

TRANSMISSION

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The Folk Belief Systems of Diana & Albert Kearley: Two Views of Vernacular Omens

From the moment we are conscious of the world around us, we are introduced, influenced, and indoctrinated by those people and things within our immediate environment. As we mature, that scope of surroundings expands, moving beyond the immediate environment to include the concepts and issues of neighbouring towns, ideals, and cultures. A typical individual moves from each stage of their development sifting through the information and adapting to the circumstances provided by each new experience. The baggage we accu-

mulate throughout this evolution makes up the fabric of what is affectionately referred to as our "belief system". How we view the world, both near and far, how we deal with our family and friends, how we interpret the unfamiliar and unknown, and how we incorporate all of these attitudes under the one roof, no matter how unrelated they may appear, is all filed under belief.

Snippets and clippings of many things we have encountered find their way into the belief mosaic. Everything from things our parents told us to keep us on the straight and narrow to slogans from topical or informative pamphlets that caught our eye and imaginations find a way to coexist in this configuration. Interactions with other cultures and belief systems prompt us to constantly re-evaluate our own. This pin ball effect results in a growing and evolving field of beliefs with regroupings and boundary shifts. Beliefs that replace or modify pre-existing ones are essential in maintaining a healthy equilibrium between knowledge and experience.

Among the plethora of beliefs within a system there exist many different categories. Those which focus on the scientific, the factual, religious, self formulated, cultural, and folk centred are only some of the many types of categories under which we classify all of our individual views on things. Generally, and unfortunately stereotypically, folk beliefs are said to be those which seem to spring from our unintelligible and ethnocentric subconscious and deal with our feelings on the supernatural and things viewed by the masses as superstitions.

Regardless of whether we discover things to be true for all or just true for us or our own community, we justify them. If they hold certain truths for us then that is sufficient. Many of us have items which we believe because it is in our cultural makeup to do so and seldom question them. They are things our parents and elders told us when we were still

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children and whether or not they play an important part of our functioning lives is irrelevant. The mere fact that they are there and contribute to our worldview is enough to justify their existence.

Belief in the Supernatural is one such belief that many scholars are quick to attack and in which many millions of people worldwide believe some aspect. The Supernatural is more than simply a representation of ghosts as many people would believe. In its most basic definition it is all things which are not within the normal and accepted limits of explainable reality, of the world as we know it at this time; it is otherworldly consisting of many aspects. [cf. Hand] These range from ghosts and ghostly visions, ESP, Out of Body Experiences, Vision Dreams and Sleep Paralysis, Faeries, Anomalous Lights, Strange Beasts, UFO's Tokens, Witchcraft, Divination, Communication with the Dead, and Omens. [cf. Hill]

Throughout the world many variations and additions are made to this basic list of the prevalent manifestations of the Supernatural. In Newfoundland, for example, we have *Jackie Lantern* as a type of anomalous light. While many people are torn between calling him a ghost which comes from a dead soldier narrative and a *faerie*, which stems from the common belief in Newfoundland concerning the little folk. [Interview with Mae & Bill Frost, Pigeon Inlet Productions Archive, 1993.] As there aren't many other local narratives concerning anomalous lights, Jackie Lantern is in a category all unto his own - Jackie Lantern! In the UK the same character is commonly referred to as *Will 'o the Wisp*. [cf. Burne]

The Supernatural offers cultures a way to provide answers to seemingly unanswerable problems. It is ridiculous to assume that all things under the sun are known to us and that we have the capability to understand them. So, it is natural and healthy to look to definitions of the Supernatural so that we can accept the existence of apparent anomalies within the

realm of our "real" world and get on with our lives. Within the Supernatural there are beliefs about the various manifestations. These beliefs house the notions, perceptions, and taboos which serve us as a guideline for us to use when relating with them. There are also beliefs which are centred around whether or not something out of the ordinary has happened or will happen. The event need not have been within the realm of the Supernatural, but our interpretation of it is so as it followed a *precursory warning*. In less tedious language, all this is saying is that unusual coincidences which are linked through circumstances or events are believed to be more than coincidence and classified as a Folk Belief formerly known as a Superstition.

For the purposes of this essay, I will refer to these types of beliefs as Superstitions for several reasons. Within the academic world of Folklore and Oral History there seems to be much debate as to the political correctness of the term Superstitious. Scholars appear to have themselves convinced that the *folk* are insulted by this word and believe it to be a type of name calling implying inherent ignorance on their part. It isn't so much the word but how exactly it is delivered by the "interviewer" or collector. If a collector believes the word superstitious to mean possessing antiquated and backward beliefs, then the informant is going to feel insulted! Ironically, the very social structures that these academics are straining to preserve through collection and recognition are being changed constantly by the very parameters established by the outsiders. If people are made to feel inferior then they will do one of two things, not give a "tinker's damn" or try to change to better suit the demands placed upon them. [Interview with Joachim Benoit, PIP Archive. 1992]

As I have yet to come across the attitude contrary to the word Superstition as an explanation for feeling there is some sort of power controlling our actions in any of the individuals I have had the pleasure of talking with, I feel secure in using it. If, and when I

do come across a negative reaction from the word then I will adapt to that situation. The modern definition of Superstitious implies that it involves fear, fanatic and groundless suspicions, with erroneous notions. Within the culture of Newfoundland, however, it isn't so negative and merely means that one believes there are things we cannot explain and that they do happen because we see them. It does involve fear but not blind irrational fear as sceptics would have us believe. The fear comes from the recognition that something has happened which we cannot understand. That prospect is frightening if not exhilarating real world or supernatural!

