

## 1 | *Always Going and Never Gone?*

**F**airy manifestations often have the quality of mirage. An Avondale woman heard “a gay, soft music,” and saw what looked like small children in white clothes; they were holding hands and “dancing on the top of the little hilltops, and when she approached they moved on to the next one further in the distance. She walked the shoes off her feet following them,” and was found the next day deep in the woods (71-42/22). Fairy lore itself is like these fairies, ever receding into the distance before the eyes of the beholder (or ears of the hearer). Present-day traditions are but a shadow of their former selves, people say, shreds of a once robust folklore fast fading into oblivion. Or are they? Almost a hundred years ago, W.B. Yeats pondered the same question in *The Celtic Twilight*, in which he quotes Douglas Hyde’s epigraph for *Beside the Fire* — “They are like a mist on the coming of night that is scattered away by a light breath of wind” — and continues:

I know that this is the common belief of folk-lorists, but I do not feel certain that it is altogether true. Much, no doubt, will perish — perhaps the whole tribe of folk-tales proper; but the faery and ghost kingdom is more stubborn than men dream of. It will perhaps be always going and never gone. (208)

The folk view of the fairies’ disappearance often includes the idea that they once did exist. “In th’olde dayes,” said Chaucer’s Wife of Bath, “. . . Al was this

land full of fayerye” (84). A Newfoundland informant was telling Herbert Halpert, the founder of Memorial’s Folklore Department, about a man who got lost one night and “didn’t even know his own community”:

... he was led astray by something, back in the days of the fairies. That’s like spirits, you know, plenty of spirits down north one time, no more now. In my father’s time there was a few. (71-54: C986/15)

The Nolans, a couple in their seventies, told me that the fairies used to be seen on a bluff near their community:

Mrs. N: They’d be all going around of a ring, you know, dancing around in a ring, dressed in red.

Mr. N: But that wasn’t our time; that wasn’t in our time. That wasn’t in our time, but it was in our fathers’ time.

They went on to tell about Mrs. Nolan’s mother being “towed away,” their neighbour’s baby being changed, and about a woman who explained her yearly disappearance in October by saying she was with the fairies. The Nolans are thus typical of informants who declare fairy traditions dead even as they recount fairy incidents involving themselves, relatives, friends, or community members. It may be that they deem certain aspects of fairy tradition more likely to still exist than others — being towed astray versus seeing the fairies dance, for example — but they also assure me that “there’s no talk of them now.” Their report of the fairies’ demise, however, would seem to be (like Mark Twain’s) greatly exaggerated.<sup>1</sup> There is no doubt that Newfoundland fairy narratives do not enjoy the currency they did when storytelling was a major pastime; the decline of narrative contexts (performance or transmission situations) has had, by all accounts, a corresponding decline in oral tradition. Fairy tradition has been weakened as well by changes in experiential contexts, or situations in which one might have a “fairy” experience, such as cutting wood, picking berries, or walking long distances on dark roads. But in the course of research over the past eight years I have come to regard the “complete belief” of the past as an overstatement, and the lack of belief today

an underestimation. Even when contextual data is scant, it is possible to see that fairy tradition has always been open to interpretation, dispute, and manipulation, that a play between belief and disbelief is prominent, and that the exchange of stories is the medium of debate. This study will attest that there are still many people willing to consider that there is “something to it” (to use the common phrase), and many for whom “belief” is not a pressing issue in retailing tales of the fairies.

This study aims to examine the nature of the fairies themselves — who and what are they supposed to be? — and the forms (such as narrative and custom) in which ideas about them are expressed. It also considers the meanings and uses of these ideas: why do people conceive of, and tell stories about, such entities? The latter question is infinitely harder to address than the first, for there are perhaps as many answers as there are people; the more fieldwork I did, the more wary I became about asserting deep meaning or design, for fieldwork shows how narratives with essentially identical content may be understood and used in quite different ways. This is not to say that general theories cannot be made — I shall offer a few forthwith and many throughout — only that they are bound to be less certain than insights drawn from particular situations. And when the difficulties of assessing any single situation are taken into account, the tenuousness of grand interpretations becomes even clearer. Yet it could be argued that the very uniformity of fairy traditions belies contextual and individual variation and demands explanation. Why do the same outlines assert themselves (for it does seem that they have an almost independent life of their own) so insistently? Clearly there is something satisfying in them, but what? This is another basic question with which I began.

