CORA Cork Open Research Archive
Cartlann Taighde Oscailte Chorcaí

Title	The demise of the Beothuk as a past still present
Authors	Owen, Suzanne
Publication date	2015
Original Citation	OWEN, S. 2015. The demise of the Beothuk as a past still present. Journal of the Irish Society for the Academic Study of Religions, 2(1), 119-139.
Type of publication	Article (peer-reviewed)
Link to publisher's version	http://jisasr.org/
Rights	©2015, The Author(s).
Download date	2026-11-07 02:12:32
Item downloaded from	https://hdl.handle.net/10468/1880

UCC
University College Cork, Ireland
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh

© ISASR 2015

Suzanne OWEN

The Demise of the Beothuk as a Past Still Present

ABSTRACT: This article aims to investigate contemporary cultural representations of the Beothuk Indians in art, literature and museum displays in Newfoundland, Canada, focussing on ways these reimagine the past for the present, offering perspectives on contested histories, such as the circumstances leading to the demise of the Beothuk. Wiped out through the impact of colonialism, the Beothuk are the 'absent other' who continue to be remembered and made present through the creative arts, largely at the expense of other indigenous groups on the island. Rather than focussing on the 'non-absent past', according to Polish scholar Ewa Domańska, 'instead we turn to a past that is somehow still present, that will not go away or, rather, that of which we cannot rid ourselves' (2006, 346). Depictions of the last Beothuk are part of a cultural remembering where guilt and reconciliation are played out through media of the imagination.

KEYWORDS: indigenous, art, representation, memory, Beothuk, Newfoundland

Suzanne OWEN is Senior Lecturer in Religious Studies at the University of Chester and Senior Lecturer in Theology and Religious Studies at Leeds Trinity University. Her research interests include critical analysis of 'indigeneity' and other categories, such as 'religion', and their contested usages by different groups; Native American studies; contemporary paganism; and methodological debates in the study of religion.

Introduction

Literary depictions of the Beothuk, an extinct indigenous group in Newfoundland, have gained scholarly attention, but less consideration has been given to contemporary visual representations and public acts of remembering at memorials and sites associated with the Beothuk. This article aims to combine anthropological research methods with postcolonial literary theory in order to investigate contemporary cultural representations of the Beothuk Indians in art, literature and museum displays as reimaginings of the past for the present, offering different perspectives on the circumstances that led to the demise of the Beothuk.

A combination of factors has led to this remembrance, and reimagining, of the Beothuk related to various "losses", which not only include the collapse of the cod fishing industry and the economy (see Chafe 2004, 93), but also the perceived loss of Newfoundland culture and identity when it became a province of Canada in 1949. In an interview in June 2013, artist Gerald Squires told me he was one of the last Newfoundlanders, referring to those born before 1949. Since that date, the Mi'kmaq on the island have been seeking – and eventually gaining – recognition as First Nations although they, like the Europeans, have been regarded as "settlers" (i.e. from Nova Scotia), leading to questions about who is native in Newfoundland in the absence of the Beothuk.[1] This has had an impact on settler-indigenous relations on the island.

In the summer of 2013, I interviewed four artists and visited a number of exhibitions portraying the lives and material culture of the Beothuk as well as sites associated with them. The results of this research have indicated that, although the last Beothuk died nearly two hundred years ago, they continue to be remembered and made present through memorials and the creative arts, often at the expense of other indigenous groups.

The Beothuk Story

The story of their demise, known colloquially as 'the Beothuk Story', has been retold by historians and fictionalised by novelists and poets, and increasingly so in the last few decades. In the early 1800s Beothuk avoided contact with settlers and therefore their total population was not known – estimates vary widely between five hundred to several thousand (see Marshall 1996, 283). There was concern by some Newfoundlanders at the

[1] Mi'kmaq were regarded by government officials as 'one of many immigrant groups' and 'responsible for the Beothuk's demise' (Baehre 2013, 83). Ingeborg Marshall, however, cites several factors for their demise, including disease (1996, 442-4).

© ISASR 2015

time that their numbers were diminishing rapidly due to slaughter and disease. Many Beothuk had been killed by English settlers, including an occasion when seven Beothuk were killed in their wigwams as they slept (Marshall 1996, 101).

In 1819, after a number of thefts by Beothuk, John Peyton Jr, son of a trader and local magistrate, organised a raiding party to recover their property (Marshall 1996, 161-2). The Peytons also wanted to capture a Beothuk to learn more about them. During the raid, which took place at a Beothuk camp by Red Indian Lake, they captured Demasduit and killed her husband, the chief Nonosabasut, during the struggle. She was given the name of 'Mary March', after the month in which she was captured, and taken to live with an Anglican priest and his family in Twillingate. Eventually she was taken to St John's where Lady Hamilton, the governor's wife, painted her portrait (see fig. 1 below). In Paul Chafe's view: 'The famous portrait of Demasduit stares back at Newfoundlanders like their very own Mona Lisa, forever unknowable, forever ambiguous' (2004, 115).



Figure 1: 'Mary March' (1819) by Lady Henrietta Hamilton. Copyright: Library and Archives, Canada).

When Governor Hamilton arranged to return Demasduit to her people, she died of tuberculosis during the voyage in January 1820 and was taken back to Red Indian Lake by a group led by Captain David Buchan. There they found the remains of Nonosabasut in a burial hut, along with those of an infant, and left Demasduit's coffin in another structure nearby (Harries 2010, 406-7). Not long after, the Beothuk removed her from the coffin and placed her within the burial hut. This was according to Shanawdithit, one of three starving Beothuk women who sought help from a trapper in April 1823. Only Shanawdithit, renamed Nancy April, survived long enough to be taken to the Peytons' place and eventually to St John's where she was interviewed by William

Epps Cormack, a Scottish explorer who was born in Newfoundland. Shanawdithit told him Demasduit was her aunt and gave other details about the raid that led to her capture. Then in 1829 she, too, died of tuberculosis.