Within the auspices of Superstition there exists a major category concerning itself with Omens. Warnings, precursory events, ESP, dreams and visions, and tokens, can all represent themselves as Omens. However, many of these things manifest themselves as supernatural objects or happenings, meaning that they are not of the real world. For my purposes, I define "real world" omens as omens that involve real tangible items which we can touch, smell, see, or hear in ordinary life. It is the sequence, timing, or manner in which these objects occur which defines them as Omens, they need not be ghosts, fetches, or dreams to be supernatural. The fact that people view real world omens to be extraordinary and more than coincidental aligns them with other aspects of the supernatural.

My main interest in omens stems from my own superstitions regarding ordinary events and how my own beliefs are passed onto younger members of my family. Presumably, I inherited a great portion of my superstitions from elder members of my family and those that I have included of my own accord are ones which adhere nicely to the pre-existing ones. My preliminary research showed me that many of my own beliefs are mirrored in other cultures around the world with only marginal differences. [cf. Buchan, Browne, Creighton and deLys] The main directive of the essay is to trace these

"real world" superstitions back to sources within my own family with my parents as the informants.

My parents, at first inspection are polar opposites with little room for comparison especially with regards to any beliefs they have pertaining to the supernatural and superstitions. Diana (Frost) Kearley was born in North River, Conception Bay in 1946. Many factors shaped her life into what it is today. First of all, she is the eldest child, born premature and very feeble sporadically through childhood. Her parents had several years of school each and were capable and intelligent individuals. They owned their own home in North River with in-laws living next door. My grandfather's family originated from Sussex, England and originally came to Newfoundland in the mid to late 1700's with a land grant from Royalty entitling them to the entire community of North River. By the time my mother was born, much of the land had been sold and settled, but there was and still is a goodly sized portion remaining. It is from this land that many faerie stories are derived. It has all the ingredients of a supernatural "stomping ground": berry picking grounds, barrens, bogs, strange rocks, rivers, brooks, and a waterfall.

Diana, along with her five younger sisters, grew up on this land in this atmosphere. Although Church of England, she attended the only school available which was a Catholic one run by Nuns. She received her highschool diploma and left home to work as a Nursing Assistant in St. John's at the Waterford Hospital "For Nervous and Mental Diseases." By the age of eighteen, she had married a co-worker and by nineteen and twenty she had had a son and was estranged from her husband. At twenty years she met Albert Kearley and his three sons and forged a new family. So, her youth at home with her family coupled with her experience as an independent worker, wife, and mother was packed into a very short span of time. Needless to say, she had a rapid increase of changes and additions to her belief system. But what did she keep and what did she leave behind as a hindrance?

My initial plan of interview with my own mother was to establish a list of questions and to adhere to them as much as possible therefore avoiding an overly personal interview. After a second thought, however, I dismissed this idea for several reasons. Many times during fieldwork I have spent several sessions simply getting to know the informant in order to build a rapport therefore creating a more relaxed atmosphere during the actual interview process. Trying to keep my interview with my mother formal seemed ridiculous so I shelved the idea and took advantage of the already cognitive and easygoing relationship I had with the informant. When I interviewed my father I was quite comfortable with this format. The interview with my mother turned out more like one of our normal conversations than an actual interview. I was pleased with this.

I started the interview with asking Diana to define the Supernatural and Superstition. This she did leaving me with the understanding that both our perceptions of the terms were along the same plane. We talked a good deal about her life growing up more than anything else and then related it into terms of who she is now. Her depiction of her youth and the lives of her parents and grandparents leave no question in my mind that she was literally surrounded by individuals who lived lives steeped in superstition and traditions surrounding the supernatural. Her grandmother living in the next house on the same piece of land lived in awe of the "Little People" and played by the rules which governed Faerie/Human interaction. No baby went without a silver coin, no child without bread or turned clothing, no soul in on the land after sunset, and no mention of the folk themselves. [Interview with Diana Kearley, 1995] Despite my mother's claims that she keeps these stories with her for enjoyment only, she won't walk out after dark without her socks turned!

The other neighbouring house owned by a large Catholic family was apparently built on a Faerie path and after many years of torment within the

walls, the family rebuilt several feet to the side of the other house. Diana's mother suffered a Faerie Blast and her mother's father often told us children memorates of his encounters with the "Little People".

Apart from the Faeries, there are also the many stories of ghosts and the "Old Hag" but probing into all of the above mentioned was only a way to set the scene and get to the "Real World" Omens for which I was searching. Diana started the interview laughing at the types of things I told her I was interested in and claiming that she didn't believe in anything "only herself." Throughout the interview I discovered that this was quite the contrary. She may have said she didn't believe the samples she was giving me but she often contradicted herself by acknowledging that she wouldn't "say" any of the superstitions she and I were talking about for fear that they were real. She knows some things are real because she witnessed them herself. Diana's sister is a seventh daughter who, as a child, had powers the other children did not. She cured a toothache as an infant simply by touching the affliction. Soon after she was so deathly ill that the family laid her out and had a vigil. At the age of four and five she was able to see dead relatives that had passed away before she was born. Diana witnessed these things and cannot truly justify dismissing all superstitions because she believes these incidents and others similar, to be fact.

The more vernacular types of omens are perhaps the most difficult for people to accept as valid beliefs worth holding onto. Of all the primary and secondary characteristics found in my preliminary research, Diana possessed knowledge of a great many. She knew of everything from animal superstitions and weather lore, to household utensils and gift giving rituals. Diana was more definite in her suspicion, if not disbelief of these types of omens. She admits that she has kept them with her all her life for she once did believe in them. She has decided that it was partly due to the proverbial accompaniment that attracted her to them

for many of them are very true in what they say. A personal motto of hers is a belief she inherited from her mother, "A new broom sweeps clean". Diana is a staunch believer in fresh ideas to clean out stagnancy which is how she applies this belief.

