

The Bucolic, the Backwoods, and the In-Between: Navigating Desire in
Atlantic Canadian Literature

By
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Abstract

Representations of Atlantic Canada in media, popular culture, and literature often depict the region as a space of rural simplicity or stagnancy. To contest these assumptions, this dissertation considers Atlantic Canadian literature from 1908 to 2019, with attention to what I see as a complex sense of identity emerging in the region which intersects with broader ideas about sexuality. For much of this period, discourses of normative sexuality spread across the country at the same time aspects of Atlantic Canadian experience were commodified and canonized. This dissertation identifies a limited, archetypal spectrum of representations running from bucolic nostalgia to backwoods ignorance. Despite the persistence of images which privilege understandings of the region as a heterosexual monolith, I suggest that within Atlantic Canadian literature there are texts that, in differing ways, trouble this view.

To make this point, I explore a range of representations and their reception, from *Anne of Green Gables* (1908) and the Netflix adaptation *Anne with an E* (2017), to writing by Alistair MacLeod, David Adams Richards, and Wayne Johnston. To differing degrees, these texts remain popular in the nation's cultural imaginary, and I outline how their recognition influences which bodies, relations, and values become accepted as part of the social fabric of Atlantic Canada. I also explore the work of R.M. Vaughan, Ann-Marie MacDonald, Jaime Burnet, and others who complicate narratives of heteronormative space which are privileged in the national imagination. This push-pull of representation and experience embodies, I assert, a *regional desiring*, a concept which troubles binaries of insider/outsider, here/there, and rural/urban. Over time, this *regional desiring* impacts what is understood as an 'authentic' narrative of Atlantic Canadian experience; my dissertation suggests, therefore, that Atlantic Canadian fiction can be a site of transgression and resistance.

Through it all, I argue that a complex desire for normative narratives of Atlantic Canada from arbiters of culture, funding bodies, and the reading public come into tension with the diverse reality of sexualities that exist in the region. Despite perceptions of Atlantic Canada as inherently conservative and traditional, an attitude that the region's literature is assumed to reinforce, the texts I explore raise questions about the intersections of space, time, and sexuality in an Atlantic Canadian context.

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Introduction

The path is made out of footprints—traces of feet that “tread” and that in “treading” create a line on the ground. When people stop treading the path may disappear. And when we see the line of the path before us, we tend to walk upon it, as a path “clears” the way. So we walk on the path as it is before us, but it is only before us as an effect of being walked upon. A paradox of the footprint emerges. Lines are both created by being followed and are followed by being created. The lines that direct us, as lines of thought as well as lines of motion, are in this way performative: they depend on the repetition of norms and conventions, of routes and paths taken, but they are also created as an effect of this repetition. To say that lines are performative is to say that we find our way and we know which direction we face only as an effect of work, which is often hidden from view. So in following directions, I arrive, as if by magic.

— Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*

I want to open this dissertation with Sara Ahmed’s description of the path. In *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, and Others* (2006), Ahmed brings together threads of space, desire, selfhood, and being and reflects on structures of experience and relational understanding. Engaging with feminist, anti-racist, and queer scholars, Ahmed builds on the philosophical tradition of phenomenology and explores how it is rooted in the wide-ranging concept of orientation. She writes that, “consciousness is always directed ‘toward’ an object,” and notes this idea of direction is central to the work of thinkers such as Edmund Husserl and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Rather than realms to be merged to a particular intellectual pursuit, Ahmed explains that “queer studies and phenomenology involve diverse intellectual and political histories that cannot be stabilized as objects that could then be given to the other” (5); instead, the goal of the text is to “build upon this work by reconsidering the ‘oriented’ nature of . . . standpoints” such as race, gender, sexuality, and the body.

For Ahmed, orientation is a continuous process—something that happens and happens again and, in so doing, generates different ways of moving and being in the world. I will return to Ahmed throughout this dissertation; however, the passage I have chosen for my epigraph

strikes me in a particular way as integral to her work, with its penchant for what she calls “queer turnings” and the questioning of seemingly stable things, and to my own desire to pause over central figures, ideas, discussions, and movements in Atlantic Canadian literature.

Indeed, representations of Atlantic Canada in media, popular culture, and literature often depict the region as a space of rural simplicity or stagnancy. To trouble these positionings, this dissertation considers Atlantic Canadian literature from 1908 to 2019, with attention to what I see as a complex sense of identity emerging in the region which intersects with broader ideas about sexuality. For much of this period, discourses of normative sexuality spread across the country at the same time that aspects of Atlantic Canadian experience were commodified and canonized. Building from the work of literary critics such as Herb Wyile (2011), Danielle Fuller (2004), David Creelman (2003), Peter Thompson (2019) and many others, I outline a limited, archetypal spectrum of representations running from bucolic nostalgia to backwoods ignorance which intersects with and, in turn, impacts understandings of sexualities in Atlantic Canada. Despite the persistence of images which privilege understandings of the region as a heterosexual monolith, I suggest that within Atlantic Canadian literature there are texts that, in differing ways, trouble this view.

Throughout, I attend to an array of literary and cultural texts and their reception. Some texts are central in the cultural imaginary of the wider nation, and I outline how their recognition influences which bodies, relations, and values become accepted as part of the social fabric of the Atlantic region. Other texts work to complicate narratives of an all-encompassing heterosexuality which are privileged in the national imagination. This push-pull of representation and experience embodies, I assert, a *regional desiring*, a concept which troubles binaries of insider/outsider, here/there, and rural/urban. Over time, this *regional desiring* impacts what is understood as an

authentic narrative of Atlantic Canadian experience; my dissertation suggests, therefore, that Atlantic Canadian fiction can be a site of transgression and resistance.

Ahmed's concept of the path, and the paradox of the footprint outlined in the epigraph, with its emphasis on the creation and repetition of conventional orientations and ways of moving through the world, sets the tone for my own questions about how sexuality is represented in the literary sphere. I am interested in how sexuality is depicted in Atlantic Canadian fiction and how this changes over time; how particular relations—bodily and familial—are naturalized in regional space; and in how the footprint of repeated representation can be understood, not as the embodiment of regional experience, but as one way of being among many. Throughout my analysis, there is a desire to “take care” in returning to the well-trodden paths of representation in an attempt to “create something other than another point along a line” (Ahmed 23).

Ahmed's text also identifies the particular spaces in which this orientation process continually occurs. Because orientations “are about the intimacy of bodies and their dwelling places,” turning attention to the well-trodden spaces of bodies in relation offers a solid starting point for this project. As Ahmed contends, “The ‘here’ of the body does not simply refer to the body, but ‘where’ the body dwells. The ‘here’ of bodily dwelling is thus what takes the body outside of itself, as it is affected and shaped by its surroundings . . . Bodies may become orientated in this responsiveness to the world around them, given this capacity to be affected” (8-9). For Ahmed, feeling, response, and space are central to orientation; not just how we are oriented within particular spaces, but also how we become oriented by particular spaces “like a second skin that unfolds in the folds of the body” (9).

When it comes to sexuality—as a force marked by patterns of desire, relation, and selfhood—the concept of home is a crucial starting point. The shifting parameters of what home

can mean, how home can change and be changed over time, and what home can do to broaden understandings of belonging run as an undercurrent throughout this dissertation. Indeed, because notions of home and, more specifically, the home place, have been a central facet in much Atlantic Canadian literature and criticism, the concept offers a strong foundation for my interrogative path. In *Studies in Maritime Literary History: 1760-1930* (1991), Gwendolyn Davies explains the home place in the context of Maritime literature as “a symbol of cultural continuity and psychological identification in the face of social fragmentation, outmigration, and a continuing hardscrabble economy” (194). As I will outline, the home place has been understood in a variety of ways over the last thirty years. To me, the home place suggests a rootedness that is not static, but instead defined by and through relation. These relations can expand, contract, and shift, and in this way the home place is localized but not bordered—it is a place of identification that rests in shared experiences, while also making space for both difference and movement.

Starting with Davies’ positioning of the home place as a quintessential trope in the region’s literature, many scholars have returned to the idea in discussions of identity formation, negotiations of nostalgia, and depictions of complicated return in the context of Atlantic Canadian literature. Emerging most overtly in the early twentieth century, the home place has long acted as a dynamic means of representing regional belonging. As Davies suggests, the home place can be tied back to the nineteenth century when authorial bonds to the specificities of Atlantic Canadian space were filtered through developing ideas of rootedness in a “new” landscape. Davies contends that by the 1920s the home place allows writers to address the social, political, economic, and cultural specificities of the Atlantic provinces. Rather than a passive backdrop or simple setting, the home place chronicles aspects of the region’s economic and

geographic marginalization by tapping into the pains of leaving, longing, and belonging in place.¹

While Davies notes a “texture of language, domestic imagery, and detail in its depiction of lived life” (196) as central to how the home place offers a distinct portrayal of the region, in *Under Eastern Eyes: A Critical Reading of Maritime Fiction* (1987) Janice Kulyk Keefer understands the domestic tethers often depicted in Maritime literature as reductive or even regressive. Though writing before Davies and therefore not using the language of home place specifically, Kulyk Keefer reads depictions of home and community as either romanticizing or disparaging life in the Maritimes. She understands the continual pull of home found in much Maritime writing as “rebarbative” (187), suggesting that such an impulse is simplistic and reflects poorly on the region’s canon. Moving through writing by an array of Maritime authors, Kulyk Keefer argues that community connection is often situated as the greatest virtue of life in the region, and that the texts she studies “speak and act out of a common pool of values, wisdom, and experience both positive and problematic” (37). While Kulyk Keefer goes on to discuss the nuances of home and community in Maritime writing, she suggests that the “sense of communal belonging that seems so savoury to the ‘outside world’” implicitly naturalizes a shared acceptance of marginalization as “part of the fabric of community life” (38). For Kulyk Keefer, this perpetual representation of shared community is something which resonates most deeply for those who live outside of Atlantic Canada, rather than standing as a depiction of connective strength in the face of shared struggle.

This positioning of home and community as a relationally limited concept is a helpful contrast to Davies’ articulation of the home place as a symbol of connection, and Kulyk Keefer’s

¹ As will be discussed in relation to Rachel Bryant’s work, the writing of self into place by settler authors naturalizes particular bodies and stories within the region at the expense of Indigenous histories and realities.

discussion of a located readership is taken up in future considerations of this trope. For Ian McKay in *Quest of the Folk: Antimodernism and Cultural Selection in Twentieth-Century Nova Scotia* (1994), popular representations of the family rooted in domestic comfort play a key role in reductive portrayals of the province. Established through consumerist nostalgia that strengthened throughout the twentieth century, the predominance of the Folk family, and their rootedness in their surrounding communities and economies, erased issues of class, race, gender, and sexuality at work in the province. McKay writes that “Innocence entailed a claim that ‘traditional’ family life was thriving among the Nova Scotia Folk in a way it no longer was in the wider world” (252). This vision of the province was insular; McKay argues that cultural producers in this period focused heavily on *inside* in contrast to an expansive *outside*. In this way, Nova Scotia was re-imagined throughout the early-twentieth century as a space rooted in, among other things, “supposedly natural and traditional gender relations at a time when these were elsewhere subject to great questioning” (251). As parts of this dissertation will show, this view of Nova Scotia and Atlantic Canada portrayed the region as an outpost of custom, or the last bastion of “natural” relations. As such, this simplified conception of home becomes a signpost for the Canadian values retroactively prescribed as foundational parts of the nation’s history.

Though neither use the term home place explicitly, both McKay and Kulyk Keefer provide essential context for understanding the function of this trope in representations of Atlantic Canada. In fact, Davies concedes that McKay’s “thesis offers a tempting way of approaching the image of the ‘home place’ in modern Maritime literature, since it is to an extent pastoral or nostalgic in tone” (195-196). Enticing as his points may be, Davies goes on to note that “to dismiss this literature as static, merely the product of middle class romanticization, is to ignore the elements of realism, irony, and economic cynicism permeating much of it;” doing so

dramatically simplifies the power of the home place as a means of critical analysis and self-definition (196). Far from a one-dimensional site, or a place of sentiment and erasure, Davies argues, in contrast to McKay, that the home place functions as a dynamic and powerful way of writing the region that attends to the differing outcomes of, and reactions to, inequality, change, and hardship.

Questions surrounding the efficacy of home as a place of regional meaning-making and identification continue into the current moment. Many contemporary scholars extend Davies' interpretation. For example, Susanne Marshall (2008) situates the urban Newfoundland often found in writing by Lisa Moore as blurring "the distinction between what is and is not a home place . . . dependent not only on topography but on human connection—and disconnection" (80). Rather than crafting a homogenized Newfoundland rooted in rural simplicity and localized domesticity, Moore's fiction is notably cosmopolitan and complicated. Newfoundlanders are often upper-middle-class townies taking part in a globalized world, rather than the expected fisherfolk of the outports. Yet, this modernization does not necessitate a disconnect from their traditional Newfoundland culture or generate a lament for a bygone era. Instead, tradition and change rest side by side, and the relationships that develop or disintegrate between characters take centre stage. As Marshall argues, Moore uses the home place as a relational force by drawing attention to "the ways in which negotiations of regional identity and global influences are played out in the minute actions of our everyday lives" (81). No longer rooted in small communities viewed from the outside or established in contrast to urban space, the home place is both a space that underscores the continuity of community but also one that allows for modern cosmopolitan attachments. By turning to the urban home place, Marshall highlights active

developments in understandings of this trope through Moore's engagements with local culture and global relations.

Rachel Bryant's *The Homing Place: Indigenous and Settler Literary Legacies of the Atlantic* (2017) also extends our understanding of this trope. Bryant argues that the home place is a version of revisionist history and suggests that literary critics working on this region must attend to the ways in which it naturalizes colonization and settlement in Atlantic Canada. She writes, "Through the shifting idea of the home place, non-Indigenous Maritime writers and readers have articulated, revised, and ultimately controlled their relationships to the places they inhabit, effectively and continuously claiming and imagining this region, to which they are relative newcomers, as their own intellectual property" (4). In this sense, for Bryant, literature functions not simply as a venue for expressing ambivalence about the home place but also as an agent in the ongoing project of settler colonialism. Bryant captures this shift and the destructive tenets of the home place in her use of the term *homing places*. To do so, she reviews how settler and Indigenous communities occupy the same space through different epistemologies. Homing places are attuned to the "constant struggle to *receive* essential information across the various barriers and interruptions that have been systemically built into the everyday workings of the Western-world's industrio-scientific culture" (27). Moving past ideas of settlement, ownership, control, and security and into reciprocity and understanding, Bryant finds, "through *listening*, the distance between our true selves and our chosen homes" (28). In this instance, the home place in the region's literature is reworked into a new praxis of ongoing exchange and is revitalized to account for the violence of settler narratives in literary representations of what is now known as Atlantic Canada. Using Indigenous epistemology to denaturalize whiteness as tied to settler

spaces, Bryant's work re-maps the literary region to highlight the past and present damages of colonization.

Marshall's and Bryant's work troubles the historic and geographic roots of the home place introduced by Davies, who posits that "Being a Maritimer is a matter of knowing, of being . . . a sense of rootedness, of geographical and historical belonging" (10). The impulse to question the borders around ideas of home and belonging is likewise crucial in re-imaginings of the home place outside the region. Of particular interest to me are the ways that communities marginalized through sexual or gender variance often situate the home place as a space of resistance rather than continuity. Scholarship on Alison Bechdel's graphic novel *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic* (2006) offers a useful model for my own understanding of how the home place can make space for the navigation of nonconforming sexuality. Bechdel depicts the home place as a space in which anxieties over gender and sexual identity are played out, revised, and often restricted. As Robin Lydenberg (2012) points out, "Bechdel uses the architecture of the house ingeniously to reinforce the isolation that characterized life in her family home" (60). Rooted in the specificities of Beech Creek, a rural community in Pennsylvania, the Bechdel house becomes a place of camouflage within which the family is forced to pivot and reassess their desires and behaviours against the tyrannical construction of the heteronormative family overseen by their patriarch, Bruce Bechdel.

Lydenberg identifies renovation, restoration, and attention to the house's facade on the part of Bechdel's father as key to "a shifting framework for the more disorienting and on-going construction of bodies, identities, and relationships taking place within its walls" (57-58). This focus on shifting physical space as a manifestation of personal and interpersonal relation is useful in thinking differently about the borders of belonging. As Katie Hogan (2019) asserts,

domestic and communal space offers Bruce a “rural queer existence [that] is both excruciating and a source of resiliency; his rural family attachments and same-sex and gender nonconformity are not problems to be solved but contradictions to be endured and, when possible, embraced” (168). As Bruce works to enact the codes of supposedly appropriate gender and sexuality in this space, his daughter positions herself in alignment with and against her father’s performance. By situating the home place in this way, as a relational space of understanding both others and oneself, the text navigates the different impulses of nonconforming desire within the specificities of familial space; in turn, the rural home place is queered to bring an important new perspective to understandings of both rural belonging and queer subjectivity.

As this brief overview highlights, the home place can function as a material and social space that codifies individual development, social interaction, and familial relations in specific ways which can shift and change through time. Likewise, heteronormative discourse is a prominent force in shaping the parameters of the home place and, by working within or against this discourse, the space can act as a locus for navigating codes of gender and sexuality. Understood in this way, the home place forms an intimate and dynamic space within which subjectivity is negotiated, acting as both a private and public platform for individual reflection on social issues, political agendas, and questions of self and desire.

While the home place is a key means through which Atlantic Canadian writers negotiate belonging, there has been little attention to the ways that texts implicitly or explicitly transgress the boundaries of appropriate codes of sexuality through the trope. Because the home place is one of the “most intimate spaces in which social difference, especially gender difference, is experienced” (Fuller, *Writing the Everyday* 30), consideration of the concept can help to highlight the intersections of sexuality and belonging in Atlantic Canadian literature. To do this

work involves building from scholarship on Canadian queer literature more broadly. Analyses by Terry Goldie (2003), Peter Dickinson (1999), and others form a critical foundation for this project and allow me to think more deeply about spatial and sexual dynamics always intersect in the Atlantic Canadian home place. As a site of familial configuration, developing selfhood, and positive or negative relation, attention to queer or queered home places builds from Davies' focus on "social fragmentation" and can attend to questions of relational belonging and individual development.

In many of the texts I discuss, home is a "porous, open, intersection of social relations and emotions" that is connected to and constituted by politicized sexuality (Blunt and Dowling 27), rather than a space separate from questions of desire or experiences of sexual variance. Jessica Grant's novel *Come, Thou Tortoise* (2009) is a perfect example of the potential of the queer home place. An admittedly tricky text to synopsise, the narrative opens as Audrey Flowers is going through a break up while living in Portland with her pet tortoise, Winnifred. Readers learn that she must travel home to Newfoundland in the wake of her father's death, and the plot moves through a series of non-sequential flashbacks and present day ruminations on Audrey's family, friends, and enemies. Audrey has a unique perspective on the world. At times her thoughts are filtered through a childlike whimsy, while at others there is an almost philosophical undercurrent to her ruminations. There are also chapters told from Winnifred's perspective which not only offer striking reflections on beauty, love, and development, but also lend a crucial external perspective to Audrey's grief, movements, and interactions.

One reviewer (2009) writes, "I don't believe I've ever read anything quite like [the novel]. In fact, I'm not even sure what it's about" (Diane Baker Mason). This sense of intrigue is found in many responses to the text, which won the Amazon.ca First Novel Award and received

significant attention for its unique portrayal of Newfoundland life. Despite the initial buzz around the book, there has been limited engagement with how the novel depicts and navigates St. John's as a queer space (Marr 2017, Chafe 2020). Writing alongside authors such as Lisa Moore and Michael Winter who investigate an urban Newfoundland in a state of flux, Grant is part of a growing group of writers who build upon and question "the wonders and terrors of a globalized and technology-dominated present" and the continuation of "shared attitudes traditionally privileged in the culture of Newfoundland" (Fowler 119). These authors work to show the complexities of Newfoundland, both working within and pushing against longstanding routes of representing the province, as I will overview in Part Two: The Backwoods.

At the same time, *Come, Thou Tortoise* marks a key shift in depictions of the Atlantic region, and Newfoundland specifically, as Grant's unique style of playing with language and narrative structure is set apart from the romantic realism of the province's early literary canon and the growing wave of historical fiction that is "imbued with a sense of loss" (Wyile 173). Indeed, though the novel gravitates around a traumatic loss, Grant playfully interrogates the strongholds of the traditional family through a re-articulation of urban space. Through depictions of Audrey's movement through her home place, St. John's is made strange to revise and reorient the family to include queer relations. Readers learn in the opening pages that Audrey's "dad is in a comma, sorry coma," from a "severe blow to the medulla oblongata as he was walking home. From, this is unbelievable, a Christmas tree. Hanging sideways out of a pickup truck" (Grant 5-6). Because Walter, her father, dies while Audrey is travelling, the St. John's into which she arrives has been irrevocably altered. She notes this shift instantly, stating "This is the wrong airport. The old airport had no escalators and we were all alive in it" (31). As the novel develops it becomes clear that coming back to a sense of rightness for Audrey will involve navigating

through these “wrong” spaces. Through this process, she in turn re-codifies reader understandings of the home place through reflections on her relationships to both people and places.

For example, speaking of herself and Thoby, Audrey wonders: “How can there be only two of us. I keep looking over my shoulder” (34). The perpetual distance Audrey feels from her deceased father instigates a process of reorientation as she moves through the family home, a process that aligns with Ahmed’s reflections in *Queer Phenomenology*. Thinking back to Ahmed’s articulation that “bodies are gendered, sexualized, and raced by how they extend into space . . . [and] become oriented by how they take up time and space” (5), Audrey’s developing reflections on her family members in different spaces offers readers insight into the full parameters of their relation. There are points along the path, so to speak, where readers are asked to stop and look to the left or to the right, moving away from a more conventional focus on what is coming up ahead on the well-trodden track. Through Audrey’s recognition of loss, both emotional and physical, readers begin to understand how the spaces of her home place impress upon an understanding of the self, perceptions of family, and expectations around bodies and desire in ways unique and surprising.

The kitchen table is an important catalyst for this orientation process. By designating the table as her “new headquarters” because “the rest of the house hurts” (Grant 112), Audrey solidifies a locale from which to view and review her relations. Specifically, this long stay at the kitchen table becomes the impetus for her reflections on the relationship between her father and Thoby. It is from this location that readers learn of the familial tensions instigated by her Grandmother and Walter’s brother Toff, become privy to Thoby’s (and secretly Walter’s) time at the motel called the Civil Manor, and see a game of Clue played at the kitchen table, an event

that foregrounds a key moment of revelation later in the novel. In this way, Audrey's presence in the specific spaces of the home place, and her reorientation through the space without her father, becomes more than merely a process of mourning. Her movement through memory and space acts as a means of rediscovery, and as a method of renegotiating and repositioning Walter and Thoby's relationship for the reader.

This process becomes clear as Audrey moves throughout the house. After many days at the kitchen table, she asks herself "Am I ready to leave the ground floor. I've been circling — kitchen, living room, hall, bathroom — for days" (168). Exhausted, as she climbs the stairs she witnesses Thoby in a moment of extreme grief. Though Audrey initially reflects that "He seemed so okay," she goes on to note that "He is not okay. . . . I'm paralyzed. I'm watching him behind his back. *I'm not supposed to see this*" (169; emphasis added). She has noticed that Thoby is "wobbly" and "trembles" as they drive home from the airport, and noted his dishevelled appearance; however, thus far in the novel Audrey continually refocuses her attention onto other matters, repeating the mantra "Don't look at him" (61). In this moment, though, from her liminal position behind Thoby, as unseen but seeing, Audrey refutes this mantra to retrieve his grief from its relegated position on the sidelines of the narrative. In this way, her movement around the kitchen table shifts the gaze away from her own grief, and necessitates a refocusing toward the reality of Thoby's loss.

In Ahmed's discussion of reorientation, she thinks of "the background not simply in terms of what is around what we face, as the 'dimly perceived,' but as produced by acts of relegation: some things are relegated to the background in order *to sustain* a certain direction; in other words, to keep attention on what is faced" (31). In her refusal of the "don't look at him" mantra, Audrey offers readers a sustained view of Thoby that adds a new dimension to reader

understandings of their familial dynamic. Through this redirection, Thoby shifts from the background into the centre; his pain is recuperated and readers are reoriented while Audrey negotiates the affective impacts of his transformed proximity. He becomes closer to Audrey and Walter as narrative attention shifts in a new direction, and his progression from Walter's strong "brother" to something as yet unknown is solidified through the later revelation in Penzance.

Just as Audrey must leave her place at the table to move through grief and reorient herself in the world without her father, so too must Thoby leave the site of his own mourning to revisit his life before Walter. Despite her fear of flying, Audrey eventually decides to look for Thoby in "the bottom of England" (Grant 385), and after a series of equally sad and hilarious encounters she finds him in a cottage in Penzance. As Audrey begs Thoby to wake up, she relates that "He looks like a pirate. Or like someone whose brother just died. Or like someone whose true love is dead" (387). In this new space, Audrey's movement through Thoby's characterizations brings the narrative's negotiation of her family full circle. She reaches back to the opening of the novel through her reference to Walter's description of their family as "a dad and a pirate and a child" (140), to the falsehood of Thoby and Walter's relationship as brothers, to solidify and make known the truth of their status as lovers. Grant's strategic use of allusion and relegation is purposeful. These moments act as points of reorientation which serve to negotiate with the normative. In turn, this reorientation outlines Audrey's home place, situating the Flowers' environs not as stable site of a conventional family, but instead as a space that is dynamic, global, joyful, and queer.

The unfurling depiction of the queer home place is crucial because the novel runs for almost four hundred pages without an overt statement that reveals the fullness of Walter and Thoby's relationship. When the reader is ultimately given a clear expression of their connection,

it is through a memory of Walter, Thoby, and Audrey around the kitchen table, the central location of their home place. Audrey moves through her closest memories of Walter and Thoby together, recalling:

Sometimes a card fell on the floor. And we were so absorbed in the game on the table, in the rolling-pinned-flat house so like the one my dad had escaped in England, that we forgot there was a floor, and a real house around us, and an under-the-table world where other mysteries might be unfolding . . . I crouched down to pick her up, and as I did, I saw my opponents holding hands under the table. Outside the game. I grabbed the card and sprang up with a surge of happiness. What was the source of this happiness. I thought it was because I'd found the lost card. Look! Look what I found! But it was not because of the lost card. Do you hear me. That was not why I was so happy. (389)

In this return to the kitchen table, readers are offered a full-circle disclosure of the family dynamic and shown the beauty of the home place as a space of nonconforming love.

Audrey navigates through many spaces in her home place after it has been destabilized by loss—from the kitchen table, to Walter's bedroom, to the tree in her bedroom, to the plane in the basement, and all the way to England. This movement is a process of orientation that also acts as means of reconfiguration. Rather than simply remembering Walter and Thoby as brothers, and accepting the false parameters of heteronormative relation, Audrey pushes back against the restrictions of this language by expressing joy at the memory of the love shared between her parents.

To be sure, Audrey does not come to a new understanding of her father and Thoby's relationship. I certainly challenge Lucy Ellman's 2009 review of the novel which argues that "It is doubtful whether Audrey ever fully absorbs the fact that her father was gay and that Uncle

Thoby, who helped to bring her up, was his lover, not his brother” (6). Rather than a simple shift between secrecy and exposition, the novel uses Audrey’s movement through the home place to turn the gaze on the reader. As Audrey reflects on her childhood and recalls different interactions with her parents, the reader in turn reflects on, and can then reinterpret, these moments within a wider series of events. One such clue earlier in the text details this renegotiation process clearly as Audrey relates, “You don’t solve a mystery by adding information. You solve a mystery by subtracting what you think you already know. You subtract your assumptions one by one until you are left with the truth” (Grant 330). This recalibration is ultimately the process at work throughout *Come, Thou Tortoise*. Rather than build toward an eventual unveiling of Walter and Thoby’s relationship, Grant structures the narrative as a stripping away. By openly recognizing and rejoicing in Walter and Thoby’s love, Audrey asks readers to reflect on their own assumptions of what constitutes a family and situates queer love as an active presence in their home place of St. John’s.

In this way, *Come, Thou Tortoise* marks a radical departure from traditional depictions of Atlantic Canada while at the same time underscoring the dynamism of the home place as a central regional trope. Situated as a site of resistance and regeneration, the home place is a supportive and positive space for the Flowers family. This affirmative queering of the home place in St. John’s not only complicates the metronormative stereotypes that govern central and marginal spaces, as I will discuss in an upcoming section, but also underscores how the Atlantic Canadian home place is more than a domestic setting, pastoral retreat, or limited relational construction. For Grant, and for many of the authors in this study, the home place functions as a material and social space that codifies individual development, social interaction, and nonconforming relations. The home place is a space where desire of all kinds is negotiated and

orientated by and through space, and where individual, familial, social, and political understandings of sexuality shift and change over time.

Before moving into my next section, a note on language is necessary. Throughout the dissertation, I use the term queer in a dual capacity; first as a “term for people outside the heterosexual norm” (Barker and Scheele 7). In this iteration, I lean toward language such as “the queer community” or “queer people” as a means of understanding a collective sense of difference. It is not my intent to uphold umbrella understandings of queer as an equal identity category. Queerness is unique to the individual, and intersects with other experiences and positionings, like class, race, and gender, in unique ways. Secondly, I use queer as a “way of challenging norms around gender and sexuality” (Barker and Scheele 7). In this way, queer functions as verb (to queer), and holds unique capacities in each iteration. Throughout the project, I also use the term nonconforming to discuss sexualities and relations that fall outside the heterosexual convention. I have chosen the term nonconforming as a means of underscoring agency and intent. While phrasing such as nonnormative suggests a similar imperative to difference, nonconforming, at least in my mind, helps to decentre the idea of a norm, to instead emphasize the power embodied by the person or persons who will not, or cannot, follow the well-trodden, straight path.

Navigating Space and Time

As this example of reading nonconforming desire in the home place shows, attention to the intersection of space and sexuality offers a fruitful means of analyzing Atlantic Canadian literature. My work in this area is indebted to scholars of the region who centre space in their own analyses. Building from theorists and philosophers such as Henri Lefebvre (1974), Edward Soja (1989), and David Harvey (1992, 2001), many literary critics working in Atlantic Canadian literature and culture have shown how an uncritical understanding of the region as a homogenous space perpetuates assumptions about who can and does live within its boundaries. Rather than a static or objective site, space must be understood as a form of social power that is aligned with institutional factors such as white supremacy, settler colonialism, patriarchy, and heteronormativity. Space is therefore politicized, in turn revealing itself as a tool of regulation, naturalization, and, in some cases, transgression.

Lisa Chalykoff's approach to literary regionalism is particularly useful for reflecting on the associations between certain spaces, bodies, and behaviours. In her dissertation, *Space and Identity Formation in Twentieth-Century Canadian Realist Novels: Recasting Regionalism within Canadian Literary Studies* (2000), Chalykoff centralizes "the process of demonstrating patterns in the way that literary texts deploy representations of socio-material space to enable performances of identity . . . [and] to elucidate space's social efficacy" (ii). As one of the first in-depth interdisciplinary models to link conceptualizations of regional space, human geography, and literary representation to the *processual* nature of identity formation, this work is essential to thinking about the Atlantic region as a "social process" rather than as depoliticized, objective, and stable (15).

Chalykoff's exploration of this process, one that affords diverse communities different

degrees of agency and self-understanding within a variety of contexts, forms a starting point for other interrogations of space and identity formation in the context of Atlantic Canada. Scholars such as Alexander MacLeod have extended Chalykoff's critique of "spatial assumptions" to explore the limitations of a "postmodern reading of history . . . [or a] naturalistic interpretation of geography" (2006, 74). For MacLeod (2008), the reconsideration of certain spaces, like George Elliott Clarke's "Africadia," can aid in the conceptualization and critical interrogation of Atlantic Canada and its literatures. Clarke transgresses "the normal boundaries between real and imagined social space and, in the process, extends regionalist discourse into new areas of political and social action" (96). There is an inherent agency in Clarke's reconstruction of the home place specifically, as MacLeod expounds: "rather than being a writer who has been passively made by his home culture and is therefore predestined to defend that social space . . . Clarke actively (and even aggressively) claims both the agency and the capacity first to reimagine his home and then to reconstruct it, physically, in the real world" (107). Crafting powerful connections not rooted in geography, Clarke remakes Atlantic Canadian space through home places that resist white supremacy and racial erasure, and presents African Nova Scotians with dignity, vibrancy, and complexity.²

Space has also been central to understanding the role of labour and "the contemporary importance of class-based collectivities that exceed the nation" in the fiction of Alistair MacLeod

² It is important to note that Clarke's work has drawn criticism for its treatment of sexuality. As Hanna Nicholls (2018) argues, Clarke's "portrayal of women, femininity, and female sexuality is rooted in heteronormative and misogynistic representations. His women rarely represent alternatives outside the stereotypical good/bad feminine dichotomy, and they are given few opportunities to explore their agency without suffering the consequences outlined by patriarchal governance" (189). Nicholls' reading of Clarke's *The Motorcyclist* (2016) is crucial in a discussion of renewed home places in the face of racial erasure. Nicholls asserts that Muriel's "failure to embody his heteronormative definition of femininity threatens his perceived masculine superiority in a patriarchal society, and Carl is unable to understand or accept her sexuality" (197). By objectifying and then delegitimizing the relationship between Muriel and Lola, *The Motorcyclist* upholds heteropatriarchal understandings of the home place all while working to critique the racist strictures which impact the everyday experiences of protagonist Carl Black.

(Mason 2013; see also Lousley, 2021). Others have focused on space to read patterns of migration in Newfoundland literature (Bowering Delisle 2013) or worked to highlight the tensions explored in Michael Winter's representation of Newfoundland's urban spaces (Armstrong 2010; Chafe 2008; Thompson 2010). The variety of angles through which space has been central to studying the region underscores a desire to attend to the nuance, difference, and complexity of Atlantic Canada's culture, history, and society.

Indeed, calls for a deeper understanding of the region's culture rightfully abound in research on Atlantic Canada. In particular, McKay (1994), Overton (1996), Fuller (2008), Tremblay (2008), and others question the reception and circulation of Atlantic Canadian literature in the national cultural sphere. In "Lest on too close sight I miss the darling illusion": The Politics of the Centre in 'Reading Maritime,'" Tony Tremblay suggests that the region's literature is filtered through myth by national audiences; he explains how this "industry mediates cultural production in the regions . . . [leading] to 'uneven' readings of our leading writers [which] are not the result of misreading but of reading as an ideological practice, a practice dependent on the same pressures of conformity" (30-31). As this passage suggests, established myths of the region are not neutral, but instead cultivate particular and powerful understandings of the region and circulate within a system that upholds and deepens these homogenized associations. Tremblay underscores this process in the language of "leading authors," arguing that those who gain "entry into the inner circle—the best central Canadian publishing houses, the most enthusiastic reviews . . . the highest profile in our national media, the largest volume of book sales" and the like, tend to be those authors whose work remains faithful "to these pre-existing myths" (31).

While their parameters may shift and change, I am interested in the implications of a mythic spectrum of representation that runs from bucolic nostalgic to notions of backwoods ignorance. This spectrum helps to situate space in discussions of region and sexuality, as well as underscore the importance of time in accepted “myths” of the region. Herb Wyile explores contrasting depictions of the region in his monograph *Anne of Tim Hortons: Globalization and the Reshaping of Atlantic-Canadian Literature* (2011), noting that the construction of the “Atlantic provinces as a quaint pastoral retreat is intimately related to the more derogatory view of the region and is ultimately likewise a product of the troubled history of the region in Confederation” (22). Because Atlantic Canada is often understood as a respite for weary urbanites who desire a return to a simpler time, or as an outmoded Podunk where nothing good ever happens, “the region has been constructed as insular, primitive, effectively lost in time” (26). As others have shown, when placed in perpetual conversation with the supposedly progressive centre, this casting of the region as a conservative backwater or as a bucolic retreat impacts what people, behaviours, and experiences are assumed to exist within its borders. These representations connect with ideas of tradition and erect temporal boundaries around Atlantic Canadian experience; the region is either understood as a place outside of time or one of stasis and stagnation.

Images of “ruggedly virile men,” “virginal but accessible women,” and “romantic courtships” that turn into “happy families” have long been central in representations of the region, foregrounding normative gender roles and sexual conformity as a collective inheritance (McKay 263-264). Moreover, while “proud, white, heterosexual breadwinners, often of Scottish descent, who dragged resources out of the ground and the sea through sheer will and tenacity” form a stock image of the archetypal Nova Scotian (Thompson 2019, 20), in recent decades

“*white trash* bodies” have grown in prominence in depictions of Atlantic Canada. Longstanding anxieties about work, outmigration, immigration, and disease in a contemporary context develop out of major changes throughout the twentieth century (20). Shifts toward a service economy, the loss of jobs in manufacturing and extractive industries, and the rise of tourism as a means of recuperation, eventually coincide with a “neo-liberal emphasis on competitiveness, mobility, and profitability” (Wyile 99). These shifts culminate in a different and perhaps even darker set of assumptions about the region: that this sense of defeat, decline, and deviancy is implicitly homophobic and heteronormative. This myth of the backwoods elides complexity and is rooted in a simplistic myth surrounding the culture of Atlantic Canada.

These associations of the region as a space homogenized by outmoded traditions on the one hand, and outmoded ideologies on the other, impact how desire is understood in Atlantic Canadian space. To that end, Jack Halberstam’s notion of metronormativity, detailed in *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (2005), allows me to think through how Atlantic Canada, when understood as simplified or stagnant rural space, informs broader assumptions of who can and does thrive within the region. Whether a bucolic haven for hobbyists or a backwoods playground for hicks, it is all hetero; therefore, metronormativity helps bridge the gap between existing studies of the region, which tend to under-emphasize discussions of sexuality, and my own push to understand the role that sexuality plays in who and what is deemed Atlantic Canadian.

Halberstam explains metronormativity as “a spatial narrative within which the subject moves to a place of tolerance after enduring life in a place of suspicion, persecution, and secrecy” (36). In particular, the “conflation of ‘urban’ and ‘visible’ in many normalizing narratives of gay/lesbian subjectivities” enacts an erasure of queer rural life and upholds

assumptions of the rural as a space of suppression and violence (36). By transposing a necessary migration from rural to urban onto the coming out narrative, the out and urban model of queerness becomes a homogenized ideal while the “rural is made to function as a closet” (37). This narrative enacts a dual erasure by simplifying life in rural and urban spaces, while also doubly-alienating members of nonconforming communities in rural areas. In turn, many people come to feel a sense of isolation in rural areas as the result of the metronormative narrative which suggests the impossibility of life in these spaces. At the same time, a sense of disconnect develops in relation to urban-centred models of queerness that naturalize certain lifestyles and behaviours.³

This narrative of necessary escape from an all-encompassing rural homophobia skews and simplifies the reality of life for queer and nonconforming communities, and is often used as a means of liberation and improvement for the most privileged members of the queer community. As Halberstam explains, the “fantasy of homophobic violence” as an essential characteristic of rural spaces (25) becomes a tool “within urban activism [that] allows for an increasingly empowered urban middle-class gay and lesbian community to disavow its growing access to privilege in order to demand new forms of state recognition, and to find new ways of accessing respectability and its rewards” (17). In this sense, an urban, white, middle-class figure (often a gay man) becomes the archetype for an out and proud idealized version of queerness, thereby negating the experiences of differently-abled or gendered, racialized, rural, and other nonconforming people and communities.

³ This sense of double alienation is noted in Will Fellow’s *Farm Boys* (1996), a collection of stories from gay men living in the Midwest in the mid-twentieth-century. This sense is further expanded in Katherine Schweighofer’s critical interrogation of the closet, “Rethinking the Closet: Queer Life in Rural Geographies” (2016).

In contrast, Halberstam argues for the need to recognize alternative temporalities and configurations of space that account for the gendered and sexualized foundations of normative institutions and processes (like the family, heterosexuality, and reproduction). Noting that theorists such as Soja, Harvey, and others have “exclude[ed] sexuality as a category of analysis” in their investigations of space, place, and postmodern geographies (5), Halberstam uses the language of spatial theory as a starting point from which to critique normative institutions from the ground up, taking broad aim at the ways rural space is understood within a spatial trajectory of queer migration from country to town. I suggest that a similar oversight exists in the use of spatial theory in the context of Atlantic Canadian literature, as the existing criticism that engages with spatial theory often sidesteps the intersections of space and sexuality.

Writing in the early 2000s, Halberstam notes that “there has been little attention paid to date to the specificities of rural queer lives. Indeed, most queer work on community, sexual identity, and gender roles has been based on and in urban populations, and exhibits an active disinterest in the productive potential of nonmetropolitan sexualities, genders, and identities” (34). Building from Kath Weston’s (1995) formative work on the symbolic distinction of urban queerness as “a dream of an elsewhere that promises a freedom it can never provide” (30), Halberstam fleshes out the effects of rural queer erasure, and provides examples of life within rural spaces that problematize the regulation and naturalization of a located, class and race-based queerness.

The emphasis on a homogenized urban lifestyle is important to question because it impacts how members of queer and nonconforming communities come to recognize their place in the world and, at the same time, conceptualizes the rural as necessarily a place of intolerance, violence, and bigotry. In *Another Country: Queer Anti-Urbanism* (2010), Scott Herring argues

that this positioning generates a “shameful rusticity,” as rural spaces are “shelved, disavowed, denied, and discarded in favor of metropolitan sexual cultures . . . the rural becomes a slur, one that has proliferated into an admittedly rich idiom” (5). While Halberstam and Herring both work in an American context, where coastal cities tend to be idealized at the expense of the rural South and the Midwest, this understanding of rural space as backward, oppressive, and outmoded is not a uniquely American phenomenon. In many contexts, the slipperiness of sexuality as a multifaceted web of relationships, embodied desires, and social and political structures rests within and beside rurality as a diverse experience “in terms of its composite physical and human geographies that come together in multiple ways to form imbricated landscapes of settlement, belonging, production, consumption, and conservation” (Gorman-Murray, Pini, and Bryant 1). David Bell and Gill Valentine’s global focus on sexualized spaces (1995), Andrew Gorman-Murray’s work on queer rural experience in Australia (2006, 2013), and recent studies of rural queerness in Canada (Korinek 2018, Kelly Baker 2016) all enrich a growing body of scholarship that investigates the intersections of space, time, rurality, and sexuality.

The “complex interplay of belonging and alienation, inclusion and exclusion, for different sexual subjects and communities within the rural” (Gorman-Murray, Pini, and Bryant 15) is therefore an important area of developing critical analysis, particularly in a margin/centre context like Atlantic Canada where the ideological and stereotypical positioning of the region is actively questioned and contested in recent cultural and literary representation and criticism. Indeed, the very idea of “Atlantic Canada” as a unified and stable entity has been and should be questioned. As Wylie makes clear, “Given the historical differences between the four provinces and their shared contemporary experiences, there is much to be gained from putting the notion of ‘Atlantic Canada’ into both theoretical and historical perspective” (7). Rather than a timelessly

uniform entity, each province has its own histories, cultural and social traditions, linguistic particularities, and relationships to the wider nation and wider world.⁴ Moreover, as an inherently settler colonial configuration, the artificial borders of each province, alongside their collectivity as a region, belies the territories of Indigenous nations such as the Mi'kmaq, Passamaquoddy, Wolastoqiyik, Innu, and Inuit.

This interplay of belonging and alienation is also important to my use of the term rural, which I view as a relational concept. In the context of Atlantic Canadian literature and culture, and within the confines of the metronormative narrative, the urban centre is glorified as a space of progress, multiplicity, and complexity, whereas the rural margins are understood as an all-encompassing non-urban entity of regress, simplicity, and stagnancy. Like the editors of *Queering the Countryside: New Frontiers in Rural Studies* (2016), my goal is to “explore the conceptual space that begins to open up once we acknowledge that ‘rural America’ is neither a monolith nor an apparition” (8). Similar homogenized myths of rural space exist in Canada, and become tethered to regional narratives in unique ways. Thus, I use the term rural as a way to explore this simplification rather than uphold it. While I discuss literature set in cities, in small towns, and at land’s-edge, I situate the region-as-rural to explore the power of spatialized myths of desire and relation. There are limitations and imprecisions inherent in this approach; I contend, however, that the language of rurality offers a way to discuss how social spaces and relations are framed in contrast to an elsewhere (often assumed to be more progressive), and tend to be homogenized as existing outside of time.

Within a metronormative framework, where the rural is the decidedly heteronormative antithesis to the urban, the region-as-rural becomes either idealized as a realm of traditional

⁴ For a more detailed breakdown of this complexity, see Wylie’s section “Atlantic Canada: The Making of a Region” (7-13).

values and pastoral simplicity or degraded as a space of stagnation and regression. In both configurations, the urban centre is understood as a modern space of progress, mobility, and tolerance—a space of queer emancipation, safety, and community. Thinking about this process within the broad history of centralization in Canada, the metronormative narrative of migration from rural (or here, regional) to urban (or here, centre) is a powerful regulatory trajectory that works alongside a complex history of outmigration, shifts in industry, and a longing for home in the Atlantic region. The repetition of representations that uphold, amplify, or sentimentalize this regulatory trajectory mark a well-trodden path in the region's literature, demarcating certain experiences as central while hiding other experiences from view.

Similarly, the power of metronormative narratives govern what representations rise to the top in a cultural infrastructure located primarily outside of the region. As Tremblay's discussion of myth underscores, the national cultural infrastructure gravitates toward a particular type of regional representation. In the case of Atlantic Canada, the recurrent appearance of nostalgic realism, a focus on conventional family arrangements, and a deep sense of community rooted in simplified rural spaces often implicitly (and also explicitly) projects a heteronormative standard onto the region. In this way, meaning-making at the intersection of space and sexuality functions as both a method of normative regulation and, as I work to show, a means of highlighting variation and nonconforming desire as aspects of regional tradition.

Regional Desiring

As part of my argument, I work to understand how the repetition of particular bodies and relationships in depictions that cast the region as a simple or stagnant space foregrounds Atlantic Canada as knowable by and through the values it appears to endorse. These values would seem to establish and uphold the region as a traditional, rural, and conservative space on the margin. For example, heteropatriarchal familial configurations and white male struggle become archetypal regional experiences that overshadow writing that does not fit this particular mould. These standard narratives are certainly useful to some cultural producers and tourist initiatives within the region that aim to revitalize the economy and play into the “desire for a homogenous, exotic Folk culture” (Wyile 25). Yet, the encapsulation of the region as a marginal space in stasis is also a valuable narrative for cultural producers and political figures working at the national, and in some cases international, level. To use Stuart Hall’s (2013) phrasing, the “system of representation” at work in continuing the construction and maintenance of this particular narrative is a key part of the argument that follows. I ask how and why certain representations gain and retain attention, and reflect on which aspects of these representations hold particular sway.

To discuss this process, I use the term *regional desiring* to underscore the push-pull of representation and experience circulating around understandings of sexuality and desire. On the one hand, regional desiring refers to what is desirable to readers and critics outside the region. This configuration is a *desire for* the region that works along normative lines and implicitly situates the region as a space of tradition. This *desire for* often speaks back to traditions of white masculinity and conventional familial structures that have been naturalized within Atlantic Canadian space. This *desire for* the region is also intricately tied to tourism and culture industries

in each province, and the ever-increasing reliance on money from elsewhere as a strategy for economic viability. I will discuss these developments in Parts I and II. I will also map out in more detail the relations, bodies, and experiences that are naturalized as the region becomes more reliant on outsider revenue.

On the other hand, regional desiring can also underscore the varying desires *within* the region. Here, desire is not limited by homogenized narratives of tradition dictated from without, or misguided ideas of rural space as always-already oppressive to gender and sexual variance. Instead, regional desiring from within pushes against normative myths by exploring queer experiences rooted in Atlantic Canadian space. Rather than a *desire for* the region, one that is at times passive but still very invested in upholding normative myths of regional space, this configuration of regional desiring is an active manifestation of *desire from* the heterogeneous places and people of the region itself. This *desire from* is embodied in the Atlantic Canadian region and, in different ways, works to understand how the parameters of nonconforming desire are entangled in and through the parameters of life in the particularities of the region. While *desire for* can be understood as streamlined and simplified, *desire from* is complex, multifaceted, and exploratory; *desire from* the region is, in many ways, queer. *Desire from* works to question and deconstruct conventions deeply enmeshed in how the region has been represented and understood. *Desire from* also demands attention to, and affirmation of, the ways that the region differs from the “assumed or imposed homogeneity and/or unity” that, as Wyile contends, is “projected usually from without but also from within” (8).

In my articulation, regional desiring is both a noun and a verb. The phrase indicates a thing to read for and think about—the depiction of desire as an entity on the page. At the same time, regional desiring centres the act of desiring in different terms. Though often overlooked or

erased from regional narratives and experience, this configuration situates desire as an active presence that can trouble binary constructions of here/there, margin/centre, and rural/urban through sites of embodied transgression and resistance. In this way, Danielle Fuller's concept of strategic regionalism, and the potentially reductive nature of "politically defined territories" (37) as an organizing principle for literary regionalism, is essential to my understanding of regional desiring. As Fuller outlines in *Writing the Everyday: Women's Textual Communities in Atlantic Canada* (2004), predicated on shared experience and a "situated knowledge of economic marginality, regional disparity, geographic isolation, and various forms of social exclusion" (246), strategic regionalism turns to the communities made-possible by "subordinate (non-elite) knowledges" (38) and the bonds formed by experiences of marginalization rather than geographic space. Like Fuller, I turn to the heterogeneity in writing from the region to investigate the importance of "social rather than physical geographies as a means of mapping communities or understanding identity" (37). Though the texts I analyze are deeply tied to their local spaces, they also (in different ways) speak to a wider consciousness of, and response to, discussions of sexuality, desire, and region throughout the twentieth century.

