

MURDER AND CULTURAL CONSTRUCTION IN 19TH CENTURY PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

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Abstract

The transformational possibilities of an island's culture are both shaped and constrained by its totalised physical boundary, helping to create a culture composed paradoxically of both intimacy and separation. Cultural construction occurs through a dialectic between symbolic systems that are put at risk through practice and thus subject to change. Island inhabitants preserve the social and physical boundaries imposed by geography because boundaries make it tolerable to live at close quarters in a community over many years. The policing of borders thus engenders a culture that promotes collectivity and elides whatever contests it. The unsolved rape and murder of Ann Beaton in May of 1859 in Rear Settlement, Prince Edward Island significantly problematised the isolated Scots culture of which she was a part and prompted its followers to construct new narratives that were one step in their integration into the larger Island society. Responses to the murder were, and have continued to be, apparently designed to circumvent evidence and to develop explanatory narratives that did not endanger the community.

Keywords

Prince Edward Island, murder, culture, folklore, Isle of Skye

Introduction

William Sewell in 'The Concept(s) of Culture', his essay in *Beyond the Cultural Turn*, argues that culture can be considered "as a dialectic of system and practice... as a system of symbols possessing a real but thin coherence that is continually put at risk in practice and therefore subject to transformation" (1999: 52). Applied broadly, this dialectic can be regarded as the animating force driving globalisation that, as Eric Clark notes, leads to "cultural hybridization" (2004: 291). In the context of small islands that, like Prince Edward Island (PEI), were colonised by different ethnicities, the distinct and separate cultures of expatriates are similarly transformed into a culture that is more integrated and homogenous. However, the "system of symbols" in such cases is not open to complete transformation since it is defined by one incontrovertible factor, the particular spatial delimitation of the island itself. The physical constraint appears to produce what several commentators have called the paradoxical nature of small islands (eg Baldacchino, 2006: 5; Deloughrey, 2004: 301). While the geographic boundary intensifies the relations between islanders and helps foster a distinctive culture, it also paradoxically constrains the possibilities for transformation. Islanders, Francoise Peron notes, are:

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fully aware of being constantly under scrutiny and so have to learn to be accommodating and tactful. Living cheek by jowl with people yet keeping a discreet distance from them is not easy. Being forever attentive to the fine-tuning of personal relationships is a requirement for those who wish to survive as members of a small island community (2004: 330).

This paradoxical arrangement of intimacy and distance suggests that island inhabitants endeavour to preserve the boundaries necessitated by insularity. Whether physical or social, boundaries make it tolerable to live at close quarters in a community over many years. This policing of borders creates a culture that promotes collectivity and elides as much as possible anything that contests it. The unsolved rape and murder of Ann Beaton in May of 1859 in Rear Settlement, Prince Edward Island significantly challenged the isolated Scots culture of which she was a part – a culture, moreover, that was imported from another island, the Isle of Skye. Beaton's murder forced the community to construct new meanings that facilitated their integration into the larger PEI society. Characteristic of small islands, however, responses to the murder were, and have continued to be, shaped to avoid documented evidence as much as possible and to find alternative explanations that did not put the community at risk.