Vernacular omens that Diana is aware of but doesn't necessarily believe are usually having to do with the coincidental factor. A great percentage of this type of superstition revolve around bad fortune or death. A bird flying into a window, blinds rolling shut, going in one door and out another, seeing the praying livestock on Old Christmas Eve, six crows, a black cat, or walking under a ladder were all signs of impending doom and should be avoided at all costs. In the summer time, Diana's house had a ladder put to the side of it and it sloped over the only thoroughfare on the side of the house. As a result, the children were strictly forbidden to go to that side of the house.

She recalls as a child having experiences with all of these omens. Usually, the people who had occasion to say them believed in them. It was never Diana herself who would make the event / omen connection, but rather some older member of the family such as a parent or grandparent. As a result of the ill tidings, Diana became accustomed to making the sign of The Cross as a combatant against against the potential power of such omens. This was the custom in her household and she was expected to do it. Although Diana currently feels as though she fits into the Agnostic rather than Christian category, she will still Bless herself in moments of fear or uncertainty. Ironically, Diana, who claims occasionally throughout the interview that she doesn't believe in superstition, clearly defines that what she does believe in is a Higher Order where lives are predestined. As a Fatalist she believes that our lives have a pattern which we follow and are permitted to exercise our free will only in reaction to what is already planned for us. Through her contrary statements she proves herself to be a paradox at the best of times!

She says that she doesn't look for the luck in events but recognizes them for their nostalgic properties. Something which would be deemed superstitious she uses as a memory prompt for her childhood in North River. The good fortune superstitions she grew up with and learned to observe and regard carefully were; a bumble flying into a room, a ladybug on your clothing or a belonging, a horseshoe, a sunny wedding day, a rainy funeral, four leafed clover, a new broom, a red sky at night plus many others. Although she claims to treat these omens the same as the ill omens, she doesn't realize that she only thinks she doesn't pay them any heed. At my brother's wedding two years ago, it had been a miserable summer and everyone was exclaiming that the wedding day had been the most beautiful one all summer. It truly was sweltering. While everyone was enjoying the sun Diana was very relieved because if it had been raining as it had been on her first wedding day, then she believed her new daughter-in-law would be as unhappy as she had been. Her second wedding was very small and a friend of the family performed the ceremony. People came to believe that this was carefully orchestrated so that Diana could continually postpone the event until a sunny day, which she did. [Interview with Mae Frost.]

This is not the only superstition she secretly harbours. She will habitually watch the skies in the summer season as she and my father have crops that rely on even weather. She believes that "A red sky at night/ A sailor's delight./ A red sky at morning,/ Sailor, take warning" [Interview with Diana Kearley.] Diana will also feel better or be uplifted if a bumble flies into a room or she finds a ladybug. This is not to say that she pegs all of her hopes on the event and waits for good luck, but she accepts that it is an omen and if good luck does befall her she will chuckle about the fact that it was caused by the superstitious omen. By the same token, Diana also believes that one should never give the gift of a wallet unless their is a piece of coinage in it. If she received a wallet without one she claims she wouldn't be bothered

by it but she insures that she never gives a wallet or purse to anyone without this safeguard against poverty. She grew up with the idea that it was very bad luck if you were given a knife as a gift without it having been run through wood first. Apparently, this action prevented the knife from representing ill tidings between the giver and the receiver. Another way to prevent this would be to give a coin back to the giver after receiving the gift. She laughs at this, which is fine for she has secretly devised a modern escape from this superstition. [Updated justifications of Superstitions become popular belief, cf. Maple.] She believes that knives or a set of knives is a very nice and useful gift for a housewarming present, so in order to do so without bringing on ill fortune, she gives the receiver a knife set in a block.

My father Albert was an entirely different story however. I had a very difficult time getting him to discuss any superstitious beliefs whether he believed them or not. He was uncomfortable talking about the prevalent superstitions of his childhood for many reasons. [Typical reaction to the beliefs, cf. Hand.] My father was born in the depression and was a child during the Blackouts. His mother worked very hard and was on her own and self supporting from the time she was eleven and twelve. She was "God Fearing" and felt she was given her lot in life and her job was to be the best she could. She married an older man who was of her own class, labouring people from a fishing background. He was very handsome and apparently he swept her off her feet. He wasn't easy to live with and although he never abused his children in any way, he was non-communicative and worked so hard to support his large family that he was seldom around for the children. He was a highly skilled and respected man being a carpenter, miner, engineer, fisherman, and inventor. Family stories have it that several years before the war he was working on a primitive form of RADAR. This is an amazing feat for a man that couldn't understand why she "Kept having

children"! [Personal discussions with Julie Mae Kearley]

Albert grew up in a home where accomplishment was rewarded and the principles of basic humanity and morals were stressed. He admits that he was aware of certain beliefs and superstitions during his childhood but he also recalls that his mother frowned upon believing in such wasteful nonsense. She had too much work to do to worry about whether or not there would be a death in the family because someone dropped their knife on the floor. She was aware of all the superstitions but felt it was contrary to her faith in God to believe in something as irrational as superstitions and omens. However, Albert does point out that his mother did acknowledge certain omens when they occurred, such as a bee flying into a room or a ladybug, or when someone spilled salt.

[Interview with Albert Kearley 1995.] She wouldn't throw salt over her shoulder to combat the ill spilled salt but would just draw attention to the event. She is in her nineties now and quite articulate, active and generally a formidable woman. I can imagine that she would resist taking part in superstitious activities because she felt it belittled her and made her look weak. My grandmother would sooner die than have someone know that there was something she couldn't do better than any man in the room! Her attitude invariably transmitted itself onto some of her children.