Before meeting Shanawdithit, Cormack had founded the 'Boeothick Institution' in 1827 in order to help the remaining Beothuk. With funds from the Institution, he went searching for Beothuk in central Newfoundland but was unable to find any. However, he came across the burial hut at Red Indian Lake and removed the skulls of the adults, donating them to the University Museum in Edinburgh, where they remain to this day (Marshall 1996, 196; Harries 2010, 408).

No other Beothuk were ever seen again and so Shanawdithit was dubbed the 'last Beothuk'. According to Fiona Polack, Newfoundlanders are invested in the idea of her being the 'last' and there is a reluctance by researchers to investigate claims that they were related to any other group (2009, 54). Her skull was taken to London, but was lost during WWII, and her burial site in St John's was destroyed during road building. So, it seemed they were being forgotten. According to artist Craig Goudie, it was Ingeborg Marshall, renowned Beothuk expert, who made sure the Lady Hamilton portrait was returned to Newfoundland after it came up for auction, as 'no one else seemed to care' (Goudie, 3 July, 2013).

A combination of factors has led to the recent remembering of the Beothuk, connected to mourning for that which is lost. Paul Chafe, at Ryerson University, opens his review of Michael Crummey's novel *River Thieves* with:

> To write about the Beothuk is to write about loss. To write about Newfoundland is to write about the same thing. The loss of the island's original inhabitants is only one of many oft-lamented losses that have forged the collective psyche of Newfoundlanders and left a distinctive trace on their art and literature. The loss of independence, the loss of the cod fishery, the loss of countless lives to the sea, and the loss of opportunity have been the prevalent and persistent themes and inspirations for many works of literature by or about Newfoundlanders (Chafe 2004, 93).

In my view, another aspect is the recognition of Newfoundland Mi'kmaq as First Nations, threatening the view that there were 'no natives in Newfoundland', a claim made by the first premier of the new province at the time of confederation in 1949 (Owen 2008, 117-8). The 1990s saw a resurgence of Mi'kmaq activity, which coincided with renewed interest in the Beothuk. Ingeborg Marshall's great tome on *A History and Ethnography of the Beothuk* came out in 1996, the same year Newfoundland Mi'kmaq held their first powwow (Jeddore 1996). The following year, the Boeothick

Institution originally founded by William Cormack was reformed as the Beothuk Institute (Marshall 2012).

Marshall noted that, '[i]n Canada, the Beothuk are the only tribe whose extinction is popularly linked to persecution by Europeans. They have therefore received more posthumous attention than any other native groups, and their extinction has led to more recrimination' (1996, 444). Terry Goldie at York University (Ontario) claimed the Newfoundlander position is, 'We had natives. We killed them off. Now we are natives,' in opposition to Mi'kmaq assertions (1989, 157), while Cynthia Sugars at the University of Ottawa thought that, 'The decimation of the Beothuk constitutes the "national Holocaust". It is shameful, and horrifying, but, nevertheless, it is definitive. We use it to reflect on our inheritance—of imperial barbarity, of invader-settler disquiet' (2005, 163). It may not be regarded accurately as a 'Holocaust' but the choice of words indicates the depth of feeling on the issue. However, Polack regarded Sugar's statement as seeming 'ill-considered in that it simultaneously over-inflates the raw dimensions of the loss and lessens it by detaching what happened in Newfoundland from the wider colonial picture' (Polack 2009, 58-9).

The ghostly presence of the absent

In her article 'Material Presence of the Past' on the Disappeared of Argentina, Ewa Domańska says 'we turn to a past that is somehow still present, that will not go away or, rather, that of which we cannot rid ourselves' (2006, 346). Offering an alternative paradigm to a thing (in the Heideggerian sense) being a 'representation' of the past, she writes of it as a 'presence' of the past. 'A person… who has been disappeared without a trace takes on a ghostly character' (2006, 343). To explain this, she turns to Freud's concept of the 'uncanny'.

In 'The Uncanny' ('Das Unheimliche', 1919), written just after the First World War, Sigmund Freud discussed anxieties linked to the modern, changing environment. In this essay, the uncanny is defined by way of *heimlich* (translated as homely, familiar) and *unheimlich* (translated as unhomely, unfamiliar) (Freud 1919, 342-7; cited in Gelder and Jacobs 1998, 23).[2] The uncanny is the experience of one's home being unfamiliar. In Domanska's analysis: 'The non-absent past is the ambivalent and liminal space of "the uncanny"; it is a past that haunts like a phantom and therefore cannot be so easily controlled or subject to a finite interpretation. It is occupied by "ghostly artifacts" or places that undermine our sense of

[2] Unheimlich can be translated as 'uncanny' but also 'unsecret' or 'unconcealed', while heimlich, is 'secret' or 'concealed', though also 'of the home' and 'familiar'.

the familiar and threaten our sense of safety' (2006, 346). To overcome this, the dead become anthropomorphised and made like us, made familiar. This is apparent in depictions of the Beothuk. Artist Craig Goudie's aim for the museum storyboards he was working on was to make the Beothuk look more like us (see below), and therefore less 'other'.