While the works I discuss are differently located in space, history, and community, the different formations of regional desiring articulated throughout offer an overarching critique of the heteronormativity at the heart of the region's canon. Reading regional desiring in such a way allows for a discussion of sexuality within the boundaries of Atlantic Canada that refuses to be contained into *a* homogeneous queer narrative of experience and community, or *a* singular regional narrative of nonconformity.⁵ Instead, the variety of representation under study helps to

⁵ This project does underscore variation of experiences in desire, but it also is very limited in its focus on white bodies. In later sections I speak to the representation of Indigenous peoples; however, the project is overwhelmingly attentive to white writers and the white characters they represent. This limitation is, in large part, rooted in the overarching focus of the project on the development of conventional representations of the region. I note this

broaden and complicate accepted understandings of the region as a backward or bucolic space. This process pushes against the reductive nature of both positions, brings together seemingly disparate voices, and moves into understandings of the in-between, ambiguous, and nonconforming.

For example, the concept of regional desiring offers a way of connecting Michael Crummey's 2009 historical novel *Galore* with Michelle Winters' *I am a Truck* (2016). Despite the differences between the texts, both navigate male desire in the context of isolated rural settings. Winters' sparse novel focuses on Agathe and Réjean Lapointe, a long-married couple who live in a small English-speaking Acadian community in New Brunswick. The couple's Chevrolet dealer, Martin Bureau, becomes key to the text after Réjean's beloved Silverado is found abandoned on the roadside. The loss of her large and stoic husband sends Agathe into a bewildered grief. Martin also feels this absence deeply; not only was Réjean a major customer of the family truck business, but he was also the only man with whom Martin connected. The comradery between the men sits in contrast to Martin's experiences of mockery and difference with his male family members and coworkers. The "reality of Réjean's non-existence" devastates Martin, and he is continually reminded "of the world where he now lived, alone" as he searches for his missing companion (104).

In contrast, Crummey's text is set in the outport community of Paradise Deep and offers a multigenerational epic that follows the Sellers and Devine families. Beginning with the arrival of a non-verbal man with albinism to the settlement, the narrative traces the social, cultural, and political struggles of a place separated from a wider world of mass technological, scientific, and

because there is much work to be done on how different communities in the region experience overlapping oppressions rooted in sexuality, gender, race, class, and religion. This project offers a starting point for more diverse research into these intersections and experiences.

governmental change. *Paradise Deep* contains a range of complex characters; however, aspects of Eli Devine's life, a member of the youngest generation, allows Crummey's text to be read alongside Winters' through its navigation of male desire. Eli's sexuality is certainly more fleshed out than Martin's, yet it remains likewise subsumed throughout the text. His relationships with men are never depicted in as much detail as the many heterosexual encounters in the text (Bidwell and McDonald 172). There is a moment when a teenaged Eli engages in oral sex with another boy, but silence and shame cloak the majority of his interactions with men. As Kristina Fagan Bidwell and Jessica McDonald (2020) assert, "Eli's sexuality becomes a hazy and largely unarticulated character trait. It is telling to imagine how Eli's story of repression and betrayal would read very differently if we were given narrative access to moments of love and sensuality" (172). Rather than situated as a crucial trait or means of connection, Eli's sexuality is used to evoke a sense of difference and impossibility and to highlight the strictures of the small community.

As these brief synopses highlight, the landscapes of both novels are drastically different and the male characters share almost no commonalities: their respective worlds are over 1500km and 100 years apart; their physicality, class status, linguistic and cultural backgrounds are distinct; and, other than the fact that they live in a region now understood as Atlantic Canada (Newfoundland's entrance into Confederation in 1949 of course complicates things), Eli Devine and Martin Bureau cannot be easily read together. And yet, Eli Devine's fantasy of "lying in the moss with a faceless man," and lament that "There was no one else on the shore like himself . . . maybe no one in the whole of Newfoundland" (Crummey 259), fits alongside Martin Bureau's lost connection with Réjean and reflection that he feels "his exclusion so acutely, it was incredible" (Winters 44). Despite their differences, physical and cultural marginalization,

complicated desire, and barriers inscribed by normative regulations of gender and sexuality are at work in both novels, and both authors muddle key assumptions of regional space through the inclusion of implicit and explicit nonconforming male desire.

Moreover, reading these texts together complicates normative temporal trajectories of queerness. It would be easy to read Eli Devine's experiences of queer longing and shame simply through the lens of history. Rural Newfoundland in the 1800s sits in a particular position along the temporal trajectory of progress for 2SLGBTQIA+ communities. In the past, it is assumed, nonconforming individuals were suppressed and erased, and in the present things are getting, and have gotten, better. Yet, a more ambivalent understanding of time and progress is needed to understand experiences of queer desire. Heather Love (2007) notes that "Contemporary gay identity is produced out of the twentieth-century history of gay abjection: gay pride is a reverse of mirror image of gay shame, produced precisely against the realities it means to remedy" (20). This "association of progress and regress" streamlines the complex reality of queer life in different moments and flattens the particularities of experience. The ebb and flow of responses to various shifts in discourse and regulation are made to fit a particular progress-based pattern, one that negates differences fostered by diverse and located experiences of intersecting marginalities.

For Bidwell and McDonald in "The Newfoundland Master Narrative and Michael Crummey's *Galore: An Interpretative Framework*" (2020), Eli's personal queer trajectory is not about progress at all; while rooted in the historical conservatism of 1800s Newfoundland, his movement from awakening to exploration to shame and on to eventual exploitation is part of a longstanding master narrative specific to Newfoundland. This master narrative rests on notions of timelessness and a negotiation of belonging (154), and situates "real" Newfoundlanders as a "seemingly unchanging and natural part of the island, recognizable by familiar features:

whiteness, traditional gender and sexuality, working-class status, outports, fishing, Newfoundland English, traditional culture, and struggle with ruling powers” (155). Eli’s experience of complex desire is therefore less about the historical pressures facing nonconforming individuals and more about a deterministic positioning of Newfoundland as a space that shapes the lives of those within it. In this configuration, Paradise Deep holds more agency than any individual who resides there, and fits within a catalogue of representations that position regional space as outside of time.

The regional desiring at work in Crummey’s text therefore aligns with a *desire for* the region. As part of a Newfoundland master narrative that has “most captured Canadian and American readerships” (155), this version of Newfoundland fits within a corpus of representation that is marketable and notable as decidedly of the region. Part of this accepted narrative rests in understandings of rural space as static and heteronormative. While Eli experiences and vocalizes male desire, it is always-already impossible in his community. In contrast, Martin’s ambiguous and timid desire for Réjean can be read as a *desire from* the region. Rather than tapping into normative categories of regional representation, Winters plays with language, perspective, time, and relation. Of particular importance here is the novel’s disinterest in categorizing desire or relation in regional space. Instead, the connection between Martin and Réjean develops slowly through intimate interaction and reflection and is not in need of naming. Though Martin is lonely, he is not defeated; instead, he goes on a quest to find Réjean as a means of rectification and reconnection.

As this example highlights, the concept of regional desiring makes space for thinking about how experiences of nonconforming sexuality can create connections across time and space. These potential connections emerge across a variety of texts from the region in complex

and, at times, ambiguous ways. Sara Tilley's novel *Duke* (2015), for example, could be placed in conversation with Crummey's *Galore* as a work of historical fiction that deconstructs linear time and coherent narrative; using found letters, journals, and logbooks interspersed throughout the narrative, *Duke* re-negotiates conventional understandings of place, progress, home, and the family. Beginning in 1906 on Duke's way to the Yukon, much of the text shifts between Duke's childhood in the 1890s to an adulthood of alcoholic lament in the 1920s in rural Trinity Bay, Newfoundland. This shifting of time and geography is integral to Duke's renegotiation of normative structures and allows his sense of difference to be read alongside Eli Divine's and, therefore, Martin Bureau's. For instance, an excerpt from 1893 reads, "Even when the other boys remove their shirts . . . I dare not for I am Fair as the Driven" (Tilley 95). Throughout, Duke's fair skin is associated with his mother (often removed from the narrative as M--) and this association with the feminine is continually coded as a weakness that sets him apart from the men around him.

The sense of difference vocalized by each man in their respective rural locales allows for Eli, Martin, and Duke to be analyzed together through how their desire is negotiated within regional space. Yet, while the timeframe, location, and genre allow *Duke* and *Galore* to be read together via a focus on sexual nonconformity and difference, the focus on blood ties and familial inheritance in Tilley's text also raise key connections to the fiction I discuss in Part II: The Backwoods. As I will outline, Alistair MacLeod's corpus focuses on the continuation of particular traits of belonging rooted in the specificities of Cape Breton. Though the timeframe, genre, and location of Tilley's and MacLeod's texts differ, how each male protagonist experiences a sense of heterosexual failure, and an inability to uphold the burden of continuing the familial line, brings them together in illuminating ways. Likewise, a critical player in Duke's

feelings of failure is his domineering, traditionalist, fisherman-turned-businessman father who holds an obvious affiliation with the Folk as detailed by McKay. His shift from a male-dominated resource economy into a self-made business man (turned failure) runs as an undercurrent throughout the text. Duke's dark account of life in his father's shadow provides a metafictional narrative that defies the strict parameters of Folk masculinity and showcases their inherently damaging nature. Through a focus on male-dominated workspaces and the codes of masculinity that structure his life, *Duke* could be placed in conversation with Frank Parker Day's *Rockbound*, a text I discuss in Part I: The Bucolic.

What this overview attempts to underscore, are the ways that regional desiring offers a rhizomatic reading practice. Rather than clear-cut connections within historical, temporal, or genre lines, regional desiring offers a way of thinking through how texts can, in different ways, write against, work within, and complicate the prominent depictions of uniform heterosexuality in Atlantic Canada. Tapping into currents from within the region by reflecting on the spread of sexualities discourse, as well as currents from without via the spread of nationalism and the development of a cultural infrastructure rooted in notions of unity-in-difference, I use the concept of regional desiring throughout the dissertation to trouble binaries of insider/outsider, here/there, then/now, and rural/urban, all of which impact what is understood as an authentic narrative of Atlantic Canadian experience.

Chapter Overview

As the above description underscores, a reading practice focused on regional desiring is promising because it highlights a common ground informed by marginality, isolation, and exclusion that is tethered to, but not built from, regional space. Likewise, regional desiring creates connections through time that destabilize notions of historical progress, thereby questioning trajectories of liberation that often obscure histories of queerness and ongoing marginalization. As I explore in Part I, there are complex histories surrounding wider understandings of the region-as-rural and therefore a space of tradition, community, and simplicity. Situated as a leisure space, images of rugged landscapes, isolated communities, and distinct local traditions and dialects became the focus of tourist initiatives throughout the twentieth century, and many musical, literary, and visual representations of the region have long followed suit.

Although the focus of these representations and their target audience have shifted over time, James Overton (1996) writes that the “rural nostalgic mode” has long acted as “a potential gold mine for the promoters of tourism” (37). While speaking specifically of Newfoundland in his analysis, Overton’s assertion rings true for a homogenized positioning of the wider Atlantic region. A significant body of existing scholarship details how myths of simplicity, beauty, antiquity, and innocence continue to uphold an idyllic construction of the Atlantic provinces. This homogenized understanding of the region offers access to a “true essence, resid[ing] in the primitive, the rustic, the unspoiled, the picturesque, the quaint, the unchanging” (McKay 30), and positions Atlantic Canada as a recreational getaway for those visiting from away.

Rooted in anti-modern sentiments and the developing importance of the tourism industry, the Atlantic region was slowly branded in the early-twentieth century as a space of rural

simplicity, tradition, and supposed authenticity through state policy and the popularization of tourist and cultural products that adhere to this myth. At the same time, shifts in perceptions of sex and sexuality, anxieties about changes in work and gender relations, and new modes of scientific and medical inquiry spread into the realm of mainstream representation. This disseminated information naturalized “traditional” gender roles, “proper” relations, and heteronormative familial units in Atlantic Canadian space. The intersection of these forces—developing heteronormativity and commodified Atlantic Canadian identity—forms the foundation of my readings of L.M. Montgomery’s *Anne of Green Gables* (1908) and a recent CBC/Netflix adaptation of the text by Moira Walley-Beckett (2017); Frank Parker Day’s *Rockbound* (1928) and reception of its presence on Canada Reads (2005) and Goodreads; and Ernest Buckler’s *The Mountain and the Valley* (1952). I reflect on how a cultural industry reliant on particular representations of Atlantic Canada, and consumers who have come to expect certain depictions, implicitly situate Atlantic Canada as Canada’s closet.

In Part II: The Backwoods, I focus on notions of getting out. There is a tension between conventional representations of outmigration from the region, often rooted in male struggle, and conventional representations of queer escape from the rural to the urban. Figuring this tension as one of necessary movement—from marginalization into supposed betterment and from shame into supposed celebration—allows me to reflect on how straight, white men become the voice of the region at the same moment when second-wave feminism, advocacy from racialized groups, and queer activism is on the rise in the national consciousness. While waves of people were “coming out” and demanding space, mainstream understandings of Atlantic Canada become rooted in whiteness and heteronormative relations. These relations are often joined with economic precarity and raise implicit associations between who leaves and stays in regional

space. I suggest that this growing interest in representations of the backwoods as a rural space of white male struggle results, in part, from a growing desire from the centre for narratives of the margin that reflect a particular brand of national heritage.

Rather than offer close readings of the texts themselves, I consider writers such as Alden Nowlan, Alistair MacLeod, and David Adams Richards within developing desires for a national culture. Attending to the interconnectedness of space, relations, and notions of tradition as integral to a developing national fabric, I discuss responses to depictions of male struggle in Nowlan's, MacLeod's, and Richards' works. Read together, a shared focus on narratives of white men underscores patterns of reader interest that become celebrated as archetypically Maritime. I also position Newfoundland's post-confederation "renaissance" within conversations of sexual conservatism. I argue that new attention to, and funding for, depictions of Newfoundland align with complex myths of rurality developing in the mid-century. Through this process, the outport becomes situated as a precarious backwoods space of stagnant but special men; these men are scorned for their backwardness in a modern world, yet in need of salvaging as a means of preserving tradition.

An overview of these developing archetypes sits in contrast to my analysis of novels by Susan Kerslake, Nancy Bauer, and R.M. Vaughan. In different ways, each author navigates similar regional spaces, themes, and experiences, yet they receive less attention and support for their writing. This comparative overview raises questions about the kinds of regional desiring that emerge in response to changes in the wider national and international social, cultural, and political spheres. I discuss how the system of representation that surfaces in Canada's canon-building era develops during a period of economic decline in the region. This interplay of development and recuperation comes to impact who and what counts as Atlantic Canadian, in

turn overshadowing narratives of women, Indigenous nations, communities of colour, the Black experience, and expressions of nonconforming desire.

Lastly, Part III: The In-Between negotiates ideas of queerness as an absent presence in the region's literature. Thinking through the language of ambiguity, I discuss the development of a queer Atlantic Canadian Gothic that repopulates the home place with spectres of nonconforming desire. Looking at the early works of two prominent writers from the region, Ann-Marie MacDonald's *Fall on Your Knees* (1996) and Wayne Johnston's *The Divine Ryans* (1990), I argue that, to different degrees, spectral representations of sexuality form an early intervention or way of challenging stereotypes of the region. In MacDonald's work, lesbian desire becomes a transgressive force which manipulates reader engagement and returns agency to nonconforming women in Cape Breton. In Johnston's text, however, spectral nonconforming sexuality functions as a plot device or metaphor, and seems to uphold, rather than question or complicate, metronormative understandings of the region as a space of oppression or erasure for queer communities.

Turning to more recent examples of the same phenomenon, I argue that effective examples of a queer Atlantic Canadian Gothic, such as Jaime Burnet's *Crocuses Hatch from Snow* (2019), offer transformative potential by turning further into disruption. Here, queer return functions less as a material force for change and more as a figurative arrival of joy. In this final section, I think through the implications of queer death as a necessity for spectral return; while texts like Christy-Ann Conlin's *The Memento* (2016) situate queer ghosts as a means of character development, Burnet's novel builds on the transformative potential of the Gothic to explore the power of lingering queer trouble. In so doing, *Crocuses Hatch from Snow* builds on the disruptive forces at the centre of MacDonald's *Fall on Your Knees*. When read together, these

novels underscore the importance of understanding spectral sexuality in the context of metronormativity and broader myths of the Atlantic region.

While my dissertation works to extend discussions of space, time, and relation as forces of sexual regulation and transgression, I also reflect on the historical trajectory of sexualities discourse and regional representation—both forward and backward—as tied to convention, heritage, and tradition. As Parts I and II show, space and time interact in unique ways to generate new archetypes and norms that become tethered to regional space. Throughout the project, I attempt to break from a traditional path of past-to-present when thinking of sex, sexuality, and gender performance and instead think about how trajectories of time have been used alongside understandings of space in ways that flatten regional experience. That said, the sections that comprise the dissertation move along a rough historical trajectory, tracking the creation, circulation, and reception of Atlantic Canadian literature from the late 1800s and into the present day.

While it maps a clear path, this structure should not suggest a comprehensive overview of the region's literature and culture; instead, I examine select texts to consider the construction of myths of a static Atlantic Canada that work alongside trajectories of progress. In each section, I describe my methodology, as different approaches are required throughout. I discuss works that are canonical—that is, those endorsed by arts institutions, national awards committees, and literary critics; I also discuss works that are popular—by which I mean texts that garner a place on bestseller lists and recognition on review sites like Goodreads. I likewise examine texts that have been overlooked by readers, critics, and curators often from outside of the region. As I work to show, systems of controlling the narrative and concealing certain histories, as well as

experiences of difference and dissent, are part of a wider process through which Atlantic Canada comes to be understood and articulated.

Indeed, naming, understanding, and troubling myths of the region that intersect with myths of sexuality is the ultimate goal of the project. In their different iterations, stereotypical representations of Atlantic Canada collapse the experiences of heterogeneous groups of people into easily digestible narratives, often suggesting a unity rooted in uncomplicated relationships to the land and community or in shared experiences of poverty, unemployment, and various forms of dependence. Throughout this project, I argue that part of this stereotypical positioning is rooted in representations of heterosexuality and normative gender performance which not only simplify the diverse reality of life in the region, but also regulate whose stories and experiences count as Atlantic Canadian. While this project builds on a significant body of regional scholarship, much work remains to be done to highlight the intersections of sexuality, myth, and belonging in Atlantic Canadian literature. To that end, a central intervention of this dissertation is its attention to how heteronormative discourse has been a prominent force in shaping the parameters of regional belonging over both space and time.

Part I: The Bucolic

Bucolic, *adj.* and *n.* Pertaining to country life; rural, rustic, countryfied. (Somewhat *humorous*).
— *Oxford English Dictionary*

Critical attention to the recurrence of particular landscapes, seascapes, communities, and peoples has long been a part of Atlantic Canadian scholarship. Notions of nostalgia, tradition, and rural simplicity found in many popular or canonical Atlantic Canadian texts from the early twentieth century have led to nuanced discussions of how Folk culture, ideas of simplicity, and notions of tradition circulate in the popular imaginary as essential to Atlantic Canadian life. This concentration impacts how Atlantic Canadian cultural products are received and understood within a wider system of representation that positions the region as either a retreat into an imagined Canadian past or a backwater lagging in the nation's push for progress. In either configuration, the region is associated with ideas of belatedness, and there are specific customs, social relations, and behaviours that are assumed integral to, or natural within, the social fabric of Atlantic Canada.

In particular, portrayals of the trials and tribulations of seaside fisherman, hardscrabble miners, weathered farmers, and humble millworkers appear to tether male labour to notions of rustic space. In these spaces, labour and love form the roots of relational attachment, as co-workers and wives (or prospective wives) work within the same constraints to eke out a viable life. Women, when fully-detailed, work to sustain the household economy and continue familial traditions. They also partake in aspects of the local economies deemed gender-appropriate, like curing fish. Children (because there are always children or the longing for children) roam the forests and fields as they move through the cycles and struggles of life in a rural area. Through it

all poverty often lingers, or the threat of some kind of ruin; so too does the struggle to create a contented existence while learning to subsist on the land and sea.

As Herb Wyile makes clear in *Anne of Tim Hortons*, the “image of Atlantic Canada as politically, culturally, and economically parochial . . . has been dominant on the national stage for the last three decades and intensified by neo-liberal thinking” (21). Within this representative matrix, an emphasis on work, family, and communal tradition mark the well-trodden route or path I explore in this section. I attend to the repetition of particular stock figures and relations in many cultural and tourist depictions, and negotiate the implied cultural traditions, bifurcated as they are by gender and restricted by normative codes of sexuality. I argue that readers and consumers may feel they come to know which direction life flows in Atlantic Canada because this path, and its attendant conventions and norms, is often marketed or understood as a didactic representation of life in the region both past and present. Likewise, critical attention to the ways that representation adheres to or diverges from this narrative marks a parallel route, one developed with care over decades and often with little attention from the broader literary institutions of the nation.

As the following sections outline, an unquestioned bucolic configuration of the region suggests interpersonal unity rooted in uncomplicated relationships to the land (through work or respite) and a sense of tight-knit community. As the definition in my epigraph helps to underscore, I use the language of the bucolic throughout to emphasize ongoing assumptions of rurality and inherent simplicity at the heart of many stereotypical understandings of the Atlantic region. Developing out of repeated and regulated representations of Atlantic experience, simplified representations of the region generate tangible spaces and products for tourists, consumers, and readers to engage with. At the same time, this nostalgia also produces underlying

temporal assumptions about the region outside of these material engagements. The perpetual representation of the Atlantic region as a bucolic space acts as a way of generating, framing, and concretizing shared meaning, and creates a constellation of representation which upholds a monolithic understanding of the region. In turn, this monolithic representation establishes Atlantic Canada's supposed difference from the rest of the country thereby leaving the variety of experiences and relations overlooked or ignored.

Even when texts play with or question assumptions of belatedness, and all the implicit suggestions of heteronormativity that come with these assumptions, the well-established bucolic retains significant power. As I will show, this simplified narrative negates nuanced readings of the region, creating and solidifying a regional desiring from without (for a heteronormative space figured as tradition) that in turn monitors and conditions the variant and complex desires that exist within Atlantic Canada. The *fantasy*, to use Stuart Hall's phrasing, at work beneath the surface of nostalgic narratives of rural simplicity is often more powerful than the reality of life in the region. Indeed, it is my contention that the early-twentieth century in Atlantic Canada marks a moment of historical convergence through which a new understanding of regional space and sexuality emerge. Just as heterosexuality was normalized through regulation, representation, and dissemination in those early decades, so too was the Atlantic region branded as a space of rural simplicity, tradition, and authenticity through state policy and the popularization of tourist and cultural products that adhered to this myth. The alignment in the development of these two histories—heterosexuality and commodified Atlantic Canadian identity—forms the foundation of my analysis.

Throughout, I explore how this myth functions and for whom. That is, Atlantic Canada's position on the margin, and the region's complex history of marginalization within the nation,

has not only impacted those who live here, but also has worked to situate the region within the national imaginary as Canada's closet. The closet is "literally a place where things are hidden. It is typically a small, confining place off a more central, open room" (Brown 2). Speaking geographically, Atlantic Canada's position as a small space on the periphery of the wider nation fits this configuration, but the closet also describes erasure, secrets, denial, and suppression. Longstanding understandings of Atlantic Canada tied to tradition, simplicity, nostalgia and rurality all hold implicit suggestions of sexual suppression, concealment, and exclusion that tap into the power of the closet as both a metaphorical and spatial force. In *Closet Space: Geographies of Metaphor from the Body to the Globe* (2000), Michael Brown argues that "Space does not just represent power; it materializes it . . . certain spaces and spatial relations do conceal, erase, deny" (3). The closet is one such relation. The closet connotes absence while simultaneously indicating that a presence exists elsewhere. In a metronormative understanding of Atlantic Canada, this elsewhere is most often assumed to be the progressive urban centre.

In *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990), Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick articulates, "Closetedness' itself is a performance initiated as such by the speech act of a silence — not a particular silence, but a silence that accrues particularity by fits and starts, in relation to the discourse that surrounds and differentially constitutes it" (3). To counter what I perceive as a silence around sexualities in representations of Atlantic Canada, in the next section I provide a brief overview of the development of heterosexuality as an "invented tradition" (Katz 182) and reflect on how discourses of normative sexuality may have spread in the Atlantic region. Attention to the heterogeneous historical reality in the region works to counter the homogenous cultural construction that forms the basis of bucolic narratives of Atlantic Canada. Just as "coming out . . . may have nothing to do with the acquisition of new information" (Brown 3), the

following sections investigate how a nostalgic or simplistic marketing of Atlantic Canada has erased the complicated history of sexuality in the region by consolidating notions of tradition, rural simplicity, and essentialized regional identity. I am not observing something new, but instead looking toward experiences that have been hidden or secreted-away by a popular imaginary focused on normative understandings of time, space, and relation.

This overview lays a foundation for the remainder of Part One, in which I place three canonical novels published throughout the first half of the twentieth century within their historical milieu and briefly contextualize their reception. As my discussion of *Anne of Green Gables* (1908), *Rockbound* (1928), and *The Mountain and the Valley* (1952) will show, narratives of rural simplicity have retained significant popularity over the last 100 years and have generated complex and deeply-enmeshed assumptions about the region. These texts and others like them have blazed a trail, so to speak, in the way the region has and continues to be conceptualized in the cultural infrastructure of the nation and beyond. To differing degrees these texts remain popular in the nation's cultural imaginary and literary sphere, and I explore how their recognition and reception influences which bodies, relations, and values are naturalized in the social fabric of the region.

Section One: Cultural Representation and the Construction of Canada's Closet

In the early-twentieth century, patterns of outmigration and unemployment in Atlantic Canada increased, and economic strongholds, like manufacturing hubs and banks, moved from the region to the nation's centre. As Tony Tremblay (2009) recounts, "In the pre-confederation Maritimes, self-reliance was the norm. The region was the envy of the still-developing world . . . With less than 20 percent of the nation's population, the Maritimes produced over 25 percent of its manufactured goods" (373). Though in the pre-confederation era this disproportionate level of production benefited both developed and rural areas in the region, the "post-confederation wealth deficits" (372) of the last 150 years have, along with other factors, contributed to the region's "have-less" status. To put the situation in clear terms, James Bickerton (2013) builds on the work of Donald Savoie to assert that, "while partially attributable to accidents of geography and history and partially due to the region's own shortcomings in failing to pursue some of the measures that would help to address its problems," the present economic situation of the Maritime region "is primarily a product of national policies, national policy-making mechanisms, and federal political institutions. Simply put, in both their design and their operation the latter have been unresponsive, insensitive, or hostile to the economic needs and circumstances of the Maritimes" (261).

As a result of the events noted above, tourism has become a leading industry throughout the Atlantic region. Because it offered a profitable recuperative strategy rooted in particular facets of the region's history and landscape, the marketing and selling of the region to outside consumers generated national and international attention. Indeed, Margaret Conrad and James Hiller (2006) outline how cultural producers, tourist developers, and political figures throughout the Atlantic provinces have long "sentimentalized rural life and the values they believed it

represented” as a marketing tool (153). Likewise, in *Making a World of Difference: Essays on Tourism, Culture, and Development in Newfoundland*, James Overton (1996) charts an emerging theme in tourism campaigns of the late 1800s of the “new Newfoundland,” which positioned the province as a “therapeutic space for alienated, affluent moderns” (36). The marketable nostalgia that resulted from such campaigns often struck a chord with people living outside the region, particularly those in urban centres looking to regain a sense of self outside the toil of everyday life.

As these major political, economic, social, and cultural shifts occurred in the region, great shifts were also underway in perceptions of sex and sexuality. Global anxieties about changes in work, social structures, and gender roles laid the foundation for psychological, medical, and sexological discussions about sex and sexuality. Scientific and medical inquiry spread into the realm of mainstream representation and naturalized constrained gender roles, supposedly proper relations, and the conventional family. By the late-1800s, “both men and women had become more self-conscious about sexuality as a personal choice and not simply a reproductive responsibility” (D’Emilio and Freedman 84). This developing understanding of choice created space for error or deviance. With a continued thread of reproduction at its core, sexuality grew to encompass the realms “of romantic love and physical passion” (84). As D’Emilio and Freedman outline in *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America* (2012), “The overlap of the romantic, erotic, and physical” made the turn of the century a particularly murky period in understandings of sexuality; it is therefore notable that it is in this moment that “European and American medical writers apply these categories and stigmatize some same-sex relationships as a form of perversion” (121).

Indeed, with so much of the world in flux, bodies, desires, pleasure, and relations now required regulation by science, by the state, and through recurring representation in cultural products (Kinsman 1987, Foucault 1990, Weeks 2007, Duder 2010, Stryker 2017). As new understandings of sex and sexuality moved through different spaces, to different degrees “every given person . . . was now considered necessarily assignable . . . to a homo-or a hetero-sexuality, a binarized identity that was full of implications, however confusing, for even the ostensibly least sexual aspects of personal existence” (Sedgwick *Epistemology 2*). This normalizing process of what Sedgwick calls “world-mapping” was swift, and from the late-nineteenth century into the mid-twentieth new language and ideological frameworks emerged for thinking about bodies, behaviours, and relations.

In *The Invention of Heterosexuality* (2007), Jonathon Katz writes: “Heterosexuality, we imagine, is essential, unchanging: ahistorical. That hypothesis is our ordinary, unexamined starting point when we think about heterosexuality—if we think about it” (13). As an historian of sexuality, Katz has been highly influential in charting how different sex acts and sexualities have been shaped and organized in different historical moments. To emphasize the social construction of heterosexuality, Katz integrates multiple viewpoints into his analysis: the work of early sexologists, such as Richard von Kraft-Ebbing and Havlock Ellis; psychoanalysts such as Sigmund Freud; notable historians of sexuality such as Michel Foucault and Lillian Faderman; cultural theorists and creators such as James Baldwin, bell hooks, and many others. Katz maps the assumptions inherent in an understanding of heterosexuality as natural, as an established practice tied to procreation, gender norms, family values, and notions of communal stability. His research shows the development of heterosexual discourse—how heterosexuality is “a value and a norm, a matter of morality and taste, politics and power” (40) that has gathered meaning, to

differing degrees, across time and space. This meaning has been used to define, categorize, pathologize, and/or sanction behaviours and desire. As an organizational principle and force, heterosexuality categorizes desires, bodies, and acts to normalize relations between men and women. It is a classification system that invents the rules of its own decorum, coding some as normal and others as abnormal, some proper and others deviant.

Starting in the 1890s, conceptions of heterosexuality, and therefore homosexuality, gradually took on new meaning, establishing “a sexual solid citizen and a perverted unstable alien . . . a new sex-differentiated ideal of the erotically correct, a norm that worked to affirm the superiority of men over women and heterosexuals over homosexuals” (Katz 112). By the early decades of the twentieth century, the “term *heterosexual* moved out of the small world of medical discourse into the big world of the American mass media” (82), as values around love, marriage, family, private vs. public affection, and sexual practice shifted and infused all areas of life. For instance, the “revaluing of pleasure and procreation” at work in this period was tied to ideas of “consumption and work in commercial, capitalist society” as well as religious doctrine and medical discourse (90).

In Canada specifically, the post-Confederation era marked the making of a moral dominion. The period saw a rise in regulations targeting “immorality,” a nebulous concept that shifted throughout the decades to fit different religious, provincial, and national needs. Carolyn Strange and Tina Loo (1997) highlight the varied activities deemed immoral, as well as the mechanisms through which immorality was regulated. A central aspect of this moral regulation “was the heterosexual family comprising the male breadwinner and a wife dedicated to raising future productive Canadians. Any deviation that threatened the viability of the family – prostitution, homosexuality, abortion, equal opportunities for women – were major obsessions of

morals regulators” (8-9). And yet, despite the rising significance of sexual norms in this period, the effectiveness of regulating these norms depended upon a host of factors; the policing of sodomy or gross indecency, for example, was much higher in urban areas with a dedicated police force than in rural areas such as Amherst, Nova Scotia, where the municipal police force had only two constables in 1880 (Strange and Loo 27).

Compared to Britain and the United States, there has been less attention paid to the historical development of sexualities discourse in Canada; however, work by Gary Kinsman (1987, 2010), Mary Louise Adams (1997), Mariana Valverde (2008), Cameron Duder (2010), Valerie Korinek (2018) and others offers insight into the dissemination of information on sex and sexuality in Canada throughout the twentieth century, as well as responses to the normalizing impacts of this diffusion. In *Awfully Devoted Women: Lesbian Lives in Canada 1900-65* (2010), Duder explains that the writings of Sigmund Freud and the sexologists⁶ spread slowly; yet, “Canada was nevertheless party to an increasing obsession with studying, classifying, and controlling sexuality in its many ‘natural’ and ‘unnatural’ forms” (24). Interestingly, there is some indication that dialogue around sexualities grew slowly in popular culture; in their analysis of pulp magazines and Canadian true crime, Tina Loo and Carolyn Strange (2004) note that while “medical and psychiatric experts of the 1940s had been exploring the psychological and hormonal etiology of homosexual psychopathy for a generation,” it was not until the mid-century that “homosexuality became a hot topic in paperbacks” (82). According to Loo and Strange, the late 1940s and into the 1950s saw a rise in “detailed accounts of ‘deviant’ sexual practices . . . in

⁶ Developing in the late-nineteenth century, sexology was a medical and scientific field involving the study, classification, and categorization of sexuality. Work by sexologists such as Richard von Krafft-Ebing, Magnus Hirschfield, and Henry Havelock helped to shift perceptions of sexuality from something you *do* to something you *are*, an identity instead of a series of behaviours. Writing and research by sexologists grew in popularity throughout the early twentieth century, and influenced psychological, legal, and social organizations.

popular literature,” a marked shift from representations of sexual violence as rooted in an uncontrollable male lust.

Moreover, rather than developing within conservative rural spaces, understandings of sex and sexuality in this period often radiated out from urban centres. Social reformers, college and university courses, and mass media outlets were the means through which rural dwellers came to “reshape and reorder those beliefs in deference to an increasingly national sensibility about the meaning of sex and gender, a sensibility that typically was presented as being more modern and therefore superior to their own” (Johnson 3). By the 1950s, according to Mary Louise Adams (1997), “Toronto was the centre of English-language publishing, broadcasting, and cultural production, a position that contributed to the publicizing of urban issues and Toronto-based perspectives across the country” (5). In this way, a centralized, urban Canadian perspective became synonymous with the national consciousness and progressive ideals. At the same time, the spread of discourses of normative sexuality, delinquency, and obscenity rooted in urban sensibilities was slow and scattered. Over time, these ideals became standardized Canadian values, and the legal and social codes of moral acceptability rooted in urban, middle and upper-class perspectives became the standard within and against which experiences and relations across the nation were regulated.

To be sure, the circulation of information in medical and religious pamphlets, as well as pop culture and art, certainly shaped Canadian, and for my purposes Atlantic Canadian, understandings of sexuality; it is unlikely, however, that this dissemination was a smooth process. The parameters of Atlantic Canadian life were vastly different from life in urban centres such as Toronto, and, as Colin Johnson argues in *Just Queer Folks: Gender and Sexuality in Rural America* (2013), “heteronormalization was neither a particularly smooth [process] in rural

areas and small towns, nor uncontested” (3). Though Johnson is writing about rural America, Duder points to similar discrepancies in Canada, noting that “The rapid expansion in published works on sexuality does not necessarily indicate a public well educated on the subject” (34). Indeed, it is difficult to know just how, and how quickly, heteronormative discourse spread throughout rural Canadian, specifically Atlantic Canadian, space.

This history of centre-to-margin spread counters metronormative assumptions of rural space as always already heterosexual, and highlights the processes through which heteronormative discourse was falsely inscribed as a marker of traditional rural life. Understanding the spread of sexualities discourse in this way also suggests that much of what was happening in rural spaces has been lost to history through a glossing over of how different spaces negotiated sexual norms, relations, and regulations in different ways. Moreover, “Given that archival institutions have not always collected records related to queer people and in some cases have actively worked to suppress queer content in their collections” (Batt and Green 155), it is hard to know the true scope of relations and desires at work in rural Atlantic Canadian spaces of the past. Thinking about the ebb and flow of knowledge dissemination underscores a spatial dimension to the complexity of how and when discourses of sexuality grew to prominence.⁷

This ambiguity or erasure not only develops from the logistical trickiness of accessibility rooted in geographic location, as the flow of information to rural areas tended to be slower and worked its way through various communities in different ways depending on educational,

⁷ At the same time that heteronormative representation grew in prominence, cultural representation of sexuality positioned as deviant circulated in Canada. Lesbian fiction appeared in many magazines before Freud’s theories gained popularity, and Radclyffe Hall’s novel *The Well of Loneliness* (1928) is known to have had a Canadian readership. Reviews of the novel and commentary on the following obscenity trials in Britain and the United States were found in a variety of Canadian periodicals at the time (Duder 28, 29).

religious, and ethnic backgrounds, but also on a socio-spatial scale, as the behaviours and relations deemed normal or deviant in a rural setting would differ from those in an urban one, and the successful regulation of behaviour positioned as immoral depended on the level of religious and legal accessibility and engagement. Using an urban lens to read the history of sexuality in Canada is therefore limited and standardizes a centralized narrative that eradicates the specificities of regional and rural pasts. The implicit links between nostalgia, tradition, and heteronormative relations often associated with Atlantic Canada exacerbate this limitation, erasing the complicated reality of knowledge distribution and the regulation of sex and sexuality occurring in the period.

While much work remains to be done on the construction and dissemination of sexual norms in the Atlantic region⁸, research by Linda L. Revie (2010) gives context for the situation in Cape Breton in the early 1900s. Using photos, diaries, and scrapbooks, Revie contextualizes the life of Ella Liscombe (1902-1969) to better understand how “she did not turn her affections toward a husband or children . . . [instead] she enjoyed escaping into the wilds of Cape Breton Island where she would swim and ‘cross-dress’ with other women” (95). Liscombe also “indulged in unconventional behaviours when she explored passionate, oft-times erotic same-sex desires” (95). Liscombe was the youngest of five children in a working-class family. While the family appears to have had some economic leverage, she was the only one of her siblings to attend university. She was enrolled at Mount Allison Ladies College for a year in 1921, before moving briefly to Ontario and then back to Cape Breton. Revie writes that Liscombe’s university notebooks were “bulging with penned biographies of classmates, sketches of outings . . . and

⁸ In her monograph, *Prairie Fairies: A History of Queer Communities and People in Western Canada, 1930–1985* (2018), Valerie Korinek notes that histories of sexuality in Atlantic Canada are basically non-existent.

group photographs,” and Liscombe reflects on crushes and close “chumships” throughout her life (107). She articulates frustration at the lack of good employment and pay for women, reflects on her feelings of difference, and details trips with female friends into the wilderness outside of Sydney. These women camp, wear “boyish” clothing, and actively set aside time for each other’s company away from their social and familial circles.

While Liscombe’s life is only one example, her reflections provide useful insight into the availability of information in the region at a time when mass media and medical knowledge was spreading throughout North America. “Nowhere in her writing does Liscombe refer to Richard von Krafft-Ebing’s or Havelock Ellis’s writing or the sexology literature,” Revie tells us, which suggests that “the medical opinion equating cross-dressing with lesbianism was unavailable to Cape Bretoners, that it did not apply to her, or that it simply did not fit the situation” (98).

Although Liscombe does, at times, use codenames and encryption to ensure secrecy when describing encounters in her diaries, Revie points out, “There is evidence in Liscombe’s more mature notebooks that some of her cross-dressed friends and their friendships were not asexual, but there is no suggestion that anyone thought of this as sinful, decadent, perverse, sick, or degenerate” (108). As she ages, Liscombe does not position her relations or desires in the terms and language associated with the medical, sexological, legal, or media discourse of her day. This insight could indicate that, despite its growing influence, heteronormative discourse had little influence on how Liscombe perceived herself and her female companions. The salvaged ephemera from Ella Liscombe’s life, and her strategic use of discretion, provides a deeper understanding of a period when both the region, and understandings of sexuality, were in flux.

The idea that queer communities have always existed is not shocking, and yet finding historical narratives of these communities, particularly in rural areas, remains difficult. Only

recently did Meredith J. Batt and Dusty Green discover the identity of Joseph (Cub) Austen Coates, well-known as the “boyfriend” of Leonard (Len) Olive Keith from 1905 to 1940.⁹ As Green notes in an interview, “There’s a massive amount of photos of them together, in varying states of undress and affection” (Sept 2018). As an early example of a queer relationship in New Brunswick, the visual archive left by Len, who was an amateur photographer, offers a glimpse into the complex and uneven development of normative codes of relations in rural space.



Leonard Keith (left) and Cub Coates sitting together in a shirtless embrace c. 1915. From *Periodicities: A Journal of Poetry and Poetics*. 18 June 2020. Accessed 27 June 2021.

⁹ Batt and Green chart the development of the men’s relationship in their recent text *Len and Cub: A Queer History* (2022).

Even when notable figures such as Willa Cather, who summered in Grand Manan, New Brunswick with her long-time companion Edith Lewis, have chosen to build a life in the region, recovering information on their lives and experiences is challenging. As Karen Lee Osborne (1996) writes, the “landscape Cather wrote *in* is as important as the landscape she wrote *about*. Where she could and did write, with and for and because of whom, informs what she wrote” (189). Yet, Cather’s time in New Brunswick, and her own complicated articulations of her sexuality, make it tricky to explore this crucial connection.¹⁰

Despite this difficulty, such examples provide a complicated portrayal of life in Atlantic Canada at the exact time when normative discourses of sexuality gained traction. Johnson writes that in the rural United States, “during the twentieth century’s early decades, especially, what looks from today’s perspective like decidedly queer behavior was anything but uncommon or unheard of in the hinterland” (3). While we cannot know Liscombe’s engagement with medical or media narratives of sexuality, for example, the enthusiasm with which she pushes against the heteropatriarchal positioning of women in this period raises questions about the potency of normative discourses in Cape Breton in the early decades of the twentieth century. Rather than a traditional aspect of the society, heterosexuality was structurally imposed, and took time to take hold, regulate, and normalize categorized behaviours and relations.

This history of sexual norms is important because it marks wider social shifts at work in the region at the same time major changes were underway in industry, employment, demographics, and representation. As access to work, the rise of the tourist economy, and the modernization of society and culture were all in flux, the normalization of a particular type of

¹⁰ Heather Love importantly notes that “despite some early brushes with a queer identification and her forty-year relationship with Edith Lewis, [Cather] did not see herself as queer” (8).

traditional and natural person and relations was evolving. This convergence of global, regional, and communal shifts influenced the kinds of images foregrounded in representations of the region. What bodies and relations became naturalized as Atlantic Canadian necessarily impacted, and continue to impact, how readers and consumers view and interact with Atlantic Canadian space.

Section Two: Anne of Green “Gaybles”

First published in 1908, and causing an international sensation for over a century, *Anne of Green Gables* by L.M. Montgomery offers a useful starting point for mapping how particular assumptions about Atlantic Canada have retained power and popularity into our contemporary moment. While I agree with Rosemary Rowe (2012) that “debating the sexual proclivity of a fictional character is a theoretical haystack” (7), I am interested in how Laura Robinson and others have contextualized non-heteronormative relations in Anne’s world. I also want to think through what reactions to suggestions of nonconformity in Avonlea can tell us about how Atlantic Canadian space functions in a Canadian metronormative context. A brief review of the “Bosom friends affair” (2000) and responses to Moira Walley-Beckett’s adaption *Anne with an E* (2017) highlights the implicit power of Avonlea as a space of supposed tradition and rural simplicity.

It would be hard to overstate Anne’s popularity. Her life story spans eight novels, and has been the focus of several miniseries, movies, and plays. The *Anne of Green Gables* musical is the longest running annual musical theatre production in the world, opening in Charlottetown in 1965. There are fan fictions, parodies, and radio shows centred on Anne’s life and iconography, and staged reconstructions of Green Gables now exist in both Prince Edward Island and Japan. The original series follows Anne Shirley after she arrives at the Green Gables farm. She is an orphan who has been sought out by siblings Matthew and Marilla Cuthbert, who end up adopting Anne despite their initial desire for a boy. Anne moves from childhood into adulthood through a series of adventures and mishaps. She meets and becomes connected to a wide range of characters along the way: for example, her original “bosom friend” Diana Barry, her rival turned husband Gilbert Blythe, and old Miss Josephine Barry, who is bewitched by Anne’s “fresh

enthusiasm, her transparent emotions, her little winning ways, and the sweetness of her eyes and lips” (Montgomery 190). Anne’s spunky personality and unique way of viewing the world rocketed her and her creator to fame. Descriptions of Avonlea captivated readers and turned Prince Edward Island into a secular pilgrimage site.

As in the rest of Atlantic Canada, tourism has long been a crucial part of the island’s economy and ideas of rural simplicity are central in many tourism campaigns.¹¹ Conrad and Hiller (2006) note that “the prohibition of automobiles in 1908 helped to preserve the pastoral image so important to the development of tourism” on P.E.I., and media and literary representation of the day transformed the image of rural life from “country bumpkins to that of picturesque, stalwart ‘folk,’ living enviably simple lives” (154). Anne is often situated in the centre of this bucolic countryside. An advertisement in *The Charlottetown Guardian* from June, 10 1939, for example, brands P.E.I as “Canada’s Garden Province . . . [a] Vacation Land of Heart’s Content [with] EVERYTHING To Guarantee An Unforgettable Holiday.” Some of the listed “Points of Interest” include churches, gardens, beaches, and Fort Lajoie as the “Home of Anne of Green Gables.”

The spaces emphasized in 1939 are much like those on the current Tourism P.E.I. home page (2020). Over 110 years after she rhapsodized about the rolling hills, orchards, and ponds of Avonlea, Anne stands alongside images of red sand beaches, perfectly manicured golf courses, and seaside culinary feasts, her red braids blowing in the wind under her token straw hat. This is not a glib statement. The landscape, seascape, and Anne Shirley have been part of a strategic and

¹¹ For a detailed exploration of this process, see: Alan MacEachern and Edward MacDonald’s 2022 text *The Summer Trade: A History of Tourism on Prince Edward Island*.

lucrative rebranding of rurality on the island.¹² Sarah Conrad Gothie (2016) notes that Green Gables Heritage Place remains “the most iconic of the Island’s numerous literary tourism sites, which is visited by approximately 150, 000 visitors annually,” most of whom travel to the province from elsewhere in Canada (406).¹³

Alongside the marketability of the island landscape, the nostalgia evoked by *Anne of Green Gables* has been a central component of the series’ popularity. At the turn of the century, changes in primary industries, such as farming, shifted longstanding social and communal structures in the region generally, and on P.E.I. specifically. These shifts “gave rise to a persistent sense of longing and nostalgia” that has become central to “the romantic idylls of such writers as Lucy Maude Montgomery” (Creelman 11). This genuine sense of longing has become a marketable commodity for the tourism industry, and Anne’s self-sacrificial desire to remain in Avonlea to help maintain the viability of Green Gables fits into this market. That is, Anne’s love for Avonlea is one aspect of what makes P.E.I. so enticing to readers and consumers. Her romantic musings on the community and descriptions of the landscape generate a vivid picture of the region, and appeal to those looking to escape into a devotedly simple way of life.

Rather than fully enclose the island within notions of morality and familial tradition, the nostalgic current of Anne’s vision also allows readers to gain prolonged insight into the complicated social structures of Avonlea. After following Anne’s educational and social

¹² The 1939 advertisement for P.E.I. tourism comes from the digitized collection *Island Newspapers*, a joint initiative from The Robertson Library at the University of Prince Edward Island, the Guardian, Island Archives, and Islandora. The comments on Anne’s centrality in current tourist representation comes from my close reading of the section “Discover Prince Edward Island” on the home page of: <https://www.tourismpei.com>

¹³ Gothie cites the following visitor data collected from Parks Canada: an “estimated 164,124 visitors in 1985; by 1987, this number climbed to 285,726. Peak visitation is thought to have been in 1994, when 375,785 visitors were recorded in a single year . . . three-quarters of visitors in Summer 2008 were on a first-time visit. The majority of visitors (69%) are Canadian, but only 2% come from PEI (Parks Canada, 2008)” (418).

development, the first novel of the series pivots as she gazes out the window of the east gable and reflects on the possibility of losing the farm. “When I left Queen’s my future seemed to stretch out before me like a straight road,” Anne recalls to Marilla, “but now there is a bend in it” (240). Rather than attend Redmond College on scholarship as planned, Anne decides to stay home to help Marilla in the wake of her ill-health and Matthew’s death. “There is no sacrifice,” she proclaims, “Nothing could be worse than giving up Green Gables—nothing could hurt me more” (240). While this choice signals the end of her individual aspirations, Anne is content to remain in Avonlea to ensure that her home, family, and community will endure in the face of adversity. She “looked her duty courageously in the face and found it a friend” (239), Anne recalls proudly, and she whispers to herself at the novel’s close “God’s in his heaven, all’s right in the world” (245).