I found answers at two levels, in what I call explicit and implicit themes. By “explicit” I mean overt, inarguable content, such as the matter of fairies “taking” people or leading them astray. Implicit themes — they can also be called sub-themes or subtexts — are those that I think can be discerned underlying Newfoundland fairy lore as a whole; they reflect cultural concerns and help explain its functioning independent of genre and belief. One such theme is the human relationship with nature. In a harsh environment, under precarious economic and material conditions, one’s niche is ever under siege;

fairy narratives reflect the struggles and hard-won survival of culture and human creation, and the tenuous imposition of order on the wilderness. It is nothing new to suggest that the fairies symbolize “nature”: Robin Flower calls them “an image of man’s unreconciled distrust of nature” (140), and Alan Bruford suggests that they “represent in anthropomorphic form the mysterious and numinous in wild nature, the part of the world which is beyond mankind’s understanding — ‘the raw’ of Levi-Strauss, as against ‘the cooked,’ what man had mastered and put to his own use” (in MacDougall ix). Lauri Honko sees the Scandinavian nature spirits as part of “a map of man’s conquest of the environment” (“Adaptation” 21), and Kvideland and Sehmsdorf suggest they are patterned on nature itself, which was experienced as “animate and possessed of will and thus capable of aiding humans but also of doing them harm” (9). There has been, perhaps understandably, little close analysis of such general propositions, but attention to a nature/culture dichotomy with reference to specific narratives and motifs offers considerable insight into the codes and symbols of fairy narrative.

A second implicit theme in Newfoundland fairy lore revolves around interpersonal relationships, specifically around knowing, not knowing, and being known. The fairies are the ultimate strangers, and serve as metaphor for all that is strange not only in nature but in other people. A concern with recognition can be seen in fairy traditions from simple sayings — “When his son acted any way strange, weird, or incomprehensible when he was young, Mr. Collins usually said to him, ‘I believe you’re in the fairies!’” (74-152/13) — to the most serious of personal experience narratives — “My mother said as far as she was concerned that was true, she said that girl never came back, there was someone in her place” (64-13: C73/20).

The plan in organizing this study was to set my field research in the context of related data, and to elucidate issues or lines of thought arising from that combination of material. In order to preserve the integrity of the field research by keeping narrators and narratives together, chapters are organized around informants or sets of informants rather than along tidy typological lines. This means that major types of narratives or fairy experiences appear in almost every chapter, but from a different perspective in each. One problem

in working with material as rich as fairy tradition is that almost any text presents numerous points of interest, and the pursuit of any one is often at the expense of others. Thus there is an unavoidable labyrinthine quality in much of the discussion; scanning an early draft of one chapter, a bewildered reader remarked that it was like being fairy-led — you never knew quite where you were going or why — and indeed, while writing I felt sympathy with those persons who in fascination follow small figures or luscious berries until they suddenly “come to themselves” deep in the woods with no idea how they got there or how to get back. But the underlying principle of each chapter is to let my attempts to impose order on the wilderness of field, archive, scholarly and comparative material be guided by affinities inherent in the material as well as by theoretical considerations.