A group of scholars in Australia have applied Freud's concept of the 'uncanny' to the settler-indigenous tensions there. In describing the issues of land rights and the process of decolonisation in Australia, Gelder and Jacobs note that 'what is "ours" is also potentially, or always had been, "theirs", the familiar is becoming strange' (1998, 23). The 'settler' becomes 'unsettled'. Contemporary settlers either see themselves as innocent – they were not involved in the earlier events, so disconnected to the past – or guilty, 'in the sense that everyone… is drawn into "the guilt industry" whether they like it or not' (Gelder and Jacobs 1998, 24). Similarly, Malcolm Page wrote: 'Any Newfoundlander sensitive to the past muses on the Beothuk Indians, feels guilt at the genocide, attempts somehow to bridge the years and attempt contact' (1994, 5). This contact is imagined in a 1978 poem by Al Pittman to Shanawdithit that begins: 'Lie easy in your uneasy peace, girl, and do not, do not, forgive those who trespass against you.' Hauntings, visions and channellings of the Beothuk are not uncommon claims, offering self-reproach and perhaps signifying anxiety in a rapidly changing environment.

Shanawdithit in particular, as the last Beothuk, has captured the imagination of Newfoundland creatives. As well as Pittman's poem, there is a musical theatre piece, *Shanadithit* (1997) by Eleanor Cameron-Stockley of Twillingate and an orchestral composition called 'Shanadithit' by Michael Parker, which premiered in Corner Brook in July 1983, 'written to commemorate the 400th anniversary of the claiming of Newfoundland for England by Sir Humphrey Gilbert on August 5, 1583.'[3]

Literature: giving voice to the silent

Newfoundland literature provides insights for studying reimaginings of the Beothuk that parallel and contrast with visual representations. According to Fiona Polack at Memorial University: 'Historical fictions by Newfoundland writers published since the 1980s repeatedly express white guilt about the fate of the Beothuk but also persist in highlighting Shanawdithit's status as "last" of the indigenes' (Polack 2009, 54), while Paul Chafe asserts that 'Newfoundlanders have made decisions that have forever separated them from what they could have been, and such guilt

[3] Sir Wilfred Grenfell College [ONLINE] http://www2.swgc.mun.ca/mparker/shanadithit.htm [Accessed 17 October 2012, now unavailable].

© ISASR 2015

and regret have been the driving forces behind many Newfoundland novels' (Chafe 2004, 96). Regarding responsibility for the extinction of the Beothuk, Richard Budgel says that Newfoundlanders fall into 'two camps': 'those who would accept partial or full responsibility for the disappearance of the tribe, and those who refuse to accept any collective responsibility for the actions of their ancestors', but thinks that Newfoundland discussions on the Beothuk have 'more to do with the nature of contemporary non-aboriginal Newfoundlanders than with the nature of the Beothuk themselves' (1992, 16). As we shall see, this is also true of visual representations of the Beothuk.

As well as poems, such as the one by Al Pittman mentioned above, there have been a number of novelisations of the Beothuk story where authors are faced with the problem of how to present Beothuk perspectives authentically. On the other hand, it has been easy to appropriate the Beothuk voice with little regard for authenticity, as there are none left alive who can object. Two novels in particular demonstrate opposing ways to address this matter: *All Gone Widdun* (1999) includes the Beothuk perspective while *River Thieves* (2001) deliberately avoids it.

Dreams and ghostly encounters of the Beothuk appear in Annamarie Beckel's novel, *All Gone Widdun* (1999) – 'widdun' is a Beothuk word for sleep or death. It tells of the story of Shanawdithit, William Cormack and the search for the remnant of the Beothuk. At Red Indian Lake, in a dream, Cormack lifts the skull of Mary March (Demasduit) and, 'Someone watched from the shadows. Dark eyes in an ancient face' – something other and seductive, just out of reach, and beyond threat; but this line is followed by: 'Bright blood spurted from the skull's grinning mouth, streamed down the alabaster chin, and dripped through my fingers. I dropped the skull, raised my blood-covered hands and screamed' (1999, 114). Anthropologist John Harries points to this as an example of the postcolonial uncanny, as described by Gelder and Jacobs (1998): 'the familiar "homely" space of the nation is haunted by the ghost of an 'other' whose presence has been (often violently) repressed, yet who returns to disrupt the temporality and territoriality of the national imaginary' (Harries 2010, 415). In Beckel's novel, the scene retells the story of Cormack's discovery of the skulls of Demasduit and Nonosabasut, but the familiar narrative turns to horror, representing the supressed 'colonial violence', as Harries puts it (2010, 416). In conversation, Beckel said that she was nervous about appropriating Shanawdithit's voice and asked Ojibwe friends about it. However, she did not think that about Cormack, a Scotsman! At first, she considered having only Cormack's voice in the novel, but thought 'that would just be doing what they've *all* been doing – Cormack's view – and I felt it would be just wrong' (19 June, 2013). In

giving the Beothuk a voice in the novel, the reader can identify with them and consequently make their demise more horrifying.

In *River Thieves* (2001), Michael Crummey reimagines a time in Newfoundland when settlers and Beothuk co-existed. However, he refrains from interpolating Beothuk perspectives in order to highlight their 'absence' (Crummey, 2009), thus challenging the notion that their perspectives are accessible to the contemporary white settler (Polack 2009, 55). This approach emphasises that the Beothuk are gone and their voices have been silenced. In a review of the novel, Paul Chafe states:

> More so than any other work on the subject. *River Thieves* delves into the emotional and psychological ramifications of such an enormous loss on those left behind — the European settlers and their descendants who would assume the mantle of native Newfoundlanders. The Beothuk of *River Thieves* function more as an *absence* than a *presence* and are thus inseparable from the notion of loss that has become a fundamental part of Newfoundland's culture (Chafe 2004, 96).

Crummey himself had said: 'But I felt it would be wrong to write a novel about the Beothuk — to write as if we know more about them than we do, or to try to give them a voice that is absent from the historical record. Their absence, to my mind, is the point' (quoted in Chafe 2004, 97, and Polack 2009, 55). In Fiona Polack's view, 'Crummey does appear overly intent at times on "indigenizing" his settler characters' (2009, 55). However, in Chafe's reading of *River Thieves*: 'The Peytons and the other characters can never be comfortably at home on this island because they always exist where someone else *was supposed to have existed*. Crummey imbues his novel and his characters with this nagging unhomeliness' (Chafe 2004, 97). This postcolonial uneasiness disrupts a sense of belonging in a place where once dwelled the Beothuk.