There has been much scholarship focused on Anne’s choice to remain in Avonlea, particularly by critics interested in gender and sexuality. For example, Irene Gammel’s “Safe Pleasures for Girls: L.M. Montgomery’s Erotic Landscapes” (2002) explores how the “mythopoetic world of Avonlea . . . is charged with visual, oral, haptic, and olfactory sensuality that solicits the reader’s desire and draws her into the sensual world of Avonlea” (117). For Gammel, Avonlea becomes a safe space for girls in the novel, and allows female readers to “cultivate and map their erotic imaginary” (118). Rather than the static ground for Anne’s antics, Avonlea is woven into the “tapestry of erotic fantasies” that occur throughout the series. The space is shaped by and helps to shape female sexuality (119). Laura Robinson (1995) also highlights the complexity of Anne’s relationship to the community. Anne’s choice to remain at Green Gables not only cements her place in the “Avonlea social fabric,” but also showcases that a “sense of power manifests itself for Anne in the ‘sacrifice’ . . . Green Gables can only be kept

if Anne stays to look after things” (217). Rather than a nostalgic calling or self-sacrificial convention, Anne gains status and power through her decision to stay home.

In contrast to Anne’s choice as opening a subtle space for feminist agitation, Cecily Devereaux situates this decision as one step in Anne’s wider trajectory toward normative relations. In her essay “‘Not one of those dreadful new women’: Anne Shirley and the Culture of Imperial Motherhood” (2003) Devereaux situates the novel and wider series within the discourse of maternal feminism to study how the series charts Anne’s movement into motherhood. Maternal feminism in this vein attempted to empower women politically and socially; however, this empowerment emphasized their biological capacities as mothers and caregivers. While the choice to stay in Avonlea is Anne’s alone, a reading of this decision via the discourse of maternal feminism in the period highlights that she is constrained by the conventions of reproduction and domesticity. For Devereaux, “Anne’s ‘self-sacrifice’ is a specifically ‘feminine’ one: she chooses home and domestic duty over education and independence” (122). Ultimately, whether a result of her developing sense of autonomy or an example of the supposedly natural connection between women and motherhood, Anne “has negotiated the contradictory ideological pressures of conformity and agency . . . [and] she ends the novel having done what she wants to do” (Robinson 217). The complexity of Anne’s wanting, or desire, is crucial to understanding how the opening novel navigates the particular social parameters of rural Prince Edward Island.

Robinson’s gesture to the “social fabric of Avonlea” is most interesting to me when thinking about heteronormativity in the context of P.E.I. in this historical moment. Reflecting back to Ahmed’s articulation of the normative path, Anne’s movement away from the “straight road” of her educational future ends up shedding light on social and communal structures in Avonlea. Regardless of the intent or reason behind her choice, Anne’s narrative negotiation of

rural Atlantic Canadian space over the course of the series sheds light on family structures and interpersonal relations that would not have been evident had she gone to Queen's. In this way, deviations from the expected route not only illuminate the things which structure our movement, but also offer a view toward the parts of life which fall away as we move along a particular trajectory.

In so doing, the novel offers early insight into a key stage in the development of regional desiring. Readers are shown a variety of relations and interpersonal connections that fall outside what would now be considered a conventional representation of the region; here, *desire from* the region appears less rooted in heteronormative marital configurations, and is instead positioned as elastic within the constraints of life in rural Atlantic Canada. Rather than the haven of marital bliss and reproductive families desired by the moral code in Canada's post-Confederation era, Avonlea comprises a variety of household units. Many of Anne's friends live outside the bonds of heterosexual marriage, which seems normal to the citizens of Avonlea. Miss Stacy, Marilla, Matthew, and eventually Rachel Lynde after the death of her husband, all lead fulfilling lives on their own or living with companions. Though characters comment on Marilla's and Matthew's oddness as individuals, there is no indication that two siblings living at Green Gables with no interest in marriage and family is believed to be inappropriate, deviant, or out of the ordinary.

This household flexibility is not simply a figment of Montgomery's imagination. In "Transitions in Household and Family Structure: Canada in 1901 and 1991" Stacie D.A. Burke (2007) reads a variety of family structures listed in the 1901 census. While the chapter lacks any direct reflection on how sexuality may have factored into the family as a "dynamic and potentially adaptive" structure, Burke's work highlights that the family is not "a prevailing, static, and unchanging concept" that can be accessed with a mere turn to a previous era (18).

Instead, “an eclectic mix of individuals” (17) make up household units in Canada in 1901, and there are many variations depending upon class, age, and location—both regional and rural.

Rather than static notions of family as rooted in the blood, an emphasis on the bonds generated through labour, for example, underscores the unique parameters of agricultural communities in this era. As Alan Brookes (1982) writes of Canning, Nova Scotia, periods of mass outmigration, shifts in educational practices, and new trends in marriage and family development occurred in the Maritimes at the end of the nineteenth century. Many people left the region to find work elsewhere, or married later and had fewer children. As a result, some young people were hired out to local families in need of farm hands or domestic workers, thereby changing the interpersonal fabric of farming communities through familial integration and crossover. Likewise, workers without familial ties, like Anne Shirley or the originally planned-for orphan boy in *Anne of Green Gables*, were often integrated into the household economy. These workers had their own spaces in the homestead, had varied relationships with the families that hired them, and worked alongside the children and extended families of those that owned the property. While not wholly part of the family, hired domestic and farm workers were part of the household, suggesting elasticity in the relations that comprise the home place.

Rather than stable family units comprised of parents and their children then, the rural Maritimes at the turn of the century saw the “orderly adaptation of malleable families to a changing balance between population and local opportunities” (Brookes 93). Complex, multi-generational, and community-based relations were paramount in the context of rural families in this era, particularly in an agricultural context. Anne’s decision to stay in Avonlea therefore gives readers access to the shifting and variable nature of household relations in this moment. In so doing, the social structures included throughout the narrative destabilize the heteronormative

family as a central stronghold of supposed tradition in the region to instead underscore a more malleable unit rooted in work and communal sustainability.

This destabilization of normative relations is even more obvious when focusing on the intense relationships between women in the Anne series (and Montgomery's writing generally). As outlined in my previous section, the early decades of the twentieth century saw the development and dissemination of normative sexualities discourse. Particularly for women, behaviours, relations, and desires that were not of issue when *Anne of Green Gables* was written shifted as each new novel was penned and published (1908-1939). Relationships between women were (and are) hard to categorize. Returning to Cameron Duder, who builds from the work of Lilian Faderman (1991), because "women were assumed to be incapable of the same nature and degree of sexual passion as men, it was inconceivable to many that they could desire each other and could engage in same-sex sexual activity" (25). The unbelievability of same-sex activity between women offers one angle into their interpersonal relationships, particularly via the concept of romantic friendship.

Romantic friendships were hyperbolic and overly expressive connections that displayed "considerable relation to literary expressions of heterosexual courtship" and used "spiritual or religious imagery in relation to emotion" (Duder 27). While sapphists and inverts may have been understood as a deviant woman, romantic friendships at the time of Montgomery's early works were a celebrated part of the educated middle and upper classes. Although one's experience of romantic friendship was contingent upon socially constructed codes of femininity depending on class, race, and location, Duder articulates that romantic friends garnered little or no attention for potential immorality until well into the early-twentieth century.

It is easy to read Anne's relationships with women through this lens; for example, she proclaims to Diana that she would "be torn from limb to limb if it would do you any good," and tells her, "You harrow up my very soul" (98). A page later, when Anne reflects on the prospect of Diana's eventual marriage, she declares "I love Diana so, Marilla. I cannot ever live without her. But I know very well when we grow up that Diana will get married and go away and leave me . . . I hate her husband—I just hate him furiously" (100). The fervour of Anne's desire to remain connected to Diana is apparent, and aligns with other areas in the series when Anne's relationship with a woman is depicted via powerful language. For example, Laura Robinson (2004) reads Anne's relationship with Leslie Moore later in the series through the orgasmic language used by the women when Anne describes her new baby.

Throughout the novels, Anne's love for her female companions is often expressed as painfully intense and psychically compelling, and could be read as in line with romantic, heterosexual love and desire. For Robinson, Anne's desirous musings over her bosom friends, and her later intense devotion to characters like Katherine Brooke and Leslie Moore, first provide insight into female longing and love to then "emphasize the heteronormative script and the apparent possibility of straying from it" (17). In this reading, love and desire between women is positioned at either end of a spectrum of hetero-homo relations, underscoring the growing power of sexualities discourse in the region throughout the decades of Montgomery's writing.

Anne's desire is clear and aligns with the over-expressive benchmark for romantic friends; yet, in *Between Women: Friendship, Desire, and Marriage in Victorian England* (2007), Sharon Marcus argues for a need to open up our thinking about interactions between women in the Victorian era. When speaking of gender, kinship, and sexuality, rather than pivot between "two related oppositions: men versus women, and homosexuality and heterosexuality" (12),

Marcus advocates for a renewed understanding of relations between women as elastic and multifaceted depending on the “content, structure, status, and degree of flexibility” of the women, their connection, and their socio-spatial parameters (14).

Using Marcus’s deconstruction of the homo-hetero binary as a starting point attends to alternative readings of Anne’s relationships. For example, in this era “friendship enabled women to exercise powers of choice and expression that they could not display in relation to parents or prospective husbands” (57). Focused on friendship as a form of agency, Anne’s growing bond with Diana can be read as a part of her developing autonomy as she moves from an orphan child who is marshalled through different families and into the self-assured and confident woman who has won over the hearts of readers. At the same time, her connections with women could offer insight into shifting codes of gendered respectability in the period. As Marcus notes:

Victorian society harshly condemned adultery, castigated female heterosexual agency as unladylike, and considered it improper for women to compete with men intellectually, professionally, or physically. But a woman could enjoy, without guilt, the pleasures of toying with other women for precedence as a friend. In maturity as in youth, women delighted in attracting and securing female friends whom they often singled out for being beautiful and socially in demand. (59)

While Anne openly shirks many social codes of feminine acceptability throughout her life, particularly in her intellectual competition with her eventual husband Gilbert, she does not do so without feelings of guilt, anxiety, and confusion, and without some social backlash. Likewise, as noted with her decision to stay in Avonlea, Anne’s choice to remain in the community is complicated by normative codes of womanhood and femininity; thus, even when her actions may

seem to go against social convention, they are still in some ways governed and influenced by them.

Put another way, a more flexible understanding of relations is centred through Anne's depiction of her surroundings and relations, further emphasizing the complexity of *desire from* the region that, as I will explain, comes into tension with a developing *desire for* the region. Indeed, despite how Anne's relationships with others and with her local community have been positioned in many tourism campaigns, her experiences in Avonlea are far from simple, and instead underscore, among other things, a complex engagement and interaction with the heteropatriarchal standards. Rather than an either-other negotiation between homo-hetero, Montgomery gradually pushes against and, ultimately, highlights the devastating impacts of these simplified structures, offering discerning readers a slow exposition of the spread of sexualities discourse throughout the first half of the twentieth century. The families of Avonlea are multifaceted, unique, and varied; the relationships between community members are, likewise, elastic and complex. Ultimately, the centrality of complicated relationships throughout the series highlights that Anne manages, "in matters of sexuality as in everything else, to disturb complacent attitudes" (Robinson 26).

As more scholarship dives into this disruption and complication, Anne's status as a national icon and typical representations of Prince Edward Island sit in contrast with renewed understandings of the people and place. While readers and consumers know that entering into the literary or touristic version of Avonlea is engaging with a fictionalized recasting of the past, the *fantasy* at work in this representation is very powerful. To briefly return to Stuart Hall, the tangible spaces of representation—the books, tourist sites, gift shops, trinkets, musicals—hold implicit suggestions that work, through repetition and recurrence, to uphold a version of the real

that often becomes more powerful than the place itself. The Prince Edward Island of the past that is celebrated by the Anne industry comes to influence how readers and consumers engage with the Prince Edward Island of the now. That is, the complex Avonlea noted above is flattened into a version of place and time that impacts how the actual history of the island is understood, experienced, and consumed. There is an investment, both imaginary and monetary, in a version of Avonlea as a stable site rooted in particular codes and values; these normative codes, situated as a stable part of the Canadian past, are thereby endorsed by an industry that celebrates and profits from ideas of nostalgic tradition that are spatialized and located in the confines of rural P.E.I, and in relation to the broader national history.

Indeed, although the complex social and communal structures of Avonlea are in negotiation with the rules of morality and normative relations throughout the period in which Montgomery was writing, thereby offering insight into her engagement with the development of sexualities discourse in rural space, these insights are not always welcome. At the Congress of the Social Sciences and Humanities in 2000, Robinson gave a paper titled: “Bosom Friends: Lesbian Desire in L. M. Montgomery's Anne Books.” As an early version of the research outlined above, the paper broadly postulated that “by exposing the operations of compulsory heterosexuality, Montgomery’s *Anne* books subtly challenge the patriarchal traditions that intervene in women’s relationships with each other” (Robinson, “Lesbian Desire” 13). Despite not arguing that Anne, any of the characters in the novels, or Montgomery herself *were* lesbians, Robinson’s piece was decontextualized by mainstream Canadian media as an ‘outing’ of Anne.¹⁴

¹⁴ Backlash over discussions of beloved literary characters is not unique to Anne. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s reading of Jane Austen’s *Sense and Sensibility* through an autoerotic lens generated significant reaction. As Sedgwick recounts (1991), some derided her work as educational corruption or promoting degeneracy, and, as an article in *The Guardian* explains, Sedgwick’s work was scrutinized under the wider lens of critical theory that, some argued, was trying to take the literature out of the literary by way of a political agenda. Like Robinson, this backlash stemmed from a research paper Sedgwick presented, “Jane Austen and the Masturbating Girl” during a session on masturbation at the MLA conference. The overlap in the response to discussions of sexuality in connection to

A piece by Tom Spears in the *Ottawa Citizen* kicked off the media backlash. His headline read: “‘Outrageously Sexual’ Anne Was a Lesbian, Scholar Insists” with the fantastical subtitle, “Green Gables heroine’s relationships full of homoerotic, sado-masochistic references, conference will hear today.” A headline that ran in the days following the conference asked, “Did our Anne of Green Gables Nurture Gay Fantasies? Or Has a Professor Had Too Many Sips of Marilla’s Cordial?” Editorials and reviews of the scandal in the *Globe* included such titillating wordplay as “Anne of Green Gay-bles.”¹⁵

Cecily Devereux (2002) highlights that the media response to Robinson’s paper, and the public scandal that erupted as a result, exposed “a rich seam of homophobia in the population” implicitly tied to assumptions about Canadian identity (35). Importantly, this reaction is also spatialized. As Devereux writes, “It is because readers have sought to find traces of her in Prince Edward Island that an industry has burgeoned around her image and her ‘home’; it is because of this impulse to find traces of Anne that her image can be so successfully marketed” (41). Anne’s decision to stay in Avonlea and her hyperbolic reflections on the community and landscape draw readers and consumers to P.E.I., and the marketing of the island as a nostalgic retreat foregrounds Anne’s milieu as a main attraction. As I have argued, however, Avonlea is not the haven of traditional or conservative values that are often associated with Anne and her community. There is an elasticity of relations at work throughout the series that is elided through mainstream articulations of tradition and convention, particularly around sexuality. Therefore, it

canonical figures raises interesting questions about the function of literature as a regulatory and normalizing force, and the roots of discomfort and rage that emerge when conventions are questioned.

¹⁵ Cecily Devereux cites the publication details for these pieces as follows: Tom Spears, *Ottawa Citizen*, May 25 2000; Hanneke Brooymans, *Edmonton Journal* 26 May 2000; Murray Campbell, the *Globe and Mail*, June 3, 2000. Devereux argues that these articles are examples of the media archive generated by Robinson’s piece. This archive foregrounds “some of *our* assumptions about Anne, about the limits of her popularity, about national identity, and about how we value ‘national icons’” (Devereux 41).

is not just Anne that functions as a national icon and reactions to her “queering” offer insight into national values, as Devereux argues. It is also important to consider how responses to suggestions about Anne, and the people of Avonlea broadly, dredge up spatialized assumptions of what people can, should, and actually do exist within the confines of the P.E.I., both past and present.

It is clear in reactions to Robinson’s paper that notions of tradition, morality, and heteronormativity are key aspects of Anne’s positioning within the national imaginary. In part, responses to the suggestion of nonconformity in the novels highlight that Avonlea is a powerful symbol of Canada’s heteronormative heritage, if you will.¹⁶ A brief close reading of media and online reviews of the CBC/Netflix series *Anne with an E* (2017) help to further elucidate my point. In the second season, writer and creator Moira Walley-Beckett reimagined the characters of Miss Josephine Barry and Mr. Phillips, and introduced the new character Cole Mackenzie. Each character marks a shift away from the original novels—Aunt Josephine mourns the loss of her late partner, Gertrude, and throws a “queer soiree” after her passing; it is suggested that Mr. Phillips is a closeted gay man; and Cole realizes and reveals his nonconforming desire throughout the season. In an interview with *IndieWire* (2018), Walley-Beckett reflects that her decision to include queer subplots allowed her “to provide a forum of acceptance and safe haven for Cole and other people in [their] community” (Nguyen 2018). Like Robinson, Walley-Beckett

¹⁶ At the Atlantic Canada Studies Conference at the University of New Brunswick in 2022, Yoko Araki gave a paper titled: “Representations of Sexual Minority Youth in Atlantic Canadian Screen Media: A Study.” In this piece, Araki studied how Japanese media responded to new characters in the *Anne with an E* series who push against the supposed conservative underpinnings of Avonlea. Araki’s preliminary findings suggest that, when mentioned, there is limited engagement with nonconforming characters like Cole in Japanese media; more often, however, there is no engagement at all, enacting an erasure of the variation the series attempts to map. Araki’s research offers fascinating insight into global levels of the dynamics I am mapping in this project.

expands the scope of queerness outside the realm of physical acts to think about the world of Avonlea as a queer space. Rather than a focus on sex acts or author intention, Avonlea as a home to Aunt Josephine, Mr. Phillips, and Cole simply posits a world in which queer people existed in the rural space of P.E.I. in a particular historical moment.

And yet, many reviews of the second season—from both online media outlets as well as anonymous comments on sites such as IMDb and Rotten Tomatoes—question the inclusion of these queer characters and plot lines. In a piece for *Paste Magazine* (2018), Amy Glynn finds the shifts made in the adaptation “irritating” arguing they show a lack of “integrity” to the original. She writes that “‘Transgressive’ is not a bad thing in my house,” yet she finds Aunt Josephine’s story arc “narratively suspect” and a “real corker of a storyline.” While she concedes that the series is aesthetically pleasing, what appears to upset Glynn are questions of fidelity to text and place. She asks: “What’s the point of scenic and linguistic fidelity to the time and place once you’ve powder-coated it with an incredibly unsubtle overlay of 2018 sensibilities?” A critic review from *Decider* by Meaghan O’Keefe (2018) expresses a similar frustration. O’Keefe writes that *Anne with an E* is a “revisionist version of Avonlea history. It’s pretty to look at, but challenging to rectify with the source material.”

Of note in both Glynn’s and O’Keefe’s reactions is how the social space of Prince Edward Island is intertwined with ideas of tradition and authentic sexuality and gender expression. Here, *desire for* the region takes centre stage. The assumption of anachronism suggests that both Glynn and O’Keefe believe Prince Edward Island would have been hostile to, or empty of, queer and otherwise nonconforming people in the period. Indeed, Glynn is overtly perturbed by the changes to the series and draws explicit connections between Prince Edward Island, heteronormative values, and notions of authenticity. It is not that she is upset by the idea

of an “open lesbian feminist over there in Charlottetown,” or even that she feels this inclusion is inappropriate for the historical period. Instead she is troubled by how the characters are written and portrayed in relation to Avonlea as a “tiny and relatively insular enclave” of Prince Edward Island (Glynn 2018). For Glynn, the inclusion of a supportive community in this miniscule rural area in Atlantic Canada just does not ring true. Compared to urban centres such as Toronto, Charlottetown would be considered a small community; yet, in this context, Glynn uses its urbanity relative to Avonlea to argue that a “lesbian feminist” in that space is comparatively more likely.

Viewer reviews on IMDb and Rotten Tomatoes vocalize a similar relationship between Anne, Avonlea, and heterosexism that is often veiled as a claim to historical authenticity. Many viewer reviews of Season One are positive (on Rotten Tomatoes the season garners a stellar 82%); however, there is a shift in reviews for the second season (which receives a mere 43% critic rating). While some reviewers dislike the grittier subject matter or ramped up melodrama, those who mention the queer subplots often make implicit connections between authenticity and Avonlea in their comments. For example, IMDb user computerguyemail sarcastically writes, “Finally we get to embrace the rich diversity of LGBTQ (et al) through a courageous reimagining of rural Canadian life in the 1890’s.” After listing the new characters and plot lines they take issue with, computerguyemail gives the season a rating of 3/10. Reviewer chrismireya (12 July 2018) also takes issue with the series, arguing that homosexuality “was even against the law in Canada and Prince Edward Island at the time . . . this is not ANNE OF GREEN GABLES. The subject of homosexuality isn’t covered in any of Lucy Montgomery’s books. Yet, even if it is going to be covered, it should be covered as a realistic depiction.” Notions of authenticity, to *place* more than *text*, are central here. Setting aside their simplified understanding of the legal

system in the period and the idea that criminality would somehow equate non-existence,¹⁷ chrismireya's frustration aligns with the refrain of authenticity in other critic and viewer responses. Many of these reviews posit, not that queer communities did not exist in historical periods or even that an adaptation of the *Anne* series should not include narratives of queer desire, but instead that there is a singular, authentic way to represent this desire within the confines of Prince Edward Island. While reviewers give no clear statement of what this authentic representation would look like, their criticisms centralize presumed oppression, delinquency, punishment, invisibility, and negation. Put simply, these negative reflections seem to argue not that queer communities did not exist in the early-twentieth century, but that they did not exist *in that way and in that place*.¹⁸

Of course, this understanding of rural life is far too simplistic. As discussed with respect to Ella Liscombe and others, relations that fell outside heteronormative standards were not as strictly policed as what may be assumed in rural spaces at the turn of the century. The conflation

¹⁷ The blanket assumption of criminality as an authentic portrayal of homosexuality in the late nineteenth-century negates the much more complicated reality of a "secular and popular consciousness of sexuality" in Canada at the time (Kinsmen 1987, 86). Gary Kinsmen writes of the "purity movement" as the driving force behind new forms of sexual regulation, noting a central focus on "female prostitution but often meaning sexual immorality generally – masturbation, *possibly* same gender-sex, as well as male sexual violence against women" (86, emphasis added). Although suspicion of same-gender "intimacies" grew throughout the early twentieth century, and fears surrounding sodomy and sexual impurity were on the rise, there is an anachronistic assumption at work in chrismireya's critique; an assumption which is especially ironic as they are charging the show itself with the kind of anachronism they are performing in their judgment.

¹⁸ In their piece, "#NotMy Ghostbusters: Adaptation, Response, and Fan Entitlement in 2016's *Ghostbusters*" Peter Cullen Bryan and Brittany R. Clark connect new digital platforms for cultural dialogue to recent backlash around film adaptations, specifically the all-female adaptation of *Ghostbusters* from 2016. "As fan bases have organized and entrenched themselves in the digital sphere," Bryan and Clark argue that there is a notable rise of toxic masculinity in response to "any development, real or perceived, that appears to place women in traditional male roles" or which changes characters from the normative, straight, white cis male (148). A melding of "nostalgia" for previous versions of a work with conservative ideology and "rampant misogyny" (151) typifies negative responses to the 2016 version of *Ghostbusters*, and is part of a wider conversation enveloping films like *Star Wars: The Last Jedi* (2017) and *Captain Marvel* (2019). Responses to *Anne with an E* can be read within this contemporary cultural milieu, where changes to an original work are responded to by mass viewers in an almost immediate timeframe, and often rooted in anti-feminist, anti-LGBTQ, and toxically masculine subcultures.

of rural or small town traditions with “a culture of sexual conservatism that is generally assumed to be intolerant of gender and sexual diversity” (Gray, Johnson, and Gilley 4), negates the ways that discourses of normative sexuality were disseminated to rural areas, often from urban centres. Moreover, as Robinson and others have asserted, lesbian desire “arises directly from Montgomery’s fiction and her journals” (13), and a troubling of heteronormative familial and social structures can be seen throughout the Anne series. Therefore, rather than a revisionist history, Walley-Beckett’s added plotlines could be read as an extension of Montgomery’s own exploration of sexual and gender norms in the period. Walley-Beckett builds on a history that has been largely ignored in popular representations of Anne, turning toward the historical reality rather than shrouding the adaptation in some sort of modern sexual agenda.

Like reactions to Robinson’s suggestions about Anne’s bosom friends, reviews that foreground these feelings of frustration and incredulity tell us much more about the homophobia of the contemporary viewing public than they do about the show itself.¹⁹ What matters here is less the reviewer’s opinions on the plausibility or integrity of Walley-Beckett’s adaption, or even their understanding of the histories of sexuality in Canada; instead, what is of interest to me is the implicit assumption that Prince Edward Island, as a rural location, holds a single, supposedly authentic history that can only be understood within a metronormative narrative. Despite the connections between place, landscape, and same-gender desire throughout the Anne books,

¹⁹ Adaptations of Montgomery’s work have often received pushback. Although Kevin Sullivan’s much-loved adaptation of *Anne of Green Gables* was viewed by over 5.5 million people in 1985, the two sequels did not fare as well. According to Phillipa Gates and Stacy Gillis (2004), both *Anne of Green Gables: The Sequel* (1987) and *Anne of Green Gables: The Continuing Story* (2000) moved away from a fidelity to the novels, generating disappointment in viewers. With each film, reviews on websites such as IMDb and Rotten Tomatoes get lower, indicating a correlation between fidelity and enjoyment. Similarly, when a sexualized, blonde Anne graced the cover of a self-published anthology, fans were more than disappointed. As one reviewer queried, “what is up with the bedroom eyes? Did they just do a Google image search for Sexy Farmgirl? Does anyone publishing this book have any idea of what the stories are actually about?” After receiving hundreds of one star reviews, the edition was eventually withdrawn (Flood 2013).

computerguyemail, chrismireya, and others presume an intolerance embedded in the confines of Prince Edward Island that is more powerful than any evidence to the contrary. This assumption not only negatively impacts their connection with the queer subplots in the show, but also becomes the grounds for their complete dismissal of a “new” version of Avonlea. An exploration of Avonlea as a queer space is shut down, and the potential for viewers to reflect on the existence and history of nonconforming communities in rural space like Avonlea is, likewise, extinguished.

In this understanding, Avonlea is chiefly situated as a space of tradition, a stable location in the Canadian past for readers and viewers to look back on and visit. The presumption that P.E.I. was a space of oppression and intolerance in Montgomery’s milieu actually works to highlight the oppression and intolerance at work in our contemporary moment. The homophobia of viewers, and the metronormative assumptions built into understandings of Canadian history, become apparent when reading through such reactions to the series. The mere suggestion of difference, the possibility that heteronormativity was not all-encompassing during the very period of its discursive development and dissemination, generates anger, contempt, and disinterest, thereby highlighting the power of metronormative understandings of Atlantic Canada that continue to skew and erase the complicated reality of how sexualities are spatialized.

Lending a queer lens to Anne and her environs offers a means of understanding connections both within the series and *to* the series; that said, it is important to also situate queer readings in the context of regional histories. C.E. Gatchalian writes in *Double Melancholy: Art, Beauty, and the Making of a Brown Queer Man* (2019):

Anne is an orphan and, consequently, like virtually every queer child, an outsider in every family she ends up with . . . She is a girl in a world that vastly prefers boys, shipped

by mistake to a family expecting and wanting a boy. In the face of these challenges she strives, Herculean, towards unadulterated poetry, beauty, transcendence. This she achieves with her most unassailable attribute, her imagination, constructing a divine counterworld to the colonial conservatism of early-twentieth century Prince Edward Island. (24)

Speaking of his connection to Anne and the series, Gatchalian reflects on the “obvious reasons why a little brown queer boy would fall in love with Anne Shirley” (24). While many of the points in this reflection open generative conversations around a kind-of inherent queerness in the series, the last point is worthy of pause. An understanding of the “conservatism” of Avonlea in contrast to Anne’s magical reworking of the space upholds simplified understandings of the region that the novel itself does not quite reflect. Gatchalian goes on to note several “queer-tinged characters and relationships” (25), but sets aside a sustained focus on the Prince Edward Island of the novel to instead think of the aspects that remain unsaid.

To be sure, the *Anne* series “speaks truth beyond what the book is allowed to express” (25); however, attention to what is depicted provides nuance when it comes to assumptions of rural space at the time of Montgomery’s writing. Moreover, as the original series, the adaptation, and responses to both underscore, *desire for* the region as a space of simplicity and heteronormative tradition bumps up against *desire from* the region as complex, flexible, and varied. In the case of Anne Shirley and Avonlea, regional desiring is deeply embroiled in a lucrative tourism and culture industry that has capitalized on a particular understanding of P.E.I. Giving attention to the layers at work Anne’s world offers a means of understanding the complexity of regional desiring in the early decades of the twentieth century and in our own moment. In this way, regional desiring offers a way of moving through time that resists ideas of

contemporary progress, as reactions to *Anne with an E* underscore, as well as breaking down metronormative understandings of rural P.E.I. as a space of oppression and erasure.

Section Three: “we’s’e’ll stick togedder always” Male Desire in Frank Parker Day’s *Rockbound*

Like *Anne of Green Gables*, Frank Parker Day’s novel *Rockbound* (1928) is not a straightforward or idyllic portrait of life in Atlantic Canada. Set on the South Shore of Nova Scotia, *Rockbound* offers a complicated depiction of class and social hierarchies, patriarchal oppression, and the constraint of tradition. The narrative follows David Jung as he arrives in the small island community and establishes a sense of home and self-worth. The landscape is harsh, and the social customs and hierarchies are well-established. Uriah Jung, David’s Uncle, is a greedy patriarch who controls the island until tensions flare in the wider community. Despite the brutal conditions of the fishery and scrutiny from his Uncle and others, David is hopeful and self-reflective as he works to understand the narrow confines of his new life. The novel “celebrates the stability of the island’s economic and social codes” (Creelman 34), and also questions many of the structures that regulate the lives of those who live in rural community.

There is an almost inquisitive nostalgia at work in *Rockbound*, and what Day chooses to concentrate on in the narrative, or to move into the background, highlights the anxieties of his moment. To navigate this process, I read four crucial “narrative ruptures” (28), to use David Creelman’s phrasing from *Setting in the East: Maritime Realist Fiction* (2003), that offer insight into the region in this period and undermine any straightforward glorification of a bygone era. Each rupture—the introduction of Gershom Born, David’s marriage to Tamar, the arrival of Mary Dauphiny, and Gershom’s death—shifts the flow of the narrative and, to differing degrees of effectiveness, raises questions about male relations in rural Nova Scotia. These ruptures expose the shifting of regional desiring at work in this period, as Day navigates developing discourses of sexuality likely familiar to him from his education and travels alongside the

documentary-style observations he notes from trips to a real community on the South Shore. Both sensibilities make their way into the final version of the novel, and the ways that Day positions David and Gershom's relationship may suggest the growing social strictures around sexuality in the early decades of the twentieth century. Using Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's (1985) concept of the erotic triangle, I position *Rockbound* not as an exploitative representation of the Folk (McKay 1994) nor as a universal romance (Davies 2006), but instead as a novel centralizing love and tenderness between two men whose work and lifestyle are precarious and difficult.

Though *Anne of Green Gables* and *Rockbound* speak to the specific parameters of two distinct communities, there are some interesting similarities between the narratives of David Jung and Anne Shirley. Both Avonlea and *Rockbound* are small communities that rely on natural resources for economic survival—farming and fishing respectively. Both communities hold well-established customs that each protagonist struggles within and against. David and Anne are both orphans who work to find their place in the world and who are eager to encounter new experiences and new people. Like Anne's refrain that Avonlea holds "scope for the imagination," David thinks his new life on *Rockbound* is "like a dream . . . [and] he was a dreamer and part of the dream" (Day 40). Both David and Anne are changed by, and make change in, their island communities, and the social spaces within which they mature are often just as important as the trials and tribulations they face.

Both novels also express a complicated anti-modernism. As discussed, there is a desire for stability in Anne's complicated decision to stay in Avonlea that ensures the persistence of *Green Gables*. However, her desired constancy also brings to light the various household relations that appear in the small community. This insight muddles what readers may assume to be traditional familial structures and domestic units in rural Prince Edward Island. Similarly,

Rockbound details a messy anti-modernism rooted in the specificities of Nova Scotian space. In her afterword to the 2005 reprinting of *Rockbound*, Gwendolyn Davies writes that “By the time that *Rockbound* appeared in 1928, it was clear that Nova Scotia was central to [Day’s] literary imagination” (300). Day’s childhood in rural Nova Scotia, and time spent exploring the province as an adult, deeply influenced his use of “stark realism” lauded by early critics of the novel (Davies 1991, 186). His rendering of the South Shore certainly celebrates “the pre-industrial culture of the region” through a “restoration/return to a stable traditional world after a period of crisis and instability” as Creelman argues (28). And yet, like Anne’s detailing of Avonlea as a place that includes various household groupings and relations, the narrative focus on the community of *Rockbound* makes accessible relations that may feel at odds with the assumed traditions of the region. While hard work and the desire for domestic contentment are overt themes, David Jung’s inner circle also suggests complicated relationships between men involved in rural, resource-based labour.

Limited scholarly attention has been paid to *Rockbound*, and much of what is available focuses on Day’s methodology and representation of the community (McKay 1994, Davies 1991, 2006, Kulyk Keefer 1987, Creelman 2004). According to Ian McKay, *Rockbound* is the most “perfect regional expression” (244) of the Folk narrative cultivated by urban, middle-class cultural producers. He reads Day’s setting as “stripped of civilization” and his characters as distilled to their supposed “inherent nature” (244). McKay situates Day’s anthropological process of recording details from his trips to the real island community of Ironbound within the wider cultivation of the Folk by Helen Creighton,²⁰ who “constructed the Folk of the countryside

²⁰ McKay does note the slipperiness of Day’s novel, stating that *Rockbound* is “no pastoral haven” (243). Unlike the scenes and stories at the heart of campaigns by Helen Creighton and others, McKay concedes that Day was “attempting to marry realistic description . . . to a conventional romance” (243, my emphasis). In the end, however, McKay still believes Day’s work fits the parameters of the Folk producers he discusses throughout the monograph.

as the romantic antithesis to everything they disliked about modern urban and industrial life” (4). Though he concedes that *Rockbound* does not idealize life on the South Shore, McKay still takes issue with the novel’s problematic essentialization of rural life.

In response to this reading, Gwendolyn Davies (2006) proposes a more optimistic view of the text. She argues that Day’s message is “a celebration of humankind’s potential for courage and selflessness” (15), offering a universal ideal that has continually resonated with readers. Although she situates *Rockbound* as a “therapeutic release from a society of conspicuous consumption and rapid urbanization” (17) and notes that at the time of its publication the novel “immediately evoked archetypal images of Atlantic offshore ruggedness” (16), Davies ultimately asserts that *Rockbound* “resonates with hope, a sense of the future, and a commitment to the wider social good” (30). While Day’s narrative of the South Shore may tap into an already established version of the region, Davies believes readers are drawn to the universal aspects of the novel, rather than any simplified specifics of place the novel evokes.

In different ways, both Davies and McKay position Day within a wider network of cultural producers from the region who emphasize “aspects of Nova Scotian society and history which they knew would succeed in the international cultural marketplace” (McKay 31); however, there are limitations to this focus on Day’s anti-modernism. For instance, McKay refers to “reckless” or “primitive” sexuality in *Rockbound*, noting that “casual sex is seen as part of the daily life of at least some of the islanders” (254). While it may be the case that Fanny the potato girl and the fisherman all sleep in the same place, this representation is not explored by McKay except to place it within the nature-based essentialism that aligns with his argument. Likewise, Davies’ desire to counter McKay’s reading leads her to focus on the marriage plot in the latter-half of the text. She argues that “David’s kingdom at the end of the novel is no outpost of

civilization but its symbolic centre” and contends that “*Rockbound* . . . conveys in its resolution Day’s tribute to the triumph of the human spirit” (29). Despite the complex relationships between David, Mary, and Gershom, or the exploration of female sexuality in the depiction of Fanny the potato girl or Jennie Run-over, scholarship on Day’s work tends to gesture to the presence of sex and desire, rather than offer any critical readings of sexuality in the narrative.

This tendency is also apparent in reviews of the novel on the website Goodreads.²¹ There is a nostalgic refrain throughout the reviews that appears to validate McKay’s assertion of the novel’s marketable Folk simplicity. Many reviews emphasize stereotypical representations of the South Shore of Nova Scotia (and the region in general) as a space in stasis—a region still engaged with the labour practices, social structures, and rugged coastlines of the early 1900s. There is almost no reflection on the complex depictions of desire, love, and sexuality at work in the community of Rockbound, instead they emphasize the landscape, “local colour,” and what can be learned about life on the East Coast.

Much of this focus likely stems from the CBC program Canada Reads, which effectively resurrected *Rockbound* in its 2005 installment. As Danielle Fuller and Rehberg Sedo (2006) describe it, Canada Reads is “an annual program that first aired in April 2002, and that aims to get Canadians across the country to read the same book: it has been described as an attempt to create a huge trans-Canadian book club” (6). Though Canada Reads started as a radio show, the

²¹ Originally, I planned to provide close readings of the Canada Reads debates, and the comment section for these debates; however, finding this data has proven difficult. To get a sense of how *Rockbound* was positioned on the program and how this positioning influenced reader responses to the novel, I analyzed the 84 reviews available on Goodreads, “the world’s largest site for readers and book recommendations.” I focused primarily on reviews that explicitly referenced Canada Reads. Phrases such as, “As defended on Canada Reads” or “Canada Reads Winner” appeared in roughly 25% of the reviews. Information was also gathered from reviews that did not explicitly centre Canada Reads to map wider responses to the novel. Reviews that do not cite Canada Reads often use similar language, highlighting the prevalence of a cultural infrastructure that has longed positioned the region in this vein. Goodreads reviews underscore that Canada Reads played a role in the novel’s popular resurgence, and offer a unique lens into reader engagement with the text.

program added a televised component in 2004 and was made available as a podcast in 2008. More than a simple book club, an early mandate for the program highlights its desired aim to “reflect Canadians to themselves through literature; . . . to unify the country; to support the literacy movement; . . . to provide an escape from the realities of everyday life; to help the publishers of Canadian books” (Kavanagh and Vartanian 2001, quoted in Fuller and Rehberg Sedo). In the almost twenty years since its inception, the program has grown in both popularity and criticism²² and continues to influence not only the reception and interpretation of its featured texts, but also book sales and wider publication trends.

The website for the University of Toronto Press suggests this mandate was met when it comes to *Rockbound*. The novel was out of print until 1973, with a small reprinting in 1989. Until 2005, UTP sold around 200 copies per year; however, after “Donna Morrissey selected it for the Canada Reads debates . . . UTP has sold over 35,000 copies and it has been reprinted three times.” As an “underdog” competitor on the CBC program, *Rockbound* procured a narrow victory over works by Margaret Atwood, Leonard Cohen, Jacques Poulin, and Mairuth Sarsfield. Newfoundland writer Donna Morrissey²³ championed the novel. In “Listening to the Readers of ‘Canada Reads’” (2007), Danielle Fuller writes:

Morrissey’s advocacy of *Rockbound* involved the invocation of humanist values (she

²² In the last decade, Canada Reads has come under criticism from a variety of angles. The damage enacted by the show’s central claim underscores many of these analyses. That is, “every season’s assumption that the nation endures to be critiqued again next year — indeed, that the nation thrives upon this critique” is itself a destructive starting point (Haynes 27). This nationalist discourse perpetuates assumptions of what Canada is, and/or can be, often “reproduc[ing] ongoing colonial domination” under the guise of friendly debate. As Jeremy D. Haynes (2019) notes, “even as the show invites diverse critiques of Canadian society, it nonetheless favours stereotypical narratives of Canadian multiculturalism, benevolence, and civility, and by doing so buttresses Canada’s unchanged status as a settler colonial state” (iii). Danielle Fuller and Julie Rak (2015) offer a critique of the 2012 season, mapping the ways the borders of the nation and national identity are upheld through the panelists’ dialogue and the conversations that continue after the season concludes.

²³ Donna Morrissey is a Halifax-based writer originally from the outport of Beaches in White Bay, Newfoundland. She has written several award-winning and bestselling novels, as well as scripts and short stories.

refers to the “age-old questions of humanity” that Parker Day explores, for example); a political and environmental reading of the text in terms of the contemporary destruction of the Atlantic fishery; and an interpretation of the novel informed by western generic conventions of “fable,” “myth,” and “romance.” (20)

Themes of timelessness, myth, and tradition were intertwined with Morrissey’s personal antidotes and stories. This positioning of the novel not only suggests how the region functions within the overall “nationalist ideology” of Canada Reads (15), but also highlights how these notions bleed into reader interpretations of the novel and come to underpin understandings of the region.

The “wave of nostalgia and idealism about regional cultures whipped up by celebrity panelists” (Fuller 21) reached a large audience on both radio and television broadcasts. This conventional reading also became the focus for many book clubs and reading competitions and landed *Rockbound* on lists like “The CBCs 150 books to read for Canada 150” in 2017. Moreover, an overview of the Goodreads page for the novel tells us that 23% of reviewers were drawn to or would recommend *Rockbound* explicitly because of its appearance on the CBC program. In 2017, Diane Tvor writes that: “I think the depiction of the life of an early-twentieth century fisherman is accurate and the main characters and dialogue are both true, real.” Pauline Dembeck would agree, stating “[*Rockbound*] is now considered a classic of maritime fiction, especially lauded for its detail and authenticity in its descriptions of life on the sea” (Aug 2, 2013). Interestingly, although some reviewers recognize that aspects of the narrative are contentious retellings of a real place, that does not seem to dampen the informative impact. Joanne Seitz succinctly remarks: “In 1929, a spokesperson for Tancook gave an outraged comment, saying the author basically smeared the local population - that they were neither as

uneducated nor as nasty as the book suggested. Anyway, great read about the Atlantic and a life that's hard to imagine now" (Feb 26, 2016).²⁴ This response pushes aside the reactions of the real community of Ironbound, and suggests a preference for "a fascinating account" of life on the South Shore that allows readers to retreat into a stereotypical past.

While the above comments situate *Rockbound* as a realistic representation of life in the region at the turn of the century (which is itself too simplistic), many of the reviews take this focus on supposed truth and tradition even further. Writing in 2012, Yvonne states: "Rockbound by Frank Parker Day helped me to understand the culture of Eastern Canada. When speaking to recent residents of Newfoundland I discovered that the book, altho' written over 70 years ago is still true to form." Similarly, Jennifer (2013) writes that "this book is an important part of the canadian [sic] canon, and a representative of one sort of an Atlantic way of life." This "one sort" of life is often tied to the archetypal image of the labouring male body as men working hard on the unforgiving sea and struggling within the insular community appeals to many readers. For example, though she does not reference Canada Reads in her review, Bonny's (2012) assessment is particularly telling. She speaks of the "backbreaking work, dependence on the sea for livelihood [sic] and the hardships of life almost cut off from the rest of civilization." She goes on to note that, "This book was recommended to me by an East coast inhabitant before my visit there later this month. After reading this book I understand the lifestyle on the opposite coast to mine better than before." Once again, we see a conflation of stereotypical elements of regional representation with the assumption that these practices continue in the modern-day region. Furthermore, there is

²⁴ This reviewer is referencing a series of letters that appeared in newspapers across Nova Scotia after *Rockbound* was published. The people of Ironbound, an area that provided inspiration for Day's writing, were angered by their portrayal as "ignorant, immoral and superstitious" (quoted in Davies 2005, 296). Day visited several communities on the South Shore in the summer of 1926, and took detailed notes for *Rockbound*. Though acclaimed for its realistic detail, the novel upset the people who invited Day into their community. They called the portrayal "unjustified" and "belittling" and wondered why "Mr. Day put such a ridiculous book on the market" (quoted in Davies 2005, 296).

an uncritical reflection on the relationships at work in the fishery. Bonny opts for a romanticized view of Uriah's regime rather than reflect on the complicated relationships between the men, their work, and the wider community.

Many of the positive reviews of *Rockbound* situate Day's depiction of life on the South Shore as an educational narrative of Atlantic Canadian life. The novel appears to simultaneously detail a life that has been lost to decades of social transformation, shifts in industry, and technological advancement (i.e. a lament for a bygone era), and yet a life that, despite these changes, continues unaffected into the current moment. The language of authenticity, truth, revelation, and reality abound, and thematically align with reactions to *Anne with an E*. Like the reviews for Walley-Beckett's series, readings of *Rockbound* often make explicit the desire for a depiction of a simple rural life, while implicitly superimposing this one-dimensional representation on the region's complex history and contemporary existence. Ironically, while many reviews note how insular and tiny the community of *Rockbound* appears to be, they simultaneously make sweeping statements about how this community offers powerful insight into the entire Atlantic region. The anthropological language found in many of the reviews, and the homogenization of one experience as a stand in for a timeless expression of life on the East Coast, showcases the power of a system of representation that has positioned Atlantic Canada through the lens of rural simplicity and tradition. This pull of the past, notions of tradition, and the boundaries placed around who fits into this understanding exemplify the *desire for* thrust of regional desiring I am mapping in this project; the longevity of this representation is astounding, as the archetypal characteristics celebrated in many of these reviews appear to align with the aspects of the narrative celebrated at the time of its publication.²⁵

²⁵ Creelman states that reception of *Rockbound* at the time of its publication was positive, detailing "reviewers – who judged it to be starkly realistic" and a little romantic (28). Likewise, in 1974 John Ferrer suggests that though

While on the surface these reviews support McKay's argument about the essentializing work of the novel, these nostalgic readings and the positioning of the novel on Canada Reads are less a result of Day's purposeful "reduction of a people once alive to the status of inert essences" (McKay xvi), and more a function of a system of representation that has foregrounded and repeated this stereotypical depiction of the region for over a century. Dominant categories of relations and regulations are misconstrued as tradition in these conventional readings. Men and women have "reckless" sex, to bring back McKay's phrasing, they get married, they have children, and thus the community remains stable in the face of changing values and structures.

Likewise, critics have, on the one hand, read the romance narrative as a simplifying tendency to ensure acceptance from urban, middle-class audiences, or, on the other, as a universalizing gesture that has allowed the novel to become a tender and timeless classic. In either scenario, the heterosexual plot is centralized as an "unexamined starting point" (Katz 13), and the events that occur in the background of the novel remain unaddressed. For the remainder of this section, I turn to specific moments in *Rockbound* that offer potential subversions of heteronormative assumptions, and reflect on how Day's representation of these moments sheds light on the social strictures of his own milieu.

To do so, I provide a contextual close reading of the narrative as a cultural artefact that offers insight into the ideological complexity of the early-twentieth century. Though the novel is about a rural fishing community and aspects of the text certainly align with a wider cultural infrastructure that glorifies a simplistic narrative of the region, *Rockbound* also depicts "a

"critical evaluations of both *Rockbound* and *Day*" were extremely limited until its republication, the decision to reprint the novel as part of the Literature of Canada series suggests that the text was emblematic of a liminal moment in the nation's cultural development. Speaking generally of the novels in the series, Farrer describes a reading public not motivated by a sense of national stress or decline, but instead responding to "that somnolent, post-Victorian, pre-Depression interlude when Canada was suspended between two quite different eras" (109). A novel of its moment, *Rockbound* was well-received, if only briefly, as text representative of a people and their place.

complex struggle with contemporary economic hardships, social pressures, and the alienation of the post-First World War era” (Creelman 28). What Day chooses to centralize and celebrate, or to move into the narrative shadows, highlights the anxieties of his moment. Because Day writes about a real community at a time when the parameters of same-sex desire were becoming increasingly narrower, particularly between men, the relationships in the novel must be carefully considered. Day, as a well-travelled intellectual, may have been influenced by the developing discourse around heteronormativity in ways distinct from the rural community of *Ironbound*. What Day records during his stay in the community and what he subsequently represents in the novel are both filtered through his own sensibilities around desire, eroticism, and sexuality. With this in mind, I move away from physical acts and an emphasis on traditional romance, and turn to the complicated dimensions of love, desire, tenderness, and passion that flow between characters in *Rockbound*.

In “Queering the Hollow: Space, Place, and Rural Queerness” Mathias Detamore (2013) investigates “the intersection of queer and straight social worlds as the spaces and practices where sexual Otherness is folded into dominant social narratives” (84). It is exactly these “in-between, liminal spaces—the rural, small town terrains” that Detamore sees as “constitut[ing] the destabilizing of hegemonic sexuality” (85). Though his work is focused on the contemporary social spaces of the Appalachia, insight into the liminality of queer place-making is useful when considering the constraints within which *Rockbound* was written. As Detamore asserts, “we cannot consider the ways in which spaces exist outside of the metropole (and the possibilities that they offer us for a new kind of transgressive sexual politics) without critically considering the places in which they occur and the peculiar cultural patterns and dangers that emerge from these places” (85). Turning a critical gaze toward historical representations of these liminal rural

spaces, like the fishing industry on the South Shore of Nova Scotia, helps to elucidate the dominant social narratives governing these spaces within their historical milieu, and offers a means of reflecting on the continuance of this narrative within a cultural infrastructure that centralizes particular representations of Atlantic Canadian space.

