-based economic experiments to the demise of the iconic fishery, is both thorough and comprehensive. What is unique here is how Cadigan ties the modern history of Newfoundland to previous eras through the rise, in the 1970s, of a romantic neo-nationalism. His exposure of this strain of chauvinism as ultimately detrimental to the best interest of the region and its people is at once both relentless and something only a born-and-bred Newfoundlander could, or should, do.

This book is by no means perfect. The scope of the material covered in each chapter begs for sub-headings, and explanatory end notes would add significantly to the lay reader's understanding (only sources are referenced). The language is curiously detached at times, as if in a conscious effort not to become infected with the highly charged events documented within. This is laudable in a scholarly work but at times the risk it runs is of actually undermining the dramatic nature of Newfoundland's tumultuous history. Nevertheless the over-all impact of this new history should not be underestimated. Fitting neatly in tone

between the magisterial Patrick O'Flaherty's *Old Newfoundland: A History to 1843* and the more recent, and populist, *As Near To Heaven By Sea* by Kevin Major, *Newfoundland and Labrador – A History* excels both, in presenting the inconvenient proposition that Newfoundlanders themselves are now the primary architects of their economic and social miseries, through continued adherence to a victim mythology and cynical reiterations of a "National Policy". As such this book represents a new and welcome direction in Newfoundland Studies.

Long the butt of "Newfie" jokes by ignorant mainlanders, the region's inhabitants are experts at self-deprecation but chary of criticism from without. A nation forged by insular geography and the rigours of an extreme Atlantic climate, there is only one certain conclusion to make concerning Newfoundlanders, as this excellent history once again makes clear: they will survive, and they will find a way to turn new events in their history into a wickedly entertaining story.