When I asked artist Jonathan Howse what he thought of the two novelists' approaches, he personally agreed with Crummey's: 'the Beothuk should be silent, to be respectful' (5 July, 2013). Like Crummey, he too appears to indigenise the settlers, or rather show that there is 'hidden blood' – Mi'kmaq, and perhaps even Beothuk – in many Newfoundlanders (see below). Three of the artists I interviewed only recently learned of their Mi'kmaq heritage, kept hidden by older family members who were once ashamed of it.

Art: making present the absent

Contemporary artists set out to remind and challenge us to confront the absence of the Beothuk by making them present. I have selected one piece

© ISASR 2015

from each of four Newfoundland artists illustrating their differing approaches to the Beothuk. To gain an understanding of their position on the subject, I interviewed three of the artists in June and July 2013. Conversations with Jerry Evans were more informal.[4] Evans also spoke about his work during a workshop organised by John Harries, Joanne Mercer and I on 'Remembering the Beothuk' (19th June 2013 at Queens College, St John's), also attended by novelist Annamarie Beckel as well as a folklorist, an archaeologist and representatives from museum and heritage groups.

Gerald Squires

One of the most well-known Newfoundland artists, Gerald Squires was born in Change Island in 1937 when Newfoundland was a Dominion. He is a 'native Newfoundlander,' though not of native ancestry. Previous to his statue of Shanawdithit, Squires did four of the illustrations depicting Beothuk for Ingeborg Marshall's *The Beothuk of Newfoundland: A Vanished People* (1989), but he is primarily known for his landscape paintings.

In 1997, Squires felt he should do something for the newly reformed Beothuk Institute and told them about a vision he had on the way to Exploits Island during a storm in 1996. Passing the uninhabited Grassy Island he said he saw a woman pulling a cloak around herself and thought it was 'a very unusual place to have a sighting of a ghost.' A staff member of the Beothuk Interpretation Centre at Boyd's Cove said Squires began to say it was a vision of Shanawdithit, the last Beothuk. He wanted the sculpture placed on Grassy Island, but was fine with it at Boyd's Cove (figures 2 and 3, below), where it was unveiled in 2000 as a millennium memorial to commemorate 'the strength and pride of the now-extinct indigenous people of Newfoundland and Labrador', according to an announcement from the Beothuk Institute.[5]

Squires said he wanted to name the statue Shanawdithit from the start, but the museum director said it inappropriate because she never lived at Boyd's Cove, so it became 'Spirit of the Beothuk'. At the unveiling, Al Pittman read his poem to Shanawdithit ('Lie easy in your uneasy peace'). 'Before Al,' said Squires, 'no one tried to bring them alive again, their perspective, humanised' (20 June, 2014).

[4] Each of the artists had an opportunity to review the sections about them in this article before publication.

[5] Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 'News Releases,' 16 Feb 2000. [ONLINE] Available at: http://www.releases.gov.nl.ca/releases/2000/tcr/0216n04.htm [Accessed 21 October 2014]. The statue was unveiled in July 2000.




Figure 2: 'Spirit of the Beothuk' (1999) by Gerald Squires and Figure 3: Detail of 'Spirit of the Beothuk'. Photos by S. Owen, 2013.

Squires told me the statue was the first contemporary depiction of a Beothuk. 'The intention was not to promote native peoples but to pay homage to her.' This made me suspect that he did not view the statue as an 'it'. 'It is her', he confirmed, 'not a statue.' He had heard that some thought an aboriginal artist should have made the commemorative piece, 'but they didn't have the idea.' Mi'kmaq artist Jerry Evans told me later that 'a lot of artists in the artists association felt it should have been an aboriginal artist to make the commemorative piece' (23 June, 2013). However, according to Squires, Mi'kmaq chief Mi'sel Joe had told him, 'if the Great Spirit led you to do it, it doesn't matter if you're red or white.' Some may feel uncomfortable by this admission in Christy Boyd's interview with Squires:

> In order to make the statue as life-like as possible Mr. Squires used the information he gleaned from his years of studying books and images of the Beothuk people. He determined that they were tall people and Shanawdithit had more of a European look about her than a native look. Mr. Squires had a non-aboriginal model to help him sculpt the facial features. He also relied on his imagination to shape the statue into his interpretation of "The Spirit of the Beothuk" (Boyd 2013).

However, the only contemporary portrait of a Beothuk woman is the one of Demasduit by Lady Hamilton (fig. 1 above). An 1841 portrait by William Gosse labelled 'A female red Indian of Newfoundland' is purported to be of Shanawdithit but it is more likely a copy of Hamilton's. In both, the subject is shown with cropped hair and wearing European clothing, indicating an attempt to convey a Beothuk woman as Europeanised, minimising difference in order to elicit more sympathy toward the Beothuk or a recognition that they are 'like us'. Squires may also be following this practice, but takes it further in stating 'they are us'',

© ISASR 2015

with Newfoundlanders assuming the identity of the Beothuk. 'The Spirit of the Beothuk' is also *the spirit of Newfoundland*.