Centring chapters on informants also seemed the best way to take the reader along the course of my ventures. He or she may scrutinize my field methodology, gaffes and all, as I knock hopefully on kitchen doors, and tell the occupants that I heard they might know something about the fairies. The process of investigation is also mirrored in the weighting of chapters: Two and Three are the heaviest in archive and comparative data, since I started in the archive and library; the last four contain more of my own field research. I would like the material to unfold, as it did for me, until not only the general patterns but turns of phrase, elliptical references, and recurrent images resonate against all the narratives heard (or in this case, read) before. By the seventh chapter — if not much sooner — the reader will probably chafe at the “tedious consistency” that Barbara Allen Woods points out allows the folklorist to distinguish genuine from dubious sources (4), but the redundancy is an assurance of accuracy, so that the reader will, for example, readily recognize the artificiality of certain literary representations mentioned in Chapter Six. I have also preferred to demonstrate rather than simply to state that one thing or another is “common” or “widespread,” and to avoid a generalized “profile” abstracted from individual accounts. Besides producing an unfortunate coy tone, this composite approach has serious shortcomings when applied to folk narrative or belief in general, for the voices and views of “the folk” as individuals are lost. I have tried to keep these voices foremost, and not drown them in comparative

material or my own ideas, and to keep my interpretive suggestions separate enough to be taken or left while informants' contributions stand. At the same time I have described my own role as carefully as possible, since the researcher's approach is bound to influence what informants tell (or do not tell) her, even if she does not know what it is. That this is a particularly complicated matter in regard to the fairies will become clear in the following note.

#### SOME PRELIMINARY METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Contrary to popular opinion among non-residents and even some livyers (people who live here), Newfoundland has never been an isolated place with a closed or homogeneous society; rather, there has always been travel both on and to and from the island, and a marked distinctiveness of communities. Seary, Story, and Kirwin discuss the "remarkable and continuous interchange and shift of population" throughout the recorded history of the Avalon Peninsula, and point out that migratory and seasonal work patterns "made Newfoundlanders one of the most mobile of people," which "helped to modify, though not to cancel out, that separateness of the people of different areas remarked long ago by Wix" (35–36). In 1836, the missionary Edward Wix had commented that inhabitants of the different bays differed from one another "as much as if they were of a distant nation" (Seary et al. 36). The special character of communities continues to be noted by student collectors and by observers like Melvin Firestone, who in the 1960s found it hard to account for the differences in communities he studied on the Northern Peninsula, when surface characteristics like economy and heritage were the same (*Brothers* vi–vii). Within villages or towns, neighbourhoods may form smaller informal communities with their own particular character. George Casey, for example, writes in an ethnography of his home community that although the younger generation see Conche as a whole (58), in the past there were distinct neighbourhoods that were noted for different narrative specialties (52). Casey himself had never heard fairy stories:

However, Dr. Halpert insisted that since Conche was an Irish ethnic area there was every reason to expect fairy lore, so I even

attempted to collect this narrative genre. To my amazement not only were fairy legends known in Conche but even my mother knew several of these stories. Neither my older brother nor I ever heard her tell any. (225)

There are plenty of Newfoundlanders like Casey, as surprised as I was to learn of fairy tradition. Others know of it, but not at first hand; an informant at Port Saunders directed Halpert and the English folklorist John Widdowson to the other side of the island to find out about it, “because they talk about fairies over there just the same as we do ghosts over here” (66-24: C272/m.t.).

MUNFLA data show that there are “good” and “bad” areas for fairy lore; that is, some places offer relatively little while others, like Upper Island Cove or Bell Island, can be seen from the number and detail of reports to be veritable hotbeds. Informants sometimes attribute the difference to “Irishness,” and advised me to seek out “Irish” or Catholic enclaves for my research; and they are right that in heavily Irish areas like the Southern Shore and Cape Shore fairy traditions are found in profusion. Fairy lore is by no means limited to such areas, however, as there is abundant data from Protestants and Protestant areas. Upper Island Cove, for example, is mainly English/Protestant, as is neighbouring Bishop’s Cove where I recorded some of my richest material; Bell Island is mixed. (I chose Conception Bay for most of my fieldwork not only because it is the oldest settled area, but because of its inextricable ethnic mixture.) Since Newfoundland settlers came mostly from southwest England and southeast Ireland (with smaller but significant elements from France, Scotland, Wales, the Channel Islands, and Brittany), it would seem evident that fairy lore came from these places as well, but because of the popular notion of “Irishness” I have devoted some attention to the matter at various points.