My father claims that being superstitious is base and shows a disregard for scientific reason and practicality. [Burne's view complies with this notion.] This is very important to him as he never got the chance to remain in school after the elementary level and from there he worked extremely hard to make his own way in life. He didn't want anyone to know that he was not as "learned" as they were and harbouring superstitions was an easy give-away that he was from "around the Bay". This has been a key factor in all aspects of my father's life. He is very proud of the fact that he is a "self made man" and has done very nicely for himself. However, he will never be satisfied that he is good

enough until he has absorbed as much knowledge as is humanly possible.

Albert's personal worldview is one which romanticizes about the future and the mystical uniting to bring individuals onto a higher plane of understanding. At a crucial point in his life, Albert was deeply affected by the writings of actress Shirley MacLaine. He believes in reincarnation and that there is some higher order which determines the path of our lives. He believes that we are put here for a reason and aren't meant to question why. However, when discussing supernatural events, Albert cannot accept many of them unless he is given proof in terms that he can understand. He doesn't trust his own judgement enough feeling that their are far superior minds than his and that matters of the unexplained should be left to them.

Like his wife, Albert proves himself to be an enigma on the point of belief and disbelief. He has no time for vernacular superstitions or omens saying he is too practical for such "bullshit". But he admits and testifies that he has had supernatural experiences. Perhaps one of the most moving experiences of his life happened when he and Diana were in Ephesus, Turkey. Supposedly, this is the place where Mary, mother of Jesus, lived out the remainder of her life in hiding from those who would persecute. Locally she was highly revered and often performed baptisms in a spring/well near her home. It was here that Albert, not knowing the history of the baptisms, as the site had only recently been unearthed by archaeologists, felt a totally different and almost scary feeling. He realized it wasn't a "bad" scary but a very good feeling that he was in the presence of something very important and good. He felt very good about the experience after he was told about the significance of the location.

Recent events dealing with his own personal experience are fine memorates but it was very difficult for me to entice him to speak of the significance, if any, of vernacular omens in his childhood home. It seemed as

though he had placed a block up against telling about those sorts of things for fear that he would be ridiculed by his peers. He would only attest to vague recollections of the Christmas cattle superstition, the good luck insects, spilled salt scorned by his mother, unlucky black cats, animals having powers we don't, and rabbit paws. As an interviewer this was a little frustrating, but I couldn't make him tell me what I wanted to hear. Towards the end of the interview I discovered something about my father that I had never known and fit in amazingly with my research. Ironically, it made me reflect upon everything else he had said about disbelief in omens and I was more confused than ever.

Diana had told me in her interview to ask Albert about crossed cutlery. Going on this I had built up my hopes about how superstitious my father was. Throughout his interview however, I was beginning to wonder if he was at all superstitious about anything. When I did ask him about crossed utensils his entire attitude changed. His physical position as well as his tone went from being fairly low key and somewhat relaxed to sitting up in his chair and becoming somewhat agitated and excited. He proceeded to tell me a story of when he was about seventeen and he was working at Norman Dick on Water St. He had worked for the business for several years and was quite good at repairing mechanical problems on machines and appliances. One day he was atop a ladder and he was getting ready to come down when his two wrenches fell to the floor with a clatter. His employer came into the room and saw the wrenches and commented jokingly on how it must be "Al's lucky night". This was the first time that Albert can recall ever having knowledge of this particular omen. A short time later, he was on the ladder again and he threw the wrenches to the ground making a comment to the effect that it was a test to see if it really was his lucky night. The wrenches fell to the floor, bounced and then landed in a cross formation. He was fascinated that they were able to do this but didn't think anything of it as really having to

do with fortune. Shortly after the test, however, he nearly lost his finger in an accident and he instantly connected it with the wrenches saying that it wasn't good luck after all, but bad.

Albert can recall many times since that first one where he has been warned of ill fortune by crossed utensils in his day to day life. He has been in vehicle accidents, had health problems, had poor crops, and been embezzled from by employees and all of these were preceded by a period of warnings by crossed things. Usually a warning will last a month and no matter what he does, his cutlery, tools, writing utensils, and whatever else will fall or simply be crossed whenever he goes to use them. When he sees this pattern happening, he knows that it is only a matter of time before the omen will manifest itself in some form of bad luck. As a result, he becomes anxious for the event to happen so he can stop worrying about what it will be and he also finds himself resigned to the fact that it will happen even though he has no logical explanation for why or how it happens. Yet, he doesn't believe that he is superstitious. He does believe that sometimes it is possible to will things to happen bad or good, if you think that they might. He will sometimes sit down to eat supper with Diana and see his cutlery is crossed. He will announce that something bad is going to happen and sure enough it does for he and his wife end up arguing about it!

It is interesting to see where we obtain our own beliefs. Sure, we add to our belief system our entire life, but it cannot be denied that a great many are directly assumed from our parents. All of my own siblings have all dealt with the worldviews of my parents in varying degrees. Having grown up contending with all of these belief systems under the one roof, I feel that I have had an advantage. I have combined and arranged the things I hold to be true and important for my life within my system of beliefs with all the influence from a larger and older group of siblings, not to mention that of my parents. The

family unit is a fascinating case study for anyone studying the formulation and makeup of belief systems. All of the members are connected and share basic beliefs, but inevitably, they make forays into the outside world and return with a parcel of new experiences which they can share with the others. Some choose to accept these new things but others cannot until they see it for themselves. Through this system of communicating beliefs, we can compare and in turn examine our own. We will either keep beliefs, move them to the background, or leave them behind and move on to the next one. Contrary to popular belief, beliefs in the supernatural and suppressions are not diminishing as each succeeding generation is confronted with scientific nay saying. People believe what they want to believe and that is all there is to it!