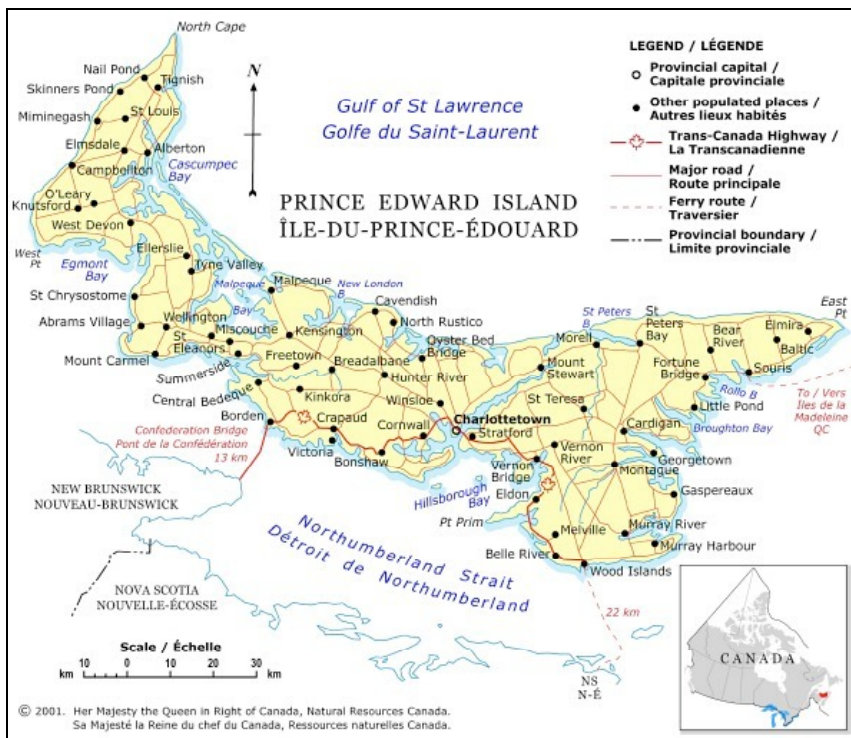


Figure 1: Map of Prince Edward Island (Natural Resources Canada, 2001)

Mid-19th Century Prince Edward Island was fuelled by an agrarian-based economy that was bolstered by a growing shipbuilding sector and various home manufacturing

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practices, such as carpentry, blacksmithing, and brewing (Weale and Baglole, 1973: 83). The population was made up of four major ethnic groups – the Scottish, English, Irish, and Acadians – together with tiny enclaves of Mik'maq, the Island's aboriginal people, and blacks, who were the descendants of slaves brought to PEI by Loyalists after the American Revolution (MacDonald, 2000: 16). The social order tended to split along ethnic lines. As a British colony, the ruling class was mostly English; despite their shared Celtic heritage, the Protestant Scottish and Catholic Irish had a fractious relationship that occasionally spilled over into violence, such as the Belfast riot of 1847 in which three men were killed over an electoral dispute (O'Grady, 2004: 212). While the English and Irish had come in large numbers in the 1830s and 1840s, the Scots, many of whom were Gaelic speakers, had come as early as the 1770s and were the largest ethnic group at close to 50 percent of the population (Kennedy, 2002). Like the Acadians, the Scots were isolated by their language and customs and did not integrate into the mainstream of PEI society as well as the English or Irish. They were successful pioneers but "a large number... remained outside the main social and political life of the Colony for many years" (Weale and Baglole, 1973: 40).

Accounts of the Murder

The murder of Ann Beaton generated a number of contemporary newspaper articles with sensationalistic headlines, such as 'Shocking Murder on the Murray Harbour Road' (1859: 3) and 'Awful and Brutal Murder of a Female' (1859: 3). The official court documents – the inquest, the coroner's report, and depositions taken during the course of an investigation conducted by Justice of the Peace J.R. Bourke¹ – provide details regarding the murder and, inadvertently, the lives of the members of the community. Indeed, the facts in the Beaton murder case offer more documentary evidence than usual about mid-19th Century life on PEI since, as Lucille Campey points out, "most emigrants left little behind by way of the written word" (2001: 6). Ann Beaton, who was roughly 40 years of age and a single mother, lived with her brother Murdoch and his family and presumably her child on a fifty-acre farm in what was then variously called the Rear or Back Settlement and Orwell Rear. The following is a chronology of the salient events² in the case beginning with Beaton's departure from home and ending with the termination of legal proceedings against the Matheson family, who were initially accused of the crime:

- On Thursday, May 12th, 1859. Ann Beaton left home around 4 pm with the purpose of visiting a neighbour, Mrs. McPherson, to view some fabric she was weaving for Ann to give to her brother. She stopped briefly at the Mathesons en route. She took tea with the McPhersons and then departed around sunset to walk home. The route Beaton took is depicted in Figure 2 (Map of the Rear Settlement Showing Ann Beaton's Route on May 12th, 1859).
- Murdoch Beaton was working away from home – and later provided documentary proof of his absence – and returned on the evening of May 13th to find his sister had not come home the night before. The next morning he found Ann's body at the back of his property.
- By early afternoon on May 14th, an inquest was empanelled with twelve neighbourhood men. It sat from 2pm to 7.30pm under the local magistrate, John McDougall. Dr. Cox, the coroner, examined her body and indicated in

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his report she was raped³ and bludgeoned to death. “After much enquiry and deliberation,” the jury returned a ‘verdict of Willful Murder against some person or persons unknown’” (McDougall, 1859:8).