Many of the central spaces of the island community are predominantly occupied by men. Although domestic spaces are referenced, much of the action happens in Uriah's fish house, on the boats, or in the lighthouse on Barren Island. Uriah Jung's fishery, a predominantly male production, is of central importance. Uriah, his sons, Gershom Born, David, and other men spend six days a week together, from dawn until dusk. The fish house is where David is inculcated into the homosocial norms of his fellow fisherman. He picks up the rules of engagement between men, learns how to interact with the men's wives and other women, and acquires the pace and flow of the lifestyle. The fish house is a liminal space between the dangers of the sea and the comforts of home, and some of the novel's most affective scenes occur over barrels of gutted fish. It is also a space between life and death—for both the men themselves returning from the sea, and for the fish who wait to be gutted, salted, and stored.

As Peter Boag (2003) details, fishing communities, agricultural hubs, mines, logging camps, and shipyards all complicate ideas of heterosexual activity as constitutive of regional history. In *Same-Sex Affairs: Constructing and Controlling Homosexuality in the Pacific Northwest*, Boag studies the regulation of sexuality in rural labour communities in the early-twentieth century, arguing these hyper-male spaces generated “a complex culture that included a system of sex and sexuality revolving around male participants” (7). Movement between communities, the intermingling of a diverse male populations, and long stints spent in isolation are all aspects of the male worlds Boag discusses. Many of the central spaces in *Rockbound* align

with Boag's observations. For example, the fish house is the space from which the men leave for their stints with other men at sea, and the space to which they come home to deal with their catch, both competing and joining together over their lot.

The fish house is also the space where David first meets young Gershom Born. David describes Gershom as "the most powerful oarsmen," a "great blond sharesman," and the "blue-eyed Viking" (35-37). He is an imposing figure who is ten years David's senior, and David is clearly drawn to and impressed by him. David and Gershom not only work together, but also come to spend much of their leisure time exploring the island and discussing their future. When they are apart, the narrator details the difficulty both men feel because of this separation. Despite the centrality of David and Gershom's relationship, however, there is a continual sense of narrative redirection in depictions of their time together. By Chapter Five, for example, the narrator notes: "When David was twenty-four and had been six years on Rockbound, he was still Uriah's sharesman. Things had changed but little" (79). Though monotony and stagnation are foregrounded here, readers quickly learn that not all areas of David's life fit this description. David has cleaned up his home, made a place for himself in the community, and, importantly, developed a strong relationship with Gershom. The pair are described as "inseparable" and readers are told that Gershom transferred to David "all the wickedness he knew" (81). There is an emphasis in their relationship on guidance, situating Gershom as a mentor figure who often shows David how to usurp or play within the social codes of the community (81).²⁶

²⁶ Interestingly, Boag's research finds that affairs between older and younger men were common. "In the early twentieth century, especially among the working classes, such relationships were commonplace and not necessarily coercive" he writes, noting that many working-class youths and young men "regularly sought out men for economic, emotional, and sexual fulfilment" (9). This is an important consideration for *Rockbound*, as Gershom Born is ten years older than David and initially acts as a mentor figure for his first years on the island.

Though their friendship is initially set up as secondary to the monotony of the fishery, it is clear that Gershom is the central force in David's life. This makes Day's initial relegation of David and Gershom's relationship to the background of the narrative worth pausing over. The rhetorical move to centralize his lack of movement in Uriah's company draws the focus toward the fishery, and turns readers' attention to traditional labour practices and the hardscrabble life David endures. This move certainly aligns with McKay's assertion of the novel's essentializing focus on simplified fisherfolk. Yet, only four pages later the narrator notes: "In his six years on the island his friendship with Gershom had steadily grown . . . Now he went everywhere with the blue-eyed giant, who, though ten years older than he, was a dashing and lively companion" (83). Despite what is offered to readers in the opening chapters, *Rockbound* no longer seems to be a simple story about the hardworking Folk of the South Shore. Instead, this initial narrative rupture introduces the central storyline of a complicated affection between men working within the confines of their social and historical moment.

As the relationship between the two men becomes more emotionally charged, descriptions of their activities are infused with references to women. This becomes a pattern, as the reader will be privy to a story of their shared lunch on a beach or a Sunday spent exploring the island to then be briefly reminded of Gershom's or David's desire for the opposite sex. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (1985), explores the homosocial continuum, and the structure of the erotic triangle offers a useful means of thinking about how David and Gershom's interactions are rendered acceptable. Sedgwick's concept has been used in a variety of contexts. In Canadian literary criticism, settler fictions such as John Richardson's novel *Wacousta; Or, the Prophecy. Life in the Canadas* (1832) and Frances Harrison's 1898 gothic novel *The Forest of Bourg-Marie* have been analyzed with attention to

how national allegories intersect with categories of race and sexuality (Dickinson 1999, Goldie 2003, S. Hulan 2017). In a Prairie context, Peter Dickinson (1999) and Terry Goldie (2003) have applied the erotic triangle to the isolated and religious parameters at work in Sinclair Ross's *As for Me and My House* (1941), focussing on what remains hidden in the novel as a way to understand the impact of compulsory heterosexuality. To date, however, the erotic triangle has rarely been used to discuss works of Atlantic Canadian fiction,²⁷ and therefore offers a unique means of understanding the developing relationship between Gershom and David within the homosocial parameters of the fish house and the wider isolated community of Rockbound.

For Sedgwick, the homosocial is a culturally contingent description of the “social bonds between persons of the same sex” (1). “To draw the ‘homosocial’ back into the orbit of ‘desire,’ of the potentially erotic,” Sedgwick asserts, “is to hypothesize the potential unbrokenness of a continuum between homosocial and homosexual—a continuum whose visibility, for men, in our society, is radically disrupted” (1-2). Because codes of acceptability govern male-male relations under different constraints than female-female relations,²⁸ Sedgwick focuses on erotic triangles configured through two men and a woman. This structure offers “a sensitive register precisely for delineating relationships of power and meaning, and for making graphically intelligible the play of desire and identification by which individuals negotiate with their societies for empowerment” (27). Indeed, in a heteropatriarchal society, “Male homosexual bonds may have a subsumed and marginalized relation to male heterosexuality similar to the relation of femaleness

²⁷ Both Goldie and Dickinson discuss Ernest Buckler's *The Mountain and the Valley* as a queer text, with Goldie rooting his reading in the triangular relationship between David Canaan, Toby Richmond, and Anna (David's sister/Toby's wife). I discuss this in the next section.

²⁸ Cameron Duder details that “The deviant, for most of the period under study [1900-1965], was generally thought of as male, but over the period the amount of commentary on female sexual deviancy did increase. It was still the case, however, that many Canadians had little to no knowledge of lesbianism” (9). Because women were thought to be devoid of sexual interest, lust, or erotic attraction, the fears of sexual interaction between women were muted and less overt.

to maleness, but different because carried out within an already dominant male-homosocial sphere” (47); therefore, an erotic triangle can allow for male-male desire to run as an undercurrent beneath and through the socially acceptable female-male bond, thus making visible the structures of power regulating relations between men in their specific context.

To access or decipher this underlying narrative can involve reading the secrets of a text, or looking for what is not being said as a means of understanding how “a repression of the homoerotic feelings which lead to the homoerotic triangle” at work in a novel (Goldie 47). In his reading of *As for Me and My House*, Goldie searches for a something, or somethings, that rise almost to the surface through the interactions of Judith, Philip, and Mrs. Bentley. Because of the isolated and bleak context of the Prairies in the Depression era when the text is set, Goldie reads the Bentley’s performance of sexuality within the social and religious constraints at work in the town of Horizon (54-55). In *Pink Snow: Homotextual Possibilities in Canadian Fiction* (2003) Goldie offers a reading practice of searching for the hidden “somethings” in a text which aligns with attention to the narrative ruptures I read throughout *Rockbound*. As a novel deeply engrained in the social and cultural contingencies of both time and place, these ruptures highlight the potential slippage of male relations in rural, resource-based labour environments and detail how the close-knit community so celebrated by nostalgic readers can work as a form of heterosexual regulation. These moments not only allow for reflection on David and Gershom’s relationship, but also raise questions about why their companionship can never be fully articulated in the text. At key moments when David and Gershom’s relationship takes up the most narrative space, or is depicted in its full intensity, the focus is redirected onto David’s work or heterosexual attraction. While it can be debated what this redirection tells us about David and

Gershom, what is central to my analysis is what this process tells us about Day's crafting of male relations.

While at first these gestures refer to a random assortment of women or female body parts (the buxom lass or the girls at the dances), a triangular balance is briefly solidified through David's marriage to Uriah's daughter, Tamar. The close and playful connection that has developed between Gershom and David is a stark contrast to life with his new wife. Though David comes to recognize that "it was indeed a grand thing to come home to a house and wife of your own" (Day 128), his relationship with Tamar is relatively underdeveloped. Tamar may "love her man" (128), but for David theirs is a marriage of preservation. Because Tamar is pregnant, David must marry her to ensure that he remains in the good graces of Uriah and the wider community. Moreover, David uses the pregnancy as a negotiation tactic—bettering his own position within the fishery and solidifying domestic comfort. When Uriah directs him to marry Tamar, David responds: "Take me in de firm if ye wants me to marry Tamar, or raise a Jung bastard" (90). After leveraging Tamar against her father, readers learn "A bargain was a bargain, both knew, and though there was no written agreement, for neither could read or write, the contract was sure and binding" (93). Tamar does not factor into this patriarchal contract, nor does romantic love appear to factor into David's attraction to Tamar. Instead, the prospect of a heterosexual union functions to maintain, and even to better, David's hard won social and economic standing in the community.

This function is an especially important consideration given the narrative space allotted to the marriage. In a mere ten pages, Tamar has started to "cast eyes upon David and to follow him about" (87); she is quickly "ruined" (89), and she and David are wed in a "rather gloomy ceremony" (95) during which he does "not feel right in his heart" (94). Two months later David

goes with Gershom to the lighthouse on Barren Island (99). There are nods to David and Tamar's developing affections, and the narrator outright states that David "grew fonder of her as the days went by" (96), yet these moments are fleeting and are often followed by a reflection on how the marriage solidifies social or economic gains for David. In contrast, David's connection to Gershom offers mutual sustenance. It is not about what Gershom can do for David, but instead there is a focus on the pleasure derived from what they offer each other. Theirs is a reciprocal union. David thinks to himself "I'se happy now; . . . my gettin' married was nuttin' much, but I'se a partner in de Rockbound firm, an' Gershom's my friend, an' we'se'll stick togedder always" (112). Here, David casts aside his marriage to Tamar to instead situate his greatest accomplishments as economic success and his relationship with Gershom.

Tamar dies quickly and is afforded almost no narrative growth or depth. Moreover, her and David's child, Ralph, goes to live with David's Aunt Anapest and is relegated to the background of the narrative until the novel's close. With both Tamar and Ralph functioning as brief props of heterosexuality, David's status as a husband and father is solidified without taking away from the connection he feels with his closest companion. Indeed, even when David later develops romantic interest in school teacher Mary Dauphiny, his connection with Gershom remains central. While Tamar, as well as the various women indicated throughout the narrative, provide a tenuous balance for the developing focus on David and Gershom, Mary Dauphiny's arrival offers the "explicit or implicit assertion of symmetry between genders and between homo-and hetero-social or-sexual bonds" (Sedgwick 47). When Mary Dauphiny arrives, the narrative shifts from a tender depiction of David and Gershom's shared experiences into a tale of rivalry, love, desire, loss, and reclamation.²⁹

²⁹ There are many angles to *Rockbound* that could add depth to this reading. A discussion of the similarities noted between David and Mary, for instance, as both are figured as outsiders and garner interest from the community.

“In any erotic rivalry,” Sedgwick asserts, “the bond that links either of the two rivals is as intense and potent as the bond that links either of the rivals to the beloved” (21). In David and Gershom’s rivalry for Mary, this is certainly the case. Thinking of Gershom in his “lonely tower” appears to move David as much as the “aching love” he feels for Mary Dauphiny (Day 167). When David lists Gershom’s characteristics as a rival, he is upset by the realization that he appears outmatched. He laments:

Gershom as a rival! Gerhsom was another matter! Gershom, keeper of the light;
Gershom, son of old Gershom Born, wise man of the islands; Gershom, who read poetry
books and could himself make and sing ballads; Gershom who never needed marriage,
and he carried women off their feet and won whom he chose; Gerhsom, the giant with
ready wit, handsome face, and great booming voice. Above all, Gershom was his friend,
his sworn ally, who had stood shoulder to shoulder with him in a dozen fights. He could
hardly enter the race against Gershom, and if he did, what would be the chances. (169)

While this statement is a reflection on Gershom’s upper hand, David also reminisces on the aspects of Gershom’s personality he is drawn to. He not only lists Gershom’s physical prowess and intellectual capacity, but also focuses on their relationship as a central aspect of his feelings of loss and sadness. It seems that David recognizes that in losing Mary to Gershom, he will also will lose Gershom to Mary. As David’s “eyes crossed the sea to the stark loneliness of Barren Island,” he thinks “his intense affection for his friend, could not lessen his love for Mary Dauphiny nor lay the sorrow in his heart” (170). Though a different kind of desire than his love for Mary, what David feels toward Gershom is no less powerful.

There is also something interesting in Uriah’s son Casper as a third rival for Mary. Casper almost bifurcates the narrative, allowing for the focus to be split between Casper’s wooing of Mary, on the one hand, and David and Gershom shared feelings for Mary on the other. This allows a more intense focus on David and Gershom, rather than on the entire group.

By the end of the novel, however, the trickiness around David and Gershom's connection is seemingly rectified through Gershom's death. This section of the narrative takes on a Gothic turn, as "social and narrative conventions are both sacrificed in the celebration of this valiant deed" (Creelman 33). Gershom slips into madness, tricking Uriah and Casper onto his boat under the guise of duck hunting and steering them all into rough waters to drown. While Gershom's death allows David to reconnect with Mary, the spectre of Gershom's importance to David remains. When David is asked to be the keeper of the Barren Island light, he agrees and works tirelessly to reconfigure the ecological footprint of the island. The aspects of the island that plagued Gershom's short stint as keeper are eradicated, until "one day the inspector of lights . . . said to David: 'Barren Island's a fit name for this island no more . . . What shall we name this island on the new chart?'" (289). David responds, "Name it Gershom's Island, arter de great mens dat once kep' dis light" (290).

Three years after David renames the island, he and Mary are (rather suddenly) married. Given even less narrative space than his marriage to Tamar, David and Mary's union occurs two pages before the novel closes with an image of Ralph, Mary, and David looking out over the sea. No longer barren, Gershom's Island is made fruitful by their heterosexual union. The "romance of quest, ordeal, and triumph" for David Jung is complete, despite the unsettling changes that occurred around the community throughout the novel (Davies 2006, 26). Crucially, however, David and Mary's union is only made possible by Gershom's death, by David's reconfiguration of Gershom's previous home, and through the renaming of the island as a loving tribute to his closest companion. While readers are left with an idyllic picture of David's family at peace in their new home, the domestic and economic stability that David achieves is quite literally enveloped in a testament to the power of Gershom's influence and memory.

Although their “snug and warm” evenings spent drinking and acting like “great overgrown boys” in the Barren Island lighthouse could certainly pose some interesting readings (Day 112-113), there are no overtly sexual moments between David and Gershom. I do not make the claim that *Rockbound* details an illicit affair between these men; however, David and Gershom’s connection is at the heart of this novel. While there comes a tipping point which results in Mary Dauphiny’s arrival and eventually Gershom’s death, even these events in the narrative are marked explicitly by David’s consideration of how Gershom would feel, what will happen to their friendship, how their bond can be deepened, how to make space for Gershom’s happiness in the face of his own suffering, and how to honour the memory of his companion. In these key moments, David’s affection for Gershom is made explicit to then be balanced out and neutralized through a redirection toward his work or his heterosexual desire. These moments of rupture—the development of Gershom and David’s friendship, Tamar and David’s marriage, Mary Dauphiny’s arrival, and Gershom’s death—all register “relationships of power and meaning” to quote Sedgwick again (27). These instances pose a brief possibility for something outside compulsory heterosexuality, a “something” that could trouble stereotypical assumptions associated with rural Atlantic Canada.

Indeed, this brief possibility for an alternative connects Day’s novel with key texts from the period that raise similarly complex questions about desire between men. In situating the relationship between the men as slowly unfolding and initially secondary, Day’s work brings to mind D.H. Lawrence’s *Women in Love* (1920). In Lawrence’s text, Rupert Birkin, an at-times aloof intellectual, and Gerald Crich, an industrialist, offer, according to Benjamin D. Hagen (2020) “a clear instance of men who are in love with each other. The novel practically says as much (more than once)” (190). Much like Day’s navigation of Gershom and David’s

relationship, the men at the heart of Lawrence's novel explore their surroundings—physical, social, and, in some scenes, corporeal—together. The novel frequently reflects on the connection that develops throughout these experiences; for example, when the narrator explains, “They burned with each other, inwardly. This they would never admit. They intended to keep their relationship a casual free-and-easy friendship, they were not going to be so unmanly and unnatural as to allow any heart-burning between them” (ch. 2). There is a sense throughout that both men work to comprehend and navigate the field of intimacy they wander across together. Though the novel is purportedly about *women* in love, per the title, and begins as a narrative about two sisters, as in *Rockbound* it becomes clear early on that the narrative focus is geared toward nonconforming male desire.

Moreover, both novels use the death of one side of the male coupling as a way to seemingly counter, understand, or deal with their intimacy. Because, as Davies points out, *Rockbound* underwent significant revision in the years leading up to its publication in 1928, and because Day, as John Ferres (1974) notes, “came to fiction unrepentant after years of teaching literature” (108), it makes good sense that Lawrence's novel may have influenced, unknowingly or not, the development of male relations in the final version of *Rockbound*. Indeed, Ferres points to an overlap between the authors; while not in connection to the potential queer resonances, he describes “echoes of D.H. Lawrence's celebration of nature as ‘the great life force’” (107) in his review of Day's text. Regardless of a potential purposeful connection, both novels centre men who “look out for each other, approach each other as a nourishing presence, and (fail to) teach each other how to keep taking pleasure” from their shared connection (Hagen 183), generating an interesting intertextual dialogue about developing discourses of sexuality on a broad scale and connecting rural Atlantic Canada to the English Midlands.

Yet, as reviews of *Rockbound* highlight, preconceived ideas of nostalgia, rural simplicity, and romanticized male labour maintain a metronormative understanding of the Atlantic region, and negate much of the social and sexual complexity of the early-twentieth century. This *desire for* the region as a harsh and conservative space outside of time supersedes the tender realities at work between Gershom and David. Indeed, opportunities to consider how heteronormative discourse spread in the region during this period are missed through a mythologizing of *Rockbound* as a snapshot of life in Atlantic Canada. Underscoring this mythology with sentimentality and a focus on simplicity negates the complicated male relationship that I read as the novel's central focus. Furthermore, critical attempts to position the novel as either conforming to the trends of cultural producers at the time, or as a direct challenge to the nostalgic gaze popular in Day's period, may sideline much of its nuanced treatment of desire and relationships.

Ultimately, Day's positioning of David and Gershom suggests that love between men in fishing villages like *Rockbound* was a powerful marker of connection and belonging, despite assumptions to the contrary; and yet, his continual redirection of narrative focus away from the intensity of their relationship raises questions about his knowledge of heteronormative discourse at the time. This tension further embodies the idea of regional desiring I attempt to understand throughout this project, as the novel shows the complexity of desire at work within the region while at the same time gesturing to the kinds of reader desires of the region that may impact its potential reception. I therefore read the narrative ruptures not as signals that the island community condemns passion between men, which may be expected at the turn of the century, but instead as an indication that Day worried his contemporary readers may judge these interactions harshly.

Section Four: Intrigue and Indifference in *The Mountain and the Valley*

While criticism on *Rockbound* may be limited, Ernest Buckler's *The Mountain and the Valley* (1952) is "without a doubt, . . . the most extensively critiqued of all Maritime realist texts" (Creelman 86). "Buckler was thoroughly immersed in the economic and cultural shifts of his time" Creelman writes, and *The Mountain and the Valley* depicts "these social/psychological disruptions" in vivid and complex detail (85). The narrative unfolds during a period of significant change in the region. Massive disruptions to primary industries such as fishing, farming, and lumber resulted in waves of outmigration that exacerbated the loss of life from the first and second World Wars. Social and communal strongholds that had developed around small communities rooted in primary industry had disappeared or were disappearing, and, as elsewhere, the codes governing economic, political, and social relations were in a state of flux. Renegotiated gender roles, class hierarchies, and new forms of media literacy were emerging, and the traditional family farm became increasingly impossible to maintain in the face of these shifts.

David Canaan's maturation takes place in this tumultuous period. The Canaan family lives in the small farming community of Entremont, nestled between the North and South mountains of the Annapolis Valley in western Nova Scotia. The plot follows David from a childhood marked by intense feelings of difference into an adulthood steeped in a loneliness so deep it became "pitted in [his] flesh" (Buckler 386). Bookended by a prologue and an epilogue that detail 30-year-old David's connection to South mountain, the novel outlines David's struggles with family, friends, and acquaintances alongside his own desires and emotions. Like Anne Shirley and David Jung, David Canaan has a unique perspective on life. In David Canaan's case, however, he continually fails to articulate the world as he understands it. While Anne often

uses her imagination to stir feelings in herself and to develop a sense of communal connection, David's imagination leads to his isolation.

Moreover, like *Anne* and *Rockbound*, *The Mountain and the Valley* is a notable Atlantic Canadian novel. Intriguing to critics, educators, and readers alike, Buckler's complicated depiction of David's movement through the world has generated varied responses. In what follows, I provide an overview of how critics have discussed the theme of David's difference. David's difference has often been rooted in his status as a (failed) artist. This line of thinking focuses on Entremont as the setting for David's artistic pursuits, arguing either that rural Nova Scotia is hostile toward David as an artist or that David as an artist is hostile toward rural Nova Scotia. Ultimately, rural Atlantic Canada plays a central role in the viability of the artist-argument, as critics maintain that the social and communal structures of Entremont either smother or support David's talent.

With this in mind, I will then review how queer theory has allowed some critics to suggest that the "failure of David's heterosexual development" (Goldie 80) is key to his sense of difference. While this lens provides persuasive analyses of the novel, the existing criticism tends to de-spatialize readings of David's desire to focus on how Buckler's writing aligns with other canonical queer narratives or fits broadly alongside Canadian novels. In so doing, queer readings have overlooked the regional parameters of David's developing sexual awareness. I aim to bring these discussions of David's difference together to discuss how the novel grapples with the "tension created by the closeted homosexual character as artist manqué" (Goldie 76) within the specificities of the Atlantic region.

The Mountain and the Valley is Ernest Buckler's first novel, and offers the "finest example of a novel that both balances and fully expresses the divergent cultural experiences" in

Atlantic Canada (Creelman 24). In the United States, the text initially sold over 7000 copies and received critical acclaim. Stuart Keate, in his review for the *New York Times* (1952), writes that Buckler “imparts to [the novel] a haunting eloquence, an almost aching sensuality” (n.p.), connecting Buckler’s promise as a novelist to the previous success of his short stories. While Keate focuses on Buckler’s use of language and describes the narrative as a “paean to the good earth and good people,” Marta Dvorak (2001) points out that other reviews compared Buckler’s writing to prominent literary figures of the period; the *Boston Sunday Post*, for example, commented on the uniqueness of his rural characters and “compared Buckler to Willa Cather in his feeling for imagery and angle of approach” (33).³⁰

Though the novel was slow to develop an audience in his home country, as Buckler’s Canadian agent “had ordered only a few copies for the Canadian market and had given it little promotion” (Bissell 10), the reviews in Canada were also positive. William Deacon in *The Global and Mail* (1952) writes: “Younger intellectuals hereabouts may take heart because one Canadian’s first novel is the fruit of Freud and James Joyce’s *Ulysses*. *The Mountain and the Valley* is beautifully written—each word chiselled with loving care” (13). Deacon’s gesture to Joyce is notable as Buckler’s modernist stylistics, and his protagonist’s struggle to understand himself in the world, bring the text into conversation with notable *Künstlerroman* like *The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916). David’s artistic awakenings, the development of key sexual relationships, and his attempts to articulate these experiences echo those of Stephen Dedalus. Likewise, Buckler’s tether to the particularities of the community of Entremont mirrors Joyce’s commitment to representing Ireland. Like in *Rockbound* and *Women in Love*, there is a

³⁰ This comparison to Willa Cather is interesting given her slippery status in the queer canon, and roots to rural Atlantic Canada.

potentially generative connection between how the text treats male desire and relationality outside of, or in conversations with, regional spaces elsewhere.

While a simple story of a young artist struggling in the confines of his place may not resonate with popular understandings of the region as an idyllic or rustic space,³¹ for some literary critics the artist narrative offers an entry point into Buckler's text (Bissell 1961, Atwood 1972, Kulyk Keefer 1987, Davies 1988, Williams 1991, Pell 1995, Dodeman 2016). David's life story is spent searching for a sense of unity and wholeness in description that always rests just beyond expression. Many moments in the text are palimpsestic, as layers of thought, memory, imagination, and language compound as David's creative consciousness develops within the social structures of the rural farming community. These moments generally end with a sense of David's frustration or sadness at his inability to grasp and then put into language what he perceives.

Critics often tie this sense of obstructed creativity to David's feelings of difference from his community. Janice Kulyk Keefer (1987) suggests that it is "possible that Buckler makes his protagonist such a rebarbative character precisely because David is an artist . . . and as such, a powerful contradiction to the very way and values of life in Entremont" (229). Margaret Atwood (1972) also suggests that "A great writer, an artist of any kind, is not imaginable in Entremont"

³¹ In the decades since the novel was established as a Canadian 'classic' via its re-release as part of the New Canadian Library series in 1961, many readers have noted the importance of place in the text; however, Buckler's depiction of Nova Scotia, particularly David's navigation of masculinity in regional space, has troubled some readers. In 2019, Goodreads reviewer George Mac writes: "It seemed like Ernest Buckler was attempting to write *Anne of Green Gables* but 'for men.'" Likewise, Hilary DeLucry (March 2020) describes the novel as just a "sad, somewhat boring tale of a young man who feels as though he cannot leave the landscape he was born in." This view is seemingly held by others who position the novel as "depressing" (Ellie, May 27 2019) and "a drag . . . utterly dull" (Alyson, Oct 2016). For readers looking for idyllic narratives like *Anne of Green Gables*, or who are accustomed to simplified depictions of stoic men from Atlantic Canada, David's struggle against archetypal constructions of regional masculinity likely does not merit classic status.

(187), setting aside the reality of the space to posit a narrative of rural stagnation.³² This positioning of David's sense of difference as stemming from an Entremont devoid of culture is damaging in the sense that it reinforces ideas about rustic ignorance. In *Queer Anti-Urbanism* Herring (2010) argues that a chronic dismissal of rural space, or the disavowing of rural spaces in favour of metropolitan cultures, creates a sense of "shameful rusticity" for rural communities and their inhabitants (5). For Herring, this casting aside of rural communities aligns with "geophobic claims that ruralized spaces are always and only hotbeds of hostility, cultural and socio-economic poverty, religious fundamentalism, homophobia, racism, urbanoia, and social conservatism" (9). Emptying Entremont of artistic and cultural sensibilities plays into wider stereotypes that situate the region as a space of simplicity and stagnation. The positioning of rural Nova Scotia as empty of creative or artistic potential implicitly connects the community with ideas of backwardness that uphold the centre as an area of progress, a normative trajectory that not only holds metronormative connotations for sexual nonconformity, but also casts aside the complexity of Buckler's Entremont.

In contrast to the suggestions of artistic impossibility in regional space, David's artist-status has been understood as an individual struggle rather than a symptom of rural decay. Douglas Barbour (1976) suggests that, rather than be alienated by the community, David's trajectory is a self-induced retreat. "At one time or another David selfishly betrays just about everyone close to him" writes Barbour, and he is "all too willing to use his ability as an artist to 'speak' his peoples' lives and to speak to them with full understanding as a weapon against them. Every time he abuses his talents in this way he cuts himself off more from others" (1-2). Barbara

³² The connective creativity of Ellen's rug-making, for example, is negated. Not only does rug-making function as an example of localized folk artistry in the novel, but it is also the central mode of narrative meaning-making. Ellen weaves together parts of the story as she engages with pieces of cloth, envisions the pattern, and weaves together memory and reality.

Pell (1995) also provides a reading of the novel's representation of David's difference, arguing that *The Mountain and the Valley* is an ironic treatment of artistry that "reveals David's self-delusion and leads the reader to an increasingly critical judgment of his failures" (20).

Moving further away from the suggestion that life in rural Atlantic Canada is antithetical to a life of artistic pursuit, in "The Ascent of the Artist in Ernest Buckler's *The Mountain and the Valley*" (2016) André Dodeman builds on these analyses to focus on how Buckler aligns David's desire for the exact language with his gradual distance from the community. For Dodeman, David is trapped in a prolonged state of expectation and hesitation, and the structure of the novel forms a kind-of enclosed pause around his life. Like Barbour, Dodeman does not see the rural lifestyle both beloved and scorned by David as a detriment to his success as an artist. Instead, it is the failure of "authenticity of language and writing" itself that leads to David's eventual isolation. Rather than celebrating urban space as the solitary cultural hub, Barbour, Pell, Dodeman, and others make clear that Atlantic Canadian rural space is not hostile to artistic thought. While there are moments in the text where David's literary abilities or heightened intellect may distance him from his community, it is always David himself who severs the connection.

This overview highlights the complexity of Buckler's novel. Like David's attempts to understand and articulate the world around him, *The Mountain and the Valley* is a palimpsestic reflection on difference and change, and "all the criticism shows, David is a tortured individual whom critics yearn to define" (Goldie 91). David's sense of difference has been the focus of scholarly debate for over 50 years, and has shifted alongside new theoretical modes of engagement. In the last two decades, scholars have used queer theory to consider "that a possible source of David's emotional disequilibrium is a conflict with his own sexuality" (Dickinson 21).

Though in *Here is Queer: Nationalism, Sexualities, and the Literatures of Canada* (1999), Peter Dickinson includes only a brief discussion of Buckler's novel, his assertion is significant. Situating the text within a tradition of Canadian *Künstlerroman* that centralize male homosocial relations, Dickinson argues that "Buckler reveals . . . a certain authorial sensitivity to, not to mention textual felicity with, the emotional investments and social emplotments of male-male desire. In so doing, he opens up another discursive space of identification and critical interrogation for those readers who prefer to interpret his text from outside the strict bounds of regional or generic classification" (22). Dickinson stresses the need to broaden critical readings of the novel. Rather than read the text as an artist narrative or through the "strict bounds of regional . . . classification," attention must be paid to Buckler's depiction of male-male desire. In doing so, Dickinson situates this male desire as distinct from the regional readings of the text, sectioning off aspects of the text as deserving of their own analyses: "Here, to be sure, is a quintessential example of Maritime- or Atlantic-Canadian writing. Here too is psychological realism at its finest" Dickinson states, "But equally, . . . here is queer" (22).

In *Pink Snow* (2003), Terry Goldie also focuses on the multiple categorizations and concepts at work in Buckler's novel to argue that *The Mountain and the Valley* aligns with many "overtly gay Bildungsroman" (78). Though Goldie makes clear that there "is certainly no defining point at which [David] can be said to be gay" (91), Buckler's treatment of difference, alienation, and male bonding brings the text into Canada's queer corpus. As in his discussion of *As for Me and My House*, Goldie again turns to the unknown as the root of his reading, paying attention to the "epistemological space which lurks in the corners of David's character and for which homosexuality could be an explanation" (91). He contends that David's developing sense of difference is increasingly oriented toward his friend and brother-in-law Toby Richmond, and

that the mounting alienation David feels throughout the narrative can be directly tied to his negotiation of these feelings within his community.

Regardless of how David's difference is understood, throughout the novel *Entremont* is an essential aspect of the narrative's power. Both as an active presence that shapes David's interactions and experiences, and as a contextual backdrop that can inform the reader's understanding of events, the rhythms and relations of the rural community mark potential paths for David to follow. In particular, the tasks of farming dominate the lives of most characters, and David often understands himself within or against this backdrop. As the narrator tells readers, "In the country, the day is the determinant. The work, the thoughts, the feelings, to match it, follow" (61). While the novel positions other members of the Canaan family as accepting or unaware of their adherence to the flow of rural life, David is situated as apart from this stream. After explaining Joseph, Martha, and Chris' movements on a fall day, for example, the narrator details: "If the day when David stood listening to the soundlessness of the pasture dying had not been exactly what it was, he wouldn't have looked up suddenly at the coloured stillness of the hardwood mountain and seen in the mountain all the things that were beyond it" (62-63). In this moment and elsewhere, David is different in his level of perception as well as the level of possibility available to him. While others appear somewhat trapped in the patterns of their lives, David rests at the precipice of multiple experiences and viewpoints.

One area in which this sense of possibility develops is in David's personal relationships. Just as David Jung and Gershom's relationship can be read alongside shifting discourses surrounding male desire in the early-twentieth century, so too can David Canaan and Toby Richmond's relationship be understood in the context of agricultural communities in the early-to-mid century. Like the fish house in *Rockbound*, the social and communal parameters at work in

Entremont regulate male behaviour in specific ways. As a community rooted in agriculture, there are distinctly gendered spaces for work, but Entremont is also home to an ethos of production, reproduction, and cultivation that demarcate particular paths for David and others to follow.

In fact, in *Just Queer Folks: Gender and Sexuality in Rural America*, Colin Johnson (2013) argues that the agricultural sector of the early-to-mid twentieth century in the United States “cleared a path for an emerging discourse of sexuality to percolate” (28).³³ Methods of controlling and regulating the sexual behaviour of animals, for example, were tied to an industrial ideology rooted in ideas of cultivation and reproduction for communal sustenance. The discourse of heteronormativity developing in this period tapped into and built from the language used in agricultural sectors. Notions of tradition, continuation, and stability played into a well-established pastoral cultural imaginary, and positioned “sex [as] something that could be employed instrumentally in the service of continuing humanity’s long-standing mission to civilize by means of cultivation” (31). Looking forward as a means of community survival, and backward as a way of naturalizing this discourse, notions of reproduction rooted in agricultural language came to infuse understandings of human sexuality as the century progressed.

Though the agricultural history in Atlantic Canada is different from this history in the United States, it is likely that similar discursive connections would have arisen from social purity campaigns. Gary Kinsman (1987) writes of exacerbated tensions around reproduction after World War I that emphasized the importance of motherhood, family, and reproductive sexual activity. Though regulations around sexual conduct had been part of legal, social, and political

³³ Johnson’s chapter focuses on the “technologies of sexual normalization” used by eugenis throughout the United States to further their cause. In “Eugenics in Canada: A Checkered History, 1850s-1990s”, Carolyn Strange and Jennifer A. Stephen assert that histories of Canadian eugenics closely align with the United States, and were decidedly local in their concerns. The trends Johnson identifies in the rural U.S. are likely to be found in Canada as well. For more information on the history of eugenics in Canada, see: Angus McLaren, *Our Own Master Race: Eugenics in Canada, 1885-1945* (1990) and Randall Hanson and Desmond King, *Sterilized by the State: Eugenics, Race, and the Population Scare in Twentieth-Century North America* (2013).

conversation since the late 1800s, the massive loss of life during the war, paired with lowering birth rates and rising rates of divorce, led to “Moral reformers, the social purity movement, and politicians push[ing] the State to play a stronger role in defending marriage and discouraging sex outside its confines” (86). Sex became the means of growing and sustaining the community and the nation, and any act deemed unproductive—from masturbation to oral sex to same-gender sex—was demonized. These mounting tensions around sex situated as unproductive, particularly in the lower and working classes, generated a hyper-focus on reproduction as the natural state, and is likely to have had a strong influence in agricultural communities already rooted in an ethos of cultivation and production.

Because *The Mountain and the Valley* balances a hesitation toward progress and a sense of lament for a way of life that no longer seems sustainable, there are echoes of this drive for continuation and cultivation throughout. Joseph and Chris, both strong and efficient around the farm, are stereotypically virile and fertile. Joseph and Martha have cultivated a family that can sustain their small farm after they are gone, and Chris eventually continues this legacy through his child. As with the seasons of the harvest so too are there seasons of production and reproduction as a means of familial and agricultural persistence; the connection between these patterns becomes more obvious later in the novel when David and Ellen are alone on the farm. Though David maintains the homestead, there will be no one to carry on after he is gone. Unlike his father, whose body and temperament seem almost a part of the landscape, Ellen reflects “How strange it is . . . that David, of all of them, is left here . . . He can learn anything. Even farming, which comes most unnatural to him” (318). Here, the language of “unnatural” positions David’s difference as something innate, and aligns this difference with language of heterosexuality as the “natural” state noted by Johnson.

Likewise, though Kinsman's research is predominantly focused on urban environments, his work highlights the increasing weight of heterosexist discourse between the 1920s and 1940s in Canada, and suggests how the language and philosophies of agricultural communities influenced and became influenced by this discourse. Moreover, in the post-WWII era, financial prosperity, the growth of white collar work, and the entrenchment of capitalism gave rise to the nuclear family as an ideal. Throughout the early-to-mid twentieth century then, the formative years of both Buckler's life and early writing, this emphasis on reproductive sex and the moral regulation around all acts unproductive rose immensely. This rising discourse likely impacted those living in rural Nova Scotia in unique ways; as Buckler lived in this area his entire life, this discourse may have influenced the ways he wrote about this place in his creative works.

The fact that David's sense of difference is tied to his "unnatural" relationship to place is important as there are moments when he attains a fleeting sense of wholeness or connection. Throughout his life, these moments are most often tied to his relationship with Toby Richmond, bringing together threads of male desire, rural convention, maturation, and pain. As discussed, *Rockbound*, published 24 years before *The Mountain and the Valley*, often relegates the relationship between David and Gershom to the background, only allowing the intensity of their connection to surface during the ruptures that redirect the narrative; yet, David Jung is explicit about his affection for his companion. Everything he does is for Gershom, and Gershom generally reciprocates this affection. There is no sense of shame or secrecy for David Jung; he openly expresses his feelings for Gershom and contrasts the strength of this connection to his relationships with women. By writing the novel in this way, Day situates close male relations as a normal aspect of the island community. The narrative ruptures signal that it is not the local community that condemns passion between men, but instead modern readers who may judge

these interactions negatively. Day subsumes their relationship while, crucially, still recording it, offering a complicated depiction of the regulatory codes at work in both rural fishing communities and the general tenor of the reading public he anticipates.

In *The Mountain and the Valley*, however, there appears to be no opportunity for this kind of open male connection. A *desire for* the region as a bucolic space, either from prospective readers or from the author, seems to outweigh the possibility of complex *desire from* the region. While in *Rockbound* the erotic triangle serves to render the relationship between David and Gershom appropriate for readers, the balancing act in *The Mountain and the Valley* between David Canaan, Toby Richmond, and Effie (and eventually Anna), serves a different purpose: to offer insight into David's growing sense of the impossibility of his difference. David continually attempts to understand himself in relation to others, particularly the men around him. With Toby, he comes the closest, only to lose this sense through the realization of Toby's indifference.

Indeed, as he reaches maturity, David comes to understand his existence in rural space as futile without the ability to live out his desired connection with Toby; that is, his "unnatural" status in his community can only be rendered liveable with Toby by his side. David has no interest in Toby's life in the city and Toby has no interest in David's life in the country. In this way, there is a kind of performance throughout the novel of a spatialized sexuality that can never come to fruition. Toby remains unaffected by this performance as his dalliances to Entremont are simply escapes into a quaint world; however, David is devastated by this performance. He harms those he loves in attempts to connect with Toby and, eventually, winds up sick, alone, and broken when Toby leaves to war. In this way, the "relationships of power and meaning" (Sedgwick 27) delineated in Buckler's novel are different from Day's, who was writing decades earlier and under distinct constraints.

Early in his life, David uses his friend Effie as a way to navigate his developing sexual awareness, particularly to prove himself to other boys. The first time David approaches Effie for sex, he does so after joking with his male friends. He thinks “of how it would be afterwards: the doing of it would be proudly and safely in him forever, for the other boys to see . . . Or if he did think of the act itself, he thought of Effie providing it, but not really *in it*” (Buckler 139). Effie’s absence and the need to impress the other boys are paramount to David’s interest in the heterosexual act. Though he describes masturbating to imagined women, they are often not “quite actual . . . She’d have no actual features; expect the hot, coarse, feature of wanting to do it with him” (139). Willingness, rather than femaleness, is what interests David, yet when Effie agrees to have sex with him, her “awful docility” is saddening. Though he comes to feel indebted to Effie, and notes feeling hopeless as he watches her cry, it is most important for him to maintain the façade of appropriate maleness.

This façade is complicated, however, when David reads a letter from his new pen pal, Toby, directly after having sex with Effie. Any lingering feelings of shame and sadness are dispelled as David becomes “baffled” by the correspondence. He reads it “over and over” wondering why, despite finding “almost no message in it,” he recognizes “the feeling that this was some kind of turning point in his life” (151). In this moment, David’s sense of general difference, something unknown that sets him apart from his community, becomes more tangible. His reflections begin to shift into a sense of difference rooted in a desire for male connection that he cannot quite understand or express, and that sits in contrast with his feelings toward the heterosexual act he has just committed. Rather than a turning point in his normative male development, as we see with his brother Chris, or a means of truly connecting with his circle of friends, sex with Effie becomes a prop for David’s failed attempts at “imitated heterosexuality”

(Goldie 79). Later in the novel when he coerces Effie a second time, “There was no pleasure in it” David notes, “The spasm was as flat as the whirring of a clock just before it strikes the hour. He hated himself, thinking of the ruining look on Effie’s face” (197). In this moment, David is again trying to impress a male friend, but he comes to realize he “could never outdistance Toby in anything he thought Toby would envy, however he might be willing to betray himself trying” (197). Though David is moved to self-loathing at the depths of Effie’s shame, he also acknowledges his willingness to repeat the act if only for Toby’s recognition. A connection with Toby is worth any negative situation that he or others may experience.

For David and readers, sex with Effie is both revelatory and traumatic. The complexity of David’s desire comes to the fore through the empty sex act and what takes place in the aftermath, as Effie dies shortly after their second encounter. Though readers learn her death is a result of leukemia, David believes she caught a cold from their time in the wet field. He initially feels guilty; however, the intensity of the feeling quickly “passed from voice to echo” as his belief that he was a catalyst in her death becomes a “possession of curious inviolability, and tempted him to collect more” (205). This secret is enjoyable and holding onto this knowledge sits in tension with his frustrated feelings for Toby. He holds power over Effie’s memory, which is more pleasurable than his power over her living body. At the same time, David recognizes that he holds no such power over Toby. This knowledge is upsetting to him, and Toby’s disinterest and the potential loss of their connection appears more distressing than Effie’s sickness and death.

It is only as he matures that David begins to understand the parameters of this desire for connection with Toby. His childhood consideration of their relationship changes in adolescence and again into adulthood as the normative codes of male conduct seep into David’s consciousness. Early on in their friendship, David oscillates between awe and embarrassment

around Toby. When the boys sleep in the same bed, for instance, his shame over not having pajamas is quickly forgotten when Toby lends him a watch. David thinks, “The defining feel of the strap on his wrist seemed to crystallize all his wavering edges into one clean core. It transported him beyond his room like a magic talisman” (188). His scattered sense of self and the slipperiness of the world is made-still in this moment of male connection. He sees “a reflection of himself” and “what he’d been missing all his life” and feels, for a brief moment, in control (192). David’s momentary connection with Toby provides a glimpse into his developing sense of self, and there appears to be no reflection on how this relationship may be influenced by outside factors.

As a child, it is possible David understands his difference as something he can work to overcome or that he can say or do the right thing to find the wholeness he desires. This sense of unity is impossible to attain, however, in adulthood. Toby and Anna marry, and they eventually come to visit an adult David, who is now sickly and lives a secluded life. When David is alone, he tries on Toby’s hat and surveys himself in the mirror. In a scene reminiscent of the moment with the watch, David “tilted the hat to one side and assumed a gay and careless smile. He thought of the free way Toby had, and of the far off places. The hat doesn’t look funny on me, he thought. We do look alike. It could be me . . .” (356). Again, this brief connection to Toby makes him feel whole; however, moments later Anna yells to him from upstairs and demolishes this momentary unity. He feels “stung” and “foolish” (356) as he removes the hat and exits what he now recognizes as fantasy.

Rather than a connection to be fostered as a way of overcoming his isolation, David’s adult reflections on Toby increasingly expose his sense of difference and shame. Women continue to be used as an equalizing factor between the men, but no longer does David seem to believe that

he can maintain his connection to Toby. As he experiences his bond with Toby intensifying, David's sense of difference and ineptness grows. In fact, Goldie situates a particular conversation between David and Toby as coming the closest to defining the homoeroticism within their relationship (79). This scene is worth quoting at length:

And walking back to the old house again with this other who was like him, David felt the man-fibre they both shared, even with his pain, and the man-togetherness. Having spoken of and felt the same way about the thing that *made* them men, the way a man feels about a woman, there was less loneliness in him than at any other time he had walked here before. There was less loneliness, in a way, than if he were walking here with a woman; for though a woman you might love, your love was only possible because she was different. The only people who can take loneliness away are the people who are the same. (360)

Much like with the unity he feels over the watch and the hat, in this moment David understands himself through his connection to Toby. Their “man-togetherness” elevates their relationship above any heterosexual interaction, and he feels a deep link that momentarily abolishes his loneliness. In these moments, David does not worry over his actions like he does when interacting with his family or community because “it’s natural – thoughtless and feels good” to spend time alone with Toby. In this instance, the language of natural as used *by* David marks a movement away from the heterosexist discourse of the moment. Here, the idea of natural relations as heterosexual is turned on its head as David co-opts the term as a way to emphasize the significance of the connection between he and Toby. He feels able to overcome his growing sense of public discomfort, eventually noting “He had never felt as fluent as today. He felt complex, manifold, *furnished*” after they ride the bus into town together (368).

The language of fluency here is crucial, as many critics agree that David's sense of isolation

is rooted in his inability to articulate the world as he sees it. This feeling of facility therefore emphasizes the impact that Toby has on David's understanding of himself, and suggests the root of the disconnect he feels from the wider community. It is not a lack of community support for his artistic mind that causes David's struggle to articulate the world around him, as Kulyk Keefer, Atwood, and others assert, nor is David's artistic mind always a self-alienating force. Rather, a lack of meaningful connection to one "who is like him" (360) forms the crux of his disconnect. Without saying as much, David knows that his connection to Toby is tenuous and outside the bounds of normative relations. The sense of shame at being found with the hat, for example, highlights an unspoken and internal policing of his desire.

Because, as Goldie notes, heterosexuality is affirmed and "erotic attachment to a woman is presented as the definition of masculinity" through many of David and Toby's conversations, it seems as though David's desire is not straightforward. He does not overtly long for an erotic encounter; instead he seeks a long-term emotional relationship: the "true complementarity" that he needs only "arises with 'the same'" (79). While there is an attachment to an ill-fitting masculine script that David recognizes as necessary, he also continually attempts to work through this script to achieve his desired male connection. It is only through Toby that David can understand and unite the parts of himself that have long felt disjointed throughout his life.

It is therefore all the more devastating when this self-actualization is obliterated by Toby's departure. It is not just that Toby leaves Entremont to head into battle, but that he leaves without looking back at David. The sense of loss and devastation is perhaps one of the most frank and painful scenes in the novel. As David registers how little he means to Toby, a "hollowness sucked suddenly at his breath . . . All the thinking came back in a rush" (386).

Slowly, David realizes that his imagination has allowed him to articulate something to himself that was not there to the other.

Just as David uses Effie as a prop for his heterosexual performance, he now recognizes that Toby has used him as a kind-of prop: “It struck him and set his lips working: he had been Toby’s friend *here*, but that would mean nothing to Toby now” (389). This statement aligns with many gestures toward Toby’s disinterest in Entremont. As a child, “Toby chuckled when David told him about the things of the country. But even then David knew that Toby’s interest was in their novelty only” (189). As he watches Toby on the train, then, the realization of his futility overpowers him. A “sudden gust of tears surged against his breath . . . [and] broke with a little cluck” as David is overwhelmed with misery. As his “face puckered as if all its nerves had been struck at once” he shouts to Toby, “Damn you, . . . I’m not crying for you” before destroying rows of his garden (391). Using the framework posed by Johnson in regards to agricultural communities and sexualities discourse, this scene raises interesting questions about David’s obliteration of purposefully cultivated space. This scene can be understood as a final disjuncture from supposedly natural modes of production and reproduction, not through a move into male-male connection but instead into isolation and a solitary life.