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-Tonya Mae Kearley, MUN



Confronting the Ghost: A Study of Treasure Guardianship in Newfoundland Legends

*X marks the spot
So the older folks say,
On an island called Kelly's
In Conception Bay.
Here pirates dug holes
To bury their gold
And drop a man in
When they knocked off his poll.
(Dawe N. Pag.)*

Kelly's Island is just one of the many supposed treasure sites in Newfoundland. For decades tales of buried pirate treasures and their ghostly guardians have been popular in the province, with most of them being centred on the Avalon Peninsula where most of Newfoundland's population was found in the early days of settlement. These treasure stories are commonly found in the province, and are also popular throughout Atlantic Canada, and

have been collected in other countries including Sweden, Turkey, the United States, and Mexico, all of which have traditions of treasure guardians, and in some cases the treasure is specified as being pirate treasure, as in the Newfoundland context. Indeed, the fascination with guarded treasures stretches far back into tradition and time:

From the most ancient times--from prehistoric days in fact--the folk-lore of nearly all races has been interwoven with tales of buried or hidden treasure guarded by gnomes, demons, dragons, spirits, and the other innumerable mystical accompaniments of folk-lore. There is scarcely an ancient saga that does not have its treasure supernatural guardians.... (Verrill 214)

To what can we attribute the ancient and continuing interest in treasure and its guardians? It seems to carry over time and geography, and it seems to fascinate young and old alike, as is demonstrated by the enthusiasm of two of my primary informants, Eric Tapper of Torbay, age twelve, and Pat Shea of Pouch Cove, age eighty.¹ Likewise, Memorial University of Newfoundland Folklore and Language Archive (MUNFLA) material available on the subject of pirate treasure guarded by ghosts has been contributed by a grade eleven student, university students, and a woman born in 1911. How, then, can we explain the continuing appeal of the topic, and why has it thrived in Newfoundland in particular?

Perhaps the most obvious answer lies in the appealing combination of the historical and the supernatural which the tales incorporate, and this is the answer which we will examine first. Newfoundland does indeed have a history of piracy, and as such has been a favourite topic of Harold Horwood, who has written and lectured about such famous pirates as Peter Easton (in whom Pat Shea has a particular interest) and Bartholomew Roberts, and their exploits along the Newfoundland coast. The traditional tales of buried treasure do, then, have some historical grounding. But it is not in the form of a lecture

that Newfoundland's pirate history has made the greatest impression on the province's residents or attracted the most attention. This knowledge is more likely to provide a historical background for treasure tales with a strong supernatural element, this being the ghostly guardian.

Interestingly, the idea of killing a person (and/or animal) to be buried along with the pirate treasure so that his spirit will guard it seems to be based on actual practice:

Cook [Captain James Cook] in his "Voyage Round the World" refers to the inhuman custom and an essay is given over to the same thing in "Chamber's Encyclopedia." This horrible safeguarding was supposed by the wretches guilty of the sacrifice, to continue till the end of time, and no human hand was thought capable of taking the spoil from its place of concealment. (Kinsella 30)

A man from Gillams explains:

This was murder over money and the old pirates believed that the dead man would haunt anyone who tried to get the treasure--that is anyone except the pirates that owned it in the first place. (Park 5)

The incorporation of this practice into the stories provides the element of the ghostly guardian of the treasure, an ingredient of the supernatural which supplies additional intrigue to the already mysterious subject of buried treasure. And the extent to which the supernatural is important to these stories becomes clear when we realize that it often comes to the forefront of the tales as their major preoccupation, rather than being included as additional detail.

As is attested to by her dissertation "Treasure Stories and Beliefs in Atlantic Canada," Joyce Coldwell found a strong and widespread belief in the guardian ghost in the region, and observed that the treasure guardian is expected to be present at any efforts to retrieve treasure--especially if it was pirates' loot (103). One may wonder how this belief originated, what its ramifications are, and why it

is popular among Atlantic Canadians, and particularly Newfoundlanders.

Robert Nesmith relays that an original essay on "The Art of Digging Money" which appeared on the front page of a Boston paper called *The Herald and The Federal Advertiser* in November of 1788 explained the background of pirate treasure tales. According to this essay, public belief held that a human being was buried with every treasure and the superstitious believed that the blood of these victims formed a potent charm and transferred the treasure to Satan, who held it against any mortal hand (62). While this may have been the basis of the belief at the time and the reason why treasures were not searched for, the connection with the devil seems to have been lost and is not evident in recent items. However, one may speculate that the association of black dogs, often with glowing red eyes, with treasure, is connected to motifs G 303.24.5 (*Devil in form of dog*) and G303.4.1.2.2 (*Devil with glowing eyes*).

Certainly the association of the treasure and its guardians with evil, such that the treasure-seekers may face dire consequences, is retained, as in a story set in Torbay which was told by twelve year old Eric Tapper, who heard it from his grandfather. According to this legend, a pirate crew which was being pursued was forced to bury treasure at Treasure Cove in Torbay. The crew included a cabin boy and a dog, who were companions. The pirates beheaded the boy and threw his remains into the hole with the treasure, and the dog was killed when it tried to attack the boy's killer. It too was buried with the treasure. Several years later two fishermen returning from sea late at night saw a boy and a dog, and soon realized "that the boy was no ordinary boy and the dog was no ordinary dog 'cause the dog had glowing red eyes and the boy had his head in his hands and chains wrapped all around him." As a result of this encounter, the two fishermen became invalids and died (LM/92-001).