More important questions about antecedent sources concern adaptation. Is it possible, for example, in comparing Newfoundland material to its parent stock, to see selection and shaping according to the features of the “new” environment? What are the distinctive contours here? I have used comparative material mostly to consider such questions of continuity and change, as well as processes of oral tradition and the interpretation of experience. I have not been

comprehensive in the provision of analogues — all the material in this study could be extensively annotated from the major collections and motif-indexes — but have used them mainly as they illuminate the material at hand. Occasionally the similarities in other cultures or eras that excited early students of fairy lore like Keightley, Wright, and Hartland have proved irresistible to me, too; there is a certain professional thrill in the sheer antiquity of fairy lore, as when someone, for example, tells the plot of the ballad “Tam Lin” as it happened in her community. Historical and literary reverberations, however, are not a feature for the tradition bearers, who have a different set of associations. Since this study is primarily an attempt to understand — or at least to present — fairy tradition from their point of view, I have limited historical material to as much as will demonstrate the extraordinary continuity that shows fairy tradition to contain powerful expressions of human interests and needs.

Comparison must be tempered, too, by consideration of the limitations of the data. The documentation of fairy tradition in Newfoundland is a relatively recent undertaking that has been neither systematic nor sustained. Except for a bit recorded by MacEdward Leach in his 1950 quest for ballads, there was no collection until the mid-1960s, when Halpert and Widdowson began their fieldwork on all folklore genres. Some of their students did superior “early” collections, and my reliance on them will be apparent. A list of MUNFLA materials on the fairies (compiled by myself and available in MUNFLA) shows that there has been little abatement of material since then, although some years were “better” than others. The quality and quantity of material from the early years were enhanced by courses taken on a year-long basis, in which students could use the Christmas break to collect in their home communities, and by Halpert’s survey approach that explicitly included fairies as a subject for inquiry. The shortening of courses to semester length made them less conducive to the recording of long narratives, and students could not always turn to their home communities to do fieldwork. As more instructors taught more courses with special emphases, fairies would not inevitably be mentioned as a possible topic for collection. Reporting has thus been random, depending on there being a student from a community with fairy traditions, who had an interest in those traditions herself, and the mobility to get to

informants within the required time. (Students have, of course, collected from each other at university, and are often excellent self-informants.) The element of chance makes it dangerous to conclude that any motif or narrative type is absent from Newfoundland just because it is not found in the archive. Sometimes a single text is all that bars such a conclusion; for example, the midwife-for-the-fairies legend, widespread elsewhere,<sup>2</sup> appears in MUNFLA in a single version (72-95/33-35:C1278/3-5). Told by someone who heard it from the midwife herself, it is so complete, and so clearly assimilated to local tradition, that it is impossible to believe that it could be the sole version in Newfoundland. The apparent absence or even “unusualness” of any particular item, then, must be treated with caution. On the other hand, it can be stated with confidence that some things are common or widespread, such as carrying bread for protection; and when there are a great many versions of an item, it can be seen that this or that variation is unusual by comparison. In general, however, “unusual” (in this study) means “unusual in the archival data.”

Another reason why a full range of fairy traditions cannot be assumed to be represented in MUNFLA is that some people consider it dangerous to talk about the fairies. There is even a formula to circumvent the prohibition:

[The informant’s grandmother] believed in the fairies and their powers although she had never seen them. She had a good collection of stories concerning them which she and the other neighbors [on Bell Island] would gather together to discuss after tea when it was dark. However, the fairies did not like being discussed and would punish anyone who told stories about them. She would in opening the conversation say, “This is Sunday, Monday (whatever day it was) and the fairies won’t hear us.” This statement would prevent the fairies from hearing the ensuing conversation. (FSC67-3/33)