Regarding whether the resurgence in the interest in Beothuk was related to guilt, he said it was rather 'the purging of guilt; also the distance to do that' (as enough time has passed to be able to face it). When he was young, 'Beothuk' was pretty much unknown, except as a brand name (e.g. Beothuck Trailers). At school, there were just a few pages about them in books saying: 'once there were Beothuk and now they're gone. They didn't say exactly how.' When he mentioned the loss of Newfoundland culture, I asked if there was a connection with that and the memory of the last of the Beothuk. He agreed and said, 'One was wiped out violently and one was wiped out politically.' Island communities, like the one he came from, experienced rapid changes from the 1950s leading to a loss of culture and way of life when many families either chose or were forced to move to the main island. Some islands were resettled, though the populations are just a fraction of what they were.

For his landscape paintings, he feels drawn to the rocky Barrens in particular because 'stone has memory; it's been there so long, they're ancient, and if you really look at them they're like people. You can hear them, I can hear them, whispering. It's a spiritual experience to communicate with these stones.' He said if he was alive at the time, he would have been attracted to Ralph Waldo Emerson's Trancendentals. He uses his 'art to get a sense of who I am and understand myself.' It's about being 'in contact with what is beautiful in nature, your connection with nature.' Beauty, he says, is what makes you happy and what makes him happy is walking through nature.

Jerry Evans

Jerry Evans, a master print maker, was born in 1961 in Grand Falls-Windsor in central Newfoundland. As a child, he said he 'kind of knew' he was Mi'kmaq because of the name-calling from other kids, but his family told him and his father they were of Spanish decent. Then when he was at college, his great uncle told him that they were Mi'kmaq and Métis from French Acadian background. Finding out gave him license to explore this in his work (23 June, 2013).

He began painting native imagery after experiencing an archaeological dig. The site was Maritime Archaic, the ancestors of Innu, Mi'kmaq and Beothuk. 'Why the division?' he said. 'Mi'kmaq were relatives of Beothuk. In the Mi'kmaw language, the Beothuk were called Pitawkewaq [which he pronounced 'bedawkwah'] – "our people up the river" – which could lie behind Beothuk name' (19 June 2013). He thought the idea that the Beothuk were a completely distinct culture was wrong.

Jerry was cast in the role of Nonosabasut in the documentary *Stealing Mary* (see Harries 2010, 418). When I asked him about that, he said when they 'were filming the scene where they're running away from the Peytons, and Demasduit gets caught, all went silent, all were crying. Sense of guilt.' He gave an account of this previously to John Harries, who commented, 'those involved [in the film] came in touch with the past lives of Nonosabasut and Demasduit, not as narratives but as a quality of experience that blurred the distinctions between past and present, between real and re-enacted events, between the living and the dead' (2010, 418).

Exploring the Beothuk in his work, Evans said, 'What we have is material culture. Smell of tanned hide, ochre, smells same as 400 years ago. Gives you a shiver.' He handled Beothuk artefacts with gloves on in museums to get the feel of them in the hand. Like several Newfoundland artists, Jerry Evans uses recognisable images of the Beothuk. In 'Living Spirits' (figure 4, below), Jerry places the image of the last Beothuk beside Mi'kmaq to show that there are still indigenous people on Newfoundland – they are not all extinct.



Figure 4: 'Living Spirits' (1999) by Jerry Evans.

When making his prints, Jerry Evans uses milled red ochre pounded in a transparent ink base. His fingerprints can be seen along the bottom of 'Living Spirits'. 'They're all about me,' he said when he showed us his work during the 'Remembering the Beothuk' workshop at Queen's College (19 June 2013). Another print, 'I Honour My Mi'kmaq Blood' (1997, figure 5, below), has his hand prints 'as way of leaving his mark' on either side of an image of an eagle feather. There are also hieroglyphs from the Mi'kmaq prayer book (from 1810) saying 'I am Mi'kmaq and I work with my hands' and two old photographs of Newfoundland Mi'kmaq from the French Shore by American anthropologist Frank Speck (on top) and French naval officer Paul-Émile Miot. The patterning is also from the Mi'kmaq prayer book, which usually resides in a glass case in the Conne River Mi'kmaq Band office (in 2013 it was in Ottawa for restoration).

© ISASR 2015



Figure 5: 'I Honour My Mi'kmaq Blood' (1997) by Jerry Evans.

When I spoke to Evans again a few days later (23 June 2013), he recounted a story about the time when he first became an artist and met Gerald Squires, who invited him to visit his studio in Ferryland. Evans, who was twenty at the time, had never seen an artist's studio before, so one day he drove down in awful weather with his vehicle getting stuck in the mud. He arrived at the door drenched, but no one was there. Walking around the building, he peered through windows and saw the studio. 'That was enough, I got what I came for.' He told Squires this story twenty years later.

Jonathan Howse

Born in Grand Falls in the 1980s and raised in Springdale, Jonathan Howse comes at the topic of the Beothuk from another angle – not only regret and guilt at their demise, but also the notion that they have something to teach us concerning what has been lost. In school he said he was taught that there were no natives in Newfoundland at all, no Beothuk or Mi'kmaq. When he was seventeen, he found out about his Mi'kmaq heritage (5 July, 2013). His Nan talked about being Mi'kmaq more after his grandfather died; 'Mi'kmaq was a dirty word before.' Then a relative on his mother's side, Ted Stuckless, claimed they were descended from a Beothuk. Howse was studying art when that story came out – he regarded it as 'hidden blood, forgotten.' After attending art schools in Nova Scotia and San Francisco, he spent a period of time living in the wilderness in the Yukon before returning to Newfoundland.

'The Return of the Beothuk' (figure 6, below) is part of his *Return of the Native* series, which includes portraits of family members. This painting is based on a nineteenth century engraving by John W. Hayward (see figure 7, below) that showed settlers bringing gifts to Beothuk, but reverses it to natives bringing gifts of traditional knowledge to settlers, turning around European patronisation.[6] When I asked Jonathan about the pale figures, he was reticent, saying that 'it's precognitive when making paintings' and 'painting is like creating new worlds' (5 July, 2013).



