

Anthony B. Dickinson and Chesley W. Sanger.
Twentieth-Century Shore-Station Whaling in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Robert Lloyd Webb

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mill and their happiness with playing outdoors allows them to avoid “fruitless confrontations with global forces” (193).

There is another way to interpret the impact of mill workers’ and their families’ sense of attachment to place. This sense entices workers into accepting the drastic restructuring of the pulp and paper industry. It further justifies the appalling price women are willing to pay to allow their families to remain in Corner Brook. A sense of attachment means that the community supports a form of lean production that transfers much of the wealth generated by the forestry sector out of Newfoundland and Labrador. The provincial government has manipulated people’s desire to stay to justify a legislative framework for a more exploitative employment in the pulp and paper industry. The only real benefit Norcliffe suggests that might arise from the sense of place is that “Corner Brook now has a voice — it is becoming proactive and reflexive in the way it views itself” (210). This “Corner Brook” is planning for a post-industrial future, and no longer sees itself as a forestry town, but we have no evidence that the community speaks with one voice regardless of class or gender, or that competing visions of a post-industrial future in tourism development and retirement homes will guarantee working people their common property rights.

Sean Cadigan
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Anthony B. Dickinson and Chesley W. Sanger. *Twentieth-Century Shore-Station Whaling in Newfoundland and Labrador*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press [www.mqup.mcgill.ca], 2005, ISBN 0-7735-2881-4

WHEN SVEND FOYN introduced the concept of industrialized whaling factories, little was understood about the large rorqual whales — blues, finbacks, and humpbacks — that were his intended quarry. Visual observation confirmed that such whales were plentiful off northern Norway, and they were often seen by crews of steamships plying the North Atlantic. That these species were relatively common had everything to do with their invulnerability. They were speedy and powerful, and when dead, they sank beyond the reach of the harpoons and cordage of whalers under sail.

During the 1860s, Foyn introduced nimble, steam-powered catcher-boats to hunt them. He outfitted each with a cannon that fired harpoons with exploding heads, and a steam winch to secure the carcasses. Soon, a compressed-air pump was added, to inflate the animal like a floating balloon. His catchers were too small to permit on-board rendering, so Foyn built shoreside factories near where the whales were known to be.

The numbers of rorquals at first seemed inexhaustible, but this perceived density proved to be a chimera. Once the “local” animals had been taken, there were few others to replace them. So the whalers did the only thing they could do: they

built new factories where none had ever existed. Industrialized whaling thus drifted, first to Iceland and the Faeroe Islands, and then on a more southerly course from Norway for Africa and the Americas. And in each instance, the same scenario played out. Huge initial profit-taking led to precipitous collapse, and the closing of each station in turn.

Three decades after Foyn's first successes, his methodologies drifted onto the coast of Newfoundland and Labrador. It is this fishery that Tony Dickinson and Chesley Sanger have studied intensely for more than two decades. Their story is worth the telling, because the rapid, unregulated expansion of the business in Newfoundland, and its fatal implosion after a mere few years provides a paradigm for all fixed-site whaling around the world.

Knowing the predilection of the whaling industry for quantifying operations in terms of production and value, I anticipated that their final product might well be a dry, analytical accounting. In truth, there are 54 figures and tables in a book that is but 254 pages long, 85 pages of which present valuable endnotes, bibliography, and index. But Dickinson and Sanger have done much more than compile statistical evidence. They have crafted a well-told story from government records, newspaper accounts, and the memories of whaling families. Furthermore, they have bothered to place Newfoundland and Labrador into the larger context of historical whaling, taking the reader as far back as the seasonal alongshore Basque fishery of the sixteenth century.

In later pages, they fully link the demise of Newfoundland whaling with the rise of a mirror-industry along the Canadian west coast. This westward drift was due in large part to the efforts of Dr. Ludwig Rissmuller, an inventor and speculator — and as evasive an individual as can be imagined — whose processing methods fully informed whaling on both shores. The authors also touch upon the role of Captain G.W. (Sprott) Balcom, a Nova Scotian seal-hunter living in Victoria, British Columbia, who in 1904-1905 established the first modern whaling factory in the Pacific Ocean.

Beyond the informative text, beautifully rendered maps, and readable tables are the photographs. It is astonishing to look at so many excellent pictures, which chronicle the entire operation from the hunt at sea to the workers busy at the factories. There are many rare images of catcher-boats, and a smaller number of photographs of whalers and their families, personal photo-album snapshots from the Ellefsens of Aquaforte; a proud formal portrait of Captain Jacobsen and his wife (48); and on page 59, a compelling photograph, one of at least two known to have been made of John Marmo posing atop a vanquished rorqual whale at a British Columbia shore station. These images retain much of their power, despite the disadvantage of having been reproduced on otherwise commendable acid-free, 100% ancient-forest-free, 100% post-consumer-recycled, chlorine-free paper.

The number of hours that Dickinson and Sanger invested in the research and writing of this handsome volume must be incalculable. I can attest that they let out

leagues of whaling line over the years, and it is fine to see that they have winched-in such an authoritative and interesting result. Their work must surely stand as the most complete English-language analysis of a modern shore-whaling industry.

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Beth Ryan. *What is Invisible*. St. John's: Killick Press, 2003, ISBN 1-894294-61-0

READERS MAY BE SURPRISED to learn that Lisa Moore is not the only woman living in St. John's producing brilliant short stories. Moore's Giller Prize nominations for *Open* and her novel *Alligator*, and her appearances in several documentaries on Newfoundland and its literature ("The Rocks Here Tell Stories" and "Hard Rock and Water") have secured for her work a predominant and comparatively large position on any Newfoundland bookstore's "local interest" shelf. Yet tucked away somewhat less prominently along the shelf are wonderful short story collections by other authors, among them Jessica Grant, Libby Creelman, and Beth Ryan. Most notably, Beth Ryan's *What is Invisible* is a treasure waiting to be discovered. Ryan's stories brim with the vivid detail that seems to be the calling card of her fellow Burning Rock writers, yet her writing possesses a realism, an immediacy, and an accessibility that is sometimes lacking in the more impressionistic work of her colleagues.

As Wayne Johnston notes in his blurb on the back of the text, "*What is Invisible* takes us all over the wonderful city of St. John's and beyond." Ryan's stories deal largely with Newfoundlanders, though they are not always in Newfoundland. The opening and arguably best story is set in Fort McMurray, and focuses on the Newfoundland workers and their families who have migrated to Alberta to work the oil fields. "Northern Lights" is an intriguing examination of both the stability and shift in the character of an individual who participates in a mass exodus. The rather reserved Walter is trying his best to enjoy the 25th wedding anniversary of fellow expatriates in the surreal surroundings of Newfoundland shifted 7,000 kilometres west:

They could have been in the Legion back home for all anyone could tell. A two-piece band from Placentia is playing — one guy on electric guitar and the other on an electronic keyboard that imitates everything from a piano to a full brass band. A team of women is in the kitchen keeping an eye on the pots of pea soup and turkey soup simmering on the industrial-sized stoves. And, like home, everyone in the place is linked by blood or marriage or history with just about everyone else. (1)

Walter counters the increased sense of community that comes with diaspora with a dose of ironic distance: "People who you barely spoke to back home become your