Failure to maintain a respectful attitude could have dire consequences, according to an Upper Island Cove collector:

If one should talk about or mock the fairies, the old people will get really upset. The old people of this town, most of them, that

is, really believe in fairies. . . . The old people say that if you talk bad about them they will try to get you and punish you. It is said that people have been captured by fairies and brought back crippled up or blind or gone mad. (79-317/13-14)

Some students confessed to unease themselves. One composed a set of “rules” for dealing with the fairies, and concluded:

Most of all, a mortal should never inquire too deeply into the fairies or their world for those who pry too much into fairy affairs may never live to write about them. If I were a believer in fairies I would not continue to write this paper, but I admit the idea is a bit frightening, because I have heard so many stories all my life about fairies and fairy encounterments. (79-378/5)

Another, attempting to record her family’s store of supernatural lore, said:

Now stories of fairies, ghosts or tokens are not easily obtained from these people because it is mostly a taboo subject, especially tokens — taboo because they are not told for the sake of telling stories or stories to be laughed at. The people who were the main characters in these happenings have a rigid belief in their truths and in their powers; and while listening to them, I found myself, if not exactly fearful, then certainly a bit apprehensive and a mite nervous at laughing at some of the seemingly humorous episodes. I found it interesting that neither my uncle, my mother, or my grandfather wanted to talk to me when there were others present. My aunt even left the house when Nash told her I was coming in to talk to him, or rather, to listen to him. (79-404/3)

Some people will talk only about what they themselves have experienced, while others will talk about anyone *but* themselves. Some will discuss certain aspects of fairy tradition but not others, usually those of a tragic nature. One collector knew about a girl who was “captured by fairies” when she left the informant’s house one day and was found “in a poor condition” a week later.

When she asked the informant about it, he said, “We won’t talk about that poor little thing. She ended up in the asylum” (74-210/11-12). For some students, stories they heard all their lives became elusive when pursued as a formal project. One wrote:

My father is from Carbonear which many people claim was the land of the fairies. His grandparents and parents mentioned many stories of the fairies and the devil to him when he was young. Dad believes in them to the extent that they were told to him by his parents as true. During my childhood I heard such stories, therefore, became interested in this type of folklore. My original plan was to visit my older relatives in Carbonear. However, it turned out to be not as successful as I thought. I found that they were reluctant to talk about it, especially Aunt Ann. She apparently knows many fairy tales but since my uncle died last fall she refuses to talk about such tales and claimed to have forgotten them, and each time I mentioned stories that my father had told me she would just say, “Is that so,” and start on a new topic. . . . I don’t know if I used the wrong approach or not but few people were willing to sit down and talk about fairy tales and the devil, especially when I mentioned anything about an assignment in folklore or their names in the archives. (71-75/2-4)

A Cupids collector set herself up to record fairy narratives from her older relatives:

They eye my tape recorder with a certain degree of mistrust and for a while I believe I will be unable to evoke any material from them on this occasion. My grandmother for one does not understand my true purpose in recording their conversation and believes they are being ridiculed by higher education. For some time she refuses to partake in the discussion. She is a woman who dislikes to have her picture taken, and similarly does not want her voice recorded on tape. . . . Fairy stories seem to figure prominently in this particular family. Stories of strange phenomena are slightly scoffed at . . .

ghosts most likely do not exist. Fairies on the other hand most probably do. (83-39/3,6)

Sometimes university projects are mistrusted on other grounds. One student reported that her informant's brother would leave the house in disgust when she arrived with her recorder: "[He] said I would get no stories there because I was getting them too cheap. He did not like the idea of those 'big university fellas getting their information for nothing'" (76-82/33).