Another version of the same story told by a resident of Torbay adds,

This ghost dog in Treasure Cove has been seen more than once. It was claimed by the people living there at the time that anyone who saw it, it meant the end of their days, as those who witnessed it didn't live very long after. (Murphy 12)

While this story is rather extreme in its incorporation of the misfortune of those who encounter the ghostly guardians, it is not an exception.

Several stories from the West Coast of Newfoundland report the sudden death of a man who found a treasure site on St. John's Island (Coldwell 206-207). And another story set on Green Island in the outer Bay of Islands involves a pirate crew member who was sacrificed to guard a treasure, and whose ghost was said to bring bad luck to anyone trying to find it. This story was first told by the collector's grandfather as a personal experience narrative, and was believed by his son (the collector's father) who related this version:

...After digging down about four feet, they struck what appeared to be a big iron box. At that very second there came a roar, like a roar of wind, that blowed sand all around them in a whirlwind, completely filling in the hole they had digged, and when they looked behind them they saw that the sod had been blown off the ground about the same shape and size of a coffin with a hole about the same depth as the hole they had digged. There wasn't a ripple on the water and the weather was calm again. They received such a fright that they both started to run and Freeman Taylor stumbled and broke his leg. John Davis bandaged it up with lobster lats and twine.

According to the informant, several tries were made at digging up the treasure, but everybody who was involved broke an arm or leg or got sick (Davis 12-13).

Some of these treasure stories include an explicit explanation of the killing of a crew member, slave, cap-

tive, or dog, and of the function of the ghostly guardian almost as an aside. Others incorporate the practice of supplying a treasure guard into the story, and it is frequently one of the narrative's main focuses:

....And the legend goes there that when it was buried there was two men, they picked you, they just, to a point, they would say such as this: "Now, who will guard this treasure?" After the treasure was buried, and if you--someone would step forward and say, "I will sir, I will sir," they were murdered or their heads cut off or something....(Gerge C603)

....They'd take the crew then and ask them, "Someone going to watch that money?" and whoever they picked on then, whoever they say he'd watch it, they'd take him then and cut his head off.... (Jacob Bradbury: LM/92-001)

Coldwell suggests that the pattern of the narrative explaining the selection and execution of the guardian is often so similar that an origin in a printed source could be suspected. However, she was unable to locate one (Coldwell 158).

The earliest printed reference to the practice of pirates providing a treasure guardian which I was able to locate occurs in the poem "Rokeby" by Sir Walter Scott (1771-1832):

An ancient mariner I knew,
What time I sailed with Morgan's crew,
Who oft, 'mid our carousals, spake
Of Raleigh, Forbisher, and Drake;
Adventurous hearts! who barter'd,
bold,
Their English steel for Spanish gold.
Trust not, would his experience say,
Captain or comrade with your prey;
But seek some charnel, when, at full,
The moon gilds skeleton and skull--
There dig and tomb your precious heap,
And bid the dead your treasure keep;
Sure stewards they, if fitting spell
Their service to the task compel.
Lacks there such charnel!--Kill a slave,
Or prisoner, on the treasure-grave;
And bid his discontented ghost

Stalk nightly at his lonely post.
(Canto II, verse XVIII, 12-30)

While this passage determines that the practice of executing a man so that his soul might guard a treasure was well known at least as early as the early nineteenth century ("Rokeby" was first published in 1813), it does not provide a possible printed source for the narrative pattern explaining the guardian's selection and execution. Nor does the earliest available reference concerned with Newfoundland (Patterson 1895). This article does, however include motif E291.2.1 (*Ghost in human form guards treasure*). This guardian of pirate treasure, though, was not murdered. Rather he perished at the treasure site, having been left behind by a pirate crew (288). The earliest printed source that I was able to find for the murder narrative pattern was first published in 1889:

Teach [Edward Teach, a.k.a. Blackbeard] always buried his treasures at night, and in a strong iron chest protected by rubber bands. The money was carried to the spot in bags. When the pit was ready, Teach cried out in stentorian tones, "Who will stay and watch?": Some bold, fearless rover of the sea steps from the ranks and answers, "I will." His head is immediately chopped off, and the parts of his body are thrown into the chest together; silver and gold are poured in on top, and here the silent watcher still lies waiting for the judgement morn, while his restless spirit hovers near, terrifying all bold, bad mortals who would come and disturb his last lonely resting place. (Mayhew and Weeks 21-22)

This seems to be a rather embellished summary of oral accounts.

Whatever its source, the narrative pattern of the selection and execution of the guardian is often of primary concern to the storyteller. Furthermore, the guardian himself/itself (an animal, especially a dog)/ or, more rarely, herself, often seems to be given more importance than the treasure they are supposed to guard.² Such is the case of an ac-

count of a treasure guardian called "Galloping Jack," which was contributed to MUNFLA by a woman from New Perlican, Trinity Bay:

Galloping Jack was supposed to be a ghost of a murdered man to watch a buried treasure. This treasure was buried on what we call "The Long Hills." On the front of the Long Hills there were three or four mounds of earth, said to be graves, and so it was named "The Graves."³ ... Galloping Jack was said to come out from the woods and roam around the harbour, so often the young men were said to try to catch him, but they never could. Galloping Jack was said to wear his boots heels before, so that when the bravos thought he was coming into the harbour, he was actually leaving. Many tried to find the treasure, but no one succeeded. (Burrage 12)

This account is rather unusual in that people are said to actually try to catch the treasure guardian.