In Toby’s decision not to look, David’s desire for connection is obliterated. Because his desire is so rooted in a navigation of “the same” in the context of Entremont, this desire can only be replaced by the ongoing invisibility of his selfhood. In both the intensity of his devastation, and in his unwillingness to verbalize the truth of his pain, David highlights the constraint of heteronormative discourse in this period. These final interactions between the men grant readers access to how David navigates this desire within and against the social structures of his moment. The discourse of normative sexuality that was taking root in the early decades of the twentieth

century, when their relationship began, has now blossomed into a regulatory apparatus sanctioned by state and social reformers. The deep emotional connection between men that Day is able to depict in *Rockbound* in the late 1920s, is not available to Buckler's David in the following decades. Instead, Toby's departure is the final disorienting realization which solidifies David's solitary status. Indeed, before his death, David has more in common with Old Herb Hennessy, the ghost-like "blur" of a man (78) who was "the strangest creature in the world to the children" (8), then he does with any members of the wider community. Just as David reflects that Herb leaves no trace as "his heavy body move[d] down the road in the almost-dark. It seemed as if no sound was coming from him anywhere, even if you were there where his feet were falling" (78), so too is David silenced. As his life comes to end, he lies covered in snow on the mountainside, made imperceptible by the novel's close.

While I agree that his intellectual and artistic capabilities often set him apart from the community, I maintain that this creative status alone does not merit the intense isolation David faces as he matures. A critical focus on David's sense of difference as an artist is therefore not enough to account for the relationships he values and his outlook at the end of the text. Likewise, though Dickinson and Goldie place *The Mountain and the Valley* within a wider corpus of queer narratives in Canada and make a convincing argument for David's developing sexual awareness, it is important to consider how the communal and social structures at work around David generate a unique self-awareness that is rooted in rural Nova Scotian space. The rural farming community of Entremont and his home place in the valley is governed by a developing set of regulations and codes of normative behaviour. Through the narrative navigation of these overlapping conventions, David's maturation offers readers a way of considering the developing regulation of sexuality in this period.

In this way, *The Mountain and the Valley* embodies a sense of regional desiring that is unique from the texts discussed so far. Here, a *desire for* the region appears to retain more strength than depictions of complex *desire from* within the region. While in *Anne* and *Rockbound* there is a possibility for women-women connection or male-male connection, hidden and limited though they may be, in the Entremont of the mid-twentieth century an ethos of natural reproduction and continuance, paired with Toby's urban sensibilities, overshadows any possibility for David to be happy. While readers are given glimpses of David's developing sense of self and sexuality, he is ultimately left broken, alone, and haunted by a lingering sense of his innate difference.

Conclusion

Speaking of the first half of the twentieth century, in *The Regulation of Desire* (1987) Gary Kinsman writes that “During these years of transition in sex/gender relations, the same general features discerned for England and the U.S. can also be uncovered for Canada” (98). In a Canadian context, the parameters of these transitions from the late-nineteenth century onward have been the focus of scholarly attention (Lahey 1999; Warner 2002; Valverde 2008; Gentile, Kinsman, Rankin 2017). In my discussions of Montgomery’s, Day’s, and Buckler’s texts, I have worked to add nuance to this conversation by looking at how the specific intersections of Atlantic Canadian space and sexuality have manifested in the Canadian imaginary through literary and cultural representation. My discussion of the above texts highlights the potential of questioning homogenized understandings of rural life and history through the careful critique of cultural traditions that situate Atlantic Canada as always already oppressive toward or empty of queer and nonconforming desires. The nostalgic or simplistic marketing surrounding each novel, and the often streamlined reader conversations, erase the complicated history of sexualities in the region by naturalizing an identity rooted in rural simplicity. As I have shown, regardless of what can be found in the novels themselves, their lingering popularity is part of a cycle of representation that perpetuates stereotypical understandings of Atlantic Canada, which in turn influence what bodies, relations, and values are naturalized into the social fabric of the region.

Rather than centralize heterosexual relations and conventional familial constructions as core aspects of the region’s tradition, a close contextual reading of *Anne of Green Gables*, *Rockbound*, and *The Mountain and the Valley* highlights the shifting status of these normative structures. The variety of household units that exist in Avonlea or the communal sleeping quarters in *Rockbound* have significantly diminished by the time Herb Hennessy ghosts through

Buckler's Entremont. Likewise, the shifting position of same-sex relations in the novels, each written roughly twenty years apart, problematizes stereotypical understandings of the region as a static space of heteronormative structures. In Montgomery's *Anne* series, Anne's love for her female companions is explicitly expressed in romantic and/or erotic tones and the narrative follows seemingly unconventional familial configurations. While both the existing criticism and Walley-Beckett's adaptation have acknowledged these queer undertones, *Avonlea* remains situated in the Canadian imaginary as a space of bucolic conservatism which offers access to a bygone way of life. Viewer response to suggestions of queer or alternative potentialities in *Anne* highlights an understanding of (and *desire for*) the island to always-already be a space of hegemonic heterosexuality. A refusal to engage with queer historical narratives under accusations of anachronism highlights the power of a metronormative positioning of Atlantic Canada.

The erotic triangles and purposeful stylistics in both *Rockbound* and *The Mountain and the Valley* strengthen this argument. Popular and critical engagement with both texts emphasize nostalgic and outmoded understandings of rural Nova Scotia. Despite queer potentialities in either text, the natural landscape, romanticized male bodies and labour, and the supposed didactic nature of the works makes explicit how they have come to fit within stereotypical understandings of the region. Paying attention to the background of these narratives, or reading the ruptures throughout each, creates a timeline for the slow spread of normalizing discourse in this rural region. This dissemination pattern showcases how the language of state policy, local tourism campaigns, and cultural producers aligned in crucial ways with moral and social reformers, medical and sexological discourse, and wider regulatory trends that developed throughout the first half of the century. Myths of natural simplicity and tradition form the crux of

these campaigns. The alignment in the development of these two histories has led to an overarching and powerful metronormative positioning of the region that negates the ebb and flow of different kinds of desire in rural space.

It is my contention that the active or passive suppression of queer or nonconforming desire in popular representations of the region, and the same processes at work in the resurgence of historical works in contemporary remediated forms, constructs Atlantic Canada as Canada's closet. Metaphorically this is clear through the suppression of nonconformity in these narratives, and readerly disinterest in asking questions or being open to the depiction of same-sex interactions. To push past metaphor and into spatial relation, closets are housed in rooms. They are marginal spaces that sit apart from, but are connected to, larger spaces. They are not stand alone structures—a wardrobe, an armoire, a coat rack—but a small part of a wider, central space. As Brown describes the closet, “One must open the door to see its contents, or to move into or out of it. So by definition a closet has a certain kind of spatial interaction with its room” (7). There is a relationship between these spaces, one that rests on the closet's function as a necessary space of concealment.

The room to my closet-region is, of course, the wider nation—specifically the urban centre. As I will outline in Part II: The Backwoods, Fuller (2008, 2011), Tremblay (2008), and Wylie (2011) assert that regional narratives picked up and made popular in the latter half of the twentieth century often uphold stereotypical depictions of the region as “quaint, conservative, backward, but still enjoying an enviable pre-modern sense of authenticity and community” (Wylie 23). There is a derogatory bent to these developing ideas that I explore through the concept of the backwoods. In the backwoods, bucolic simplicity is replaced by stagnancy and tradition stands in opposition to progress.

This positioning of Atlantic Canada's most sellable and distinctive trait as a return to a simpler or stagnant rural past has various downsides. One, as Halberstam's work makes clear, is that the "rural is made to function as a closet for urban sexualities" (37). In a Canadian context, this positioning is exacerbated by longstanding nationalist frameworks, tourist narratives, and regulatory tactics that appear more powerful than a subtle negotiation of metronormative stereotypes in regional representations. Just as "Sexuality is far too slippery a concept to lend itself to either tidy forms of research or tidy forms of writing" (Adams 16), it is tricky to map the intersecting histories of Atlantic Canadian cultural and touristic production alongside the development of sexualities discourse in Canada. I have done my best to begin this work. In the sections that follow, I build from this foundation to read both the continuance, as well as the troubling, of a widespread and popular metronormative understanding of the Atlantic region.

Part II: The Backwoods

As I cross the strait, a mile or so strand,
 I look to the woods, the dark timber stand;
 And deep in my heart, though I can't understand,
 Why I break my heart to find work with my hands.

....
*The Canso Causeway's a wonder they say,
 It's mainland rock and mainland clay;
 Many do come but they don't plan to stay,
 It was built for going away.*
 —Albert MacDonald, “Causeway Crossing”

Although my background is typically middle class and suburban, I cannot remember a time when I, as a Maritimer, was not represented in the national media as a caricatured fisherman—preferably old, preferably toothless . . . Dressed in a yellow slicker, stoop shouldered and narrow-eyed, the ‘Salty Dog’ projects an image of wily (but uneducated), harmless and whimsical (but uninformed) folk wisdom. He is the Canadian equivalent to . . . the locals from *Deliverance*, and he is used to sell everything from fish sticks to Maritime vacations.
 —R.M. Vaughan, “Lobster is King”

If the framing metaphor for the previous sections is the closet, I would now like to move into a metaphor of the causeway. While a closet suggests separate spaces that exist in proximity, and underscores a sense of hiding or being hidden, the causeway is a space of movement between two points—here and there, home and away. Traversing a causeway, as my first epigraph notes, is a method of getting out and looking forward. For many, the causeway also makes space for considering what has been left behind. “I can’t understand,” MacDonald’s speaker laments, “Why I break my heart to find work with my hands.” There is a sense of affective distance and necessary movement suggested by the causeway that is different from the proximity and stasis suggested by the closet. This movement in and out of the region, the juxtaposition of here and there, and questions about who stays and who leaves, form the framework for my discussion of the backwoods in this section.

This shift into thinking about movement aligns in useful ways with changing discussions of sexuality in the latter half of the twentieth century. Queer Nation's slogan "Out of the closets and into the streets" comes to mind as emblematic of the growing activism and dialogue around 2SLGBTQIA+ rights in the 1960s into the 1990s. This period marks both a figurative and literal mobilization from secrecy into a complicated *outness* for many people. In 1969, for instance, Bill C-150 enacted change at the governmental level in Canada and "transform[ed] both the material realities and discursive practices that organized/disorganized [feminist and queer] communities" (Gentile et al. 5). Speaking of this legislation, Rebecca Rose (2019) explains that supposed progress is often made through the typifying of certain behaviours as acceptable while others remain unspeakable. While the Criminal Code was in some ways reformed, in reality this change was "an exception clause allowing two adults aged twenty-one and older to engage in gay sex in the privacy of their home" (24); here, secrecy and discretion remain paramount, all while being celebrated as a progressive advancement. In this way, changing understandings of sexualities are marked by a push-pull of regulatory tactics designed to further categorize and control desire, behaviour, and movement. Yet, this push-pull goes both ways. As the editors of *We Still Demand: Redefining Resistance in Sex and Gender Struggles* (2017) illuminate, shifts in discourse around sexualities in this period also "led to the emergence of a radical sexual politics" in Canada and elsewhere (6).

At the same time, but in very different ways, the period between the 1960s and the 1990s was one of cultural development for Atlantic Canada. As the fight for liberation and recognition from marginalized communities occurred throughout the nation, there was an uptick in interest in social realist representations of the Atlantic region. Rooted in a sense of regional difference and nationalist critique, much popular fiction from this period moves away from bucolic

representations of regional space and into overtly politicized examinations of the conditions of marginality and dispossession in the Atlantic region. This emergent literary tradition specifically took aim at key sites of power that impact Atlantic Canada, including nationalism, centralization, and class stratification.

In a 1990 interview with Kathleen Scherf, David Adams Richards details his understanding of how the “Ontario literary establishment,” to use Scherf’s phrasing, understands and situates Maritime writing. He notes:

I can understand why the critics from there would say that I’m a regional novelist, because you see, I say things about Canada, that no Torontonians want New York to know. And so since I do I must be a regionalist, because Toronto wants New York to think of Canada as being urbane and upwardly mobile and progressive, a lover of baseball and concerned about violence in hockey. And God, here I am talking about people killing moose out of season and all this, and Toronto doesn’t want New York to know about that! (154)

Furthermore, Richards outlines how critics and reviewers often falsely position key writers from the Maritimes as authoritative speakers of regional experience. As he explains, “they don’t know what to put their finger on in my work, and so they say ‘he must be a regionalist.’ Another thing they say is ‘he must be a social realist because he’s saying stuff that doesn’t happen to us but only happens in the Maritimes, so he must be a social realist regionalist because this is what happens down there,’ that’s really not true” (154). Here again Richards points to a process of *becoming* emblematically regional as positioned from the outside, as critics and reviewers work to situate and contain the experiences of his characters within the region even though he sees his writing as a broader expression of the “human dilemma” (154).

Richards' assessment of how writers and texts *become* regional in this moment is telling. Regardless of how writers see their work, critical assessment and endorsement of "social realist regionalism" in this period generates an accepted or authenticated mode of representing Atlantic Canada. Although Richards plays down the role of sexuality and gender in this construction of Atlantic Canada—for him, the two possible models for exploring the human condition offered to Canadian writers are male exploits on Bloor Street or male exploits in the New Brunswick woods—his juxtaposition between urban-as-progressive and rural-as-regressive aligns with the metronormative narrative I see at work at the national level. In this positioning, particular narratives *become* regional because they align with actions, relations, and bodies that need to be contained and sequestered from urban sensibilities.

In fact, one outcome of the rise of social realism in the regional canon is the positioning of Atlantic Canada as a space of gritty masculinity. Because so many of the works made-notable are written by men and centre a particular version of manhood, rural Atlantic Canada is not depicted as a space revolutionized by renewed attention to nonconforming desire, feminist calls to action, or liberationist politics, but instead as a place marked by poverty and male struggle. While the texts themselves may take aim at power structures that negatively impact the lives of many both inside and outside of the region, as Richards notes above, critical positioning of this corpus as rooted in the particularities of place constructs borders around the issues and experiences that are represented. As in my last section, I am interested in thinking about how systems of representation create, continue, and develop understandings of Atlantic Canada-as-rural alongside shifting categories of desire, selfhood, and regional belonging. I reflect on how the Atlantic region has been positioned as a backwoods in the Canadian imaginary through the

recurrence of a particular version of rural white masculinity that is predicated on heterosexuality as an unmarked, but fundamental, aspect of life.

Through this configuration, Atlantic Canada is situated as a space that is socially, economically, and politically lagging, and tethered to outmoded ideas, practices, and relationships. As Nadine Hubbs (2014) details, when we perpetually encounter such images of the white working-class, “it reinforces a notion that homo and transphobia are confined to certain groups of bad people rather than systemic throughout culture, and it locates the problem in a low status and relatively powerless segment of society while ignoring the institutions . . . possessing the greatest power to produce and maintain, or to eliminate, gender and sexual bigotry and its effects” (47). Rooted in the particularities of a people and their place, intolerance and ignorance become entities that can be contained to rural space and set aside, rather than analyzed and dismantled at a broader societal level. In the process of becoming a regional problem, the origins of injustice are sidelined and activism from marginalized communities in the region is eradicated from the historical record.

To understand this developing mode of representation, I focus on movement and continuation as a means of analyzing the representative flow of bodies (often white men) through the region, complex dimensions of (be)longing, and notions of coming and getting out of rural spaces. My understanding of continuance builds from Ahmed’s discussion of heterosexual inheritance. Rooted in Adrienne Rich’s (1993) work on “compulsory heterosexuality,” Ahmed outlines heterosexuality as a constructed, social force and explains how children become a “point of pressure” within a familial story of heterosexual inheritance. In this understanding, continuance is wedded both to the idea of the heterosexual couple continuing along the path demarcated by their own parents and social constraints as well as to the pressure of this

heterosexual continuance inherited by their children. As Ahmed explains, “In the conventional family home what appears requires following a certain line, the family line that directs our gaze. The heterosexual couple becomes a ‘point’ along this line, which is given to the child as its inheritance or background. The background is *not simply behind the child*: it is what the child is asked to aspire *toward*” (90). This inheritance, or the continuance of the heterosexual imperative, is specific to the place of dwelling and often an unseen force which both orients and, at the same time, is “something we are oriented around, even if it disappears from view” (90-91). As part of the path that directs our understanding, the imperative to continue along a trajectory of heteronormative relation in the home place generates a continuous current of orientation which can shape understandings of what relationships should move toward and achieve.

This thread of continuance in the context of Atlantic Canadian literature also builds from points made in my previous section. As noted, the emergence of supposedly traditional heteronormative relations as part of a regional heritage suggests a kind of Atlantic Canadian heterosexual inheritance, or a continuance of heterosexual legacy, that is an essential part of the region’s history. This two-fold understanding of continuance—at the level of repeated regional representation and at the level of representations of heterosexual inheritance within the specificities of place —develops momentum throughout the twentieth century, and further illuminates the slipperiness of regional desiring as a concept that troubles “insider” reality and “outsider” understanding. A more pronounced *desire for* the Atlantic region emerges in the latter decades of the twentieth century that is defined through white male struggle as a traditional contrast to conversations around diversity, nonconformity, and progress happening on a broader scale. Through this contrast, the “Salty dogs” of Atlantic Canada come to stand in as complex

figures of national heritage, and function as a starting point in trajectories of naturalized white heteronormativity.

In this context, I discuss Alistair MacLeod's work and reception, and tie the central figures of his corpus to writing by David Adams Richards and Alden Nowlan. While the work of each writer is different, there are common threads throughout that tend to be picked up, commented upon, and centralized in discussions of their works. In particular, a critical focus on how each author navigates the everyday underscores implicit connections developing between rural space, male experience, and unmarked heterosexuality. To close out this section, I also discuss the interconnectedness of space, social relations, and notions of heritage as integral to the developing national fabric of the mid-twentieth century in the context of Newfoundland. Because the post-Confederation era for the province coalesced with a surge in literary nationalism, Newfoundland's cultural "renaissance" provides a useful illustration of my contention that complex myths of rurality often serve to homogenize the Atlantic region in Canada's cultural imaginary. In particular, I review the development of a rural, white male archetype who is scorned for his backwardness, but who must also be salvaged in the name of cultural preservation. A brief review of the development of an "authentic" Newfoundland narrative in the province's post-confederation era highlights the naturalization of particular bodies and relations alongside ideas of who leaves and who stays. Due to its late entry to the nation, the province offers a useful means of thinking about how normative myths of the margin exist in complex relation to the infrastructure of the centre.

I juxtapose these analyses of unmarked sexuality in white male narratives with a consideration of novels by Susan Kerslake, Nancy Bauer, and the work of R.M. Vaughan. Kerslake's *Middlewatch* (1976) and Bauer's *Wise-Ears* (1985) tap into similar themes, topics,

and perspectives as the texts by male authors gaining popularity in this timeframe; however, Kerslake's narrative of struggle in a coastal community is largely absent from critical discussions of regional writing, and Bauer's quirky reflections on family and aging are overlooked almost completely. Likewise, R.M. Vaughan worked tirelessly to discuss, question, and represent a renewed version of Atlantic Canadian experience, yet this work has not gained the popularity afforded to those who remain loyal to accepted regional archetypes. Overall, Vaughan's corpus—both creative and critical—offers a sustained and explicit revision of these archetypes. As a creator, critic, and commentator, Vaughan questioned narratives of sex, art, and region, noting that there is power in the “perpetual state of displacement” he felt throughout his life as both a gay man and a Maritimer (Interview, QHINB, 12:01). While this section highlights the stories and experiences sidelined by the centring of heteronormative myths of the backwoods, overall the comparative overview raises questions about the kinds of regional desiring that emerge in response to changes in the wider national social, cultural, and political spheres.

Throughout, I argue that the celebration of a regional narrative rooted in white male experience elides the heterogeneity of the region. Because this experience is circulated and celebrated as *of* Atlantic Canadian space, the geographies and relations made notable by popular and canonical works come to function as a stand-in for the region writ large. While this argument may seem obvious, an explicit discussion of how the codes of white, working-class masculinity have constrained understandings of sexuality in Atlantic Canada remains underdeveloped. Because the marketability of such depictions constructs boundaries around what counts as Atlantic Canadian, in turn impacting which narratives gain traction and attention in the national literary sphere throughout the late-twentieth century, navigating this development is crucial to understanding the complexity of regional desiring at work in Atlantic Canadian literature.

As more narratives of the backwoods emerge, rural Atlantic Canadian space begins to stand outside of time, thereby projecting a notion of the region in perpetual stasis. One outcome of this continuing narrative is the implicit connection between Atlantic Canada and broader ideas of the rural backwoods as a space of individual ignorance, communal regress, and oppression. This simplification is troubling not only because situating the region as rough, parasitic, and lazy negates the much more complex reality of life in Atlantic Canada, but also because assumptions of bigotry aligned with the backwoods dismiss the systemic basis of racism, sexism, and homophobia.

Another outcome of this accepted narrative is the implicit suggestion of heterosexuality as a singular and natural state. As noted in my previous sections, the naturalization of heterosexuality as a central facet of Atlantic Canadian life negates the much more complex reality at work in the region itself and in representations of the region that do not gain recognition or critical acclaim. In this configuration, the ideal Atlantic Canadian is constituted as one who stays to continue the assumed traditions of their social sphere through the heterosexual “gift” (Ahmed 86). This repeated construction situates regional belonging as necessarily rooted in the continuation of the familial and communal line, thereby limiting what counts as Atlantic Canadian life to those who have children and who never move across that causeway (both metaphorical and, in some cases, literal).

Section One: “Well, if Toronto ever did have an idea of New Brunswick it would be an idea learned from a movie about Alabama”³⁴

According to David Bell in “Eroticizing the Rural” (2000), the “rural occupies a very particular, but very complex, location in the wider sociospatial economy of desire” (84). Bell’s discussion of sex “in the middle of nowhere” outlines how ideas of nature, rural life, and sexuality manifest and function in the popular imaginary, influencing both who and what is assumed to exist within rural space. As outlined in my discussion of the bucolic, emergent discourse in the early-twentieth century anachronistically positioned heterosexual relations as natural and authentic to rural space. The foregrounding of simplicity in many tourist and cultural products situates the Atlantic region as a place of the past and, therefore, a place rooted not only in the customs and practices of a bygone era but also in the associated values expected of this milieu. I have situated this positioning as a regional desiring that is rooted in notions of the bucolic; this is a nostalgic arrangement that underscores the natural world and the connections between people, their local landscapes, and the relations bred from links to the land. This construction not only erases colonial histories in the region and, in turn, plays a key role in the broader cultural project of indigenizing settlers into the Atlantic Canadian landscape,³⁵ but also

³⁴ In conversation with R.M. Vaughan, David Adams Richards reflects on the similarities between the Maritimes and the American South, noting: “that both places have a history of being parodied and condescended to by the urban centres.” See: Vaughan, R. M. “An Instinct for Life: David Adams Richards Discovered His Own Voice by Making His Own Mistakes (Interview).” *Books in Canada*, vol. 22, no. 6, 09, 1993, pp. 15-18.

³⁵ For a discussion of white male reterritorialization in Canadian short fiction, see: Gordon, Neta. “White Masculinity and Civility in Contemporary Canadian Short Stories: The Fantasy of Reterritorialization and Return.” *Men and Masculinities*, vol. 17, no. 2, June 2014, pp. 173–194, doi:[10.1177/1097184X14533644](https://doi.org/10.1177/1097184X14533644). For a reflection on the entrenchment of settler knowledges through literature in what is now Atlantic Canadian space, see Rachel Bryant’s *The Homing Place: Indigenous and Settler Literary Legacies of the Atlantic*. Wilfred Laurier UP, 2017.

rewrites histories of gender, sexuality, and familial relations to privilege heteronormative constructions as natural to and within rural space.

On the other hand, as the twentieth century moves forward the simplified social relations and familial structures centred in this configuration bump against myths of sexuality, desire, and identity tied to notions of rural space as backwards, Podunk, and closed-minded. Developing conceptualizations of the region as a backwoods uphold notions of rural space as outmoded, in-decline, dysfunctional, and deviant. Those deemed undesirable (often by the urban middle-class) become understood as bad, backwards, and a problem. In *Rednecks, Queers, and Country Music* (2014), Hubbs reviews a plethora of examples from film, media, and music in the United States to reflect on the negative associations between country music, working-class community, and understandings of rural space. She notes that “just a few banjo or fiddle notes can suffice to convey qualities of rusticity, southernness, stupidity or lack of sophistication, and violent bigotry, especially racism and homophobia” (3). Indeed, from “the dominant middle class perspective,” Hubbs writes, “rednecks and queers are thought to occupy opposite ends of various political, social, and cultural spectrums” (30). By noting the implicit connections brought up by certain cultural forms and class positionings, and their supposedly attendant social and political outlooks, Hubbs’ work highlights the flipside of the rural as defined by pastoral beauty and simplicity.

While contemporary cultural producers from the region play with ideas of the backwoods, poking fun at the flipside of the pastoral and raising questions about the associations between rural/urban and ignorance/intelligence,³⁶ many negative associations of the region retain

³⁶ Writers such as Lynn Coady, who Rachel Steeves (2007) describes as “creat[ing] a new vision of the region — a vision that is deeply informed by gender, and managed through a keen sense of humour. (232) Steeves continues that, Coady’s writing “reflects a deep anxiety about common literary and social tendencies that idealize and oversimplify the Maritime region” (231). Coady has been vocal regarding her desire to trouble idealized depictions

significant power. Moreover, the region's history of economic marginalization conjures particular associations of people on the pogy (unemployment insurance) that further these connected myths of ignorance and economic marginalization. In the latter half of the twentieth century, descriptions of fishermen who work six days a week throughout the year, as noted in *Rockbound*, or heartwarming scenes of families swapping Christmas presents while awaiting a holiday feast, as in *The Mountain and the Valley*, become less prominent. Instead, a version of regional life predicated on male struggle and sacrifice, as well as communal loss and stagnancy, become central in popular understandings of the Atlantic region. Implicit in this Atlantic Canadian backwoods is the suggestion that sexual nonconformity and rural living are antithetical experiences. There can be no queer desire outside of urban space, as assumptions of bigotry, bias, and invisibility are tethered to life in the backwoods. Aligned with metronormative understandings of rural life, the backwoods is a space always already devoid of queerness through adherence, aggression, and expulsion.

My analysis builds on Tony Tremblay's (2008) reading of the region as a "construction of the centre rather than the margins" (24). Tremblay discusses how the reception of regional texts in the national sphere impacts what is recognized as a narrative of the Maritimes, noting that, in this arrangement, the arbiter of what is authentic to both region and nation is multifaceted. Ultimately, "centralized concentrations of power — in Canada, ideological control-rooms like the CBC and the National Film Board — *produce* or *solicit* stories of the margins in an effort not only to control the periphery but to affirm as well their own status at the centre" (30). What emerges is often a simplified understanding of the region as curated by the outside, at times positioning the Maritime provinces through the myths of simplicity outlined in my

of the region. As she explains to Steeves, "I've never really bought into the soft-lensed depictions of the Maritimes because that hasn't been my own experience" (232).

discussion of the bucolic, while at others depicting the region as a space stagnating in economics, population, education, ideology, and opportunity.³⁷

Developing from work by McKay (1994), Overton (1996), and Fuller (2008), Wyile further outlines how the construction of the “Atlantic provinces as a quaint pastoral retreat is intimately related to the more derogatory view of the region and is ultimately likewise a product of the troubled history of the region in Confederation” (22). This more derogatory version, or what I call the backwoods, positions the region as a drain on the nation. While on the one hand there is an unspoiled, bucolic celebration of regional space, on the other Atlantic Canada becomes an outmoded, ignorant, and, at times, repellent space from which the centre has progressed. Both domains, a place to escape to or a place to escape from, become embroiled in Canada’s developing nationalist impulses in the 1950s and beyond. In turn, this dual positioning of the region constitutes a regional desiring built from a voyeuristic yearning to see without experiencing, or to observe and pass judgement without understanding the full lives of the people under scrutiny. In particular, the backwoods is not a space to enter and experience as a kind of release, as with the bucolic, but instead constitutes a more negative-desire—a desire not-to-be or not-to-be-again.

Depictions of those who stay in the region take on specific characteristics and are important for my understanding of how sexuality is represented in this period. Many key narratives are written by and about men, and there is a sense of bounded virility that rests at the

³⁷ This simplified commodification of a Canadian region is not unique to Atlantic Canada, though the archetypes and landscapes at its heart are specific to the East Coast. In their introduction to *History, Literature, and the Writing of the Canadian Prairies* (2005), Alison Calder and Robert Wardhaugh explain that “judging by representations of the prairies in much literature and popular culture,” it is easy to believe that they “are frozen in a rural, agricultural scene alternately coloured by the sepia tones of the Dirty Thirties or by the romanticized golden glow of a nostalgic small-town sunset” (3). For an overview of this process, see: *History, Literature, and the Writing of the Canadian Prairies* (2005).

heart of those who stay. Male struggle, physical hardship, and the implied heterosexuality of continuing the family line rise to prominence in popular narratives of life in the Atlantic region. This positioning of who remains, and the attendant suggestions of Atlantic Canada as a backwoods negotiated through a particular white male experience, explicitly erase the stories of anyone who does not fit the archetype. Indeed, as Kulyk Keefer (1987) notes of the centrality of closed community in Maritime writing, “A refusal to shift perspectives, to take moral risks, to extend or alter boundaries—all these create the plague sore of community in Maritime writing. The homogeneity of community is achieved . . . by excluding or considering as non-persons the most blatant outsiders” (38). This erasure not only functions implicitly along metronormative trajectories of progress and notions of a viable life on a national stage, but also moulds the parameters of what is accepted as a regional narrative.

Alistair MacLeod’s corpus, which is often focalized through male narrators struggling to navigate both the confines of regional space and the emotional complexities of this experience, exemplifies this focus; MacLeod’s fiction has garnered much critical acclaim, with his novel *No Great Mischief* (1999) winning several major national awards as well as the IMPAC Dublin Literary Award in 2001. For his significant contribution to Canadian culture MacLeod was awarded the Order of Canada in 2008, and his work continues to be lauded as a fundamental representation of Maritime life and experience.

MacLeod’s male characters are almost always of Scottish descent, they or their family members work in the mines or on the sea, and they have intricate relationships to their loved ones and communities. Moreover, the burden of staying or leaving is frequently at work in MacLeod’s writing, as men who wish to expand their professional horizons struggle with the shame of leaving and internalized feelings of self-doubt. In *Nights Below Foord Street*:

Literature and Popular Culture in Postindustrial Nova Scotia (2019), Peter Thompson underscores the complexity of this depiction, noting that MacLeod's fiction highlights how extractive labour "once provided jobs and stability, built up infrastructure in the region, and linked families and communities together, but also polluted the environment, was the setting for labour violence, and destroyed the bodies of workers" (42). The damage imposed upon the hardened male body, alongside complex connections between harsh physicality and a sense of emotional stoicism, are part of a representative legacy that continues to impact how the region is depicted and discussed.

Of particular interest are the ways that heterosexuality seems to be an inherent aspect of this male world; often, sexuality is unmarked and yet centralized through discussions of bloodlines, the continuation of family traditions, and a sense of ambiguous connection between men and women as natural to the confines of Cape Breton space. The short story "The Return" (1971) provides an example of this aspect of MacLeod's fiction. As the title indicates, the narrative follows a man named Angus as he returns home to Cape Breton. Angus travels with his young family from Montreal, and the story evolves through the memories of his ten-year-old son Alex. It becomes clear that the family has not been to Cape Breton in at least a decade. While Angus is overjoyed as they arrive on the island and Alex is intrigued, the unnamed mother makes her distaste for the community clear. Readers learn she was born and raised in Montreal, and her main narrative function is to voice urban snobbishness and a disdain for rural living.

Though mother figures are important in this story and others, men are central to a discussion of unmarked sexuality in MacLeod's world.³⁸ The concerns, losses, and reflections of

³⁸ For more insight into MacLeod's treatment of his female characters, see: Kulyk Keefer, Janice. *Under Eastern Eyes: A Critical Reading of Maritime Fiction*. U of Toronto P, 1987; Creelman, David. "Alistair MacLeod: Realism, Freedom, and Tradition." In David Creelman ed., *Setting in the East: Maritime Realist Fiction*. McGill-Queen's UP,

male characters often underscore, as Miasol Eguibar-Holgado (2013) points out, “the struggle to maintain alive a set of traditions and values (of Scottish origin) which do not seem to belong in the contemporary world, because their ontological space is gradually shrinking with each new generation” (2). Further, Caitlin Charman (2018) explains that each generation is “acutely aware” that their communal and familial traditions “always entailed physical hardships, untimely deaths, and economic difficulties” (60). Through this emphasis on continuance and generational inheritance, there is a particular burden placed on the male bodies that remain in the region. MacLeod’s “male characters carry the wounds and scars of their traditional professions” (Byrne 209), as they are placed in physical and psychological peril, physically encumbered with the weight of tradition, and must find ways to release the stress of this burden (usually involving physical altercations, addiction, or escape). While the modes of continuance are varied—some tied to work, others to language, others still to community—a central facet of inheritance is connected to ideas of heterosexual duty. As Cynthia Sugars (2008) notes, MacLeod’s novel *No Great Mischief* is “propelled by a drive for genealogy” (2). Sugars continues, “a prime source of the novel’s power is the way that it plays with the paradox of contingency and origin” by emphasizing ideas of inheritance, uniqueness, destiny, and chance as tied to familial continuance and communal tradition (4).

As Ahmed explains, “The naturalization of heterosexuality involves the presumption that there is a straight line that leads each sex toward the other sex, *and that ‘this line of desire’ is ‘in line’ with one’s sex*” (70-71). In this configuration, where heterosexuality is assumed and configured as expected, the other sex becomes more than just the direction, or end point, toward which desire is oriented; here, among other things, heterosexuality “becomes a social as well as

2003. pp. 125-145; Byrne, Pat. "Past, Present, and Memory: The Ambivalence of Tradition in the Short Stories of Alistair MacLeod." *Ethnologies*, volume 30, number 2, 2008, p. 201–213. doi.org/10.7202/019952ar

familial inheritance” (86). The importance of continuing the family via children, and the “endless requirement that the child repay the debt of life with its life” (86) is depicted, in MacLeod’s fiction, as central to a sense of belonging. In the context of MacLeod’s story, whether overt or unmarked, heterosexuality and the continuation of familial and communal traditions are required of those who belong within Cape Breton.

The connection between male physicality, tradition, and family becomes clear at the midpoint of “The Return.” Angus and his mother explicitly discuss a familial pull to stay in Cape Breton and his desire to leave, and the tension between their different outlooks is palpable. While Angus notes he and his brother wanted to “go to college so we could be something else,” his mother asks: “And what is the something you two became?” (86). She continues:

I have lost three children at birth but I have raised eight sons. I have one lawyer and one doctor who committed suicide, one who died in coal beneath the sea and one who is a drunkard and four who still work the coal like their father and those four are all that I have that stand by me. It is those four that carry their father now that he needs it, and it is these four that carry the drunkard, that dug for two days for Andrew’s body and that have given me thirty grandchildren in my old age. (87-88)

This reflection underscores the parameters of heterosexuality as a form of required inheritance. Moreover, this particular inheritance is rooted in the social and familial spaces of Cape Breton. If read with an understanding that Angus’ mother is listing the relations she values in order of significance, those most cherished are the sons who have stayed in the mines and produced grandchildren who live in, and are therefore “of,” Cape Breton.

Though Angus has fulfilled the heterosexual promise through his son Alex, his decision to leave Cape Breton and shift in class position³⁹ has not fulfilled the socio-spatial requirement; instead, his absence from Cape Breton creates a breakage, or a refusal to continue within the specific constraints of belonging derived from Cape Breton space. Alex does not appear to be included in the list of grandchildren as Angus has not stood by his family. In turn, because Angus' wife is situated as an outsider, Alex is further distanced from a proper example of familial continuance. His grandparents love him and desire a connection with him, but this connection can only be effective within the spaces and places of Cape Breton.

This desire for reconnection becomes clear when Alex goes into the mine to meet his grandfather. As they walk together through the wash-house, Alex relates that:

unexpectedly and before I can reply he places his two big hands on either side of my head and turns it back and forth very powerfully upon my shoulders . . . I can feel the fine, fine coal dust which I know is covering my face and I can taste it from his thumbs which are close against my lips . . . And now he presses my face into his waist and holds me there for a long, long time with my nose bent over against the blackened buckle of his belt.

Unable to see or hear or fear or taste or smell anything that is not black; holding me there engulfed and drowning in blackness until I am unable to breathe. (93-94)

This interaction almost resembles a baptism. Alex is physically immersed in what, in the context of this story, is the essence of Cape Breton: coal. As this occurs, Angus “sounds like [Alex’s] mother” as he yells for his father to let Alex go. Feminized and aligned with the outsider, Angus’

³⁹ While the men who stay are lauded for their decision, there is a sense of sacrifice (mind and body) that runs throughout the story. At the same time, the figures of middle-class intellectualism, like Angus and his doctor brother, associated with this “elsewhere” are not unscathed in their decision to leave. Instead, for Angus to maintain the life he desires “in the twenty-first century” he must sacrifice his ties to Cape Breton. At the same time, for him to retain close connections to the people and places he loves, he must sacrifice his ties to Montreal. Thus, Angus remains in a sense of stasis (on the causeway of his life, so to speak).

disconnected status is further solidified as he sits “all alone on the bench which he has covered with his newspaper so that his suit will not be soiled” (94). The disjuncture between Angus, his family, and their home place remains insurmountable; despite this attempt to bring Alex into the fold, his grandfather notes “you are the only grandchild I will never know” (96) as they prepare to return to Montreal.

As Ahmed explains, “The child who refuses the gift thus becomes seen as a bad debt, as being ungrateful, as the origin of bad feeling” (86). This sense of animosity is palpable throughout “The Return” as Angus and his wife feel incongruous with the spaces of his youth. Moreover, this bad feeling resonates through the end of the story, as Angus’ time at home does not rectify his sense of difference and longing, or suggest that he will return again to address the oppressive structures that frustrate him. Instead, he returns to Montreal with his wife and child, who describes the train ride back as “silent and alone . . . we do not say anything . . . We have come from a great distance and have a long way now to go” (97). The story closes with an ambiguousness surrounding how and where Angus and his family belong, underscoring how the politics of outmigration can intersect with constraints of sexuality specific to the communal and social spaces of Cape Breton.

This lingering ambiguity is indicative of MacLeod’s wider treatment of here and there alongside particular depictions of masculinity and sexuality; in the popular story “The Boat,” for example, a male professor reflects on the impacts of leaving Cape Breton. Again, the pull of familial legacy is strong, though in “The Boat” the narrator’s father sacrifices his life to ensure his children can pursue their dreams off the island. As in “The Return,” the mother-figure is opposed to her family leaving and, at the same time, to Cape Breton changing through modernization and tourism campaigns. In the end, it is the father’s ambiguous death that allows

the narrator to follow his sisters in creating a life on the mainland. In crossing the causeway, he is cut off from his mother and does not return to the home place despite a sense of longing. Much like Angus in “The Return,” though the heterosexual gift is fulfilled by the younger generation through his sisters’ children, the fundamental constraint of continuing-in-place is not, thereby disconnecting the family through that “bad feeling.”

As MacLeod’s work indicates, there is pressure around ideas of familial and social tradition, place-based connections, inheritance, labour, and unmarked sexuality in the context of the Atlantic region. MacLeod is not alone in this depiction. Other major literary figures of this period, such as David Adams Richards, also navigate questions of who stays and who leaves and, in so doing, create opportunities to question what bodies and behaviours are naturalized in the rural region. One of the region’s most prolific writers, Richards sets the majority of his fiction in rural New Brunswick and often navigates questions of work, family, and community through the lens of what he calls “self-sacrifice [which is] always more important than empowerment” (Richards, quoted in Vaughan “An Instinct,” 15). Rooted in an ethos of struggle and setback, the male protagonists featured by Richards often battle addiction, ableism, and classism. Many of his novels focus on different kinds of violence—individual, familial, communal, and social—almost always occurring in the Miramichi region.

Richards’ 1988 novel *Nights Below Station Street* exemplifies the complex implications of staying as they align with sexuality. Throughout, intellect is portrayed as a quality that impacts belonging and relation depending on how, and from where, it is acquired. As with the positioning of doctors and lawyers in MacLeod’s story, within the Miramichi region, traditional markers of intelligence, like education, are viewed as futile, unnecessary, and negative. In contrast, Joe Walsh, an Everyman figure found in “taverns in the country, one of the many

labourers who have suffered back injuries from their work” (Tremblay 305), is positioned as “self-knowing” and therefore “more fully developed . . . so that he is better able to rise to practical action (common purpose) when called” (310). As Tremblay (2010) notes, the “real” world of hard labour, bad weather, and small-town values that comprise the Miramichi region has no need for characters such as Ralphie, who I will discuss in more detail, or his sister Vera, who briefly attends Oxford University. While the siblings may have “the advantages of education, class, and ideological currency” (310), in the rural community Joe’s sense of self retains more significance than any formal education or outsider knowledge.

As with the Mother in “The Return,” there is a different ethos for those who belong in this place. This ethos is derived from an acceptance of a particular role necessitated by their socio-economic and geographic surroundings, and insinuates the value of acceptance and continuance within the confines of the Miramichi. Compared to MacLeod’s work, the heterosexual constraints of belonging are at times less overt in Richards’ texts; however, the complexity of belonging, relational desire, and the specificities of community all impact Ralphie who is “tall and thin with red hair and delicate features” and goes “about as an outsider” (Richards, *Nights* 43). Throughout his development, there is a strain between a viable life for a man of the Miramichi and the notion of personal growth and individual difference.

Moreover, the backwoods aura of stagnation is more overt in *Nights Below Station Street* and other works by Richards. This more overt portrayal of economic struggle, ignorance, and roughness adds to the kinds of struggles noted in MacLeod’s corpus. Paired together, the spaces, people, and relations in the rural Atlantic Canadian milieu of both writers underscore developing regional archetypes in this period as rooted in particular manifestations of masculinity, familial configurations, and implied sexual relations. Because there is an

implication that those desiring education, economic betterment, and more opportunities (of different kinds) must leave rural space, these depictions can be read along a metronormative trajectory that positions the rural as stagnant and the urban as the realm of multiplicity.

Indeed, as the “quasi-genius boyfriend” (Tremblay 306) of Joe’s daughter Adele, Ralphie navigates a tension between his intellect and his connection to male archetypes of physical labour and loss. For many in the town, Ralphie is situated as an outsider due to his mind and class status; however, he feels a sense of connection with his home place, and longs for an easy life with the woman he loves. In an attempt to bridge both sides of the divide—remaining in that liminal space of the metaphorical causeway—Ralphie applies to study samples in the lab at the local mine. This job would shield him from the physical labour or unemployment of most men in town and allow him to make use of his scientific knowledge, while also allowing him to remain at home with Adele; through this position, Ralphie attempts to merge the insider and outsider parts of himself as a means of continuing his relationship in a way that is deemed natural.

Despite attempts to connect these competing desires, Ralphie ends up “doing the same job Joe had done years before” (Richards, *Nights* 194). In the final pages of the text, Ralphie is “a mile under the earth . . . considering a calculus problem. That is, how does a person get to where he is from where he had been?” (220). What restricts Ralphie to the Miramichi and lands him in the mine, is a sense of love and duty rooted in his coupling with Adele. There is also a sense of implied legacy through which Ralphie takes the place of Adele’s father, who has no sons. He becomes constrained in a life of hard labour through his desire to continue both communal and familial traditions within the home place rooted an unspoken sacrifice, of both mind and body, and in ideas of inheritance.

Though less explicit than MacLeod's navigation of what Ahmed calls the heterosexual "gift," complicated by the loss of Ralphie and Adele's child, the constraints imposed upon Ralphie because of his desire for Adele are no less of an inheritance than pressures around reproduction and the continuity of family. While there is no specific suggestion by the end of this novel that the continuation of the heterosexual "gift" in the particularities of the Miramichi creates the same potential disjuncture found in MacLeod's work, there is a clear implication that, in order to build the life he wants with the person he desires, there are codes of belonging to which Ralphie must adhere. Rather than romanticize the Miramichi, Richards works to highlight its complexity; at the same time, however, there are clear signals that indicate what counts as a worthy life for men in this space.

Similar patterns of continuance and a sense of implied metronormativity through movement emerge in the work of Alden Nowlan. Nowlan published collections of poetry and essays, co-wrote five plays, and penned several works of fiction. He grew up in rural Nova Scotia, and eventually moved to New Brunswick, where he gained national acclaim for his writing. He went on to mentor students and writers from his position at the University of New Brunswick, like David Adams Richards, and became a major figure in the local, regional, and national writing scenes before his early death in 1983. Creelman (2003) positions Nowlan as a key figure in shifting depictions of the Maritimes throughout his career. Moving from the nostalgia of writers such as Buckler, Creelman understands Nowlan's exploration "of the marginalized and the impoverished . . . in rural or small-town settings" as embodying a hesitancy toward the region (113). While nostalgic depictions often look backward to sentimentalize or sideline the harsher realities of their settings, Nowlan's work focuses squarely on the difficulties of life for his characters in their small communities. His writing also looks forward to muse on

the longstanding impacts of structural oppression in rural space, which often leads to a sense of individual or social annihilation.

Threads of male frustration, struggles with work, and the complications of family run throughout Nowlan's *Various Persons Named Kevin O'Brien* (1973) and *The Wanton Troopers* (1988).⁴⁰ As in notable texts by MacLeod and Richards, Nowlan populates his fictional version of the region with male characters who experience unease, damage, and defeat. Moreover, characters who look to move out of the region are often alienated or portrayed as "different." In *Various Persons Named Kevin O'Brien*, for example, protagonist Kevin longs to escape the region to access higher education. Told through various snippets, the novel follows Kevin from his childhood in rural Nova Scotia, through his life as a struggling teen, and into adulthood when he leaves the region. As Paul Milton (2006) explains, Kevin's eventual return allows him to confront "his alienation from the home place and what it expects from him" (72). Kevin's reflections on life in rural space offer insight into poverty, familial violence, the pull of industrial employment, and codes of normative masculinity.

Indeed, tensions between leaving and staying form a complex and gendered thread throughout the text that connects certain characteristics, such as intelligence or ignorance, to the male bodies that move through rural space. Kevin's desire to get out, and reflections on his difficulties as a child, indicate the region is not a place open to male self-reflection or imagination. This unease is further explored in *The Wanton Troopers* through Kevin's father, Judd. Situated as a hard man who works a hard job, moments of tenderness from Judd are few.

⁴⁰ Critics discussing Nowlan's work at the time of its publication are attentive to his exploration of gender hierarchies in rural space. Fred Cogswell (1986) argues that Nowlan's experience of rural poverty and the structures of rural society infuse his writing, manifesting "unchanging Maritime attitudes . . . to two very important aspects of that region: women and outsiders" (18). Likewise, Barrie Davies (1986) situates Nowlan within a corpus of Maritime literature that "abounds in illustrations of the *machismo* values of the lumber and fishing camp, and the paralysis of the artist figure" (163).

That said, he deals with stress and a sense of failure brought on by poverty by doodling at the kitchen table. This turn to creativity for comfort shows “a sensitive and artistic side” (Creelman 115); however, because “he has internalized the community’s codes, which read expressive practices as childish” (115), Judd destroys his creations upon completion to ensure that no one outside his family knows about the practice. Because the strict gender codes of his community cause him to view this personal relief as a weakness, or as inherently un-masculine, he burns the drawings, and often turns to violence against his family as an alternative form of release and as a way to recuperate power.

Similar to depictions of education in writing by MacLeod and Richards, Nowlan’s interconnected novels portray intelligence or imagination as outside the realm of acceptable male behaviour in this rural region. As noted with my previous examples, these acceptable behaviours are implicitly connected to metronormative codes of sexuality that align ideas of continuance, sacrifice, and struggle with the rural region and position a desire for change, education, or opportunity as connected to “the outside.” At times, these codes bubble to the surface as the male protagonists reflect on desire and longing; this happens, for example, when the teenage Kevin covets his older, female neighbour. To engage in this relationship, positioned as deviant by the age difference and infidelity, the couple must head out of town on the train. In other moments, however, the negotiation of here and there is more covert, and the metronormative implications hover on the edges as a force that regulates relations and individual development. Most often, these normative paths are expected yet remain unsaid.

Ultimately, the men who stay in the region appear stuck in a system that, among other things, cultivates disinterest, shame, or struggle, and emphasizes damaging requirements for staying in place. This affective positioning aligns with broader cultural understandings of the

backwoods as a space of stagnation, and rural space more broadly as antithetical to ideas of progress. Read in development with aspects of David's difference in *The Mountain and the Valley*, the continued emphasis on the bounds of belonging in MacLeod's work, and the pains of remaining in Richards' texts, set up rural Atlantic Canada as a conservative, inert, and, in some ways, begrudging of outside influence. The continued repetition of this experience rooted in difference connects to the point Hubbs makes regarding the notion that, when oppressive ideologies are located "in a low status and relatively powerless segment of society," they are easily contained and situated as a problem of place (47).

Moreover, the association between struggling men, localized sacrifice, and the particularities of communal ties becomes implicitly connected to ideas of heterosexuality as a monolith that occurs naturally or which must be upheld at all costs. This positioning of the region as either empty of or oppressive toward those who do not fit a particular mould aligns with the metronormative narrative discussed throughout the project. The invisibility or abandonment of any form of nonconformity erases the possibility of life outside the supposed normative, most often unmarked as heterosexual. In turn, movement and migration intersect with sexualities as this constraint upholds assumptions of Atlantic Canada as a space of necessary escape for those who desire a vibrant life outside of these restrictions.