Figure 6: 'The Return of the Beothuk' (2010) by Jonathan Howse.

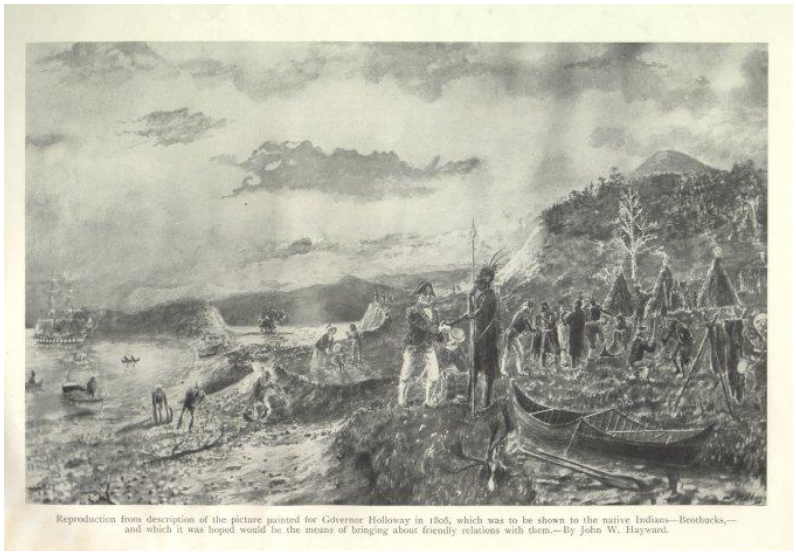


Figure 7: J. W. Hayward engraving in Howley (1915, Preface).[7]

[6] A reproductions of the engraving by J.W. Hayward can be found in Marshal (1996, xxiii), taken from Howley (1915, opposite the Preface).

[7] The image of Hayward's engraving in Howley (1915) was found on the Memorial University

© ISASR 2015

He was inspired by the poet Gary Snyder, 'especially the nature poetry, observing in nature. Being "native" is this.' He views 'The Return of the Beothuk' as 'a return of traditional skills and knowledge, a return to being native, paying attention to your surroundings,' thinking how his grandparents had all these skills – his grandfather learned bush skills from an Innu. 'Now people hire people to do what people used to know how to do.' The biographical aspects of his work are more apparent in his other paintings. According to Christina Parker, who runs the gallery that sells his work, one painting by Howse she had at the time I visited, 'Native', is a self-portrait with lots of symbols including feathers and hockey sticks (22 June, 2013).

Craig Goudie

Before discussing the final artist, Craig Goudie, who did the storyboard illustrations for the Red Indian Lake Heritage Society, some context is necessary. There are several museums and sites in Central Newfoundland associated with the Beothuk, such as the Mary March Museum in Grand Falls-Windsor, the Beothuk Interpretation Centre in Boyd's Cove and Indian Point at Red Indian Lake.

The storyboards in the Mary March Museum were made in 1988 and include a timeline showing that the Europeans arrived in Newfoundland shortly before the Mi'kmaq, a contentious issue. There is also a gallery with changing exhibitions. On another wall there used to be an image of the capture on ice of Demasduit, 'Mary March', which showed settlers shooting Beothuk. When asked about it, a staff member said the painting had to go to St John's, 'and there were issues with it… it was nasty... but part of the history' (3 July, 2013). She said another image of Demasduit was taken into storage to protect it from light damage. Now there are no images of 'Mary March' – just an inscription about her near the entrance, ending with the line: 'To her and to the memory of her people this museum is dedicated'. The curator explained that the museum is for Central Newfoundland. 'Some people think this is a Beothuk museum, but it is not.'

The Beothuk Interpretation Centre in Boyd's Cove, on the other hand, is fully devoted to the Beothuk, although a staff member said its focus was on how the Beothuk lived – not on how they died (26 June, 2013). The centre also hosts events in collaboration with indigenous

website [ONLINE] Available at: http://www.mun.ca/rels/native/beothuk/beo2gifs/graphics/plates/front.jpg [Accessed 21 February 2015]

groups, contemporary artists and others, such as a folklorist speaking about stories of the Beothuk.

Neither the Mary March Museum nor the Beothuk Interpretation Centre address the circumstances of the demise of the Beothuk in much detail. At the former, the gallery space has a plaque with a small image of the Lady Hamilton portrait and includes some information: 'the Beothuk found themselves in a losing competition for resources with the arrival of other cultures, particularly the European' – plus a dedication at the bottom: 'In memory of the tragic extinction of the Beothuk culture, this gallery is dedicated to the future harmony of all peoples.' The choice of the word 'culture' rather than 'people' distances itself from the human deaths involved. One board at the Beothuk Interpretation Centre, near Gerald Squires' statue of Shanawdithit, states: 'Until the early 1700s, the Beothuk co-existed relatively peacefully alongside other aboriginal groups and European fishing crews and settlers who came to the island,' portraying an almost idyllic past that somehow slipped away. It continues by saying: 'With increasing encroachment on Beothuk territory, relations became hostile,' without specifying who was involved – other aboriginal groups or Europeans, or both? Attributing this to no-one, it says: 'Hostile acts persisted as the Beothuk population dwindled.'

At Indian Point, one storyboard identifies groups of perpetrators but provides little more detail: 'Without receiving protection, the Beothuk were increasingly harassed and many cruel acts by settlers and trappers have been recorded.' Below this, however, is an illustration showing Europeans shooting dead a group of Beothuk who have their backs to the men with rifles, leaving little doubt as to what settlers' 'cruel acts' included (figure 9, below). The artwork was by Grand Falls-Windsor artist Craig Goudie under the direction of Ingeborg Marshall. The pictures were sent to the Rooms in St John's for approval and they requested some changes for authenticity: muskets, rather than rifles; square bottles, not round (Goudie, 3 July 2013). They left the story to Ingeborg Marshall.