I encountered evasion early in my inquiries but was not discouraged by it because I did not know at the time that I was being put off. After meeting Andy Newsome, I began to ask everyone I met about the fairies. Richard Murrin of Shoe Cove and the late Alice (Picco) Hayes of St. Thomas (1911–1991) denied knowing anything about them; it was not until I got to know them better that I heard of the "blast" Mr. Murrin's father got in the leg, and the time Mrs. Hayes's father encountered fairies, a few feet tall, who leered at him and jeered, "Nyah, nyah, Tom b'ye" (see Chapter Seven for details). But meanwhile I had begun reading in the archive, and found potentially discouraging information in this vein. One informant told the collector that it would be a waste of time to look for fairy stories in Salmonier:

He said that the people would be quite suspicious of an inquiring stranger and simply would not cooperate. He also mentioned that I would very likely run into persons who sincerely believed in fairies and who knew the stories that he had related to me but would not admit to either believing in fairies or to knowing any of the stories. (72-16/1)

Another student determined to record the supernatural stories that had terrified her during her childhood in Bonavista:

I approached several people who used to be good storytellers but they insisted that they didn't know any stories. It was frustrating to be told by everyone that I talked to that if poor Alb or poor so and so were alive now, they could tell me stories. . . . So at this point I had to reassess the situation. I knew the stories I wanted

to hear, so I put away the tape recorder and my notebook and just went visiting. Since I was visiting older people and since these stories are generally woven into the conversation, I took my mother along with me. This turned out to be a good idea. Mom is sixty-one, old-fashioned, knows everybody's relatives and enjoys tracing back people and events.

She found that her informants did not understand her desire to hear a story for its own sake; for them, it was so crucial to know *who* the story was about that she sometimes resorted to a pretence of acquaintance or recollection because "there's always the danger that you might not get the story if you do not know the person involved" (79-708/4-7).

A Bell Island collector also noted the advantages of previous contact:

I found that I had to know what my informant had in terms of fairy stories. Both men were very reluctant to talk about the fairies and I was constantly mentioning stories that they had told previously. My pre-interview research consisted of talking to the children of the men. In this way I was able to get the stories I needed and was able to use them in prodding the men to relate the experiences I later collected. (74-43/21-22)

Pondering the difficulties of being an ignorant outsider, I hit upon the plan of contacting some of the student collectors who had written on the fairies, or people who had already served as informants or been mentioned as potential informants. This is how, directly or indirectly, I got most of my informants. In place of knowing an individual's particular repertoire, I knew the general outline of the tradition and things to ask about, and in place of personal acquaintanceship with informants, I offered a wide-eyed interest in their experience and knowledge, a new audience who placed great value on their words. I have described my method in each case, which usually consisted of an informal conversation on the first meeting and a request for a second visit to make a tape-recorded interview. I recognize the potential indelicacy of importuning people to talk about something, then writing it all down for

an audience outside their culture or control, and I was tempted to use pseudonyms on that account; however, most of my informants are self-assured and articulate people, and there seemed no need to disguise them on account of any wild ideas I might (and probably did) advance about them or their stories. I tried to record faithfully — indeed doggedly — what I was told; but a certain amount of imagination is essential (and inevitable) in any investigation of human thought, and so I have done a lot of guessing about my informants' ideas and motivations. If students of folk belief (or folk narrative, for that matter) were to stick only to demonstrable facts, many of its most interesting dimensions would go unexplored.

#### A NOTE ON ACADEMIC TERMINOLOGY

“Tradition” is a workhorse of a word because it covers a full range of genres and is neutral in terms of attitude and belief. “Narrative” is another usefully neutral word, but to avoid monotony I also use “tale,” “account,” and “story”; the latter is closer to folk usage than “legend,” which in spite of professional definition suggests distance and doubtfulness more than “story” does. One non-emic (or non-native) term I use with reluctance is “supernatural,” which is objectionable in the semantic sense that anything that is in the world cannot be considered “outside” or “above” nature; it carries an implicit judgement on objective reality that I wish to avoid because for many people the existence of the fairies is an empirically verified fact. The term can be misleading, too, in its popular sense of “strange” or “uncanny,” because not everyone considers the fairies particularly extraordinary. One man calmly stepped off a road to allow a fairy funeral to pass: “This was told to my father by his grandfather Ross as a sort of night-time story,” said the student, “it seemed that at this time the people were not alarmed by seeing the fairies and as far as my great-grandfather Ross was concerned it was just a natural thing” (71-75/12-13). While this may be a romantic projection onto the past, there are without a doubt people (including some of my informants) who take a matter-of-fact rather than awestruck view of the fairies.