This metronormative undercurrent is notable in the text themselves, but becomes even more apparent in critical interrogations of popular or canonical literature of this period. Interestingly, criticism and reviews surrounding the publication of key texts note similarities in focus and, in so doing, highlight what aspects of regional writing were popular, or desirable, in second half of the twentieth century. The Spring 1978 issue of *Canadian Literature* helps to connect some key threads in the critical reception of the authors noted above. A review of

Nowlan's poetry sits alongside reviews of work by MacLeod and Richards. The reviews are separate, there is no cross-mention of the writers, and they cut across career trajectories as well as style and form; yet, the evaluations of Nowlan's poetry collection *Smoked Glass* (1977), MacLeod's short story collection *The Lost Salt Gift of Blood* (1976), and Richards' second novel *Blood Ties* (1976) suggest what critics were attuned to and focused on in this time period. Kevin Roberts writes that Nowlan "reports what he observes going on in the world, what he sees, what people tell him" (109). Describing Nowlan's poetry in similar terms as those used in reviews of his prose writing,⁴¹ Roberts notes that the "dominant force is [Nowlan's] own observation. Nowlan reports. He makes no great show of his poetic ability yet . . . the reader feels satisfied, as if some encounter with mindless experience has been set down this time" (108). It is Nowlan's simple recounting of the people and places he confronts that is appealing, and Roberts explains that "To write so that many people understand, as Nowlan does, is not the academic sin we have been led to believe. Canadian poetry needs it" (109). Nowlan's unassuming depictions of everyday life, and ability to render the beautiful from the mundane, makes his writing unique in the Canadian literary sphere in this moment, and sets him apart in the national poetry scene.

The reviews of both MacLeod's and Richards' works similarly focus on their distinctive use of voice and style. Both Laurence Ricou and Fred Cogswell outline the past and memory as central to the fiction under review, and reflect on the roles of labour, language, and love in relation to ambivalent notions of place, home, and belonging. There is a "thoughtful nostalgia" in

⁴¹ A decade later, a review by Elaine Auerbach of *The Wonton Troopers* also highlights Nowlan's focus on the everyday and pursuit of the individual against social strictures. Despite what she sees as some simplistic characterizations, Auerbach is struck by Nowlan's complex rendering of 1940's Nova Scotia. Work (forestry), family (abusive father and imaginative but stunted mother), and struggle (poverty) are central, and Auerbach notes that the town is divided by "two classes: the rich and the poor" (121). This distinction is crucial to how Nowlan renders life "in the backwoods of the Maritimes after the Great Depression" which is "carried out with a poet's eye for nature and ear for language." Sensory, difficult, and distinct, Auerbach finds Nowlan skillful in rendering life in a particular moment that allows readers to experience "through all our senses" the struggle of regional life.

MacLeod's stories noted by Ricou, who is drawn to the author's skill of "illuminating the commonplace" (117). Additionally, MacLeod's use of the historical present in his story is "so rare among modern storytellers" (117). As with Nowlan's poetry, MacLeod's ability to depict the minutiae of everyday life in Cape Breton is distinctive and engaging, and this approach uniquely positions him within the national literary sphere. Fred Cogswell likewise describes Richards' novel as "a classic" that his publisher is lucky to have been part of. For Cogswell, Richards affectively depicts the "familiarity of conventional day-by-day intercourse." As a novelist who is "primarily interested in what it is like to be young and growing up in rural New Brunswick," Richards succeeds in "render[ing the place] with a sensitivity and honesty that is completely convincing" (116). In this way, Richards, like MacLeod and Nowlan, offers a "real" depiction of everyday life in the region.

What is crucial for me when considering the overlap notable in these reviews, is how the language of belonging, simplicity, and reality helps to reinforce the central tenets of rural life notable in the texts themselves. That is, not only can the fiction of Nowlan, Richards, and MacLeod be read through a metronormative lens as implicitly (and, in some cases, explicitly) constructing Atlantic Canadian space as devoid of or hostile to nonconforming sexualities through an emphasis on continuation, but a critical focus on this depiction as an accurate or actual portrayal of everyday life in the region also doubles-down on this simplified construction. The critical response to popular fiction from the region streamlines an understanding of place at a secondary level, as the narrative positioning found in the fiction of prevalent male writers becomes the singular, authenticated, and authoritative experience of the region.

Because each review valorizes the authenticity of the writing and the subject matter, there appears to be a *desire for* insight into regional life. This *desire for* the region, even when

vocalized by those from within like Cogswell, is emblematic of the renewed attention to regional writing occurring in this period. As I will discuss in relation to Newfoundland writing, the reception of male authors, and their endorsement by major national funding bodies and cultural arbiters, circulate and centre an understanding of the Atlantic region rooted in white male struggle, defeated physicality, and a sense of heteronormative continuance. Indeed, heterosexuality, unmarked or overt, is central to a developing canon of regional writing in the 1970s and 1980s, placing boundaries around the desires and relations associated with regional space. Whether situated through familial and communal continuation in place, or understood as a necessary aspect of broader codes of normative masculinity, heterosexuality is positioned as the core component of everyday life in the region, thereby upholding a metronormative construction of the region in conversation with a more varied, open, and progressive centre.

Section Two: Background of the Backwoods, the Newfoundland “Renaissance”

Though rooted in very different histories and following a unique trajectory, a similar investment in Newfoundland as a space of straight, white, and rugged men occurs in the late-twentieth century. As in the Maritimes, the proliferation of an authenticated Newfoundland narrative or experience is deeply intertwined with shifts in industry and culture, outsider investment in place, and the impacts of leaving and staying. As a figure who underscores whiteness, physicality, struggle, and degradation, a particular version of the Newfoundland man became an essential element in popular representations of rural life throughout the late-twentieth century. Out of time yet tethered to rural space, writing by Farley Mowat and others positions this male figure as in need of redemption. He is looked upon by the outsider as a figure of decline that must be made appropriate. At the same time, this figure is emblematic of a moment in Canadian history to which we may want to visit via representation but never return in real life.

It is important to note that my methodology is notably different in this section of the dissertation. Here, I am less interested in reading texts closely for how they situate sexuality, or the implications around sexual conventions they may endorse or complicate; instead, the focus rests more fully on the broader infrastructure in which the “new” Newfoundland emerges and circulates. The development of national arts funding and outsider support is understood in conversation with similar patterns noted in the previous section. I attend to intersections between more opportunities for cultural development that emerge in the wake of the province’s entry into Confederation and shifts in the socio-economic structures in Newfoundland, developing regional archetypes that place boundaries around those who stay, and broader socio-political trends of “coming out” understood as progressive, urban advancement.

After a fraught referendum in 1948, Newfoundlanders voted to join Canada by the slim margin of 52.3% in March of 1949; one result of this merger, according to Patrick O’Flaherty in *The Rock Observed: Studies in the Literature of Newfoundland* (1979), was a shift in literary depictions of the province. His ground-breaking overview of the “Outport as Idyll” connects these emerging representations to migratory patterns both to and from the province that impacted developing understandings of Newfoundland. The sentimental treatments of rural Newfoundland found in magazines or short fiction from the 1950s, for instance, are read by O’Flaherty as a response to mockery from U.S. soldiers who were shocked at the conditions and poverty of the outports (152). In this example, movement into the province by those unfamiliar with the culture and lifestyle prompted a defensive turn by local writers. This reactionary shift into the bucolic resulted in depictions of Newfoundland that often sideline the hardships of outport communities, instead celebrating close-knit relationships and connections to land and sea.

In contrast to this movement in, the province’s post-Confederation era increased the number of people leaving the outports—often for education, work, or perceived social uplift.⁴² This movement out becomes fodder for several male writers, and O’Flaherty connects the “dislocations they experienced in their own lives by leaving their homes” to a rise in idealized depictions of outport life (152). While in some cases homesickness and nostalgia led to romantic portrayals of rural Newfoundland, in others, issues of poverty, abuse, and loss were inscribed as central to a rural existence in the province. The slow spread of this version of outport life, rooted in family struggle and community need, solidified particular landscapes, relations, and identities

⁴² For more information on resettlement see Conrad and Hiller’s (2010) chapter “The Real Golden Age: 1949-1975” in *Atlantic Canada: A Concise History*; and Blake, R. B. “The Resettlement of Pushthrough, Newfoundland, in 1969.” *Newfoundland and Labrador Studies*, vol. 30, no. 2, Sept. 2015, <https://journals.lib.unb.ca/index.php/NFLDS/article/view/25133>

as natural to, and proliferating within, Newfoundland and Labrador. At the same time, this positioning suggests what types of people may, by choice or by force, leave their home place in search of new options and improvement.

Likewise, changes in the economic strongholds of the province in the post-Confederation era increased the flow of people leaving in multiple ways. As Jenn Thornhill Verma (2019) outlines, “By the early 1950s, . . . many schooners had been forced out of the fishery by a number of the factory trawlers” (53). These factory trawlers, numbering at times close to 1000, could catch cod and other fish in greater numbers and at a faster speed. What Thornhill Verma calls “floating fish factories” dominated the waters at the same moment that Canada took control over the industry, demarcating a shift into a new era that would lead to the eventual collapse in 1992. The rapid decline in the fishery during this period not only led to mass job loss and the need to look for work elsewhere, but also “pulled the plug on a way of life, driving other, less fortunate [people] to drown their depression and sorrows in the bottle. Some even took their own lives” (145). Leaving, in this context, took multiple forms, impacting the lives of both those who stayed in their rural communities and those who departed.

Long before the multifaceted demise of the fisheries, however, federal control over the industry had instigated a renewed focus on alternative options to strengthen the province’s economic viability. The provincial government’s dedication to advancing the status of Newfoundland within its new nation led to major changes in tourism campaigns, for example, and a slow but steady refocusing on the province’s marketability as a destination site.⁴³ This refocusing on the celebration and commodification of local heritage was also central to the arts

⁴³ For recent work on the development of tourism in the province see: Clare J.A. Mitchell and Meghan Shannon (2018) “Exploring Cultural Heritage Tourism in Rural Newfoundland through the Lens of the Evolutionary Economic Geographer.”

in this timeframe. In his article exploring the roots of the “Newfoundland Renaissance” in the 1970s, James Overton (2000) situates Farley Mowat, a writer from Belleville, Ontario, as an igniting figure in this movement. Mowat’s desire to “make Newfoundlanders better known to the Canadian Mainland and to the world” (169) brought attention to the people and culture of Newfoundland. For Mowat, Newfoundland was an anti-modern haven that fell outside the influence of the U.S. and central Canadian media.

In the late 1960s, Mowat’s belief that “The New Newfoundlander has now emerged” became a central thread in wider notions of cultural distinction and the need for a sound cultural infrastructure. An excerpt from what Overton calls Mowat’s manifesto, titled “Some Unsolicited Suggestions On How To Spark a Cultural Revolution In Newfoundland,” helps to underscore his concern and vision: “The metamorphosis that stripped him [the Newfoundlander] of his rags of poverty, cleansed him of the scabs of disease, and freed him from the brand of servitude – has also stripped him of his history, his story, without which he can have no culture of his own and no firm grip on certainty” (quoted in Overton 183). This brief snippet encapsulates developing depictions of *the* Newfoundlander in the 1960s and 1970s. Straddling as it does both the bucolic and the backwoods, this archetypal figure is of the past and yet in the present. He is decidedly male and struggles against multiple forces outside of his control. Untethered from his own narrative, this archetype must be storied by others and yet reconnected to himself. Crucially, this recalibration to an authentic state and space necessitates a return to his unspoiled rural roots (in this case under the gaze of those who desire to record and preserve male outpost tradition).

Mowat was not alone in his desire to suspend and commemorate a particular version of outpost life in this moment. Harold Harwood, a journalist, commentator, and writer from St. John’s, described one outpost as a “human backwater, where men stagnate, or emigrate, or

struggle against impossible odds to preserve a spirit and a way of life that belongs to the past” (Overton 195). Harwood’s fiction, such as the novel *Tomorrow Will Be Sunday* (1966), emerged at the beginning of the “Newfoundland Renaissance,” demarcating its contextual parameters at an early stage as rooted in male connection to rural space (Chafe 2020, 271). Here again, a tone of lament situates outport space as in need of saving. The people in the outports (men) link the past and the present and, in so doing, straddle the divide between bucolic tradition and backwater degradation. Male physicality, rural space, and the need to preserve particular traditions are central to this developing positioning of the entire province.

These depictions and others grew in prominence throughout the latter decades of the century, as did a broad cultural infrastructure to curate and assess them; by the 1970s, Memorial University had dedicated significant focus to the history of Newfoundland and the importance of studying the folklore of the province. Whole departments had formed around the study of Newfoundland and, in many cases, funding for research into the province’s past and future was provided by the Canada Council (Overton 198). To be sure, interest in the distinct histories and localities of the province was a marked investment in both preservation and reflection. As Heritage Newfoundland and Labrador notes on their website, “Often for the first time, the local population saw their stories, dialects, and customs reflected back from the page, canvas, stage, or television screen” (1). Both “validat[ing] and shap[ing]” Newfoundland culture, the proliferation of research and creative output in this period occurs within a wider context of touristic development, cultural nationalism, and social revolution for marginalized communities. Within this climate of change, questions can be raised about the implicit aspects of validating and shaping at work in defining the archetypal or authentic version of the province.

The formulation of the singular Newfoundland story as one of isolation, hard work, poverty, impossibility, masculinity, and unmarked heterosexuality places boundaries around what and who counts as *of* Newfoundland. Though unique to the parameters of place, these boundaries align with those noted in a growing canon of Maritime literature in this period which can be read along an implied metronormative trajectory. Indeed, many popular narratives of an authentic Newfoundland centralize community struggle, troubled patriarchs, or families coping with the loss of a breadwinning figure. Other than the hard life of fishing, work is scarce in this rendition; drink, humour, or other mischiefs, however, are often abundant. As a foil to these issues, close-knit communal structures and normative codes of relation and desire prevail. Even in narratives that consciously reflect on the slow growth of religious convention or standards of social behaviour in these rural spaces, there is a celebration of normative tradition in popular responses or adaptations. Put another way, through repetition, regulation, and consumption, an essentialized way of seeing Newfoundland emerges in which homogenized and metronormative ideas of rural space as empty of sexual diversity become part of the standard narrative.

As Jennifer Delisle argues in *The Newfoundland Diaspora: Mapping the Literature of Outmigration* (2012), the implications of leaving and longing, or staying and waiting, are defining traits of Newfoundland culture and identity. At the same time, when it comes to understanding sexuality in the province, it is important to appreciate that there is always a very particular desire from the outside for essentialized narratives of Newfoundland. A complex interplay between rurality, sexuality, and masculinity becomes a central part of Atlantic Canadian culture in the second half of the twentieth century as a direct result of the prominent role that such images played in the works of the authors I have discussed. The result of this process is a set of constraints that govern the ways in which sexuality and gender are represented

within the region. This is emblematic of a *desire for* particular depictions of the region and relations in the region from without. In this *desire for*, heterosexuality becomes an unmarked requirement of Atlantic Canadian life, for example through the perpetual continuation of the familial line rooted in the confines of local space.

The narrative of Newfoundland as a space out of time and in need of preservation develops out of renewed attention and support for a particular version of the province's history. As I discussed in the previous section, the "Salty dog" of the Maritimes, and other such figures, have similar roots. Through the repetition and circulation of these figures, an entrenched understanding of the entire Atlantic region develops. In *Country Boys: Masculinity and Rural Life* (2006), Campbell, Bell, and Finney underscore the impacts of representation on understandings of rural masculinity. Within the matrix of representation, they write, "obscuring becomes ignoring. Which slides easily into concealing and deliberately distorting" (4). Through stories told and told again, the central narratives of rural space become accepted as the singular reality. One aspect of this process is that "Masculinity (particularly white masculinity) has often hidden itself from our eyes using the disguise of 'the norm'" (8). In particular, a growing preoccupation with white working-class masculinity has been part of a wider shift in depictions of rural space, giving "rise to popular representations that influence behaviour and ideology" (Campbell, Bell, and Finney 253). The recurrence of representations that uphold simplified understandings of rural masculinity come to influence who and what is situated as natural within rural space.

This naturalization crafts a narrative of white masculinity and unmarked heterosexuality which impacts not only expectations of the region generally, but also how representations of the region are received, understood, and discussed. For example, in the context of Atlantic Canada,

the commemoration and glorification of mining as part of the region's heritage situates strong or broken male bodies as essential symbols for familial continuance and communal legacy (as noted via MacLeod). In contrast to this narrative of male sacrifice, men who struggle to find work or those who leave for educational or professional opportunities are situated as failures or traitors to their communities. This sense of failure is, in some cases, implicitly connected to the "bad debt" or "bad feeling" of breaking from heterosexual inheritance by guaranteeing children are born and raised at home. Here, outmigration, the home place, gender conventions, and sexuality become tangled with notions of belonging and desire.

Understood within a metronormative framework, where the rural is the decidedly heteronormative antithesis to the urban, the region becomes either idealized as a realm of traditional values and pastoral simplicity or degraded as a space of stagnation and regression. In both configurations, the urban centre is understood as a modern space of progress, mobility, and tolerance. In *Making a Scene: Lesbians and Community Across Canada, 1964-1984*, Liz Millward (2015) recounts how notions of rural space as uncontaminated by "immigrants, migrant workers, lesbians or gay men, or people of colour" are part of "the myth of the rural idyll that gives rise to the perception that the rural is a relentlessly hostile and dangerous place for lesbians and gay men" (233). Available studies of Atlantic Canada highlight the falsehood of this myth. For example, rather than always-already a space of aggression toward nonconformity, Michael Riordon notes that isolation exemplified the experience of many Atlantic Canadian respondents in his monograph *Out Our Way: Gay and Lesbian Life in the Country* (1996). Similarly, in "Lesbian Life in a Small Centre: The Case of St. John's," Sharon Dale and the Women's Survey Group (1990) highlight the complexity of life for lesbians living in St. John's, Newfoundland in the 1970s and 1980s. They write that "[l]ife for lesbians in St. John's is not at all different from

life in a large metropolis, but the problems lesbians face living in a large centre can be compounded in a smaller centre” (103). Here, the most common problem noted by participants was the size of the lesbian community, and initiatives to help this community grow and thrive were the focus, rather than any suggestion of needing to leave Newfoundland and Labrador for a better life in a larger, urban centre. These examples are not included to suggest that queer people and communities in Atlantic Canada do not experience violence, struggle, and erasure, but instead help to emphasize how a metronormative positioning of the region belies the complexity of place.

Section Three: Being and Belonging Against the Archetype

At the same time that this perception of Atlantic Canada as white, male, and working-class solidifies in the national cultural imaginary, alternative depictions of the region appeared but largely went unrecognized. Even in cases where the subject matter is very similar and the specific area is the same, novels not written by and about white men from Atlantic Canada are sidelined. For example, Susan Kerslake's *Middlewatch* (1976) negotiates themes of struggle, poverty, and uncertainty rooted in rural Maritime space. Like many of MacLeod's texts, the community outlined in *Middlewatch* is coastal and structured around seasonal work, weather, and activities such as school and harvest time. The narrative follows a single man who moves into the community to take over the small school; while there, he meets and develops a strange connection with a girl named Sibbi, who he eventually saves from an abusive familial situation.

As an educator and an outsider, Morgan does not seamlessly fit into the community. Though he is respected and appreciated, he is not positioned as of the place. In this way and others, questions of leaving and staying run throughout the text, as do reflections on class, community, and the constrictions that come from a life in rural space. Moreover, Sibbi and her tumultuous relationship to her brother Jason can be read alongside the Walsh family dynamic in Richards' Miramichi trilogy, or even Kevin O'Brien's fraught relationship with his parents in Nowlan's texts. Different forms of abuse or neglect are central in each narrative, and family is defined through struggle, shame, and brief snippets of hope. Instead of being romanticized and naturalized into rural space via notions of inheritance or continuation, family becomes a contested site of both pain and personal choice in *Middlewatch*. Sibbi and Morgan can make their own family, for example, rather than remain connected to others by blood ties or community standards. In this way, *Middlewatch* seemingly fits within a tradition of Maritime

writing that explores the darker sides of rural life, while also underscoring the complex social and communal dynamics that influence individual development.

Though Kerslake's novel was shortlisted for the 1976 Books in Canada First Novel Award, overall *Middlewatch* did not receive the same attention afforded to Nowlan's, MacLeod's, or Richards' works. Interestingly, this oversight does not seem to stem from issues with the prose itself, as Anthony Appenzell (1977) describes the text as an "admirably written first novel . . . lyrical-archetypal." In fact, Appenzell's review in *Canadian Literature* offers an important perspective when considered alongside reviews of the authors noted above. He explicitly disassociates Kerslake's talent from her position in the Maritime region, noting *Middlewatch* is "altogether the kind of novel one might expect to come out of Quebec rather than out of the Maritimes, but welcome nevertheless" (73).

The supposed incongruence between an exceptional novel and the Maritime literary scene is worth pausing over. In the reviews discussed from 1976, male Maritime writers were lauded for their innovative style, attention to detail, and nuanced depictions of everyday relations in the region. In contrast, Kerslake's work is disconnected from such depictions of regional space, despite the novel's exploration of similar experiences and its stylistic innovation. Instead, a complex narrative focus and writing style from Kerslake is associated with sensibilities outside of the region. Kulyk Keefer's assertion that "women writers in the Maritimes have had to . . . [invade] the predominantly masculine world of letters, . . . [and counter] the portrayal of their own sex as one implacably hostile to literature and literary culture" (2) allows one to read between the lines of Appenzell's comment. Though he is only one reviewer, the disassociation between author, subject matter, and place is just as telling as the wider silence around Kerslake's

work. The central difference between the stark Maritimes of *Middlewatch* and that of MacLeod's Cape Breton or Richards's Miramichi is the gender of the author who created it.

Similar insights can be raised about Nancy Bauer's *Wise Ears* (1985), which questions what makes a community and constitutes a family. Bauer's novel reflects on changing understandings of the self in relation to shifting community parameters, and outlines the impacts of outmigration on those who remain in New Brunswick. Bauer received many local accolades throughout her career for both writing and mentorship. In fact, her general obscurity in the national scene is quite interesting, as she is closely associated with both Nowlan and Richards via local writing groups.⁴⁴ Despite this association, and overlap in the attention to leaving and staying and familial tradition in the region, *Wise-Ears* has received little attention for its exploration of Maritime experience.

Unlike the other novels I have discussed, *Wise-Ears* is written from the perspective of a woman in late-middle age and contemplates the nuances, difficulties, and joys of womanhood. Protagonist Sophie Aspinwall reflects on her life and work, noting that she feels at times proud of her role as a mother and at others a sense of loss. Rather than the impoverished men of Richards' fiction, or old men who continue to work in the mines despite the toll on their body in MacLeod's, Sophie's husband Harold is gainfully employed and attentive to his wife and children; the couple is also financially comfortable as they enter old age. That said, Sophie laments that "Little by little all the people she loved most dearly had gone away—or she had gone away from them" (10). That their three children, Edmund, Emma, and Phillip, have all left

⁴⁴ Bauer's work supporting the local writing community won her the Alden Nowlan Award for Excellence in Literary Arts in New Brunswick in 1999. As a member of the writer's group known interchangeably as "The Ice House Gang" or "Tuesday Night Group," she shared writing space with Richards.

New Brunswick and moved throughout Canada for work and for their spouses is central to many of Sophie's considerations.

Rather than rural poverty or struggle, Sophie is plagued by a sense of restlessness. She does not know where to expend her creative energies or how to reconnect the relational tethers she has lost to outmigration; each of her weird and whacky ideas—from a renovated crawl space for future grandchildren, to tape recorded stories she makes up as a way for her family to connect with her creative mind, to redoing the guest bedroom into an exotic retreat to spur the sex life of her son—are rooted in the desire to retain familial connection and extend the familial line. As she notes at one point, “If people have no grandchildren, there really is no reason for them to have lived. Unless there was another kind of preservation” (52). Much like the Mother in MacLeod's “The Return,” Sophie's purpose is derived almost exclusively from the continuation of her family. Because this continuation should be further nurtured through wider connections to their community, Sophie spends much of the novel plotting ways to entice her children back to the home place.

Sophie's concerns about her children's movement out of the region are compounded by what she believes to be her son's movement out of the closet. While there are reflections on the religious implications of this nonconforming desire, and a sense of loss regarding the grandchildren she so desperately wants, in the end Sophie is open to Edmund's sexuality. She spends parts of the narrative working through how she has come to understand normative constructions of sexuality, and tries to envision a different kind of life for Edmund than the one she is accustomed to. “She had brought home from the library many books on the forbidden subject,” the narrator tells readers, “clinical analyses, autobiographies, and popular psychologies” (138). Though what she reads in these texts does not seem to match her

understanding of Edmund's development, Sophie is not dissuaded. She decorates the house with fresh flowers in advance of his trip home, noting "It was her way of saying to Edmund, "We're celebrating the meeting with your friend" (139). Rather than shame, anger, or bigotry, Sophie desires to understand and support her son with the hope that he will make his way back to a life in the province.

In the end Edmund is not gay, but has instead met another woman during a breakup with his wife. This revelation, and the different reactions to it, underscore the slipperiness of queer acceptance; for example, when Sophie explains that she thought he was gay Edmund responds, "I should be insulted. But I'm just so damned relieved" (141). Here and elsewhere, the text highlights competing and complicated reactions to nonconforming sexuality, often troubling assumptions of rural/urban and old/young by situating the late-middle aged New Brunswickers as open-minded and accepting and the younger urban professionals as uncomfortable with queerness. While Sophie and Harold work to accept what they believe to be their son's nonconforming desire, Edmund views their assumption as an insult. This complexity in each character's reaction to the possibility of Edmund's desire, and Sophie's turn to literature as a means of understanding, suggests a backdrop of shifting sexualities discourse at work in New Brunswick in the 1980s. This backdrop is, of course, absent from archetypal renderings of the region in this timeframe, as well as from their critical reception. Moreover, Sophie's willingness to discard her investment in the heterosexual gift (grandchildren) suggests that ideas of familial continuation are not an all-encompassing aspect of Maritime experience.

Kulyk Keefer discusses Bauer's work as part of a different legacy of Maritime writing, noting "something low-key, laid-back, [and] resolutely un-high literary . . . It is as though she has given a voice to generations of Maritime women who have been handmaidens of silence,

who simply did not have the leisure or the authority to speak and write” (13). The language of authority here is crucial, as the reception of Nowlan, MacLeod, and Richards suggests an implicit connection between male perspective and authoritative accounts of regional experience. Who stays and leaves in this configuration becomes implicitly connected to myths of both the backwoods as a space of the white working-class (and the assumptions attendant with this categorization) and, in turn, to metronormative myths of rural space as devoid of queerness.

While Kerslake’s and Bauer’s gender is key to their lack of popular reception and the tenor of critical engagement with their work, male writers from the region whose work defies traditional archetypes are likewise sidelined. As a vocal critic of myths of regional life that tend to solidify ideas of central Canada as progressive, advanced, and all-powerful, R.M Vaughan’s cultural commentary offers an early and invaluable critique of the ways that ideas of progress can be weaponized along trajectories of settlement and development in Canada. At the same time, as a queer cultural producer and prolific writer, Vaughan’s art and mentorship refuses categorization along the normative lines he critiques so ardently; in turn, his corpus generates a legacy of difference that is crucial to recategorizing and uncovering who stays in Atlantic Canadian space. While Bauer’s text includes queer potential, and gestures to conversations and experiences occurring within the region during this period, Vaughan’s corpus offers an embodied nonconformity that queers the Atlantic region through refusal and eccentricity.

Vaughan’s work as both a cultural critic and creator has been central to contemporary understandings of Atlantic Canadian culture. Thompson effectively sums up Vaughan’s “scathing assessment of the way images of Atlantic Canada fit into the country’s mainstream culture” (13) when he writes:

Vaughan argues that many of the images associated with Atlantic Canada—the lobster, grizzled fisherman, the lighthouse, to name a few—symbolize obsolescence and servitude. But they also serve a practical function within the logic of Canadian nationalism: by reinforcing the idea that the region is in constant decline and perpetually with its hand out, stereotypes of Atlantic Canada help to create a pool of cheap labour and a store of exploitable resources, which crucially include cultural resources, for the rest of the country. (14)

While Thompson's work focuses on resource extraction, his summary of Vaughan's argument effectively encapsulates the central threads of my own interest in movement and implied sexuality.

Indeed, Vaughan critiques figures similar to those I have focused on throughout this reading of the backwoods. In "Lobster is King: Infantilizing Maritime Culture" from 1994, Vaughan reflects on the figure of the "lumpen Maritimer," arguing that those who remain in the region are believed to be dull, disinterested, and difficult; through this depiction, the people (most often men) of Atlantic Canada are distilled through regulation, repetition, circulation, and consumption until they fit national narratives of progress that position the region as a backwoods space. While bucolic space can be looked back on with fondness or revisited as a way to reconnect with a sense of authenticity outside of modernity, the backwoods is an oppositional reminder of the good parts of modern life. In this vein, archetypal figures and experiences of rural Atlantic Canada as a space of ignorance, oppression, and erasure suggest what has been gained through supposed progress, and what has been left behind. As previously outlined, part of this narrative involves metronormative ideas of progressive and regressive attitudes toward nonconforming sexualities as tied to urban and rural space. Returning to Hubbs, just like

“rednecks and queers are thought to occupy opposite ends of various . . . spectrums” (30), so too can the lumpen Maritimer breed associations of stupidity, unsophistication, and prejudice that rest at odds with ideas of intelligence, progress, and acceptance in centralized, urban space.

In contrast, Vaughan’s practice of queer refusal helps to underscore the ways this discourse of delay intersects with discourses of sexuality. He often reflects on the incongruity between regional archetypes and his own experience, noting a sense of discomfort at the continual lack of diverse and complex representation. The tension between what is expected of the region and what is experienced by those within is complicated by his own maturation as a gay young man in New Brunswick. “Throughout my life in New Brunswick,” he notes, “I have been inundated with centrally-generated images of my provincial self that have never accurately spoken of or for me” (170). Self-described as a weird kid, Vaughan was adopted by a family in Saint John at a young age. He recounts periods of bullying and homophobia throughout his schooling, noting he eventually became “just kind of mysterious” to those around him. Vaughan remembers that “the G word was never used” to describe him; instead he recalls an existence on the fringes of the fringe, and reflects on a life spent reclaiming and rebuilding a sense of himself rooted in difference rather than attempts to escape from it.⁴⁵

In an interview with Dusty Green, Vaughan is open about how New Brunswick and queerness functioned as overlapping forces that shaped his experience and outlook. While parts of his childhood were “hellish,” he also describes coming out to his mother in 1979 at the age of fourteen. “She said ‘oh that’s lovely dear’ and just kind of walked away,” he recalls, but the next

⁴⁵ Much of this information comes from an interview with Vaughan conducted by Dusty Green in 2020. The event, titled *Identity and Creativity: Art, Practice, and Joy in Life-Based Work*, was hosted by the Queer Heritage Initiative of New Brunswick. Both Natalie Sappier-Samaqani Cocahq, a Wolastoqiyik multidisciplinary artist, and Vaughan reflect on their experiences in New Brunswick as creative people, and as members of marginalized communities. For more information: <https://youtu.be/kUdas9WcSvq>

day “there was this book called *Boys and Sex* . . . on the bed and she’d bookmarked the microchapter on homosexuality which basically said: it’s fine don’t worry about it; you’re fine, there’s nothing wrong with you.” This contrasting experience of limited or passive acceptance and outright hatred not only aligns in some ways with Bauer’s depiction of responses to queerness in *Wise-Ears*, but also challenges the regional stereotypes Vaughan is so frustrated by throughout his life. There is not a one-size-fits-all experience of bigotry in the Maritimes, but instead a complex and ongoing series of relations, outcomes, and conversations. In this way, Vaughan uses his own history to speak against popular understandings of Atlantic Canada as rooted solely in decline and ignorance, instead offering a cornucopia of difference, desire, and decadence as crucial to his own development.

A far cry from the rain-slicked, harden patriarch of stereotypical Maritime representations, much of Vaughan’s work, both as a critic and creator, navigates the complexities of queer eroticism and self-acceptance. In his novel *Spells* (2003), a teenager named Andy Loch believes in (and can tap into) mysterious powers. Andy attempts to navigate rural New Brunswick in the 1970s, oscillating between feelings of powerlessness and dominance, and offering a complicated portrayal of life and relations in his small community. Like his son, Andy’s father also has powers that defy human ability, and the complex tension and love between the Lochs is crucial to the younger man’s developing sense of self. Similarly, Andy reflects on the lack of control over his body and inability to regulate how others perceive him. While most of the time this frustration stems from his magic or his weight, as the novel progresses he reflects more openly on queer longing. When he does eventually make close connections to both friends and lovers, they are complicated by communal perceptions of his family, homophobia, and, of course, bomb wielding mystics that blow up a museum exhibit.

Spells is typical Vaughan. It is dark and funny, and invested in both the external and internal factors that influence and impact one's life and self-perception. Going against the popularity of realist depictions of the region, the novel uses a Gothic approach to expose the instability of myths of Atlantic Canadian space. This use of Gothic tropes to question rural stagnation or simplicity becomes popular throughout the 1990s and into the contemporary moment. As I will discuss in Part III: The In-Between, embroiled in notions of powerful return, deviance, and liminality, Gothic resonances begin to repopulate canonical Atlantic Canadian spaces with the traces of those who have been buried by normative regional myths. In *Spells*, New Brunswick is home to sexually suggestive mystics, queer cops, and malevolent record store owners; this is most definitely not a romanticized or defeated space. Instead, in Vaughan's rural New Brunswick, depictions of male struggle and frustration are made-laughable, small-town gossip offers a kind-of mysticism, and the home place becomes a breeding ground for different kinds of devotion. Moreover, tradition and ignorance are overridden by the use of magic as a means of control; for example, Andy hexes those who mock him, and his father ends up beheading a local bully while on his way home from a Christmas party.

In both implicit and explicit ways, the narrative signals toward what is expected of New Brunswickers to then complicate or refuse this expectation. For example, when Andy waits in line at the Art Gallery of Ontario, a woman asks what part of New Brunswick he is from. In response to his answer, she tuts: "How nice. And you heard about King Tut all the way across the country," to which Andy drily replies: "It's in the newspapers" (189). Andy's frustration develops throughout this conversation; when the woman exclaims, "Learn as much as you can. I don't suppose there are many young men in New Brunswick as lucky as yourself," Andy thinks: "Move, you idiot old bitch, move, movemovemove" (189). Here, Andy is irritated by the

association between New Brunswick as a space of ignorance and Ontario as a space of intelligence. Though he often reflects on a desire to leave his home province, this moment underscores the frustration generated by stereotypes of the province as a backwoods. At the same time, this interaction turns the very idea of ignorance around. The woman is positioned as ignorant through Andy's comment "It's in the newspapers," and through her attendant suggestion that many people do not get a chance to vacation outside the province.

In this brief interaction, Vaughan sets up the idea of New Brunswick as a space at a distance from Toronto. This distance is both geographic, "all the way across the country," and intellectual, as the woman is surprised by Andy's knowledge of Egyptology and, in turn, suggests that he is an exception in his community. This interrogation of expectation also functions at the level of desire, as *Spells* is decidedly queer—not just in its skewing of regional literary conventions and tropes, but in Andy's developing recognition of nonconforming sexuality. Moving from fantasy to reality and then to somewhere in-between, Andy convinces himself that his dad's only friend is his boyfriend, dissuades himself from this belief, and then closes the text imagining "his boy, his lover . . . the man's face. It was a good face, a reliable face, or so it might seem to the lost" (231). Throughout, Vaughan refuses to easily categorize desire or offer a stable understanding of sexuality in rural space. As he makes clear in a later work (2020), "New Brunswick queers are tough. Tough as kelp. And not for reasons you think you know . . . Our queerness is built, not bestowed from afar. We take our own cues, thank you, and shall skip rocks as we please. What's that cute new word for this state of being? Liminal. Our queerness is liminal" (8). In this way, *Spells*, and Vaughan's work more broadly, offers an ideal example of the complexity of regional desiring; the narrative underscores and plays with a

desire for a version of the region from without, to in turn foreground complex existing desires from within.

This depiction of sexuality and desire in New Brunswick fits within Vaughan's wider corpus. As Sarah Brophy (1998) describes, Vaughan weaves together an "often unapologetic self-positioning as 'out' and his attempts to distance himself from the life-denying, restrictive aspects of what he sees as the dominant aesthetic of gay art in the 1990s" (174). To be sure, Vaughan engages with different strategies of resistance and focuses on nonconformity in a variety of contexts. In his poem "discontent and its society," for example, the speaker states:

remember that when you ask me how my parents deal or
 don't I ever worry about or
 how old was I when I knew
 questions you couldn't ask a married son, a woman with three
 children
 a boy of twelve
 but you can – I've fucked one, met the other, been the last. (116)

This blatant and insistent assertion of the queer self, and questioning of naturalized heterosexuality, is typical of Vaughan's work. In different ways, his corpus navigates the complexities of love, family, community, and place all while pushing against the constraints of regional expectation on a national stage.

While Vaughan explicitly questions regional stereotypes, and his criticism and cultural commentary has impacted how the region is understood, there has not been sustained scholarly or popular attention to his work. This oversight is interesting as the language used to close out Brophy's analysis of Vaughan's poetry aligns his work with the canonical regional authors

discussed above. Brophy articulates Vaughan's creative focus as "celebrat[ing] the ordinariness and the pervasiveness of gay desire, so as to 'embed' it, literally and figuratively, in 'everyday life,' releasing it in the hope of transforming the conditions of that life" (184, building from the work of Cindy Patton). The emphasis here on ordinary observation and the everyday places Vaughan's method and style in conversation with authors such as MacLeod and Richards, but with a twist. Vaughan's work is positioned as reconfiguring the normative everyday by writing himself, and others like him, into the very spaces where they have been erased.

Ultimately, the regional desiring distinguished by Vaughan is nonconforming and complicated; as he mused shortly before his death, "Contrary to central Canadian ideas, NBers in general are not conservative, uptight, or secretive. We are, instead, crafty. Foxy even" (*Marsh Blue* 8). In this way, Vaughan's writing actively works against simplistic understandings of the region, and counters derogatory positionings of the Maritimes as a stagnant backwoods. Rather than suggest a singular version of queerness created in the image of the centre, or one that strives to leave the margin as a means of progressive advancement, he offers and supports versions of queerness that he describes as "dashing, smart, and deeply local" (8). His work tirelessly questions the ways Atlantic Canada has been maligned from without, and in the recent anthology *Marsh Blue Violet: Queer Poetry from New Brunswick* (2020), creates space for a variety of writers working toward the same ends. In the wake of Vaughan's sudden passing, this collection gives voice to a new generation of creators who defy regional archetypes and push against metronormative assumptions. Taking up Vaughan's mantle, these voices signal a regional expression that is vocally queer and problematize the attendant suggestions of hegemonic heterosexuality derived from longstanding myths of the bucolic or the backwoods.

Conclusion

Like Vaughan, other writers in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s worked to revise metronormative depictions of the Atlantic region as a white male backwoods by writing nonconforming desire into regional space. Don Hannah's *The Wise and Sinister Virgins* (1999) follows a complex web of characters who live just outside of Moncton, New Brunswick and are rendered by and through their various desires. A wealthy but closeted elderly man kidnaps, pines over, and eventually releases a working-class Acadian teen from his derelict mansion. A teenage girl tries to figure out how to access abortion services in the hyper-religious province. A middle-aged virgin stages a family reunion for her brother and his lover who travel home from Toronto while struggling with complications from AIDS. In ways similar to Nowlan, MacLeod, and Richards, Hannah underscores the stratification of Atlantic Canadian society through depictions of work, outmigration, and religion. This stratification is furthered through depictions of complex desire in rural space, complicating the authenticated narrative focused on familial tradition, virile masculinity, and heteronormativity to instead outline a region imbued in contemporary sexualities discourse and multifaceted desire.

In Hannah's texts and others, the desires that emerge instigate ways of reconsidering the straight white male narrative as an authoritative experience of rural Atlantic Canadian space. These texts in turn extend a foundation for queer re-imaginings of the region, and underscore a *desire from* Atlantic Canada that rest in juxtaposition to those authenticated from without. That this *desire for*, or the solidification of an authenticated regional backwoods, occurred during a major period of political and social upheaval for marginalized communities is important. Rather than position the Atlantic region as a space embroiled in shifting discourses and liberatory politics, the texts that are celebrated in the national imaginary focus on ideas of communal

connection and continuance (often situated through heterosexual inheritance), the impacts of poverty and hard labour, and activities such as drinking and physical violence. In this characterization, those who stay in the region are positioned as belonging yet tied to the past and, through implication, physically, politically, and ideologically stagnant; in contrast, those who leave are positioned through a sense of betrayal for seeking some kind of betterment and, in so doing, creating a disjuncture with the home place and its attendant relations.

Methods of controlling the narrative and concealing certain histories, as well as experiences of difference and dissent, are part of a wider process through which regional space comes to be understood and articulated. This process is particularly overt in a national cultural infrastructure where the Canadian centre acts as the nexus of creative and critical power. The circulation of backwoods depictions of Atlantic Canada works within notions of progress that are both temporal and spatial. As a rural starting point along trajectories of national advancement, the nation's eastern edge sits in contrast to ideas of Westward progress. In this trajectory, the region is situated as a place of origin on the road to national development—a road that continues through central Canada and beyond. This positioning is spatial, in that it gestures to geographic development that is imbued with deeper understandings of rural space as traditional or backward. At the same time, this positioning is temporal, in the associations between the region as outdated and static which suggest the inherent modernity of those spaces outside of it. For my context, this positioning is ultimately metronormative in that it upholds, implicitly or explicitly, an understanding of the region as a space devoid of nonconforming desire.

As I have shown, the latter decades of the twentieth century act as a kind-of conceptual building block in developing understandings of the Atlantic region as a rural space. The popular reception, circulation, and celebration of writing by MacLeod, Richards, Nowlan, and others

reiterates and extends this belief, constructing a norm by way of “obscuring . . . [and] ignoring. Which slides easily into concealing and deliberately distorting” (Campbell, Bell, and Finney 4). Speaking of the “signifying practice” of stereotypical representation, in “The Spectacle of the ‘Other’” Stuart Hall (2013) outlines the power structures at work in the reduction of a people or place. This process often involves fetishization and connects the “conscious and overt” aspects of representation (images, narratives, film, spaces) to the “unconscious or suppressed” aspects (252). Often, these unspoken features are the sexualized and/or forbidden objects of intrigue or desire. In this way, stereotypical representations collapse the experiences of heterogeneous groups of people into easily digestible narratives; in the context of the Atlantic Canadian backwoods, this occurs through repeated depictions of male struggle, familial continuance, and unmarked heterosexuality as indicative of a regional ethos. The ways in which archetypes of the region have overshadowed the experiences of women, as well as, racialized and Indigenous communities have been discussed by Wyile, Fuller, Thompson, and others; however, explicit attention to the implications surrounding sexuality and normative codes of desire that emerge from such archetypes remains to be explored. Therefore, this part of my project offers a first step along what I hope to be a much longer, more varied, and complex path of inquiry.

Ultimately, I contend, there is a *desire for* the region understood in this way. This desire not only allows those reading from outside to observe and scrutinize, but also to understand themselves in opposition to what they encounter. The region as a rural backwoods is therefore rooted in a *desire for* the region that is constituted through negative association and used as a means of progressive comparison. As I discuss in the upcoming sections, this oppositional or progressive comparison becomes a point of contention for contemporary authors who use the Gothic to trouble myths of the Atlantic region. While some Gothic texts work along

metronormative lines, others importantly skew this normative trajectory to render queer life in the region and, at the same time, turn the voyeuristic gaze toward the centre. In these texts, lines of progress—at the levels of both time and space—are recalibrated through the spectres of sexual nonconformity which haunt regional space.

Part III: The In-Between

As moonlight crowns thy pine-clad hills, there is a darkness that spreads its hand into the nooks and crannies of the rocky landscape and lingers under the gleeful façade of Newfoundland and Labrador.

It's not on billboards.

It's not in magazines or featured on cooking shows.

When ginger-haired children run through tourism commercials alongside a clothesline strewn with floral-printed sheets from nan's spare room, the sheets don't catch the shape of a body that isn't actually standing in the sun-drenched field of high grass.

But that darkness is there. Waiting to envelope the place like fog smothering the harbour.

—Mike Hickey, *Terror Nova: An Anthology of Newfoundland Inspired Horror*

by nature [ghosts] are haunting reminders of lingering trouble (xix).

—Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*

As discussed in my last section, a particular construction of the backwoods holds a central position in the canon of Atlantic Canadian literature. Writers such as Alden Nowlan, Alistair MacLeod, and David Adams Richards have received critical acclaim for their realist observations of regional life, with their attention to the everyday and the local being lauded for a sense of authenticity and grit. At the same time, many writers from the region play with glimmers of Gothic potential in their depictions of the region. For instance, in *Canadian Gothic: Literature, History, and the Spectre of Self-Invention* (2014) Cynthia Sugars argues that “an often overlooked aspect of [*Anne of Green Gables*] is the extent to which Anne ‘gothicizes’ her adoptive landscape of Avonlea, Prince Edward Island” (135). Sugars reads Anne and Diana as giving a “mythical resonance” to the landscape, a quality exacerbated by their use of “conventional Gothic fictions (headless men, murdered children, wailing women dressed in white)” to render the space “culturally interesting” (136). These Gothic resonances provide a means of making Prince Edward Island strange, and push against conventional depictions of regional space through a child’s imaginative interpretation of her surroundings.

Gothic traces also arise in Frank Parker Day's *Rockbound*. Gershom's ghost stories, his devilish turn to madness, and the foggy haunted lighthouse all function as part of a fin-de-siècle Gothic tradition.⁴⁶ These elements register anxieties developing in Nova Scotia at the time, one of which, as I have argued, is the supposed threat of nonconforming desire. Because this particular unease remains unspeakable in Day's moment, the Gothic aspects of the novel can be understood as gesturing to something at work below the surface of the narrative. Ghosts and madness emerge in slippery moments between David and Gershom or when the erotic triangle slips off kilter and causes problems for a normative reading of desire. That is the power of the Gothic form. Depending on its use, the Gothic can both highlight and keep hidden and often thrives in liminal and unexpected experiences and locales.

While examples of Gothic tropes and figures can be found throughout the Atlantic Canadian literary corpus, in the 1990s there is a shift toward the Gothic as a means of representing the particularities of the region's history and culture. As I will discuss in an upcoming section, elsewhere in Canada such a turn begins during a period of literary nationalism in the 1960 and 1970s; in the Atlantic region, however, novels, such as *The Afterlife of George Cartwright* (1991) by John Steffler or, a decade later, Michael Crummeys' *River Thieves* (2001) begin to use Gothic tropes to attend to histories of colonialism and settler violence in the region. Other texts that emerge during this shift, such as *The Divine Ryans* (1990) by Wayne Johnston and *Fall on Your Knees* (1996) by Ann-Marie MacDonald, take part in a wider movement

⁴⁶ Pilar Somacarrerra (2004) describes the "fin-de-siècle revival of the Gothic, exemplified in works such as *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886), Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891), H.G. Wells's *Island of Dr Moreau* (1896) and Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897)." She argues that "this new Gothic is concerned with the horrific re-making of the human subject, within a general anxiety about the nature of human identity permeating late Victorian and Edwardian culture, an anxiety generated by scientific discourses, biological and socio-medical, which served to dismantle conventional notions of 'the human' as radically as did the Gothic which arose in response to them" (71). Though Day published *Rockbound* slightly later than this period, Gershom's turn to madness, and the Gothic tropes that pop up around his relationship with David, could be read within the anxieties generated by psychological and sexological discourse.

toward navigating sexual difference via the Gothic. A turn toward ghosts, specifically, to represent queer desire is part of a wider shift. As my overview of the queer Gothic as a genre underscores, there is a broad move into thinking about spectral return as a means of attending to histories of oppression, necessary movement, and, importantly, queer love.

The spectre, as an essence of liminality, rests at the heart of my argument in Part III: The In-Between. Unlike the closet as a space of relational stasis, or the causeway as a means of relational movement, my central frame here is one of disruption. As an embodiment of liminality—of the in-between or the here-and-gone—the spectral figures discussed throughout the upcoming sections enact, or at least attempt to enact, a sense of embodied queerness as tethered to the Atlantic region. In so doing, and in different ways, each figure disrupts ideas of belonging, relation, and being in space and time. Each text under study includes the figure of a queer ghost, suggesting, I argue, an active disturbance of many literary conventions within the region. At the same time, these disruptive figures are not all equally successful.

To make this argument, I will outline the role of spectral sexuality in the queer Gothic form generally, as well as think about the parameters of return unique to an Atlantic Canadian context. Uncanny rural landscapes and haunted houses are frequent facets of the queer Gothic; therefore, the form takes on particular resonances in Atlantic Canadian literature where rural simplicity or stagnancy, and the attendant connotations of familial tradition, have become defining features of the canon. Throughout, I examine the tension between tropes of death and haunting as the static suppression of nonconforming desire and the use of spectral nonconforming sexuality to animate historical oppression, highlight interconnected structures of regulation, and demonstrate the vibrant reality of the region's past and present. Each text under study offers an alternative way to read and represent the region. While *The Divine Ryans* and

Christy-Ann Conlin's *The Memento* (2016) situate domestic space as only-ever oppressive and rooted in heterosexual dominance, *Fall on Your Knees* and Jaime Burnet's *Crocuses Hatch from Snow* (2019) use spectral sexuality to restore personhood to their respective ghosts.

