

Jennifer Bowering Delisle. *The Bosun Chair*. Edmonton: NeWest Press, 2017. ISBN 978-1-92645-587-7

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point of view in the last two chapters. As the first-person replaces the limited third-person, it also becomes easier for the reader to connect with Johnny, introducing empathy into all the places it was previously non-existent. Unfortunately, Johnny's death quickly snuffs out his emotional subjectivity (246). The novel may end in a beautiful afterlife (246–47), but the world of the here-and-now remains ruthless and bleak, keeping its harshness intact.

In my final assessment, I find that *We'll All Be Burnt in Our Beds Some Night* is thought-provoking, stirring, and, in places, heart-rending, but also shocking and disturbing. I believe that it is worthy of the Governor General's Award, but I also think it is a controversial text, and that readers will likely read it within the context of contentious issues in their everyday worlds. In this review, I have had to express my experience of the novel, which evolves out of my peculiar reading context and does not necessarily reflect the broader trends in audience responses. Nonetheless, I would suggest that, even if you hate it when you start, Johnny and his world have the power to imprint themselves on your mind, insinuate themselves into your emotions, and then stay with you long after you finish the book.

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It is dangerous to allow an author too much authority to frame her work just the way she wants, but *The Bosun Chair* is best understood, and most kindly reviewed, in the context of the author's own interpretation of her work as the subgenre "second-generation diaspora literature." Delisle tells us in her prologue of the rootlessness of hearing stories of "home," a home that is not her natal Alberta but her parents'

and ancestors' Newfoundland. The prologue provides the weaving together of intergenerational echoes that mark much of the narrative tension of the collection.

Delisle begins with the story of Jean Chaulk, her great-grandmother, and ends the book by completing the tale. Between the book-ends are six other lyrical, impressionistic, and episodic vignettes that work together to tell the story of early twentieth-century Newfoundland and her great-grandparents' generation. Her project, and that of many of those who write second-generation diaspora literature, is to reclaim place and heritage, but in most such cases they are actually constructing an imaginary country to which they can belong.

It is a dangerous project that, in less sure hands, has produced the well-worn Newfie-drag fictions, all salt cod, a smattering of Newfoundland English, and a kind of nostalgic outport fetishization. At times Delisle wanders into a laundry list of "old Newfoundland" clichés, but they are brief, and more importantly, they are often tempered and tutored by a larger project of relentlessly, and sometimes ruthlessly, examining her family, their character, and the choices they made. Here, the final story of *The Bosun Chair* is a good example of trying to understand a woman at once young and heroic aboard a shipwreck and, by turns, hard and pathetic as an aged woman.

Perhaps the strongest piece is the second, "Three Thousand Quintals," a rhythmic near-prose poem balancing several voices: the main character, John Bowering's poem of his shipwreck, newspaper reports, letters, and the author's own voice. It has a rhythm and a power that holds the reader, and you can't believe 24 pages have slipped past while you were in the grips of a perfectly balanced symphony of voices. The next tale is arresting, primarily because that rhythm and storytelling technique is suddenly absent. I blamed the author for a while, thinking perhaps she couldn't recapture the grace of the first full tale. But each story, while employing a similar set of techniques and storytelling devices, has a distinct quality. Perhaps this is a collection that should be read, one story a night, or maybe one a week, lest you blame the next tale for what it is not trying to be. It is, overall, a worthwhile book that

rewards focused attention but does not demand it, that uses several complex narrative techniques but always in the service of the story.

If there is a critique, it mostly arises by considering the audience. Newfoundlanders who tell their own stories and read the ones others tell may find — for lack of a better term — the texture of the stories somewhat thin, lacking some nuance and dissonant voices of this imagined home Delisle is trying to recapture. Likewise, we find, once again, that the home and the larger identity of Newfoundland itself are always historically receding, somewhere back there, not here and never now. But I do not want to blame a book for what it never tries to be, and what this book attempts to do is worth the writer's efforts and the reader's time.

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John C. Kennedy. *Encounters: An Anthropological History of South-eastern Labrador*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2015. ISBN 978-0-77354-493-2

On its publication in 1995, John C. Kennedy's *People of the Bays and Headlands* became the first historical account of what Kennedy dubbed the "Unknown Labrador," the portion of Canada's Atlantic shoreline stretching northward from Chateau Bay to Hamilton Inlet. His characterization was a fair one at the time, the region's population, together with the forces influencing their past and present way of life, having garnered relatively little attention from researchers compared to the extensive scholarship on the Inuit, Innu, and settlers of northern and central Labrador. Of late, however, interest in the area has surged, a good deal of it aimed at supporting the claims of local residents to constitutionally protected rights and titles arising from their mixed Inuit-settler ancestry (e.g., Kennedy, ed., 2014;