There is also an ironic aspect in calling the fairies “supernatural” when an

association with nature — in the general sense of uncultivated wilderness — is one of their most salient characteristics. John Lindow calls “the world of the nature-beings” of Swedish tradition “the other world,” but points out that it is nevertheless “essentially the one in which the tradition-bearers live” (31–32); I have also used “other world” and “otherworlders” with the same reservation. In general I tried to use “supernatural” and “otherworlders” as shorthand at times when there is no simple way to refer to the range of traditions concerning the spiritual or extramundane world without distracting lexical convolutions.

#### A NOTE ON MY OWN “BELIEF”

It is well recognized, as David Hufford writes, that “a scholar approaching any interesting subject with human implications must do so with bias”; more debatable is Hufford’s view that academic inquiries on “supernatural” folk belief start with the premise that the “beliefs” under investigation are “false” (“Supernatural” 24–25). This book is a study of the opinions of the tradition-bearers, not of my own; but as I have taken it upon myself to “interpret” their narratives, I should probably make my own views as clear as possible. I am basically of what Gillian Bennett calls the “more things in heaven and earth, Horatio’ school” (27), and although I have never seen anything worse than myself (as the saying goes), I would not rule it out entirely. On the other hand, I am of such an agnostic and materialist tendency in general that a relativistic view comes easily for some things: the fairies seem as reasonable to me as “God” as “he” is envisioned in formal religion. I am nevertheless irrational about some things, possibly more so than many people; for example, I am always amazed — quite aside from the question of morality — that able-bodied people would tempt fate by parking their cars in a spot designated for the disabled. I have no reason to believe, other than his word for it, that Mr. Tucker, the dowser of Chapter Six, can discern unseen essences in houses, but I would not buy one that he said had “bad energy” (the better-safe-than-sorry school). As to the fairies, I am like Mr. Smith of Chapter Five, who says, “From my point of view, probably they don’t exist, but I wouldn’t say they

don't." I feel there is a certain unwarranted arrogance on the part of those who dismiss them out of hand.

#### A NOTE ON TOPOGRAPHY

The landscape is so central to Newfoundland fairy tradition that its aspect will soon be apparent, but for the reader unfamiliar with it a brief description may be in order. Most communities cling to the coast, often near vertiginous cliffs by deep bays and inlets. Aaron Thomas's 1794 description is still good: "Newfoundland being in all parts intersected with Bogs, Barrens, Lakes, Morasses, Hills, Rivulets and Woods we find all places are plaster'd or thickly scatter'd with stones of all shapes and of all sizes" (63). He gives a good picture of the summer weather as well: "It often happens that one hour is hot, the next hour is cold, then a Fogge afterwards clear, then Rain — so that it commonly falls out that you get Four or Five kinds of weather in one day" (123). Winter is equally changeable, especially on the Avalon, where continual freeze-thaw cycles create hazardous and deceptive conditions, so that apparently solid surfaces are only skins of ice over water or chasms. Temperatures can drop many degrees in hours, and blinding storms whip up with little notice. Even more unpredictable are the drifts of fog, which, at any season, shift the landscape into new patterns and perspectives, when not obscuring it entirely. The seasonal work patterns that took people into this strange terrain — wood-cutting, berry-picking, hunting, troutng, travelling — will also become apparent in narrative, with the notable exception of fishing. "They don't agree with fishing," Ellen Keough of Chapter Seven says of the fairies. It was on the land that one carried bread in case of meeting them.