Indian Point was the location of a Beothuk winter camp beside Red Indian Lake, where Demasduit was captured and her remains returned, 'widely regarded as the last home of the Beothuk.'[8] Few people make the effort to visit as it is quite a ways down a road that ends at the small town of Millertown. Not much else is beyond that, apart from an open pit mine and dense boreal forest. The Lewis Miller Room museum in Millertown contains a few replicas of Beothuk artefacts, such as combs and arrowheads, lumps of red ochre one can take away, and, when I visited (2 July 2013), I was shown a print of a 1951 painting by Helen S. Parsons depicting either Demasduit or Shanawdithit based on the Hamilton

[8] Community of Millertown. [ONLINE] Available at: www.communityofmillertown.ca [Accessed 4 November 2014].

© ISASR 2015

portrait. All of Goudie's original pastels for the Indian Point storyboards are hanging on the walls in the town hall adjoining the museum.

For the illustration titled 'Attack on a camp' (figure 8, below), he said 'De Goya's image of execution is in it. The Beothuk with his hands up knows what's going to happen, as in the Goya painting' (3 July, 2013, referring to Francisco de Goya's 'Executions of the Third of May 1808,' painted in 1814). He also put in a Mi'kmaq because, he said, 'all are involved, no one comes out well.' Like many others, Goudie discovered recently that he had Mi'kmaq ancestry, but he is reluctant to identify as Mi'kmaq. When I told him I was an outsider to all of this, he said, 'We all are. There are no insiders.' (Ingeborg Marshall herself is originally from Germany, born in 1929, and came to Newfoundland in 1968.)

Goudie described the site of Indian Point as Newfoundland's 'ground zero', which 'forces the visitor to face the likely possibility that their extinction was at the hands of their ancestors. Many do not want to remember the Beothuk story this way.' I had visited the site the day before the interview with a few people from Central Newfoundland and one remarked that it was hard to believe his ancestors were like this. Millertown, for Goudie, has the feeling of the Ann Frank museum, 'When I know what's there.'





Figure 8: 'Attack on a camp' (2011, slightly cropped) by Craig Goudie. Figure 9: Storyboard at Indian Point. Photo by S. Owen, 2013.

Referring to the 'Attack on a camp' illustration as 'the slaughter', Goudie said Ingeborg Marshall wanted more blood and fire, in order to make a statement about what had happened. In the other images, Craig wanted to make Beothuk 'look common, personal, show family gatherings. The Beothuk are not alien, strange people, but could be anybody.' When the original pastel images were first exhibited, he said a woman went around them in tears. 'They shouldn't be gone, forgotten; for some reason it is a hard story to talk about.' Goudie claimed there was more support to remember where they lived, such as at Boyd's Cove, rather than where they died, at Red Indian Lake.

Remembering the Beothuk

In order to get a glimpse of the ways indigenous groups remember the Beothuk, I attended an Aboriginal Day Sunrise Ceremony in 2013 organised by the Native Friendship Centre in St John's that was attended by Mi'kmaq, Inuit, Innu and a few of non-Aboriginal descent (see figure 10, below). It took place at the Shanawdithit memorial plaque in Bannerman Park and opened with a prayer to Mi'kmaq, Innu, Inuit and 'those not there', presumably referring to the Beothuk. Everyone took a pinch of tobacco and went one by one to place it on or by the memorial. A woman read out the poem 'Manitou of the Beothuk' by Ron Young (1987), which begins: 'I used to walk these lonely hills, long before you came, your people called me Beothuck but never knew my name....' The ceremony ended with the group drumming and singing the Mi'kmaq Honour Song, which was composed by George Paul and is a standard at Mi'kmaq powwows and other gatherings (Owen 2008, 132). Overall, the ceremony was conducted in the manner of a solemnly-observed memorial service.



Figure 10: Sunrise ceremony at the Shanawdithit memorial plaque, Bannerman Park, St John's, 21 June 2013. Photo by S. Owen, just prior to the start of the ceremony.

Ziya Meral in her article 'A Duty to Remember?' asks '*Why* is a particular narrative of the past chosen and *why* is so much energy spent in the formation, sustainment and propagation of it?' She says it 'is inherently linked to the human drive to make sense of reality and place ourselves within a group, society, nation, and people; to insert a clear sense of who we are in an ever confusingly changing world' (Meral 2012, 32). Why are the Beothuk remembered? With atrocities like the Holocaust, we hope something like that will never happen again. In this case, there are no survivors. However, there are other indigenous people, other groups who are marginalised and treated with suspicion and disdain. But these are seldom spoken about as it is safer to remember the past that can never be redressed.

Acts of remembering maintain otherness, taming the atrocities of the past and legitimising the status quo. In Newfoundland, until lately it was primarily those of settler descent who were doing the remembering. The Mi'kmaq have only recently gained enough political voice and acceptance to participate in public expressions of remembering. The indigenous perspective remains generally absent from the Beothuk story. What is the Mi'kmaq version of the Beothuk story? In the popular version told by those of settler descent, Mi'kmaq are included as fellow perpetrators rather than any kind of victim of colonisation. For some Mi'kmaq, the Beothuk live on in them through intermarriage (Owen, 2008, 115).