- A grubbing hoe matted with blood was found several days later. It belonged to the Matheson⁴ family, close neighbours.
- On May 23rd and 24th, Justice of the Peace Bourke investigated the crime *in situ* and questioned upwards of 500 people.
- Bourke arrested Archibald, Margaret, and Murdoch Matheson, owners of the grubbing hoe. They were freed on bail almost immediately
- The case against the Mathesons came before the Grand Jury in July 1859 and was dismissed. There were no other legal proceedings. The *Examiner* reported that “In the case of the parties who were charged with the murder of Ann Beaton... no Bill was found” (‘Supreme Court’, 1859: 3).

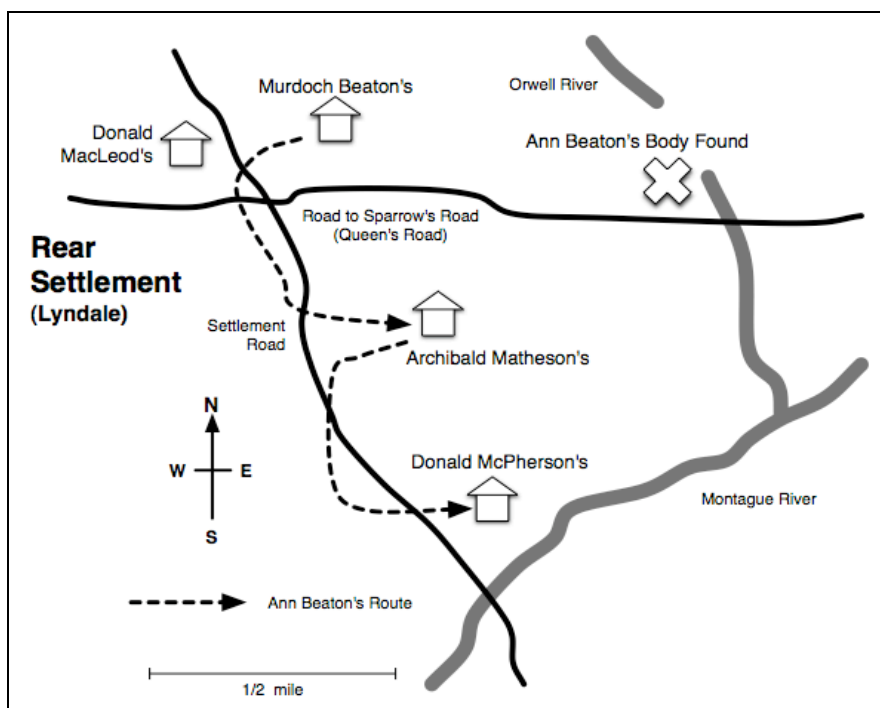


Figure 2: Map of Rear Settlement Showing Ann Beaton's Route on May 12th, 1859⁵

There have been five separate accounts of the murder written from the vantage point of the 20th Century. The first was by Murdoch Lamont, writing in the *Prince Edward Island Magazine* in 1902. His family were close neighbours of the Beatons, although he himself was not born until after the murder. His sources are anecdotes and folklore from the community passed on orally. Similarly, Sir Andrew Macphail, who was born in 1864 and

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brought up in nearby Orwell, mentions the murder in his autobiographical account of 19th Century life in the district, *The Master's Wife*, which was written in the 1920s and published in 1939. Roy and Maida Campbell's 1977 article in *The Island Magazine*, 'The Murder at Goblin Hollow', relies heavily on Lamont and Macphail as sources, but also contributes some community-based information, such as the disconcerting effect Bourke's inquiries had on the Gaelic speakers. Charles McQuaid wrote an article on the murder in 1994 as part of a brief, unpublished volume, *Twice Hanged and Quartered: A Miscellany of Murder and Other Tales of the Macabre*, that he deposited in the Prince Edward Island Archives, which focuses on the legal processes that the Mathesons would have undergone through the 19th Century court system. In the late 1990s, Bourke's depositions and Cox's coroner's report became available in the PEI Archives; afterwards, McQuaid prepared an additional archival document on the case, 'Death in Goblin's Hollow: Who Slew Ann Beaton', in which he attempts to unravel the case. The most extended folkloric rendering of the crime was a ballad written by Donald Lamont, Murdoch's brother and presumably the same Donald Lamont who was the minister for the Central parish of the Free Church of Scotland in the 1920s ('History of the Free Church of Scotland on Prince Edward Island', 2008). 'The Ballad of Ann Beaton', an undated and unpublished ballad, was collected by the Campbells and included as a preface to their article in *The Island Magazine*.