As I outline, there is a difference between novels that feature queer ghosts that haunt Atlantic Canada and novels that express a queer Gothic sensibility rooted in the specificities of Atlantic Canada. On the one hand, novels such as *The Divine Ryans* and *The Memento* include queer desire in a way that exposes intersecting oppressions of homophobia, religion, class, and family; here, queer male ghosts haunt their home places as both metaphor and method of character development. These ghosts are interesting to think about in conversation with the male archetypes noted in Part II: The Backwoods, as their return, in part, signals the constraints of masculinity in the region. On the other hand, texts such as *Fall on Your Knees* and *Crocuses Hatch from Snow* evoke a spectral queerness rooted in disruptive embodiment. Though their ghostly presence is less concrete and manifest, the women that haunt MacDonald's and Burnet's novels do so on their own accord. The impacts of their spectral presence, and the root of their haunting in nonconforming desire, sends powerful ripples through the narrative that deconstruct ideas of here/there, rural/urban, region/centre, and regress/progress offering a sustained reflection on broad structures of oppression and the importance of recognizing both subjugation and queer joy.

Section One: Spectral Sexualities and Queer Returns

In the new introduction to *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (2008), Avery Gordon writes that “Haunting is not the same as being exploited, traumatized, or oppressed, although it usually involves these experiences or is produced by them. What’s distinctive about haunting is that it is an animated state in which a repressed or unresolved social violence is making itself known, sometimes very directly, sometimes more obliquely” (xvi). The return of the familiar made strange, the emergence of a frightening vision from the past, or the coming together of the once-gone but now-here can be fleeting, but these events are not easily dismissed. For Gordon, “ghosts appear when the trouble they represent and symptomize is no longer being contained or repressed or blocked from view. The ghost . . . is not the invisible or some ineffable excess. The whole essence, if you can use that word, of a ghost is that it has a real presence and demands its due, your attention” (xvi). The feeling of being haunted can be an aspect of daily life, and Gordon reflects on the ways that lingering social violence or resurfacing historical harms create trouble in their ongoing presence. Once exposed, the haunting authority asks for something to be done, creating a “sociopolitical-psychological state” (vxi) that interferes with notions of historical containment or repressions limited to or within the past.

Literary fiction plays an important role in giving shape and meaning to this nebulous state of resurfacing. Fiction demonstrates “what we need to know but cannot quite get access to with our given rules of method and modes of apprehension” (25). Gothic texts are particularly useful for exploring the parameters of what Gordon calls this “imaginative design.” As Fred Botting (2012) outlines, Gothic expression has long acted as “a screen for the consumption and projection of the present into a past at once distant and close by. The play of distance and proximity, rejection and return, telescopes history, both condensing the past into an object of

idealized or negative speculation and unraveling and disarming the gaze of the present with its ambivalent return” (22). This fluctuation of time creates a liminal arena where conflict exists within the particular parameters of a historical moment that is both detached yet familiar. Indeed, Gothic writing has always “resonate[d] as much with anxieties and fears concerning the crises and changes in the present as with any terrors of the past” (14), offering an elaborate stage upon which processes of memory, trauma, anxiety, violence, transgression, and return can play out.

Functioning as a reminder that “the past and the present are neither discrete nor sequential” (Freccero 196), ghosts and haunting tend to be particularly useful for interrogating ongoing socio-political concerns. Literary ghosts often mediate and interfere with our relation to time, place, and space by instigating the reader’s complex return into a historical narrative while at the same time bringing past happenings (oppression, degradation, violence) into the present in spectral form. For Carla Freccero (2007), the “borderline between then and now wavers, wobbles, and does not hold still” (196). In this process, where time loses a traditional trajectory, space becomes a cornerstone for reader understanding. More than just the area within which the text is set or plays out, particular spaces take on renewed meaning and solidity. Recuperated from the background, certain rooms, landscapes, and locations become powerful forces for navigating turmoil and its wider social roots and causes. This foregrounding of space asks readers to consider how the traces of history may linger and create tension in particular localities.

In the American Gothic tradition, for example, rural space sustains certain connotations that seem to exist outside of time. In *The Rural Gothic in American Popular Culture: Backwoods Horror and Terror in the Wilderness* (2013), Bernice Murphy writes that “The US in the twenty-first century may be a predominantly urban (and suburban) nation, but something keeps drawing writers and film-makers back to [the] point of initial contact, and to the cultural constructions

that have sprung up around it” (2). As a “distinct sub-genre existing within (and closely related to) the wider American Gothic tradition” (4), the rural American Gothic is rooted in constructions of race, space, and religion tied to moments of national origin and the rural frontier. Moreover, because “Gothic in an American context has come to connote the American South” (Bjerre, 4), this rural Gothic is often rooted in particular spaces and images. Swamps, decaying plantations, mountain shacks, and uncanny pastoral locales highlight “the extent to which the vision of the idyllic South rests on massive repressions of the region’s historical realities: slavery, racism, and patriarchy . . . take concrete forms in the shape of ghosts or grotesque figures that highlight all that has been unsaid in the official version of southern history” (5). As Bjerre (2017) suggests, American Gothic texts often interrogate contradictory notions of rural space as either “a pastoral idyll, an agrarian garden free of toil” or the South as “a repository for all of America’s shortcomings: a region of sickness and backwardness” (4). As I have argued throughout the project, the movement between assumptions of simplicity or stagnancy, or idyllic versus ignorant spaces, likewise exists in constructions of Atlantic Canadian space. Because such depictions often cater to a marketplace outside the region, the continued positioning of the region along a seesaw of the bucolic or the backwoods suggests the kinds of people, experiences, and desires that exist therein.

Indeed, the notion of the rural as both a positive space of the pastoral and a negative space of dangerous potential aligns in many ways with the Gothic tradition in Canadian literature. In particular, the postcolonial Gothic has shaped key understandings of Canadian space in literary criticism. This lens often situates Canadian landscapes (like the bush, the North, or the Prairie town) as exposing feelings of “territorial illegitimacy, anxiety about forgotten or occluded histories, resentment towards flawed or complicit ancestors, assertions of [Indigenous]

priority, explorations of hybrid cultural forms, and interrogations of national belonging” (Turcotte and Sugars ix). A slipperiness emerges in these representations, where wild space, like the dense forest, comes into conversation with small outcroppings or towns.⁴⁷ In contrast to larger centres, this multifaceted space is understood as relationally rural. As Sugars explains in her entry on the Canadian Gothic in *A New Companion to the Gothic* (2015), the “drive to resurrect forgotten local histories” in postcolonial consciousness makes use of rural localities as a means to “forge a Gothic presence amidst these seemingly placid Canadian communities” (418).

Moreover, Canadian Gothic traditions tend to be regionalized and therefore approach space in different ways depending on location. The Southern Ontario Gothic, for instance, often navigates an uneasy sense of common connection or generational rootedness, and features small towns or modest dwellings that directly abut a fear-inducing wilderness. The Southern Ontario Gothic emerged through “prevalent [fictions] in the nationalist revival period in the 1960s and 1970s” (Sugars 418).⁴⁸ In ways similar to the thrust of male narratives noted in Part II: The Backwoods, the nationalist origins of the Southern Ontario Gothic involve an “emphasis on historical uncovering and legend.” For Sugars, the process effectively charges “the local with historical relevance, thus achieving a redemptive effect by infusing Canadian locations with a history they were long seen to lack” (418). This palimpsestic process of re-inscribing or revitalizing localized histories can be found in Margaret Atwood’s *Surfacing* (1972), *Lady Oracle* (1976), and *Alias Grace* (1996); Robertson Davies’s *Fifth Business* (1970), *The*

⁴⁷ There are some instances of Gothic hauntings in urban space in this period; for example, Dennis Lee’s “Civil Elegies” uses poetry to explore questions of citizenship and belonging in Toronto.

⁴⁸ There are early examples of Gothic writing in Southern Ontario space that Hepburn and Hurley (2006) outline as the foundation for the postcolonial canon; for example, Richardson’s *Wacousta* (1832) and Susanna Moodie’s survival stories in *Roughing it in the Bush* (1852).

Manticore (1972), and *World of Wonders* (1975); Alice Munro's *Lives of Girls and Women* (1971); Jeff Lemire's contemporary graphic trilogy *Essex County* (2009), and many other creative works.

These texts and others use local histories of Southern Ontario to move through similar geographic area and respond to the eerie lingering of the past in the present. They also detail imposing threats both external, lying just beyond the treeline, and internal, lurking within the proprieties that govern everyday life. Moreover, specific kinds of ghosts haunt the landscapes of Southern Ontario in unique ways; for example, Hepburn and Hurley (2006) provide a definition of the subgenre in *The Oxford Handbook of Canadian Literature*, explaining that certain threats and actions are tied to particular spaces and figures. Threats to female protagonists are often tied to the wilderness, where "Irrational figures like the Wild man, the Wild woman, fool-saints, or wendigos provide the apparition of the supernatural within the Canadian bush" (2). Alternately, the navigation of family secrets or tainted bloodlines tends to occur in the domestic realm or institutionalized spaces like the church. Throughout, the Southern Ontario Gothic explores "the deadening and deforming forces beneath genteel surfaces, manifest in the merciless forces of Perfectionism, Propriety, Protestantism, and Prudence" (2). Marked both by the particularities of regional space and figures related to this space, the specific ghosts of Southern Ontario would not be caught dead in the landscapes of the Canadian North or the Prairies.

With its own approach to, and use of, Gothic tropes and figures, regionalized Gothic writing taps into broad socio-political issues by using the particularities of oppression, suppression, threat, and memory tied to recognizable regional histories and spaces. In this way, Atlantic Canadian space is haunted by and through its own unique spectres and symbols. As the first epigraph suggests, the "darkness that spreads its hand into the nooks and crannies of the

rocky landscape” or the shapeless presence that rests just off screen as “ginger-haired children run through tourism commercials” are unique to Newfoundland and Labrador. Likewise, it would be hard to imagine the misty seascapes, abandoned mines, or dilapidated Victorian mansions of rural Nova Scotia resting on an ice floe in the North. Rendered in ways specific to Atlantic Canadian space, Gothic figures offer a rumination on, and an interrogation of, the lingering impacts of social, political, and economic structures in the region’s history and present, such as resource extraction, economic disparity, and heteropatriarchal families.

Additionally, Gothic novels from Atlantic Canada often play with the region’s homogenization as simplistic, stagnant, and traditional and use key tropes from the canon, such as rural settings, domestic spaces, and miners or fishermen, to draw on popular representations while simultaneously rendering these signals uncanny. For example, Bethany Daigle (2018) argues that Leo McKay’s 2003 novel *Twenty-Six* “targets the localized nature of the poverty and the hopelessness that haunt Pictou County,” Nova Scotia; while poverty and hopelessness can occur anywhere, Daigle suggests that the haunting and doubling used in the novel troubles past/present distinctions to underscore regionally specific histories of economic depression and dispossession. Thus, depicted in ways specific to Atlantic Canada, ghostly figures can offer a rumination on, and an interrogation of, the lingering impacts of social, political, and economic structures in the region’s history and present, such as resource extraction, economic disparity, and, key for my own interests, heteropatriarchal traditions.

This use of local parameters and the particulars of regional space is also essential within the subgenre of the queer Gothic. Because, as Phyllis M. Betz (2011) asserts, “sex is one of the most policed areas of human experience . . . What is exactly meant by ‘unnatural’ clearly relates to the time and place in which the story is situated” (14). Though the Gothic as a form has

always been queer (Hughes and Smith, 1), in *Queering Contemporary Gothic Narrative 1970-2012*, Paulina Palmer (2016) argues that the “queer Gothic as a specific literary form and the critical texts that analyse and define it have developed relatively recently” (8). George Haggerty (2006), William Hughes and Andrew Smith (2009), Palmer (1999, 2016), and others have argued that queer Gothic texts make use of tropes and figures found in the traditional Gothic to explore and expose the parameters of the supposed real that uphold and naturalize heteronormative institutions and relations. The figure of the vampire, the monster, the ghost, or the mysterious deviant all function as iterations of the abject,⁴⁹ sectioning off particular factions of society as grotesque or unnatural. The queer Gothic works to confront abjection by animating these figures; in so doing, the form both outlines the processes that condone the othering of sexual nonconformity in particular spaces and offers the potential for the oppressed to return as a powerful force.

While not always subversive, queer Gothic texts often “challenge realist perspectives and investigate dimensions of experience that realist fiction tends to ignore or repress” (Palmer, *Lesbian Gothic* 3). This challenge to convention makes the queer Gothic particularly interesting in an Atlantic Canadian context, where realist fiction has been “the Maritime region’s dominant literary genre” since the First World War (Creelman 5). Because queer hauntings slip out of the specificities of a given time to attend to the particularities of space, an Atlantic Canadian queer Gothic often hinges on the rural and familial spaces central within the realist canon. My focus on haunted domestic spaces, for example, will highlight how queer Gothic texts play with familial space to outline dominant and ongoing heteropatriarchal structures in the region. The

⁴⁹ Julia Kristeva (1980) argues that the “phobic has no other object than the abject” (6). “It is not a lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection” Kristeva writes, “but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite” (4). See *Powers of Horror: An Essay in Abjection* for a more detailed exploration.

particularities of the haunted home place tell readers something about histories of localized oppression, and suggest what bodies, desires, and relations continue to be naturalized as belonging to, or safe within, specific sites.

In the queer Gothic, the haunted house acts as both a means of addressing homophobia and heteronormative violence and as a location for the spectral return of the oppressed as a potentially powerful force. This return has the possibility not only to detail the damaging impacts of a toxic home life, but also to function as an ongoing disruption. To return to Gordon, “The way of the ghost is haunting, and haunting is a very particular way of knowing what has happened or is happening. Being haunted draws us affectively, sometimes against our will and always a bit magically, into the structure of feeling of a reality we come to experience, not as cold knowledge, but as a transformative recognition” (8). Ghosts appear, remain, and demand. They “interrogate the reader’s preconceptions about reality and expose the unfamiliar underlying the mundane” (Palmer 3). Because the home place and domestic realm form such a key space of meaning-making in Atlantic Canadian literature, queering this space via nonconforming sexual spectrality raises crucial questions about experiences of desire in the Atlantic region. Moreover, as the next section will underscore, what and how these ghosts demand is crucial to navigating the slippery line between a one-dimensional representation of sexuality in regional space and an active and disruptive embodiment of queerness that disrupts normative categories of desire and Atlantic Canadian life.

Section Two: Impacts of Absence in *The Divine Ryans* and *The Memento*

Wayne Johnston's *The Divine Ryans* (1990) is an apt place to begin a discussion of both a Gothic turn and a queer turn in the Atlantic Canadian literary sphere. As I will show, the St. John's of the text is a city that compels nonconforming sexuality into invisibility, stagnancy, and non-existence. The domestic spaces of the novel, rooted in relation to their wider surroundings, are crucial to this process. Narrator Draper Doyle's abandoned family home and the wider Ryan family's homestead rest in juxtaposition to each other, offering a complicated understanding of belonging and suggesting that some homes may be safer than others for those who do not fit a heteronormative ideal. Building from criticism that connects Donald Ryan's spectral presence to hockey and his son, I investigate how the tension between haunted and non-haunted spaces functions alongside Donald's slippery spectral presence to suggest a queerness made-impossible because of familial and communal confinement. Moving away from sentimental or metaphorical readings, I discuss how Newfoundland is situated in relation to an elsewhere of possible freedom, and reflect on the function of Donald's presence in the spaces of St. John's. Ultimately, I review the potential damage of using the figure of a dead gay man to emphasize St. John's as a space devoid of, or hostile to, queer desire, and suggest how this narrative reinforces metronormative stereotypes of the Atlantic region.

Set in the late 1960s, *The Divine Ryans* is narrated by nine-year-old Draper Doyle as he struggles to come to terms with his father's death. Draper's dad, Donald Ryan, ran the local newspaper and was an avid hockey fan. Although his work and general demeanor kept him at a distance from the family when he was alive, his death is still devastating. In the year since, Draper has blocked out the memories of his last week with his father, and he, his sister Mary, and their mother Linda have been forced to leave their home "for the greater good" (24). This

good is decided by his domineering Aunt Phil, who forces the trio to move into her large and foreboding home. Draper's hilarious Uncle Reginald lives in a separate apartment on the top floor of the house—another victim of Phil's compulsory relocations—and he offers Draper psycho-analysis sessions. During these sessions, they speak of hockey, the family, and Draper's maturation. Crucially, they also discuss the ghost of Donald Ryan, whose visits to Draper instigate a flurry of recovered memories and realizations for the young boy. This process climaxes in Draper's recollection of witnessing his father with another man and of finding his father's body on the couch in their family home. Using wit, religion, and sport, the novel follows Draper as he tries to understand his father in the context of their family and the place in which they live.

Johnston won the Thomas Raddall Atlantic Fiction Award for *The Divine Ryans* and the novel was eventually adapted to film in 1999. Reviews of the novel are positive, and tend to focus on Johnston's use of humour, heartbreak, and hockey; for example, *Kirkus Reviews* (1999) writes that *The Divine Ryans* is a “practically perfect comic novel” with a tone of “perfectly modulated comic satire.” Likewise, Leo Furey of the *Antigonish Review* playfully states, “this is a comic novel of the most serious sort.”⁵⁰ Most critics agree that Johnston effectively portrays the “family unit as both sanctuary and madhouse” (*Kirkus*), and that sport functions as a stabilizing force. Indeed, Jason Blake (2018) considers how “hockey and play are more than an escapist flight from real life: they help Draper make sense of his world” (43). More than recreation, Draper figures out the complicated present by turning to past hockey games, for

⁵⁰ Furey goes so far as to envision his own ideal film adaptation of the novel, describing that “I stopped more than once to consider what a wonderful film the Codco crew could make of *The Divine Ryans*”, noting the specificities of growing up Catholic in St. John's in the mid-1900s as a conjoiner for both the comic crew and the text.

example, or by asking his scrotum-cum-truthteller “Methuselah” who will win the Stanley Cup (Johnston 48) and “What does my father want” (49).

In this way, hockey is a gateway to connection for Draper and his family. It is “a lifeline thrown to the son by the father’s ghost” (Sugars “Notes” 159), and functions as a “substitute for filial intimacy” (Cook 132) by bringing the family together around the television, through conversations about past games, or through secrets “encoded in a series of hockey puns” (132). Moreover, hockey is connected to “a simultaneous recognition and denial of the father’s homosexuality” (Sugars 159), placing sexual nonconformity at the centre of *The Divine Ryans*. While Furey describes the moment Draper sees his father with another man as “the tenderest scene of all” (7), in his piece for *The Journal of Newfoundland Studies* (1991) Stuart Pierson situates the novel’s final exposé as “unsuccessful” (80). He describes the closing scenes in surprising detail, and appears annoyed by the “symbolic swirls and flips” that are involved in the exposition of Donald’s sexuality. While there “is much to admire and deplore” in the novel, Pierson finds fault with jokes that are “tasteless and misplaced” or “too long, too crude, and too juvenile” (82).

That the narrative follows the memories of a nine-year-old boy appears trivial to Pierson; however, Draper’s juvenile perspective is central to how the novel explores the tensions around religion, class, and normative codes of gender and sexuality that dominate life for the family.⁵¹ Draper’s childhood perspective, in most cases, reserves judgement as he attempts to understand the intersecting systems that regulate their lives, and he often questions rather than accepts these

⁵¹ For instance, Cook reads his prepubescent dreams of the half-sister-half-mother figure of Momary as “a highly constructed creature” that signals a “failed sexuality” the young boy cannot comprehend (125). She speaks specifically of Momary as a kind-of “interpretative predicament” for Draper, a grotesque figure he is terrified to look upon, yet one he must confront to understand and encounter his repressed memories (143).

structures. Most available readings of Draper's understanding of his father's sexuality are tied to his own sexual maturation. Sugars and Cook position Draper's budding sexuality—his growing knowledge of his body, sexualized dreams, and eventual first ejaculation—as intertwined with the search for insight into his father's death. In this way, Donald's queerness is understood as the taboo root of Draper's "obsessive need to know where he has come from" (Sugars 164).

Importantly, this obsession unfolds through Draper's slow recognition of the pressures of familial tradition and the heterosexual legacy that he learns was foisted upon his father. As in the fiction of MacLeod, a key pressure facing Johnston's male characters is the continuation of the familial line. For some, life as a priest offers a reprieve; however, as Draper learns more about his father, he begins to understand the burden of carrying on the Ryan name. This familial line, or what Ahmed, as I have noted, calls the heterosexual gift, becomes too heavy for Donald. He withdraws from his family and community and, once his secret has been exposed to Draper, the only remaining Ryan progenitor, he is no longer able to withstand the weight.

Of course, readers do not know this at the start of the novel. Instead, Draper's inquisitive nature allows him to uncover family secrets and gain a fuller picture of his father which, in turn, offers readers insight into what life may have been like for a gay man in St. John's in this moment. My interest lies primarily in why Donald resurfaces at this time and in these spaces. Donald not only returns to haunt St. John's a year after his death but, because the novel is set in the 1960s and published in the early 1990s, his ghost also haunts readers more than twenty years after the events in the narrative. Muddled in time, the ghost becomes "a domain of legitimacy . . . [who] comes back because there is something unfinished" (Freccero 196). Understood in this liminal sense, Johnston's use of spectral nonconformity as a narrative stronghold deserves sustained consideration, not just for how it functions as a tool for others' development but also

for the particular parameters of its manifestation. If Donald's presence is to be read as the suggestion of a lingering trouble, it is worth thinking about the where and the why of his troubling return.

While some critics have argued that in *The Divine Ryans* "Newfoundland exists as a kind of present absence in the text . . . there but largely as a backdrop" (Sugars 153), others read the city of St. John's as an amalgam; for example, Paul Chafe (2013) refers to the setting as "St. Johnston's": a familiar version of Newfoundland found in many of Johnston's texts that features misfits, structures of social distortion, and grandiose government and religious configurations critiqued for their influence on the everyday (160). The St. John's of *The Divine Ryans* is certainly shifty, and it is hard to get a sense of the different spaces and locations, distorted as they are by both the juvenile narrator and his Gothicized visions; yet, the local specificities of the city, and the relational positioning of the province in the narrative, are crucial to Johnston's representation of haunted/haunting sexuality.

The central realm of the novel is the Ryan family empire. This domain consists of Aunt Phil's house and the "four corners: the *Chronicle* and the funeral home, which we owned, and the orphanage and the convent, which we might as well have owned, given how someone named Ryan had been running them" (2). Theirs is the stuff of life and death—events and funerals, birth and the afterlife—suggesting a Ryan-based permeation of all spheres of existence. What lies outside of this domain, however, is equally important. Draper positions the house he shared with his father, mother, and sister as a separate entity. While looking out from Aunt Phil's house, he relates: "I could see [our house] from my bedroom window . . . I could see right into the rooms, all of which were empty" (2). Set apart from the five points of the empire, this exchange of proximity and distance suggests that Draper's immediate family is different from their wider

community. This fragmented home place signals a peculiar domestic configuration from the opening pages.

After recognizing his sense of separation, Draper then further differentiates his father from the Ryan clan. Readers learn that Donald “had barely spoken at family gatherings. His often distant, preoccupied manner had been put down to what Sister Louise had called ‘the fineness of his mind’” (72). In life, Donald is subdued and detached while the family watches hockey, barely registering the goals scored by his beloved Habs. Even the ghostly Donald strikes Draper as incongruent with their domestic routines. When he first sees his father’s ghost in their old home Draper wonders if his father is “hiding from us. It seemed like the kind of thing he would do” (7). In this way, Donald is situated as both perplexed by and secretive within domestic space. He is withdrawn, despondent, and misunderstood—a man whose breakdown a few years before his death was viewed by his family as inevitable because of his intellect, and whose “curious awkwardness” with his wife was comic relief for those around him.

Aligned with the different, the distanced, and the queer, the memories of Donald’s life and the time around his death hint toward his nonconforming desire. These suggestions taunt the unknowing Draper as he works to understand his father and their relationship through each new revelation. For example, even though he lived outside the province for five years, the only concrete information readers receive of Donald’s time in this elsewhere is through the Oxford Rhodes Blades. As Draper studies an old picture of the team, he tells readers that “Rhodes Blades were wearing blazers and slacks, and sitting crossed-legged in their armchairs, they were also, all of them, wearing skates” (157). The “elegantly crossed” legs, nonchalance, and smirks of the men seem odd to Draper, and he is aware that there is something at work in the photograph that he does not understand.

Though he eventually figures things out, he is initially “Ignorant of the camp subtext and homoerotic undertones of this photograph harkening back to a fin-de-siecle men’s club gathering,” and fails to “descry the ‘joke behind the joke’” (Cook 143) in a way that readers do not. The “game of hide and seek” (Blake 49) that Donald and the other men play is therefore included for the contemporary reader, enacting a purposeful “game of hiding in plain sight and daring the viewer to discover their secret” (49). This gesture to a culture of male play works to expose the parameters of Donald’s difference. For Draper, this picture offers another means of shaking loose his buried memories. For readers, the picture suggests that Donald was able to play with codes of gender and sexuality during his time at Oxford, outside of the confines of his home place. The fact that Donald has found another man to have sex with in St. John’s, which may suggest a potential network of queer relations within the city, is overshadowed. Instead, the focus remains on the need to leave Newfoundland to experience the full potential of his desire.

Indeed, Donald’s freedom is tethered to the particular spaces of not-Newfoundland—his four years at Oxford are situated as a reprieve from life on the Canadian margin and his missing year in Montreal is understood as a grasp for freedom before returning to the repressive spaces of St. John’s.⁵² These spaces of escape sit along a trajectory that places St. John’s as a space of oppression. This positioning is made explicit when Draper comes to understand that his father’s time away offered “the kind of life he could never keep secret at home” (184). While some form of freedom is available outside the province, a life of celibate service in the priesthood or of

⁵² The Stanley Cup puck Donald gives Draper offers a clue to his whereabouts during that time. He was in Montreal from 1952-1953, steadfastly escaping the confines of both family and community by spending time in an urban Canadian centre. Interestingly, Uncle Reginald tells Draper that, while the family uses the word “missing” to describe this time, the word hiding “would have been more like it” (153). This language harkens back to the opening scene in which Draper believes his father could be hiding in the shadows of their dark and empty house, thereby connecting Donald’s time in Montreal with some sort of shadowy presence in the domestic sphere of St. John’s. There is an interesting tension here in the idea of hiding while away while also hiding upon his return: from whom is Donald hiding in each location, and what aspects of his selfhood are repressed in different spaces?

secrets and struggle in the “marriage bed” (161) are situated as the only options for a man who desires men in Newfoundland. In this way, Donald’s time in both England and Montreal functions only to strengthen a representation of St. John’s as a space embroiled in familial, religious, cultural, and historical pressures. St. John’s is situated as a space that is only-ever inhospitable to nonconformity, and a space within which desires must be secreted, suppressed, or snuffed out.

The burden of Donald’s life in St. John’s becomes clear through his suicide note. As Blake describes, Donald’s shame is “Etched among the hockey scores . . . the suicide note that serves as crucial written proof of what Aunt Phil would deem the double sin of suicide and homosexuality” (49). In finding this note, inscribed on the cover of a book the pair used to bond over hockey games, Draper realizes the harm of his father’s suppressed desire in the home place. The note suggests Linda knew of Donald’s sexuality and tells Draper: “*You will all be better off without me*” (207). After reading, Draper reports that “It took a few bewildering moments before I realized that this letter had been written, not after, but before my father’s death, not by my father’s ghost, but by my father” (207).⁵³

Donald’s note reveals the heteronormative strictures he faced in both the social and familial realms. After writing the note, Donald dies by suicide on the couch while his wife and children sleep nearby, underscoring the intensity or impossibility of these strictures. Likewise, after Draper finds the note, Donald’s ghost is expunged from the narrative. He dissipates once the knowledge of his queer desire is solidified; this deviancy from the appropriate path is figured

⁵³ At this point, Draper has recovered the memory of seeing his father “with another man, engaged in what might have been some strange form of mimicry, their trousers down around their ankles, their shirt-tails and their ties hanging loose” (Johnston 184).

as a force so shameful that his son pictures it as a “cyanide capsule” carried around in his father’s pocket, ready to be taken at the moment of revelation.

For Donald, queer desire is never redeemed or rendered powerful. Instead, both his youth and adulthood in St. John’s are marked only by suppression, silence, and separation. Even his last words, after being seen by his son and uttered in narrative, are concealed. “One night, as the carpenters who were still working on our old house were getting ready to leave,” Draper tells readers: “I went over and, when no one was looking, pushed the book through one of the holes they had knocked in the plaster . . . It may have been found . . . or it may still be there, rotting like some skeleton between the walls” (213). In this way, Draper becomes the one who wields the power of his father’s secret. He remembers and discovers the truth, only to hide it again after the search is over. In fact, the only real change that results from the exposition of Donald’s secret occurs when Draper enters Aunt Phil’s room late at night and utters the words, “I know about Dad” (209). With these words, he releases Linda, Mary, and himself from the constraints of the Ryan sphere and the novel closes as the family leaves Newfoundland for an unknown destination.

While it is encouraging that Donald’s wife and children can escape the pressures of the community, the spaces within which Donald lived and resurfaced do not change because of his presence. Donald has no agency or impact in St. John’s, and this powerlessness raises questions about the function of queer spectrality in the text and how his character can be understood within as an Atlantic Canadian Gothic figure. In some ways, Donald functions as an example of the “bury your gays” trope. Outlets like *UWire*, *Vox*, *Variety*, and *Marieclaire* explain the trope in relation to the controversy surrounding the popular show *The 100*.⁵⁴ *UWire* (2019) writes: “Bury

⁵⁴ *The Hollywood Reporter* (2016) describes *The 100* as a post-apocalyptic survival series set 97 years in the future. The show follows 100 teens as they are sent back to earth (after a nuclear disaster) and struggle to survive. When

your gays’ references the killing of queer characters . . . for shock value and/or to further the development of another more central character” (2). Haley Hulan (2017) provides some historical context by looking to the representation of nonconforming sexuality over the last 125 years; she argues that originally the killing-off of queer characters functioned “to allow LGBTQ+ authors to tell stories which featured characters like them without risking social backlash, breaking laws, or ‘promoting’ homosexuality” (17).

More recently, however, the trope “in western media . . . is no longer necessary, and its implementation is no longer the refuge it once was” (17). Instead, representations of queer death often serve as compelling plotlines for a straight audience, or fall flat in the face of changing societal, legal, and familial standards around sexuality. Because Donald is the catalyst for Draper’s development, his presence in *The Divine Ryans* fits within this trope. Though he lingers after death in spectral form, he functions more to generate affective tension and release for readers than as a fully-developed character. This affective function is underscored in the reviews and some scholarship which reads Donald through his impact on his son or via the emotive power the exposition of his desire has on readers.

Donald has also been read metaphorically within the context of Johnston’s wider corpus or the contemporary Newfoundland canon. Johnston’s later works have been heralded by readers for their grounding in an “elegiac” portrayal of Newfoundland, filled with metaphors for, and allusions to, historical loss and reinvention. In her study of regional bestsellers, Fuller (2008) notes that the “association within the popular Canadian imaginary of Atlantic Canada with old-fashioned cultural practices” (48) plays a key role in readings of Johnston’s fiction. Speaking of his novel *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams* (1998), Fuller outlines how the text is often

Lexa, who has an on and off relationship with another female character was killed, many fans of the show were outraged.

perceived as “a lament for Confederation and the nation that might have been as well as one that once was” (48). A nostalgic evaluation of Newfoundland situates the province as a space outside of time, home to a people rooted in tradition, and disconnected from ideas of progress tied to the wider nation.

Moreover, according to Méira Cook in “On Haunting, Humour, and Hockey in Wayne Johnston’s *The Diving Ryans*,” ghosts have a particular function in Johnston’s work. She writes, “Johnston’s spectre-ridden fiction . . . takes as its subject a certain dynamic of cultural loss and recovery” (134). In *The Divine Ryans* specifically, the absent father is a stand in for “the ontological anxiety about the longing for a lost place.” In this configuration, Draper’s “filial longing for his ghostly progenitor . . . suggests the demise of regional commensurate” to a “fatherland” (119). Read this way, Draper’s desire to understand Donald’s ghost functions as a metaphor for Newfoundland’s connection to the wider nation. Donald’s queerness and ghostliness can be understood as symbols for Newfoundland’s difference from, and lingering presence in, the wider nation—his death marks the end of a struggle to remain connected to those who push for conformity (the centre/the family), and his continuing presence implies that ties between the margin/centre cannot be severed cleanly or easily.

As either developmental aid or metaphor, Donald’s difference is the only thing that defines him. Living or dead, he is positioned as Other and/or abject—made to function for the betterment of others or as a representational tool. This process not only disembodies queer desire, but the slow uncovering of Donald’s secret and his attempts to embrace this longing also function along a metronormative trajectory that upholds simplistic configurations of regional space. There is, therefore, something about the spectre of nonconforming sexuality in *The Divine Ryans* that raises questions about the potential damage of ghostly representations of queer

sexuality. As Cook asserts, “Draper, with the reader in tow, must seek the solution to his father’s riddle” (119); yet, once this riddle is solved, the resolution is abandonment rather than any sort of change. Donald’s spectral reemergence is crucial to his son’s development. This ghostly return allows Draper to overcome the trauma of his father’s missing week, and permits the family to escape Aunt Phil’s reign and the community’s constraint.

However, through this leaving, Donald’s haunting presence does not change any space to which he has returned. Likewise, the revelation of his sexuality and the reason for his death does not seem to influence the mindset of most family and community members. Instead, the house on Fleming Street, the city of St. John’s, and the province of Newfoundland are situated as stagnant. Localized social and communal relations remain unaffected by the revelation of Donald’s nonconforming desire. Though Donald’s ghost is a presence that highlights the “invisibility of lesbian and male gay sexualities in heteronormative society” (Palmer, *Queering* 23), there is little hope that the Ryan empire, or the wider city of St. John’s, is or will become changed as a result of his subjugation. In this way, his ghost offers a fragmentary reminder of past injustice and the continuous presence of nonconformity in the present, while maintaining metronormative stereotypes and refusing the transgressive potential of the spectral.

While *The Divine Ryans* marks an intervention in both the canon of Atlantic Canadian literature, and in critical conversations around sexualities and space, the form and function of this representation matters.⁵⁵ If the queer body or queer desire is only used as a metaphor for regional or provincial loss, or to compel the development of other characters, what does this do for and to

⁵⁵ Johnston’s *Son of a Certain Woman* (2013) is also set in St. John’s in the 1950s/1960s, and narrated by a young male who feels like an outcast (in this case more overtly because of a congenital disfigurement). *Son of a Certain Woman* garnered critical acclaim despite its similarity to *The Divine Ryans*, hyper-sexualization of women, and problematic representation of queer desire. Paul Chafe writes, “In truth, I was confused when I first heard news of this novel: a story revolving around a quirky misfit of a boy, coming of age in 1960s St. John’s, struggling against an oppressive Catholicism, whose security is threatened by the secret homosexuality of a parent. Has not Johnston already done this, more expertly and more succinctly, in *The Divine Ryans*? (164).

actual queer people who live in the Atlantic provinces? How does this disembodied configuration impact wider understandings of sexuality and regional space? Does such a representation compound metronormative understandings of the region and, in turn, erase the activism, existence, and joy of “all that is not-queer” within Atlantic Canada?

These questions should be asked of any representation that intertwines the ghost and the queer within the confines of regional space. When thinking back to the idea of regional desiring, and the tension between *desire for* the region and *desire from* the region, Donald’s ghost helps to underscore the complexity of representing sexuality in space and time. To be sure, including an explicit representation of nonconforming sexuality in regional space helps to provide nuance when it comes to the unmarked heterosexuality of the Atlantic Canadian canon in this period. In presenting nonconforming *desire from* within the region, *The Divine Ryans* makes space for readers to reflect on the various bodies and relations that exist in Atlantic Canada and which should be represented in its literature. At the same time, by rendering the region as not only hostile to Donald’s desire but as a space of impossibility for queer life, the text upholds a homogenized understanding of the Atlantic region as a space of regress. In so doing, *The Divine Ryans* also represents a *desire for* the region bounded by the tropes and archetypes mapped in Part II: The Backwoods.

Importantly, Johnston is not the only writer to engage in this slippery use of spectral sexuality in an Atlantic Canadian context, nor is this an issue of its time. Christy-Ann Conlin’s *The Memento* (2016) offers a more recent example of this queer spectral inertia, using the suggestion of sexual and gender deviance to situate shame as one source for the dark events that occur in her novel’s rural Nova Scotian setting. Murky presences meld with local tradition to create a Gothic tale “of madness, murder, and dark secrets set on the rugged Bay of Fundy coast”

(as the book jacket describes). The narrative follows 12-year-old Fancy Mosher as she struggles with her unique gift of communicating with the dead. Using ghosts, disfigurement, and a frightening landscape, *The Memento* underlines many disparities in Nova Scotia and reflects on both the insularity and vibrancy of a small community. Very different from the Annapolis Valley of Buckler's *The Mountain and the Valley*, Conlin's novel roots the Gothic in the local, blurring the boundaries between reality and fantasy, joy and fear, normal and abnormal in a distinctly regional space.

While queerness as a state of being runs throughout the narrative,⁵⁶ I am interested in how Charlie Parker's gender and sexual deviance is represented. Suggestive statements about Charlie are peppered throughout: for example, readers are told that "[he] didn't like the ladies, just his mother . . . [but] The Colonel wanted his son married and so Charlie did what was expected" (122). Such assertions insinuate a variance from the heteronormative trajectory expected of a well-to-do family in the province, and function as a complex undercurrent in the text. Charlie sporadically enters the narrative through others' memories and as a nebulous figure of ghostly difference. This difference is rooted in the particular spaces of Petal's End, the Parker family's estate perched on North Mountain.

Spanning a "thousand acres of forest and farmland" (37), Petal's End was designed by Colonel Parker, an implant from the Old World looking to create a haven for himself. Comprised of a grand house, several outbuildings, expansive gardens, and an island with an old lighthouse, the imposing estate "wasn't on no modern maps" (36). Above all, Petal's End was designed for

⁵⁶ *The Memento* is marked by a general queerness: promiscuous women in the context of extreme sexual regulation; peculiar families living apart from the village on the mountain who can speak with the dead; incest; disability. Each iteration of difference or deviancy from the norm is policed in different ways within the social structures of rural Nova Scotia. Yet, Charlie's deviance from normative codes of masculinity and his suggested deviant sexuality are the ones positioned as most irredeemable.

isolation. As Fancy tells readers, “that was how the Parkers liked it, especially after Charlie killed himself” (36). Set away from the community of Lupin’s Cove, the interior and exterior spaces of Petal’s End are further segregated by class and gender, with certain areas designated safe for, and used by, different members of the family and staff.

Within this configuration, Charlie chooses to die in and haunt the Annex. His tethering to this part of the house implicitly segregates him within the estate, suggesting that he is bound to a subordinated space. This marginalized position is further emphasized by descriptions of Charlie and his family. Readers learn he was “was a small man, fragile and reed thin, and he liked gardens and roses, dancing, and beautiful women and men. He was nothing but a disappointment to his big, strapping military father” (37). While readers are never explicitly told why he “died playing with a rope” (38), it is suggested that his suicide is a result of this veneer of heteronormative propriety.⁵⁷ Here, as in Johnston’s text, Charlie is represented as a figure burdened by expectation, so much so that the only option is self-harm within the familial home. As with Donald, Charlie’s value rests in the continuation of a particular heteropatriarchal standard and he attempts to conform to this pressure by getting married and having children.

Moreover, like Donald in *The Divine Ryans*, Charlie’s attempt to uphold the heteronormative ideal is a spark for the eventual destruction of his home place. After his suicide, parts of the estate are boarded off, his mother has a stroke, and the family eventually vacates, leaving a small staff to care for the house and grounds. The brief glimpses of Charlie’s life suggest the impacts of heteronormative pressure and familial tradition, and his ghostly presence

⁵⁷ It is later revealed that Pomeline is not Charlie’s biological child. Jenny, the odd and sickly child, is the biological Parker heir. Though he does his best to honour the Parker family, Charlie fails. He never produces a son to carry on the name and his daughters both involve some kind of a tainted bloodline. Jenny becomes riddled with cancer as a result of fertility drugs taken by her mother and Pomeline carries on an affair with Dr. Baker who, it is ultimately revealed, is her biological father.

in the Annex takes on renewed meaning in the years following his death. These revelations tie Charlie to the masculine traditions implied by the backwoods, particularly through the pressure of the heterosexual gift outlined above. The questions of fertility, bloodlines, and belonging expose and, at times, complicate the supposed essence of continuing in place in Maritime culture. That said, he does not disrupt the home place to remind his family of their role in his suicide nor does he return in an embodied form to ease the consciences of his children; instead, when Charlie returns he finds a young Fancy Mosher trying to figure out her own place in the world.

Despite this connection, Charlie's ghost and Fancy never directly interact. Charlie mostly emerges as "a glimpse of a face, with white swirling around it" in a nearby mirror (118) or in the recollection of his "bowed head . . . his face like crushed pansies" (110). As a younger child, Fancy and her friends found his hanging body while exploring the back portions of the home. As she matures, the final memory of Charlie's physical presence comes to Fancy and readers frequently. It is partially through this macabre connection to the Annex, and to Charlie, that Fancy begins to understand both herself and the spaces she navigates.

While no new details of Charlie emerge with each visit, Fancy's trips to the Annex offer a means of working out her connection with the dead. In the most crucial instance, she runs "back down to the Annex and right into the big room at the end where the curtains blew long and white" (364). Upon arrival, she specifically notes the absence of "Charlie Parker with his bulging eyes" (364). Instead of Charlie's usual presence Fancy finds each of her own embroideries on the wall (364) and realizes she communes with the dead through needlework, an epiphany that somehow dissipates Charlie's whispering presence. When focusing on the intersection of spectrality and sexuality, Charlie once again mirrors Donald Ryan; in both novels, the

nonconforming sexuality of each man functions predominantly as a stepping-stone for a child's development and the complexity of each man's life and death is sidelined.

While Charlie's presence in the narrative could be read as a disruption of the domineering domestic space that oriented his life—and at times Fancy does humanize his character and work toward a more embodied representation of his presence—the frequency with which Charlie dissipates into a formless figure or emerges only to confirm Fancy's sense of difference complicates a transgressive reading of the text. Memories of Charlie, his suicide, and his potential reemergence function as murky reminders of familial obligation and heteropatriarchal regulation, or work to aid in the maturation of the novels' central character. In this way, Charlie's suggested queerness, and the importance of this suspected deviancy, hovers around the edges of Petal's End. As in *The Divine Ryans*, the domestic realm is situated as a decidedly oppressive space and the haunting presence of nonconforming character is used to solidify this oppression, rather than to make space for a different or more complex reality.

While both Johnston's and Conlin's text feature male ghosts that resist or complicate the heteronormative strictures within which they live, there is a sense that there are limits around the disruption caused by their complicated return. Donald Ryan and Charlie Parker both offer readers a space to step back and reflect on the unique ways that discourses of sexuality, religion, class, and family intersect in particular areas and timeframes. In so doing, both novels work to address the damage of homophobia and heteronormativity in St. John's and the Annapolis Valley and expose the constraints placed around belonging in the region. At the same time, the ongoing disruption at the centre of the queer Gothic does not come to fruition. Instead, both men, in their lives and after death, appear to be eradicated when their narrative use-value comes to an end. Once Fancy realizes her true connection with the dead, Charlie dissipates from the Annex.

Likewise, once Draper understands the parameters of Donald's return, and places his suicide note in the wall, Donald Ryan is removed as a potential agent of disruption or change.

While the spectral traces of queer male desire in each text help to expose the burden of heterosexuality and the requisite continuation of the familial and communal lines, both novels ultimately suggest that there is no escape from this "gift." In so doing, the novels implicitly continue a canonical celebration of unmarked heterosexuality as a regional trait by positioning those who remain in the region as those willing to uphold the boundaries of this burden. Who stays and who leaves becomes imbricated in the ability to come out, a movement that is positioned as an impossibility within Donald's and Charlie's respective communities. In this way, complex *desire from* within the region is thwarted to instead align with a broader *desire for* the region as a stagnant and traditional space.

Section Three: Recognizing the Spectre's Power in *Fall on Your Knees*

In contrast to some of the limitations noted above, Ann-Marie MacDonald's *Fall on Your Knees* (1996) effectively highlights the unique parameters of the queer Gothic in Atlantic Canada. The landscape of Cape Breton and the historical specificities of New Waterford form an interactive backdrop for the novel. Apparitions seem to walk the misty seaside, outlines of religious icons ghost the walls, and murder, mayhem, and secrets are rooted in local experiences of the text's milieu. If the St. John's of *The Divine Ryans* is tricky to navigate, *Fall on Your Knees* includes key figures and spaces of Cape Breton that are turned on their head through Gothic resonances. The ghostly miners who haunt abandoned coal shafts, for example, tie back to the centrality of such figures in the work of MacLeod, Hugh MacLennan in *Each Man's Son* (1951), and others. Here, both the people and places of Cape Breton are rendered spectral and connect to the broad scale of damage caused by resource extraction in the community.

While the locations of *The Divine Ryans* and *Fall on Your Knees* are very different, the texts pair well together overall. In both novels, the exposition of queer desire comes late in the narrative. In *Fall on Your Knees*, the relegation of Kathleen's transgressions engages readers in the story of the Piper family before making the truth behind the tragedies known. A similar moment of outing falls late in *The Divine Ryans*, when the nonconforming desire of the ghostly father is made visible to his son and to the reader. As in MacDonald's text, a family member unexpectedly witnesses a sexual encounter which forms a catalyst for the oncoming devastation. In both cases, this witnessing leads to the death of a central nonconforming character who then returns as a powerful presence in the lives of certain family members. Both novels are also haunted in tricky ways, and their respective local spaces take on renewed meaning through

spectral resurfacing, as darkness, demons, and dreams break up their supposedly secure domestic realities.

As I will discuss, the novel's use of the Gothic in depictions of racism and notions of settler legitimacy in Canadian space have received significant attention from literary critics. Sugars writes that "MacDonald, herself of mixed Scottish and Lebanese background, shows how the spectre of racial and ethnic intolerance undermines the consolidation of coherent settler-national identity" (*Canadian Gothic* 208). At the same time, reader reception of *Fall on Your Knees* has focused on the novel as a multi-generational story that maps the tensions at work in a small town. In both instances, MacDonald's use of the Gothic form is central to understandings of the text.

Building from this discussion, I read *Fall on Your Knees* through a focus on the spectral presence of Kathleen Piper. I argue that her love for Rose is the catalyst for an eruption of Gothic figures in the novel, specifically different kinds of spectrality. While Kathleen does not return in a traditional ghostly form to haunt the Piper family, her death in the attic recodifies the home place. The haunted attic functions contrarily for different members of the family, demarcating spaces that James avoids and therefore continued spaces of reprieve for the Piper children. At the same time, Kathleen's marginal presence functions to trouble the narrative's realist veneer. Photographs of Kathleen, snippets of her past, and excerpts from her diary are peppered throughout the novel. These seemingly random re-emergences rupture the narrative present, thereby breaking the chronological flow and offering a kind of material haunting outside of a bodily form. Kathleen's lingering presence and the ripples of her oppression disturb the heteronormative order imposed on her by her family and community. As such, queerness persists

as a powerful force in Cape Breton, troubling metronormative assumptions of the region and centralizing female desire as a space-altering disruption.

As an example of the queer Gothic, *Fall on Your Knees* aligns with Paulina Palmer's (2016) assertion that the form does not just make "frequent reference to non-normative sexualities and genders" (8), but also "foreground[s] 'a systemic and stylistic deviance from perceived norms'" (Palmer, referring to Hughes and Smith, 8). Vibrant depictions of same-sex or nonconforming desire, particularly in the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s when the genre emerged and when MacDonald's text was published, push against heteronormative socio-economic systems. Novels using fantasy, magic realism, and Gothic figures in this way help to critique dominant structures or envision new ways of being and world-making. Because Kathleen and her love for Rose create "ghosts [that] only multiply and plague the family for years to come" (Sugars 209), the novel's Gothicization of queer desire does more than simply expose heteronormative oppression. I assert that spectral forces change the spaces within which they exist, thereby creating a new reality for those who encounter the Piper family and their environs.

Comprised of nine books, and spanning multiple generations of the Piper family, *Fall on Your Knees* details decades of abuse, trauma, and resilience. The first third of the narrative focuses on the marriage of James Piper and Materia Mahmoud. The couple elopes when Materia is only 13, eventually moving into a new white house that is "big compared to the miner's houses" (1). After they flee, Materia is shunned by her family, and she is left mostly alone to raise their three children: Kathleen, Mercedes, and Frances. James quickly morphs from a devoted husband into an abusive tyrant. He equates Materia's Lebanese background with a slow mind and abnormal sexual appetite, and becomes gripped by notions of tainted bloodlines and

miscegenation. James' physical and psychological abuse leads to Materia's eventual suicide, which occurs after their eldest daughter, Kathleen, dies following her return to Cape Breton from New York. Kathleen leaves the Atlantic region to pursue her singing career, aligning the text with the many regional narratives exploring the notion of necessary outmigration for a "better" life.