Depictions of the Beothuk appear to go from feelings of 'regret' and 'loss' in the literature to, in the visual representations, a reappearance of the Beothuk alongside a reassertion of indigeneity. In some of the recent narratives of the demise of the Beothuk, the perpetrators (whether settler or Mi'kmaq) are rendered as the other, the 'not us', while the Beothuk are the ones that are 'like us' – putting ourselves in the place of the victim. Yet, while the Beothuk are the lost innocence and nobility that Newfoundlanders can both mourn and aspire to, Mi'kmaq (and to a lesser extent Innu and Inuit in Labrador) continue to be an irritant to other Newfoundlanders. During a recent fishing dispute, one fisherman was reported to have said, 'We killed all the Beothuks, we should have killed the Mi'kmaq, too' (CBC News 2014), voicing frustrations over rights to scarce resources, especially since the number of federally recognised Mi'kmaq Bands in Newfoundland has grown in the past decade. In addition, it demonstrates that the demise of the Beothuk still occupies a place in the public imagination.

Note:
This research was supported by a British Academy Small Research Grant. Thanks to Joanne Mercer for hosting me in Newfoundland and reading a draft of the manuscript.

References

Artwork

Gerald Squire: 'Spirit of the Beothuk' stands in woodland at the Beothuk Interpretation Centre in Boyd's Cove. His other artwork can be viewed on his gallery website. [ONLINE] Available at: http://www.squiresgallery.com/ [Accessed 7 Feb 15]

Jerry Evans and Jonathan Howse: their work was viewed in private collections and at the Christina Parker Gallery. [ONLINE] Available at: http://www.christinaparkergallery.com/artists.asp [7 Feb 15]

Craig Goudie: the Red Indian Lake Heritage Society has the original Indian Point artwork. Reproductions can be viewed on the Beothuk Art Facebook page. [ONLINE] Available at: https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.115714475251336.21744.115708925251891&type=1 [Accessed 7 Feb 15]

Interviews and conversations

Gerald Squires, artist, St John's, 20 June 2013
Jerry Evans, artist, St John's, 19 and 23 June 2013
Jonathan Howse, artist, St John's, 5 July 2013
Craig Goudie, artist, Grand Falls-Winsor, 3 July 2013
Annamarie Beckel, author, St John's, 19 June 2013
Christina Parker, gallery owner, St John's, 22 June 2013

Secondary sources

Baerhe, R. (2013). 'Indigenising the Academy: The case of Grenfell Campus of Memorial University of Newfoundland and the resurgence of Newfoundland Mi'kmaq.' In Anderson, Kirk and Hanrahan, Maura (eds), *Indigenising the Academy*. 40th anniversary edition of The Morning Watch, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 81-103.

Beckel, A. (1999). *All Gone Widdun*. St John's: Breakwater Books.

Boyd, Christy (2013). 'Fulfilling a Fascination with the Beothuk,' *The Western Star*, 28 August. [ONLINE] Available at: http://www.thewesternstar.com/News/Local/2013-08-28/article-3364171/Fulfilling-a-fascination-with-the-Beothuk/1 [Accessed 1 November 2014].

Budgel, R. (1992). 'The Beothuks and the Newfoundland Mind,' *Newfoundland Studies* 8. pp. 15-22.

CBC News (2014). 'Hate speech allegations against Mi'kmaq under investigation.' 24 March. [ONLINE] Available at: http://www.cbc.ca/m/news/#!/content/1.2583491/ [Accessed 19 May 2014]

Chafe, P. (2004). "Lament for a Notion: Loss and the Beothuk in Michael Crummey's *River Thieves*." *Essays on Canadian Writing* 82 (Spring). pp. 93–117.

Crummey, M. (2001). *River Thieves*. Toronto: Doubleday.

Domańska, E. (2006). 'The Material Presence of the Past.' *History and Theory* 45(3). pp. 337–48.

Freud, S. ([1919] 1987). 'The Uncanny.' In S. Freud, *Art and Literature*. The Pelican Freud Library, vol. 14. Hammondsworth, Penguin, 336-376.

Gelder, K.D. and Jacobs, J.M. (1998). *Uncanny Australia: sacredness and identity in a postcolonial nation*. Carlton, Victoria: Melbourne University Publishing.

Goldie, T. (1993). *Fear and Temptation: The Image of the Indigene in Canadian, Australian, and New Zealand Literatures*. Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queens University Press.

Harries, J. (2010). 'Of bleeding skulls and the postcolonial uncanny: bones and the presence of Nonosabasut and Demasduit.' *Journal of Material Culture* 15 (4). pp. 403-421.

Howley, J.P. (1915) *The Beothucks or Red Indians*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Jeddore, P. (1996). 'Miawpukek Hosts Mini Powwow (community gets finer points on how to powwow),' 15 February 1996. [ONLINE] http://www.geocities.com/Pilip/feb.htm [Accessed 29 October 2006, now unavailable].

Marshall, I. (1996). *A History and Ethnography of the Beothuk*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press.

Marshall, I. (2012). 'The Beothuk ("Boeothick") Institution,' Newfoundland and Labrador Heritage, Memorial University. [ONLINE] Available at: http://www.heritage.nf.ca/aboriginal/beo_inst.html [Accessed 21 October 2014].

Meral, Z. (2012) 'A Duty to Remember? Politics and Morality of Remembering Past Atrocities' *International Political Anthropology* Vol. 5 (1): 29-50.

Owen, S. (2008) *The Appropriation of Native American Spirituality* (London; New York: Continuum).

Page, M. (1994). 'Michael Cook Biocritical Essay.' University of Calgary Special Collections. [ONLINE] Available at: http://dspace.ucalgary.ca/bitstream/1880/43977/1/Biocrit%20%20M.%20Cook.pdf [Accessed 9 September 2012].

Polack, F. (2009) 'Memory Against History: Figuring the Past in *Cloud of Bone*.' *English Studies in Canada* 35 (4). pp. 53-69.

Sugars, C. (2005). 'Original Sin, or, The Last of the First Ancestors: Michael Crummey's *River Thieves*.' *English Studies in Canada* 31 (4). pp. 147–75.