In most cases the guardian is feared, such that P. J. Kinsella writes the following:

One of my friendly helpers to this book has written *re* this very subject, "you cannot," he says, "for love or money get a single man or body of men in this place to search for supposed hidden treasure there. I have seen some of those men encounter the greatest hardships, without faltering, but to mention ghost-guarded treasure is enough. They would not remove a shovelful of earth from that dreaded spot, not even if the attempt was to make them as rich as Croesus. (Kinsella 30)

Accordingly, many stories, including some which I have already cited, are very preoccupied with the consequences of interfering with ghost-guarded treasure. And several accounts are concerned with avoiding the harm or evil which could befall a treasure seeker:

Dey say dat if you're goin' diggin' for treasure you got to keel a cat and wash yer arms in its blood. If ya don't, denn the ghost dat's guarding

the treasure will 'aunt ya for life. (Carpenter 7)

It seems, however, to be generally accepted in the treasure story tradition that you do not mess with a ghostly guardian. If the belief about the guardian is not enough in itself to deter treasure seekers, then a warning from the guardian seems to be ample reason to leave buried pirates' treasure alone. In Old Perlican, for example, a skeleton was said to have appeared one night at the home of men who had been digging for treasure, and it warned them not to touch the loot. Nobody tried again to find the treasure (Barrett 5).

If you are indeed brave enough to pursue a pirate treasure, meeting the guardian in the process is very likely to change your mind in a hurry, as in the case of a man who sought treasure at Sheep's Head, Cape Broyle and was so frightened by the ghost that his red hair turned white (Finney 2-3). This motif also appears in a song sung by Victor Ledwell of Calvert which also incorporates the ghost of a black man as the guardian:

Oh come boys while I'll tell you a place you know well,
They buried a fortune, a very long spell,
A place called Church Cove, on the Southern Shore,
Where gold it was buried, they say, in galore.

They say twas a pirate they call Captain Kidd,
In Church Cove his wonderful fortune had hid,
And for years they were digging the fortune to raise
Till the boys of the village got near in the craze.

Where this money was buried, a great many went,
With pick axes and shovels to put up a tent,
And just as they stuck the first pick in the ground,
The ghost of a darkie did hover around.

Oh they rushed from the spot on the terrible night,

And the crackie got turned inside out from the fright,
And a man from Cape Broyle had watched the quar sight,
His whiskers turned foxy that always were white...

(Coldwell 171-172)

Coldwell notes that stories about treasure, like those found in Shoal Bay, in which the treasure is guarded by the ghost of a black man, who was either a member of Captain Kidd's crew or of a pirate ship composed entirely of black men, are found in both oral tradition and print (171). The elements of these stories also appear in stories set in other places such as Lewisporte and Placentia Bay. In Lewisporte a headless black man was said to be buried with pirates' money on Fox Island (Francis 9). In Placentia Bay the story was told that a crew of black men all died by "strange happenings" and were buried on a point of land where treasure was said to be buried. Every night after that a black dog was seen, making people fearful, so the priest excised it and the dog was never seen again (Morris 1-2).

If someone is bold enough to chance a second encounter with a treasure guardian, it is very likely that he will be sufficiently frightened on that occasion to never try to retrieve the treasure again, as in the case of a story which Nicholas Doyle of Torbay would share with afternoon visitors. According to this story, a man went to dig for pirates' gold in Middle Cove, but a figure dressed in oil clothes and a rain hat appeared in front of him. He got frightened and went home, but returned with a friend to continue the search. As the two were digging the hole kept filling in on its own, and they agreed that it was the doing of the ghost and never went back (Doyle 5).

In addition to the basic appeal of the supernatural supplied by the motif of the ghostly guardian(s), another reason for its incorporation may be observed: it aids the perpetuation of the stories themselves. Because the ghostly guardians do not allow the treasures to be recovered, the stories can be repeated over and over, not

only fascinating listeners with supernatural motifs, but also tantalizing them with the idea that pirate treasure remains buried in Newfoundland. The treasures are not found within the framework of the actual stories, and therefore the idea that they are still buried remains. But, the supernatural element may discourage people from trying to find it.

Indeed, one student believes that his uncle spread a story about an encounter with a ghostly guardian of pirate treasure so that nobody would look for the bottles of rum which he had buried (Park 1-6). So, if the guardians are never confronted, the treasure is never found--or it is never proven that it does not exist, in which case the stories can continue to be told, as they cannot be proven untrue. In this manner the stories ensure their own survival, which in turn perpetuates the notion that there is wealth buried beneath the province's rocky soil.

Furthermore, as John Lindow observes about the ambivalent attitude toward treasure characteristic of Swedish tradition, the fact that these stories actually discourage finding treasure while simultaneously teasing the listener with the very idea of it suggests that "dreams of the sudden acquisition of wealth would be disruptive" (275). The possible results of someone becoming wealthy by finding treasure can be interpreted with consideration of the ostensible value of egalitarianism that characterizes the social attitudes of many Newfoundland communities.

Nonetheless, treasure stories which incorporate ghostly guardianship do perpetuate the notion that there is pirate loot to be found in Newfoundland. An indication of the universal appeal of such a notion is a Turkish saying about treasure: "*Lafi bile tatli*" ("Even thinking about it is sweet") (Uysal 135). These sweet thoughts along with the perceived romance and adventure of pirate history, and the horror and intrigue of the supernatural, make a winning combination which may account for the continuing popularity of these stories.

Notes:

1. I am also grateful to my other informants Jimmy and Gen Tapper, and Jacob Bradbury of Torbay.
2. I have found no references to female guardians in primary sources. However, according to one article, a female ghost guards a chest at Motion Head near Torbay, Newfoundland (English 35). And in New England the ghost of a freebooter's mistress faithfully guards a treasure (Bassett 296).
3. Pat Shea of Pouch Cove reports that there are similar mounds in the Harbour Grace area, where tradition holds that pirate Peter Easton buried treasure (LM/94-002).

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-Lara Maynard, MUN



New Age Folklore?