Isle of Skye Background and Culture

The Scottish influx into PEI was a direct result of the breakup of the clan system following the failure of the last Jacobite uprising in 1745: "The long-standing relationship between Chief and clansman was completely transformed. Social conditions began to deteriorate with the increased pressures being put on the tenantry or crofters" (MacDonald, 1998: online). Landlords sought more funds to pay their debts to the British Crown by hugely raising rents on the small land holdings or crofts thus forcing the crofters into increasing indebtedness. Prior to this time, the crofters had lived as they had done for centuries through subsistence agriculture supplemented by fishing when necessary. Although much of the Highlands had been inundated by the Norsemen around 800 A.D., the crofters were descendants of the ancient Celts and spoke Scottish Gaelic, part of the Goidelic branch of Celtic languages that also includes the Irish and Manx languages. After the Greeks and Romans, the Gaels were the first Europeans to develop a written language, "referred to as Classical Gaelic – which was used by political leaders, scholars and others professionals throughout the Gaelic world" (Kennedy, 2002: online) well into the Renaissance and even later in Scotland. After their victory at the Battle of Culloden in 1746, the British took immediate measures to accelerate anglicisation in the Highlands and in so doing deprived the Gaelic leadership, or *tacksman*, of any significant role in the restructured social order.

The first significant Highland immigration to Prince Edward Island was a group of 200 Gaelic-speaking Catholics from South Uist who arrived in 1772 led by a prominent *tacksman*, John MacDonald of Glenaladale. They were followed by a stream of immigrants that lasted well into the 19th Century; perhaps the best known of them were the 800 settlers who were led by Lord Selkirk and in 1803 settled near Belfast in eastern Prince Edward Island. Most of this assemblage was from Skye and South Uist, but they also came from Argyllshire, as well as Perthshire, and Sutherland (Campey, 2003: 19). The direct impetus for their emigration from Scotland was the landlords' attempt to raise the profitability of their land by clearing it of crofts in order to make way for the more

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remunerative practice of raising sheep. The Clearances resulted in widespread poverty and despair and made emigration to North America seem to the crofters a viable means of preserving their way of life (ibid). Selkirk had acquired 60,000 acres in lots 10, 57, and 58 in eastern PEI which he sold at fee simple, or easy terms for the settlers to purchase the property ('General History of the Highlands', 2008). The next major wave of Highland emigration thirty years later was triggered by yet another economic downturn, in this case the decline in the price of kelp. Kelp, which was used in the manufacture of glass and soap, had helped sustain the crofters in the wake of the clearances but its failure forced many to decide to emigrate. "It is hardly surprising," Lucille Campey notes, "that nearly every Scot who came to Prince Edward Island in the late 1820s and early 1830s came from one of the kelp producing areas in the Western Isles" (2001: 83). Upwards of 600 settlers from the Isle of Skye came to Prince Edward Island in 1829 alone; among them were Ann Beaton and her family.

The settlers were not just fleeing economic hardship but also the imposition of centralised British rule which threatened their culture and included prohibitions against Highland dress, traditional musical instruments, like the harp and bag pipes, and the use of Gaelic (MacDonald, 1998). Indeed, Selkirk's explicit purpose in organising the 1803 emigration was to help protect the social customs and beliefs of the Highlanders in order, he wrote:

that a portion of the ancient spirit might be preserved among the Highlanders of the New World – that the emigrants might be brought together in some part of their own colonies, where they would be of national utility and no motives of general policy would militate (as they certainly may at home) against the preservation of all those peculiarities of customs and language, which they themselves are so reluctant to give up, and which are perhaps intimately connected with many of their most striking and characteristic virtues. (Campey, 2003: 10)

They regarded themselves as exiles from their rightful home, a notion that persisted for many years. Writing in the 1920s, Malcolm MacQueen notes that, "the intense loyalty of the early settlers to the Skye tradition burns in the breast of the present generation with a flame as steady as it did in any that has gone before" (1929: 20). This fervent commitment to a way of life, buttressed by isolation and intermarriage, meant that the Skye culture, including the use of Gaelic, had been largely preserved in mid-19th Century Prince Edward Island.