Imprisoned in the attic while pregnant, Kathleen perishes in childbirth when her children are cut from her body by Materia. The twins become key characters—with the saintly Lily offering different kinds of solace to her family, and Ambrose, who drowns as a baby, emerging as a haunting presence in the family home. Importantly, readers are given little insight into the roots of Kathleen's tragedy until the last two sections of the text, when her love affair with her Black accompanist named Rose is described. Only then do readers learn that James raped Kathleen after finding her in bed with Rose. This rape leads to her pregnancy, her death, and the perpetual traces of violence against nonconforming women throughout the narrative.

Described as "possibly the best-known Gothic novel by any contemporary Canadian author" (Sugars, *Canadian Gothic* 208), *Fall on Your Knees* remains wildly popular on both national and international levels. The novel won the 1997 Commonwealth Writers Prize for Best First Book, the Canadian Authors Association Award for Fiction, was shortlisted for the Giller Prize in 1996, and made its way to Oprah's Book Club in 2002. Oprah.com highlights the novel's Gothic elements as a pull for readers. Noting the setting as a "haunted Cape Breton Island," the write-up on the website emphasizes violence, "forbidden love," and "racial strife" as worthy of attentive reflection. While the website overview is quite general, Danielle Fuller (2008) reads Oprah's coverage and discussion of the novel through three key streams of engagement: the first, as "mediated for the audience through the edited format of entertainment

television” with a particular focus on the sordid aspects of the text; the second as a recommendation from “a trusted friend/celebrity” who is interested in reading as “self-improvement” (51); and the third focusing on her positioning of *Fall on Your Knees* as an exploration of Black history. Through discussions with the author and her readers, Oprah’s Book Club investigates the specific parameters of racial violence and Black experience in Nova Scotia. In so doing, the novel becomes “clearly mediated through Oprah’s framing of what may be articulated on her show” (51). Because readers believe what Oprah selects will not only entertain them, but will also offer personal insight through the reading process, this framing impacts reader focus and reception.

Though the relationship between Kathleen and Rose is discussed in Oprah’s Book Club, it is examined at a surface level and through a metronormative understanding of rural space. Situated as a “queer-from-the-hinterland” text (Fuller 51), the transgressive and transformative power of Kathleen and Rose’s relationship, as a racially-mixed queer pairing, remains mostly unspoken. Fuller rightly notes that this “silence is typical of the popular readings and published reviews of the novel” (52), many of which hone in on the dark and Gothic elements of the text without connecting these elements to their root in sexual nonconformity. *Quill and Quire* foregrounds the novel’s haunting qualities, stating: “this book is haunted . . . It is home to ghosts, cripples, cross-dressing piano players, and guardian angels (or is *that* the devil?) negotiated for release from limbo” (Jackson 9). Rose, as the “cross-dressing piano player,” is mentioned only in passing. Her liminal presence in this list situates her as one of many grotesque figures in the novel, rather than an active human presence whose transgression of societal norms leads to the proliferation of the very Gothic aspects the reviewer enjoys. A piece for *Kirkus Reviews*, which holds nothing back by way of spoilers, does not mention Rose at all. While the piece talks about

death, rape, and secrets as part of a “plate piled dangerously high with calamities” there is no mention of nonconforming desire or the relationship between the two women that rests at the centre of the novel.⁵⁸

While it may not be surprising that reviews sidestep in-depth discussions of queer sex and sexuality, literary criticism on the Gothic aspects of *Fall on Your Knees* often focuses on how the novel fits within wider traditions of the genre (Andrews 1999, Somacerrara 2004, Kulperger 2009) or how the novel complicates myths of Canadian identity and settler stability. For example, Pilar Somacarrerra (2004) situates *Fall on Your Knees* within the traditional Gothic canon, arguing that echoes of *Jane Eyre* throughout the novel revise “Gothic conventions which go beyond the stereotypes of the genre” (57). Gabriella Parro (2005) likewise emphasizes the blurring of boundaries produced by the novel, stating “*Fall on Your Knees* distinguishes itself as Gothic in order to reveal that Canada is haunted by a fear of miscegenation and a desire to be tolerant. Haunted bloodlines, the essence of the Gothic text, inhabit the novel, and MacDonald insists on examining the myth of racial purity” (179). Indeed, nuanced histories of race relations and settler validity are studied within a “larger complex of social and historical mediation” to read the “spectre of race and social conformity [that] ‘taints’ the genealogical lines of the Piper and Mahmoud families who strive for national and social legitimization” (Sugars 208). Rooted as they are in investigations of difference and distortion, these analyses have been essential to my own understanding of queer haunting in the novel.

⁵⁸ This murkiness surrounding critical interrogations of lesbian desire in MacDonald’s work is not relegated only to *Fall on Your Knees*. Although readings of her rendering of queer sexuality have become more common, Neta Gordon (2019) suggests that MacDonald’s writing continues to be placed outside the realm of queer literature. Speaking of the marketing and reception of *Adult Onset* (2014), Gordon outlines how reviewers and readers ignore the character’s emerging understanding of queer sexuality to instead read the text as a “domestic drama primarily about parenthood and the lasting trauma of child abuse” (81). She writes: “*Adult Onset* is largely a complex story of coming out, yet that story, for the most part, is not ‘read’ by those marketing the novel and is thus made invisible” (81).

An attentive reading of queer desire as a Gothic spark furthers an understanding of the text, particularly in relation to domestic space. When Kathleen returns to Cape Breton, the family home is quickly made-strange by her changed presence and the delicate realist perspective emblematic of the opening sections splinters with Gothic reverberations. Brief references to ghostly figures and Pete, the scarecrow that disturbs Kathleen as a child, burst into a panoply of drowned babies, three-footed cats, haunted space, and family secrets. Ambrose, who drowns on the night of Kathleen's death, is an obvious example of the complex ripples of queer return. He emerges as a "disquieting disruption of the reader's habitual modes of intelligibility" (Laouyene 135), surfacing in Lily's bedroom years after his death, presenting as old when he should be young, and appearing to be of a murky "somewhere in between" (226) that envelopes those who view him.

I agree with Atef Laouyene in "Canadian Gothic and the Work of Ghosting in Ann-Marie MacDonald's *Fall on Your Knees*" (2015) that "Ambrose keeps forcing himself into the Piper family history as well as into the narrative itself" (137), in part to allow Frances to work through her childhood trauma by telling stories to her sister, Lily; however, there is a missing piece to this analysis. Other than points about "James' violent rape . . . as a clear attempt to force a white, heterosexual imperative on Kathleen" (144) and the "adamant disapproval of Kathleen's sexuality," Ambrose's ghost is understood as the "haunting return of his father's fears of racial miscegenation" (Laouyene 137) rather than a result of heteropatriarchal dominance. To my mind, both interpretations can be true at the same time. The dual roots of Ambrose's creation—miscegenation and heteropatriarchal suppression—should be developed in a discussion of his narrative function. Because Ambrose ultimately stems from sexual violence in reaction to a desire perceived as deviant, and his liminality stems from this creation, his existence in Cape

Breton can be viewed through a queer lens as a transgressive continuance of Kathleen's nonconformity. Indeed, Ambrose's ghostly return to the Piper family home, developing from his mother's changed return much earlier, is one of the many ways that past experiences are slowly exposed and twisted throughout the narrative. Through this process, the home place becomes a key space for re-remembering and re-codifying notions of tradition, family, and domestic comfort.

In addition, the attic of the Piper family home offers another key undercurrent to consider when focused on sexuality, domestic space, and spectrality. Because of the narrative importance of attics, both within the text and in terms of the Gothic form, the shifting parameters of this space for different family members offers a nexus for understanding the disruptive potential of spectral sexuality in the novel. The attic is at once empty and occupied, disconnected and yet deeply intimate. It is a space in which binaries and categories of belonging, safety, and home are troubled, and where understandings of here/there are mangled through traces of lingering trouble.

While Materia initially uses the attic as a space of reprieve, an area to remember her family and ignore James's calls from the lower floors, the space changes by the novel's second book. Readers learn that "In the attic of the house on Water Street, Kathleen lies dying" (135). The space is quickly mediated through Kathleen's sensory experience of child birth and her own death, alongside Materia's and James's feelings of responsibility and disorientation. For Kathleen, there is no terror but a "blissful release from pain" (137). In contrast to this emancipation, Materia is broken by her decision to let Kathleen die to save the lives of the twins. Over the course of one evening, she loses a child and a grandchild, is beaten and locked in the basement, and her only space of refuge is obliterated by violence. The attic, a space "of absolute

peace and quiet” (145), is annihilated through Kathleen’s death and James’ violent presence, shifting in response to the horrific events of the evening.

The attic also takes on a different resonance for James. When he breaks down the door and sees Kathleen’s body as an “overdone, tasteless, melodramatic painting . . . Naïve. Grotesque. Authentic” (143), the attic shifts from a space of disinterest into one marked by culpability. An image freezes in his mind of Kathleen’s “ravaged” corpse, Materia with the scissors and the infants, the hope chest, and the religious icons. He realizes this “temporary confusion is a premonition; it tells him that he will never get over this sight. That it will be as fresh fourteen years from now, the colours not quite dry, as it is today” (144). Certainly, this is a description of James processing the violence before him; yet readers are also told “the supernatural elements are, if present, invisible” (144). With this omniscient statement, readers are told that James recognizes the potential for new presences as a result of Kathleen’s death. Again, in this moment the essence of the attic space changes. It is no longer blank or empty, instead there is a latent force made manifest as James stands on the precipice of the third floor.

Because the reason for Kathleen’s return from New York remains unsaid at this point, James’ moment of consideration marks the attic as a troubled space without revealing the depths of this troubling. Instead, the origins and outcomes of the secret unfold over the course of the novel as the Pipers interact with the space. For instance, Mercedes describes the attic as a “non-room” and notes that it is “separate from the rest of the house. In a state of perpetual quarantine. It’s really an abandoned room” (258). Other than the hope chest, the “attic’s one other distinguishing feature is an absence: a criss-cross halfway up the wall where a crucifix used to be” (258). The religious symbolism here is obvious, tethering this space to longstanding religious affiliations in Cape Breton and beyond. At the same time, these gestures to an unseen

existence—or the remnants of a past thing now gone—align with James’ pause over the attic’s invisible presences. Palpable traces of something powerful persist in the attic, evoking a sadness that the ever-practical Mercedes is not fully able to understand. Moreover, the space functions as a realm where things like the disfigured Old-Fashioned Girl (258)⁵⁹ or the photo of Kathleen (259) can be hidden from her father and allow the girls to escape his outbursts. Mercedes does not question the reasons why James does not enter the third floor, but instead acknowledges the importance of such an ambiguous space for secret-keeping.⁶⁰

While Mercedes’ relationship to the space oscillates between trepidation and appreciation, Frances holds a more convoluted understanding of the attic. On the night of Kathleen’s death, Frances sees her sister’s body and takes the babies to the creek, accidentally drowning Ambrose. The narrator relates that “The difference between Frances and James is that, although she sees a version of the same horrible picture, Frances is young enough to still be under the greater influence of the cave mind. It will never forget. But it steals the picture from her voluntary mind” (146). Though Frances implicitly knows the attic is a space of confinement and death, within the uncanny tension enveloping the space she cultivates a sense of refuge.⁶¹

⁵⁹ See Laura Robinson’s article “Remodeling *An Old-Fashioned Girl*: Troubling Girlhood in Ann-Marie MacDonald’s *Fall on Your Knees*.” *Women and the Politics of Memory*, special issue of *Canadian Literature*, vol. 186, Autumn 2005, pp. 30-45.

⁶⁰ Late in the novel, Mercedes pushes her father down the stairs after he retrieves his bayonet from the attic. She thinks he is going to harm Frances for being out with an unknown man, and places her hand over Lily’s eyes before shoving him from the top step. Other than the night of Kathleen’s death, this is the only other time readers are explicitly told that James enters the attic. On his return to the space, he is drunk for the first time since the time of Kathleen’s death and he leaves the space injured by one of his daughters. There are interesting connections to be explored here that lie outside the scope of this chapter.

⁶¹ Frances’ dolls further signify this complex relationship to the attic. All the dolls are kept in the attic, and are icons of illness with names like Scarlet Fever, Diphtheria Rose, Typhoid and TB ahoy, and “the little boy doll, Small Pox” (182). As the names suggest, a young Frances sees the attic as both a segregated space of attempted recuperation or death, and as a place of play where the toys are “nicely lined up against the hope chest” (182).

After waking from a nightmare when she is sixteen, for example, she longs to sleep on the third floor. As she begins her ascent:

she is seized with fear because she can hear voices . . . in a moment she will understand what they are saying. Frances starts babbling quietly with her hands over her ears and forces herself onto the second step. Damp shadows slipper by, Kathleen is up there. No she isn't, that's just the kittens, *stop* — they have to be baptized — *don't* — 'who's the killer?!' — *don't* — 'you're the Devil!' — *don't, don't, don't, don't*, all the way up the stairs until she gets to the top and opens the door. (306-307)

The liminal area between the second and third floors opens up her “cave mind,” causing a skewed remembering of the moments before Frances entered the attic as a six-year-old. These snippets of memory re-codify the space from an eerie-but-empty refuge to an embodied space where tangible signs of trouble linger. The attic is not *potentially* haunted, as it is for James who “admits there are places and times which he avoids in his own home. Not out of belief — out of that spot on the back of his neck that stirs now and then for no reason” (209). Instead, a powerful presence is made manifest through Frances’ repeated return to the space, a presence that does not deter (as it does for James) but in some way invites. Frances pushes toward the lingering trouble, and when she arrives in the attic it is “like arriving in the desert after almost drowning. She closes the door behind her . . . lies on the floor. She closes her eyes and sleeps deeply and blankly, no longer any need to fear death by dreaming” (307).

For the Piper sisters, then, the attic is both a space of contentment and confinement. They each recognize the attic as a space of lingering trouble (through memory, sense, or vision), and yet it remains a space that is separate from the domineering presence of their father and tied to their lost sister. Though Kathleen does not haunt the attic in a literal way, as Ambrose haunts

Lily, the aftermath of her rape, pregnancy, and death leaves spectral traces on the third floor of the Piper house. For most of the narrative James separates himself from the attic, and this detachment is what renders the attic a liminal space of both terror and comfort for the sisters. As they find a skewed sense of reprieve in this separate space, the attic also offers up family secrets through Frances' storytelling, materials in the hope chest, or omniscient reflections from the narrator. This illuminating ephemera reaches its height when James shares the truth about Kathleen with Frances. Frances takes her sister's diary "up the attic stairs, where the voices are louder than ever. She pauses, wishing they would speak one at a time and stop yelling. 'I'm listening,' she says" (432). In this way, the attic becomes the space from which both Frances and readers finally get the full picture of Kathleen's life, the punishment she receives from her father as a result of her relationship with Rose, and the extent of James' culpability in her death.

Therefore, Kathleen haunts *Fall on Your Knees* not only by rendering the attic a changed space in the ways I have outlined, but also through the traces of her story woven throughout the text and explicated in her own words. Through the diary, readers learn of Kathleen's time in New York, her caretaker Giles, and her connection to Rose. At certain points, the omniscient narration returns to outline James' recollection of events—exposing the truth behind his sexual violence and Kathleen's pregnancy. While James' rape of Kathleen can be read as "a symbolic attempt to force upon her a pure white bloodline" (Sugars 29), as others have argued, his actions are also punishment for Kathleen's sexual transgression.⁶² In this way, Kathleen's death, and the

⁶² I agree with Siddall when she writes, "Kathleen's violent rape and subsequent death attest to MacDonald's sense of social change as an ongoing, often bitter struggle" (16). Siddall is focused on the political and transformative impacts of improvisational jazz on Kathleen, particularly as an instigator of gender and sexual freedoms, rather than the role of the Gothic in the novel.

resulting mutations of the Piper home and Gothic resonances in the narrative, all stem from James' violent response to his daughter's perceived perversity.⁶³

Importantly, this deviance is vocalized by Kathleen herself as she outlines a developing recognition of her nonconforming desire through her relationship with Rose. The lovers explore the club scene as a couple (with Rose in drag),⁶⁴ have sex in parks, and linger on street corners throughout the city. Rather than "disembodying the figure of the lesbian and decorporealizing her desire, thus negating the physical intimacy between women" (Palmer *Lesbian Gothic*, 60), Kathleen is open and honest in her reflections on Rose and their encounters. Her record of their love, paired as it is with the violence that James enacts at the sight of it, reconfigures what readers may have assumed throughout the text: she is not ashamed by a secret interracial relationship and having a child with a Black man; rather, she has been broken by her own father because of her desire for a Black woman.

Indeed, it is Kathleen's sexual deviance, more than fears of impurity, that spurs James's violence. His immediate response upon seeing Kathleen on the bed with a "black back,

⁶³ There are signals throughout of Kathleen's desire. Kathleen's feelings of difference as a teenager at Catholic school are expanded through snippets of interaction between her and Rose, as well as through visuals; for example, there is a two-page spread that details: "Making love with the New Yorker [as] an experience which announces to Kathleen that the present tense as finally begun" (176). The description of Kathleen's "first-love conversation" closes on an ominous note: "That fall James got a letter. He went down there and brought Kathleen home the day the war ended" (176-177). Because the New Yorker remains ungendered and the danger facing Kathleen is later described as "miscegenation" (235), her pregnancy is (mis)read as a result of heterosexual intercourse made shameful by her unwed status and the suggestion of her lover's race; yet, the page is bordered at the top and bottom by treble clefs, hearts, and roses entwined by thorny stems. This motif could signal for discerning readers that Rose is the New Yorker that Kathleen loves.

⁶⁴ Rose appears in drag when she and Kathleen go to jazz clubs at night. The women have their first sexual experience while Rose is in drag, and she is wearing these clothes when James finds them together. Rose also ends up building her professional personae as a male "Doc Rose" to, as Gillian Siddall argues, navigate the masculine world of jazz music. Siddall describes that readers are not asked: "to interpret Rose's cross-dressing as a capitulation to the heterosexual norm" but instead "as drawing attention to . . . the performativity of gender, and the absence of any stable sexual identities or categories" (15). Paired with Rose's feminine day-time attire (bows, dresses, puffed sleeves), there is a costuming of the self to both navigate social structures and also to play within and against these codes. Laura Robinson includes a footnote in her piece on the old-fashioned girl that suggests Rose is, in fact, a trans man; however, this analysis is not sufficiently extended.

disappearing beneath the waistband of a pair of stripped trousers” (549) is rage. Only after he has pulled Rose off the bed does James shift from planning “to kill [Kathleen’s] lover with the flat of his foot” to the realization that “no, James would never kill a woman” (549). “He is not feeling angry” after he tosses Rose from the room, instead he is aroused at the sight of his daughter. The rage he feels at the threat of the Black back dissipates with his understanding of Rose as a woman. There can be no actual threat of tainting the white bloodline, therefore there is no need to kill Kathleen’s suitor. Instead, Kathleen is the guilty party and must be punished. It is Kathleen’s sexual perversion that allows James to finally break his own vow to keep his incestuous desires at bay.

The now-exposed truth of James’s suppression of Kathleen’s queer desire forces a reconsideration of what readers have been told. This unveiling offers an experience of “surprise [and] recognition at the same time . . . That kind of sense of ‘Of course it had to be this way’” (MacDonald to Tihanyi, 22). MacDonald notes that these details fall at the end of the novel where “it’s too late to put down the book [because] at that point you’re hooked” (22). The full depiction of Kathleen’s queer desire is, therefore, not buried or hidden in the narrative, but instead purposefully situated to allow her own words to uncover the transgressive potential of her actions. Moreover, MacDonald pulls back into the realist mode to articulate the events in Kathleen’s own words. Far from grotesque, Kathleen’s developing awareness of herself is tender and animated. In an interview with Eva Tihanyi (1996), MacDonald notes that the sex scenes between Kathleen and Rose were the hardest to craft “because [she] felt [she] didn’t have any examples . . . like [she] was confronted with a complete void” (22). Into this space, MacDonald writes queer desire as something “that is beautiful, that is hot, and that preserves the first-

timeness of it” (22). The power of this embodied depiction reverberates backward through the text.

Crucially, although Kathleen’s diary and Donald’s note in *The Divine Ryans* reveal the heteronormative strictures faced by both characters, their hauntings function differently in each novel. While the exposition of Kathleen and Rose’s relationship solidifies queer desire as the catalyst for powerful Gothic resonances and returns agency to Kathleen by allowing her to detail her experiences, Donald’s suicide note—both the content and the results of finding it—ends his existence. Likewise, the exposition that occurs in *Fall on Your Knees* offers a powerful articulation of a *desire from* the region that refuses to be constrained. Even through violence and death, Kathleen remains a powerful force, and this power builds from her relationship with Rose. In contrast, the eventual exposition of Donald’s desire holds no such influence. While his presence in St. John’s is important for suggesting the existence of queer sexualities in Atlantic Canada, the novel ultimately upholds the parameters of a *desire for* the region via its negation of any possibility for nonconforming desire to thrive.

In this way, Kathleen’s story offers more than a metronormative rendering of oppression and violence toward nonconformity in rural Cape Breton, as the readers of Oprah’s Book Club assert. Rather than “an absence or silence in the narrative” or functioning through “the role of monster, as is often the case in the Gothic texts of the past” (Palmer, *Lesbian Gothic* 23), Kathleen is “credited with an identity and viewpoint” (23) that is crucial to, and purposeful within, the design of the novel. *Fall on Your Knees* uses what MacDonald calls her “little lesbian sub-plot” (Tihanyi 21) to contest societal control of female sexuality, offer insight into the dark side of the traditional family and home place, and showcase the power of queer women across vast spans of time and space. In so doing, the insidiousness of the heterosexist status quo in both

the region and in stories about the region is exposed, and the resilience of nonconforming desire remains a powerful narrative force.

Section Four: Varied Viewpoints of Relation in *Crocuses Hatch from Snow*

In ways similar to *Fall on Your Knees*, Jaime Burnet's 2019 novel *Crocuses Hatch from Snow* rejects disembodied or one-dimensional versions of queer spectrality. Situated mostly in Halifax's North End, the narrative follows two families as they navigate various systems of oppression in Nova Scotia. Ken, a Black man and longtime resident of the neighbourhood, lives with his teenaged children Kiah and Shawn. Things are changing in his world—his wife Leona has died and new neighbours have moved in next door. Three generations of white women now live in the adjacent house, a sign of the slow gentrification of the predominantly Black neighborhood troubled by over a century of dispute, forcible removal, and racism.⁶⁵

The women, Mattie, Joan, and Ada, each offer different perspectives on life in Nova Scotia. Mattie and Ada, as two queer women with five decades of life experience between them, help to flesh out changes in social and political structures in the city and wider province. Leaning into the region's messy histories, *Crocuses Hatch from Snow* navigates life for gender-queer and sexually nonconforming characters, as well as racialized and otherwise marginalized communities, to map how love, life, and connection persist despite persecution and change. These intersecting oppressions, rooted in the particularities of Nova Scotia, are navigated through a series of flashbacks between 2006, 2007, 2008 and the 1940s-1950s. This movement through time while tethered to space generates a complex and generational *desire from* the region that troubles homogenized notions of Atlantic Canada as a place of simplicity or stagnancy.

The spectral return of Edith, an Indigenous woman Mattie loved in her adolescence, is key to the way the novel functions within the queer Atlantic Canadian Gothic. *Crocuses Hatch from Snow* navigates the lives of two generations of sexually nonconforming women, Ada and

⁶⁵ See Jennifer Jill Nelson's *Razing Africville: A Geography of Racism* (2008).

her grandmother Mattie, who embrace the unique experiences that queer love offers them; at the same time, the relationship between Mattie and her lover Edith highlights the specific familial and institutional responses to nonconforming desire throughout the mid-to-late twentieth century that are imposed on settler and Indigenous women differently. In doing so, Burnet depicts the interlocking power structures that regulate the lives of nonconforming women, both past and present, and offers a complicated depiction of desire that troubles metronormative understandings of the region as only a place from which to escape.

Before diving into the text, it is important to pause over the integration of an Indigenous spectral presence in the novel. In recent decades, critics have noted the slipperiness and potential damage of representing Indigenous life via ghostly presence. Emilie Cameron (2008) writes:

that ghostliness is a politicized state of being. Many scholars have interpreted these politics as a function of visibility – that is, they suggest that the uncovering and exposure of the ghosts of the past is an emancipatory act. In many cases this may be true, but I would suggest that there is also a politics of vision involved in these hauntologies. Those who see and imagine ghosts are as deserving of interrogation as the ghosts themselves . . . And so while the spectral does seem to offer a means of conceptualizing that which we cannot easily see, even of giving some voice to colonial traumas, confining the Indigenous to the ghostly also has the potential to re-inscribe the interests of the powerful upon the meanings and memories of place. (390)

This passage is worth quoting at length as there is a history in the Canadian literary sphere of the representative violence or damage Cameron notes; confining Indigenous presence to the past, reinscribing meanings of place through the use of nebulous spectral figures, or positioning Indigenous communities and individuals as benevolent or unnerving presences, can work to

manage the narrative of settlement and override on the ongoing presence of Indigenous nations and peoples in the present.

In her author's note, Burnet notes the importance of considering the potential harm of literary representation. She writes, "I know it can be problematic, offensive, and culturally appropriative for white authors to write Black characters, Indigenous characters, and other characters of colour" (246). While not speaking to the use of Indigenous ghosts specifically, Burnet explains the research process involved in creating the novel and notes "African Nova Scotian, Mi'kmaw, and South Asian friends, and African Nova Scotian and Mi'kmaw sensitivity readers engaged by Vagrant Press read the manuscript and shared insightful feedback and invaluable knowledge about cultural accuracy and respectful characterization" (246). I note Burnet's approach to representation here not to suggest that Edith's presence cannot be read in the way Cameron and others have understood Indigenous ghosts, but to underscore the intent of her narrative presence. In *Crocuses Hatch from Snow*, Burnet works to craft a representation of place that attends to its complexity and difference, and is attuned to, and accountable for, the potential pitfalls of this representation as a settler writer.

Interestingly, the rendering of Edith's ghost aligns in similar ways to Kathleen's lingering presence in *Fall on Your Knees*. Rather than return in a way the narrator and reader can fully see and understand, as Donald Ryan does, Edith only visits Mattie and her form is never described. In the narrative present of the early 2000s, Mattie is "seventy-four, [and] still getting her rocks off" (29) with the ghost of her past lover. These visions of her ghostly lover are questioned by her daughter who believes them to be brought on by dementia. In contrast, Ada not only believes her grandmother but finds joy in the curious situation. There is no shame accompanying thoughts of her grandmother's queer sexuality.

Instead, Ada wants to learn more about Edith. As a result, readers discover that Mattie and Edith met as teenagers in the 1940s while living in Shubenacadie, a small community in central Nova Scotia that was home to the only residential school in the Maritimes.⁶⁶ Edith is Mi'kmaq and Mattie is white, and their relationship develops in the context of colonial systems designed to force Edith to conform to Mattie's world or to disappear. Though the two initially meet while Edith is at the "Resi" (15), their relationship blossoms after she is sent to public school. As an Indigenous girl in a mostly white school, she is mocked, shunned, and abused; just as the nuns at the residential school discipline her for speaking Mi'kmaw, so too do the public-school teachers shame her for the way she speaks English. In this oppressive environment, Mattie reaches out to Edith. She slips notes in Edith's pocket and eventually meets with her in secret.

As their relationship develops, Mattie understands they are "Forbidden friends" (98) despite having no reference point or language for queer desire. She daydreams that they "could form a secret society . . . Create their own language and letters written in code" (98). Eventually they come to share "A silent speech that could only be understood when standing very close to another speaker" (116). They are careful and aware of the danger posed by their developing relationship; despite their caution, they are caught kissing by a nun. Mattie's parents arrange for her to be married, with her father threatening: "You will act as a good, Christian daughter and do as I say, or I will report the Indian girl to the Mounties and you will be sent to the hospital for treatment" (124). This moment underscores different responses to queer desire as dependent upon race; while Mattie, as a white teenager, is threatened with medical treatment and, likely, the attendant public shame, Edith, as an Indigenous teenager, is threatened with the force of the

⁶⁶ For more information, see: Knockwood, Isabelle. *Out of the Depths: The Experiences of Mi'kmaw Children at the Indian Residential School at Shubenacadie, Nova Scotia*. 4th ed., Fernwood, 2015.

police state. On the one hand, nonconforming sexuality is a crime to be punished when rooted in the racialized body. On the other, nonconforming sexuality is positioned as an illness to be cured when tied to the white settler. By gesturing to these intersecting yet divergent responses to nonconforming desire, *Crocuses Hatch from Snow* not only offers a complex representation of Nova Scotia as a heterogeneous space, but also underscores legacies of intersecting oppression.

As a result of their exposure, Edith leaves the province and Mattie complies with her family's demand. She moves from Shubenacadie to Halifax with her new husband. They have sex one time, and she eventually gives birth to their daughter Joan. Mattie thinks about Edith frequently and "wishes . . . she and Edith and Joanie lived in one house" (180). Yet, when she receives a letter asking her to meet Edith in Toronto, she cannot see a way to merge their lives. The fear of losing her daughter stops Mattie from leaving. Again, through references to particular mental institutions, the church, the RCMP, and the differences between local communities, Burnet explores the specific dangers of their connection within the confines of Nova Scotia, rendering their desire impossible in ways unique to regional relations, histories, and power structures.

However, when Edith arrives in Toronto, she does not find the freedom that may be assumed within a stereotypical trajectory of metronormative movement. Although she joins a community of supportive women and finds safe spaces to work and live, she also experiences racism, sexism, and homophobia. For example, at their local bar the narrator describes an "old butch . . . [standing] in front of Edith, cold eyes peering down her narrow nose . . . looking like a Mountie, a nun, a priest, a schoolteacher" (137). In her question, "What d'you think this is, a goddamn pow wow?" the woman demarcates certain spaces appropriate for Edith as an Indigenous woman. Although Edith's sexuality gains her access to the bar, her race excludes her;

associating the butch's racism with institutional figures of regulation and oppression configures this moment within structures of systemic discrimination that exceed the spatial parameters of the Atlantic region. That is, while the move to Toronto affords Edith freedom from certain regulations or threats particular to Nova Scotia, the overarching systems of settler colonialism and heteropatriarchy continue to impact her life in an urban setting where she is still stigmatized for being Indigenous and lives in perpetual fear of bar raids and violence.

The complexity of these restrictions in both urban and rural space is reminiscent of Rose and Kathleen in *Fall on Your Knees*. Much like in MacDonald's text, Mattie and Edith realize that the danger of their desire is complicated and comes from all directions, and the threat of exposure exists in different ways both inside and outside of the region. Unlike *Fall on Your Knees*, however, the interconnected systems of white supremacy, settler colonialism, and heteropatriarchy are at the forefront of the narrative. There is no secret to be exposed and no purposeful positioning of queer desire as a way to ensure reader engagement, as was necessary in the 1990s. With a deeper societal understanding of both the violence against Indigenous communities in Canada and the nation-state's role in the suppression and surveillance of queer and gender nonconforming communities, Burnet can move past the exposure stage—the need to situate the presence of nonconformity within regional space—and into an interrogation of these overarching structures. It is no longer enough, the novel suggests, to show that queer people exist and struggle in the region, or to highlight that they have done so for decades. By writing Edith and Mattie, as well as Ada and her lover Pan, in the region, Burnet taps into a complex and vibrant history of sexual nonconformity that pushes against stereotypical notions of linear progress, stagnation/simplicity, and the rural to urban trajectory.

In the novel's present of 2008, there is no domestic suppression in need of disruption because Mattie and Joan are accepting of Ada's sexuality and she, in turn, is accepting of theirs. There is no past wrong in their immediate home place that needs to be righted, and it does not seem that Edith's return is a way to dismantle any familial traditions or trajectories. It is not made clear when Edith's ghost begins to visit Mattie, nor is she limited to a specific space. She moves with the family as they relocate to the North End, suggesting a spectral presence that is less about place and more about people. Because no one seems scared of her visits, nor does her presence interrupt their daily lives, Burnet's reconfiguration of the home place via nonconforming sexual spectrality offers a new angle into the potential of Gothic figures to disrupt the regional canon. In *Crocuses Hatch from Snow*, the figure of the queer ghost becomes a means of joy and release. To be sure, Edith's return allows for narrative reflection on past injustices, and the depiction of gentrification complicates the very notion of a home place itself; yet, the spectral rekindling between Edith and Mattie is predominantly joyful—offering Mattie freedom from a life of discontent and from recent years marked by the pain of an aging body.

In so doing, this queer joy marks a decided turn into *desire from* the region. There is no sense of bucolic simplicity or the celebration of conventional familial structures, nor is there a suggestion of ideological decay or an imperative to familial continuation in the region as a backwoods; instead, Edith's return marks an important intervention into the ways sexuality has been positioned in a Canadian context. There is no easy celebration of freedom in the centre, but rather a rumination on the different kinds of restriction and joy. The novel does not romanticize or simplify life for nonconforming individuals or communities. No particular space or location is deemed good or bad, safe or suppressive. Rather, broader systems of oppression—the church, the state, social codes of morality, and damaging discourse in the medical community—are exposed

for the ways they overlap and regulate the lives of queer women. By highlighting the specific spatial and temporal parameters of affect and experience, Burnet shows that desire and danger, joy and fear, sex and suppression exist everywhere in different ways, and are intersected with factors that make any simple assumption or representation impossible.

Conclusion

In *The Divine Ryans* and *The Memento*, readers are not asked to respond to Donald's or Charlie's ghosts; instead, both novels use the suicide of a nonconforming character to situate domestic space in the Atlantic region as unlivable for those who do not fit the heterosexual imperative, and their spectral presences function mostly to aid in the development of the child protagonist. In this way, spectral nonconforming sexuality is not about queer life, but instead about heterosexual dominance. The transgressive potential of the queer spectre in this configuration is rendered inert, and the novels work within a *desire for* the region as a space of ideological and social stagnancy.

In *Fall on Your Knees*, however, Kathleen's lingering power in the home place and the narrative agency offered by her diary rework stereotypical representations of the region that developed throughout the twentieth century. Because Kathleen is explicit in her desire for Rose, and reflects honestly on both the joy and terror that comes with her new experiences, *Fall on Your Knees* moves away from the disembodied "apparitional lesbian" discussed by Terry Castle.⁶⁷ Instead, agency and personhood are restored and readers are asked to reconsider Kathleen's role in the narrative as a lingering presence of nonconforming sexuality. Throughout this reconsideration, the novel queers key symbols of the region and nonconforming desire is situated as having a real and lasting presence in the face of historical and social change.

This troubling is also central to *Crocuses Hatch from Snow*. Published more than twenty years after MacDonald's novel, Burnet's interrogation of intersecting histories of oppression extends the reconsideration process instigated by Kathleen and Rose's relationship. Edith's spectral presence highlights how different forms of regulation were afforded to, or forced upon,

⁶⁷ See Terry Castle's formative text *The Apparitional Lesbian: Female Homosexuality and Modern Culture* (1993).

different bodies. Moreover, Mattie's and Edith's contrasting experiences in Nova Scotia and Toronto trouble a clean trajectory of escape from the oppressive region and explode any simplistic or nostalgic rendering of Atlantic Canada as devoid of queer communities and histories of violence.

By positioning queer desire as complex, multifaceted, and joyful, both MacDonald and Burnet tap into broad socio-political issues tied to recognizable regional spaces and create a *desire from* the region that pushes against longstanding archetypes of simplicity or stagnancy. They present ghosts that refuse to be ignored or expunged when their narrative use-value is extinguished and make space for readers to consider the power of these spectral figures as force of reconfiguration; in so doing, the queer and ghostly women of both texts manifest as real and positive presences who demand reader attention by troubling longstanding associations between Atlantic Canada and heterosexual hegemony.

Conclusion: A Continuing Path

how hard it is to get the real truth
 how hard it is to admit when you aren't to question a claustrophobic place
 a house with several closets
 your parents expect you to leave
 never. I have asked myself to take a lot into this poem
 which no one may read.
 — Matthew Walsh, “More details forthcoming”

While Gothic figures allow writers to destabilize conventional notions of space, time, and sexuality as a strategy for troubling foundational aspects of the Atlantic Canadian canon, other works in the last twenty years have approached this process from different angles, genres, and positionings. Douglas Gosse's 2005 novel *Jackytar*, for example, follows protagonist Alexandré Murphy and other queer characters as they navigate between Toronto, St. John's, and Bond Cove, Newfoundland. Toronto is depicted as a space of disconnection and alienation, whereas Newfoundland is marked by “oppression. The deafening silences. The smirks. The undercurrents of disdain” (30) that Alex remembers from his time in both rural and urban parts of the province. Unlike the quirky negotiation of loss and love in St. John's found in Jessica Grant's *Come, Thou Tortoise*, which I used to open this dissertation, Gosse's novel is steeped in feelings of bitterness, isolation, longing, and struggle. While in Grant's text the Flowers' home place is a supportive space for queer worldmaking and individual development, the Murphy home place is not so easily categorized. In fact, by the novel's close Gosse offers no recognizable version of the home place as it has been understood in Atlantic Canadian literature. Instead, readers are left to sift through remnants of the dynamic sense of “psychological identification” (Davies *Studies* 194) in the face of fragmentation at the heart of the trope, crafting a piecemeal connection out of Alex's ambivalent relationship to both rural and urban spaces.

However, at the level of synopsis and character, *Jackytar* offers an oddly perfect pairing with *Come, Thou Tortoise*. Both texts are set in Newfoundland and follow protagonists who return home following the death of a parent (in *Jackytar*, Alex loses his mother to brain cancer). Both novels signal to currents of outmigration, and the complicated feelings of belonging that can follow the leaving subject. Audrey and Alex both carefully consider the intricacies and impacts of their home places as they grieve, and both narratives move through memory and contemporary reality to juxtapose their experiences in either temporal sphere. In the process, both Grant and Gosse explicitly complicate metronormative narratives of Atlantic Canada through their depiction of life inside and outside of the region. While *Come, Thou Tortoise* situates St. John's as a positive space for queer love compared to the oppressive spaces in England, *Jackytar* rebuffs the possibility of safety and happiness for Alex in either a rural or an urban setting. Rather than invert the rural/urban binary, Alex's complicated relationships to Toronto, St. John's, and Bond Cove eliminate the binary all together, thereby flattening opportunities for queer joy and questioning the contemporary rhetoric of pride and progress.

Works like Gosse's and Grant's, as well as many others that fall outside the scope of this project, may indicate that Atlantic Canadian literature and culture is in the midst of a "queer turn." Or, perhaps better stated, the velocity of a turn that began in the 1990s is finally picking up speed as filmmakers, poets, artists, historians, fiction writers, playwrights, and more are turning a critical gaze to how regional space is shaped by sexuality and how sexuality is shaped by space. The texts I have discussed in this project offer a limited view of a much larger conversation, and act as points along a varied and vibrant trajectory of representation.

Moving from a less rigid understanding of sexuality in bucolic space, as noted in *Anne of Green Gables* and *Rockbound*, I have worked to show how key texts in the Atlantic Canadian

canon become more constrained through time. As discourse around sexuality shifts in the twentieth century, the popular and canonical literature of the region, particularly the texts most celebrated from *without*, batten down the hatches on heterosexuality as an essential aspect of Atlantic Canadian experience. Likewise, rather than developing a more progressive view of sex and sexuality over time, many readers and consumers of popular Atlantic literature and culture actually seem to have become more conservative and myopic when it comes to representations of the region. The received version of the region as traditional, conservative, stagnant, innocent, and ignorant prove difficult to dislodge; in fact, responses to works that challenge this heteronormative trajectory reveal incredulity, annoyance, and even rage.

These contemporary responses to suggestions of queerness in supposedly traditional regional space, alongside the centering of unmarked heterosexuality as a key facet of regional heritage, upends conventional narratives of progress at the levels of both space and time. This developing sense ties to a *desire for* the region as a space of simplicity or stagnancy. In this vein, the gatekeepers of the national cultural apparatus in urban centres, such as Toronto, are complicit in the continual association of the Atlantic region with ideas of socio-economic, political, and ideological lag. While in some cases this delay is rooted in reality, the continued and repeated representation of similar male-dominated spaces, heterosexual couples, and communal belonging rooted in ideas of reproduction and continuation vastly oversimplifies the much more varied and complex scope of relations, experiences, and desires in Atlantic Canada.

Likewise, rather than develop a more progressive or open understanding of Atlantic Canada into the twenty-first century, this project suggests that a *desire for* the region as a space of simplicity or stagnancy gathers momentum and power over time. This advancement turns notions of past-to-present progress on their head. In *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of*

Queer History (2009), Heather Love analyzes writing rooted in negativity or queer ambivalence. “It is hard to know what to do with texts that resist our advances,” Love asserts, noting that “Texts or figures that refuse to be redeemed disrupt not only the progress narrative of queer history but also our sense of queer identity in the present” (8). These narratives may suggest that a viable queer life is a delusion, or offer limited-to-no space within which queer characters can be happy. In so doing, they hold the potential to illuminate the intricacies of life outside one-dimensional or binary narratives of improvement and acceptance. Because these irredeemable narratives refuse to fit a contemporary political praxis of progress, their backwardness highlights the power of abjection or ambivalence. Indeed, negative affect is situated as a useful force that can help to underline “the gap between aspiration and the actual” (4). In the discomfort or frustration produced by narratives of queer ambivalence, readers can remove the rose coloured glasses of progress to think through the residual struggles for queer liberation that remain prevalent in our contemporary moment.

Although *Feeling Backward* focuses on historical texts ranging from the late-nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth, Love’s discussion of reader discomfort with ambivalence offers a useful way of reflecting on the development of a more rigid focus in popular and canonical literature over time. That is, rather than finding suggestions of nonconforming impossibility in texts from the early-twentieth century, this project maps a mid-to-late century development of ambiguous or absent approaches to sexuality in the Atlantic canon. While it could be assumed that texts from the 1970s onward would offer a brighter and more vibrant version of the region, suggestive of more possibilities for queer and nonconforming communities, in some ways that is not what occurs. Instead, at the same time that activism for queer rights and equality happens on a broad scale, the region’s canon closes in on itself; the popular motifs, tropes, and archetypes

that emerge during this time reinforce the idea that heterosexuality is an unmarked and essential part of the region's canon. This happens at the same time that the tourist economy in the region gains steam and is in search of particular images of Atlantic Canada to market to outsiders. As a result, instead of becoming more diversified, images of the region coalesce around conventional notions of work, the landscape, and the family.

As a result, this confluence of forces homogenizes the Atlantic region; to return to Vaughan's apt description from the start of Part II: *The Backwoods*: "I cannot remember a time when I, as a Maritimer, was not represented in the national media as a caricatured fisherman—preferably old, preferably toothless . . . Dressed in a yellow slicker, stoop shouldered and narrow-eyed, the 'Salty Dog' projects an image of wily (but uneducated), harmless and whimsical (but uninformed) folk wisdom" (170). As I have worked to map throughout this project, sexuality is a key aspect in the longstanding success of this here/there or insider/outsider or margin/centre construction.

One of the main threads that runs throughout this analysis is the focus on home, or the home place. Home is often a complex site of understanding for queer and gender nonconforming communities, and manifests in a variety of ways in cultural representations of sexual and gender difference. As Alison Blunt and Robyn Dowling (2006) detail, "Home . . . is a place, a site in which we live. But, more than this, home is also an idea and an imaginary that is imbued with feelings" (2). This is most certainly true of the home place in Atlantic Canadian literature, which can connote feelings of longing, belonging, and return, for those like Anne Shirley, or feelings of disconnect, alienation, or fear, as felt by David Canaan or Donald Doyle. Indeed, because the home place is a site often implicitly associated with traditional understandings of the family, work, and production/reproduction, it functions as one of the "most intimate spaces in which

social difference, especially gender difference, is experienced” (Fuller 30). At the same time, “Home does not simply exist, but is made” (Blunt and Dowling 23), and the interplay of material, relational, and imaginative elements of home-making are “produced and articulated through relations of power” (24). Rather than a private space of domestic relations, or the haven to which those that have gone will return, the home place remains intersected by both private and public structures and imbricated in the specificities of how regional space is understood and constructed.

With this in mind, my analysis of Atlantic Canadian literature in the context of sexualities studies works, in part, to focus on the home place as a potential site of queer worldmaking. In contrast to the rigid boundaries placed around belonging in a broader *desire for* the region, home can act as a space of pushback and complication as *desire from* the region takes over spaces deemed antithetical to queer love, experience, and life. Rather than sustain the idea of an idyllic family centred around the hearth, normative gender roles, and heteropatriarchal relations central to stereotypical understandings of the region, the home place can attend to (and complicate) this image via feelings of alienation, division, and a unique sense of joy experienced by queer people within their chosen or self-built home places. As discussed with respect to Mattie and Edith in *Crocuses Hatch from Snow*, the home place can be a site within which a queer world unfolds. The pleasure Edith’s ghost brings to Mattie offers a transformative representation of lesbian desire as a lasting force that defies geographic distance and even death. This power is a mobile force that follows Mattie when the family moves to the North End, indicating that home is less a specific location and more a familial configuration—a way of making space in relation to the way the family moves through and re-makes their respective and collective worlds.

Alongside the home place, categories of here/there, progress/regress, and conforming/nonconforming have been central to my discussion of belonging and regional desiring in Atlantic Canadian literature. As a result, much of my analysis sits within binary understandings of space, time, and relation; however, my attention to queerness, and the language of nonconformity, reflects the haziness inherent in these categories. As Vaughan explains of queer New Brunswickers specifically, “Our queerness is Hatfieldian – dashing, smart, and deeply local. Our queerness is built, not bestowed from afar . . . Our queerness is liminal. Because it has to be to thrive in such small numbers” (8). This liminality, the embodiment of the in-between but also the bleeding-through, is crucial to my project. Like all things, queerness, and sexuality more broadly, is complex and varied; it takes different forms in different moments, and is experienced uniquely by all. And yet, there is also overlap and commonality in a shared experience of strangeness or peculiarity in a marginalized space.

The framework of regional desiring works within binary categories of meaning as a way to question their stability and trouble their effectiveness as key markers in regional literature. Thinking about how desire is constituted in space and time, and how this constitution can place boundaries around belonging, has been essential throughout. I have done my best to show how developing discourses around sexuality have intersected with literary representation and support for arts and culture from the Atlantic provinces. While not always explicit or clear-cut, the confluence of these forces has led to an overarching *desire for* the region as, among other things, a space rooted in tradition, conventional families, constricted masculinity, and sense of homogenized sexuality that is unmarked as straight. Reflecting on where this understanding comes from, and how it has developed over time (rather than involving a continuation of sexual heritage tied to the region), is not a straightforward process. Likewise, as mentioned throughout,

there is much, much more work to be done in the study of sexualities and regional histories, culture, and literature.

Harkening back to the epigraph by poet Matthew Walsh (2019), in some ways the Atlantic region has been understood as a “house with several closets your parents expect you to leave/never” (79). Not only does the gesture to multiple closets underscore a sense of variety in relation to hiding or erasure, but also the line break between leave and never suggests the complexities of leaving and staying, or belonging and non-belonging, that I have worked to ruminate on throughout this project. To get out, come out, or be out, and the associated options of staying and hiding, are crucial when discussing sexuality in general, and sexuality in marginal spaces in particular. As Dusty Green (2022) notes when reflecting on his youth in rural New Brunswick, “I became aware of the often-touted phrase in queer circles, ‘We have always been here.’ I knew that *we, queer people*, had always existed, but the *here* never clicked for me . . . [I] developed an internalized homophobia that was so firmly set that I considered it baked-in” (11). In response, Green and co-writer Meredith J. Batt work diligently to find and re-establish queerness in the region’s history, offering their readers representation that has been so harmful in its absence.

Though my experience was different, Green’s reflections and Walsh’s poetics are familiar to me. Growing up, life in small town New Brunswick felt unusual and, at times, uncomfortable in ways I did not fully understand until I left. Through the years, I have developed an appreciation for the places and people of my community, and an understanding of the unique rhythms and relations at work in this space. At the same time, I have also grown to recognize a sense of difference that, as an adolescent and young adult, I could not name but that shaped me, my understanding of place, and my personal relationships. Moreover, this feeling continues to

shape how I now see the region from the outside, how I interact with views of the region from those who have not lived here, and how I understand myself in relation to my home.

This sense of difference, and my own continual orientation around and through that sense of difference, is an important part of this project. As Green explains, “Being part of a marginalized population in a place seemingly devoid of representation” compounds feelings of alienation, confusion, and fear. That feeling of the region as *seemingly* devoid of representation was a personal catalyst for me. The more literature I have found that complicates this façade, or which could be read queerly, the more I have become interested in where this façade comes from and how it has been created, maintained, and continued into the contemporary moment. Because of this interest in development and continuation, a key aspect that I love about Walsh’s poem is that they do not offer a clear-cut metronormative positioning of home; instead, they note “how hard it is to get the real truth” as well as the amount of oneself that goes into searching. What this truth is, I do not know, but the process of looking for it, of reading and thinking about regional representation queerly, has helped to recalibrate how I think about home and belonging in Atlantic Canada. As I have noted throughout, my hope is that this project will be one point along a long and varied investigative path. To that end, I want to close with the words of R.M. Vaughan from his last project, *Marsh Blue Violet Queer Poetry from New Brunswick*. Vaughan echoes my sentiments more beautifully than I can: “This . . . is not a complete project. Not even close. It’s a start, a baton passed in a relay. I hope it will lead you to discover more of our wonders” (8).

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