Two recent articles in *Maclean's Magazine* are worthy of the attention of folklorists for a number of reasons. One deals with the proliferation of celebrity-endorsed phone-in psychic advice services which are a current feature of late night television. The other deals with the rise of alternative medical practices, including acupuncture, aromatherapy, and reflexology. The tone of the article dealing with the psychics is rather dismissive. They are seen as quick-buck artists and charlatans who are riding the bandwagon of a new fad, comparable to the pet rock phenomenon of years ago. The alternative medical practitioners are treated much more tolerantly. The scepticism of medical licensing bodies is acknowledged, but the growing acceptance of fringe therapies into the medical mainstream is noted with approval.

Not many years ago the alternative medical practitioners would have been dismissed by the popular media in much the same way that the current crop of celebrity psychics are. One wonders whether, ten years from now, a *Maclean's* cover story will welcome them into the mainstream fold as well.

Both phenomena are grounded in rediscovery, reinvention and revival. Many of the new therapies have their roots in the traditional medical practices of various cultures, and the psychic practitioners are, in many cases, reviving selected elements of folk religions. The new age, therefore, ap-

pears to have a decided predilection for things traditional. Both phenomena may simply be the manifestation of a desire to dress old ways in new garb, or, more fundamentally, they may illustrate the need to re-create gods, priests, shamans, and seers to replace those displaced and put aside by an early modern scientific certainty. Either way, the new age seems to offer unlimited potential for traditional study.

-Dr. Pat Byrne, MUN

Abstracts of Current Research

[The publication of abstracts will be an ongoing feature of TRANSMISSION. So please send us YOUR abstract for publication.]

The Symbiotic Relationship Between Auto-Ethnography and Ethnography: Their Fictive Realities
by Michael A. Robidoux, MUN

The term auto-ethnography assumes many faces: defining a group from within that particular culture; defining one's self within a culture; or any form of composition that is understood by an audience as reflexive, therefore defining the self. Considering the ambiguity of the term and its multiple signification, we are still able to realize auto-ethnography as ethnography somehow directed toward the self.

Despite this multiplicity, scholars have contemplated the implications of reflexive scholarship and the ramifications of emic knowledge. What I wish to argue, however, is that all ethnography is a construction that, to a certain extent, is a reflection of the researcher's own sensibilities; therefore, all ethnography is auto-ethnography. The ethnographic process is a constructive act, and I feel that looking at an idealized sense of auto-eth-

nography will elucidate its fictive reality.

In discussing the creative forces evident behind historical representation I will employ Hayden White's and Claude Levi-Strauss' theories concerning this process. I hope that through this argument I will blur the emic/etic dichotomy that has been seriously misunderstood.

"The Shack' in the Lives of Adolescents in Rural Newfoundland
by Lara Maynard, MUN

This past summer I conducted field research on shacks, as they are usually referred to by those who build and frequent them, on the Avalon Peninsula and Burin Peninsula of Newfoundland. Much of this research was undertaken with the support of the Mary A. Griffiths Bursary for Folklore Field Research, for which I am grateful.

The eventual product of this still ongoing research will be a comparative study which will focus mainly on the communities of Torbay and Red Harbour. Thus far, the similarities have been more striking than the differences.

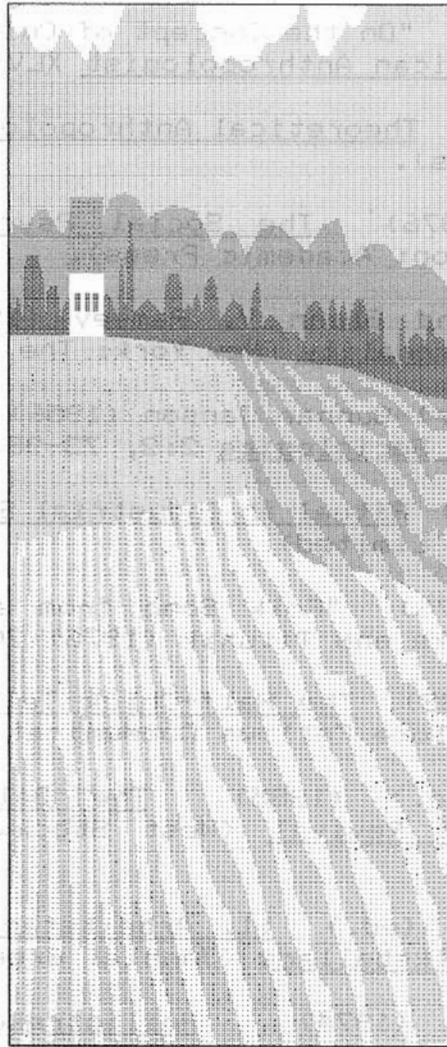
Remarkable examples of vernacular architecture, shacks are most often the products of adolescent males' first attempts at carpentry, often using scant supplies and tools. But it is in the shack as a setting for the establishment and development of friendship groups that I am most interested. Shack building, "membership," and visitation patterns reflect stages of adolescent social development.

Shacks are often the setting for the "firsts" which are associated with rites of passage, including courtship and drinking. Such activities are generally considered the prerogatives of adults in our society. The shack can therefore be thought of as a place in which adolescents making the transition from childhood to adulthood gather--a place of their own.

"Come All You Weary Cybernauts:" Filk Singing on the Internet

by Bruce L. Mason, MUN

Using an ethnography of computer-mediated communication approach, I suggest how to characterize behaviour on a USENET newsgroup for "filk" singers -- alt.music.filk (a.m.f.). Filk is a genre of folk song sung by science-fiction fans at conventions. Drawing on my PhD research I demonstrate how a.m.f. forms a folk community in its own right and conclude with some programmatic statements about the issues involved with ethnography on the Internet.



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