The inhabitants of the Rear Settlement were almost exclusively settlers from the Isle of Skye, including both the Mathesons and Beatons⁶, who arrived from Skye on June 1, 1829 aboard the *Mary Kennedy*. This group imported a seemingly monolithic and intractable cultural system constructed around shared religious beliefs, socio-economic practices, consanguinity, language, and a history as islanders. In particular, the Skye emigrants were deeply influenced by the evangelical movement that began in the early 19th Century and significantly increased "orthodoxy in Protestant religious practice" (Kennedy, 2002); indeed, the shared religious code permeated all aspects of their lives. "The church", reports MacQueen (1929: 35), "was the lodestone around which centred the life of the people". As a result, they followed closely the religious upheavals in Scotland during the 1830s and 1840s. In May of 1843, a group of ministers led by Thomas Chalmers broke away from the Church of Scotland and formed a separate institution named the Free Church of Scotland. Their main point of contention was a court

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decision, later upheld by the British parliament, that congregations could not reject ministers who had been appointed to serve them. Otherwise, the Free Church continued to maintain the doctrines and policies of the Church of Scotland. The struggle against ecclesiastical authority, and indirectly against the landowning class that was the source of their hardship and misery, was taken up by many Highlanders. “On the Island of Lewis,” for example, “98% of the people left the Established Church... and in all but the Catholic areas and a few larger towns... the figure was rarely less than 90%” (Brown, 1997: 90). The Free Church promoted a kind of evangelical Calvinism which emphasised conversion and austerity and led to religious revivals across the Highlands, including Skye.

The effects of the Disruption were felt as far away as Prince Edward Island. MacQueen notes that a Free Church congregation, inspired in part by the fervency of new immigrants, was established in the Rear Settlement soon after the Disruption: “The ardor of the people for it almost partook of hostility to the neighboring Established Church at Murray Harbour Road” (1929: 87). However, the Free Church movement did not sweep the Island in the way that it did the Highlands in part because there already existed a PEI religious movement led by Reverend Donald MacDonald that was fiercely independent and strongly evangelical. In 1826 when MacDonald arrived on PEI none of the major religious denominations, including the Church of Scotland, were well organised or firmly established (Weale, 1976: 96). Coupled with geographic isolation, this lack of structure made it possible for individual ministers to have enormous influence over their congregations. MacDonald, whose authority was such that his followers were known as the MacDonaldites, instituted an autonomous religious organisation on PEI that was “independent of the Church of Scotland or any other established church body” (Weale, 1976: 132). The majority of the 1829 Skye settlers became his followers (MacQueen, 1929: 82).

Ostensibly a Church of Scotland clergyman, MacDonald led two Island-wide revivals between 1826 and 1867 that focused on an individual experience of conversion that was described as “‘outward manifestations’ of an ‘inner experience’ (called ‘the work’)” (Bishop, 1990: 32) and was characterised by “sobbing and weeping” (Bishop, 1990: 63). MacQueen makes a point of singling out the 1829 Skye settlers as being especially susceptible to MacDonald’s message:

Perhaps in the history of the migration of the race no more high-minded and worthy people ever entered a new land than those who came out on the Mary Kennedy. Their heritage of piety persisted undiminished for several generations... Like their forebears they were rigid Calvinists (1929: 73).

Weale and Baglole report in *The Island and Confederation* that by the mid-19th Century Islanders at large “were fond of referring to the Island as a ‘Little Eden’ or as “that little end of all creation” (1973:107). For the Scottish immigrants, however, this Edenic vision was further apotheosised by Reverend MacDonald who provided a sacerdotal narrative that explicated their past hardship and exile: “MacDonald told his followers they were special... He told them they might be The People, being tested for the coming Millennium” (‘Unattributed’, 1997: 12).

MacDonald, who could reputedly preach for six hours without pause in both Gaelic and English (Bishop, 1990: 12), forged his widespread congregation into a single entity: “his

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adherents were visibly united as one ecclesiastical body, guided by the same rules” (ibid). His brand of iconoclastic Presbyterianism was hierarchical and tended towards misogyny. Men and women sat on separate sides of the church well into the latter part of the 19th Century (MacQueen, 1929: 83). Elders or the officiating minister, always men, could publicly castigate members of the congregation for any real or perceived transgressions. Any activity, such as drawing water, cutting wood or even preparing food, was done on Saturday so that the Sabbath was not tarnished with labour. Malcolm MacQueen in *Skye Pioneers* reports: “The general atmosphere of the community was that there was an avenging God hovering overhead, or concealed in the adjoining forest, ever ready to pounce upon the guilty” (ibid: 51). The result was a culture that was continually circumscribed by the imposition of a strict religious code that affected all aspects of the lives of its adherents. It is worth noting that in the mid-1930s, long after their leader’s death, the MacDonaldites joined the Free Church of Scotland (Weale, 1976: 245) and a number of congregations, citing MacDonald as their inspiration, continue to exist in Prince Edward Island to the present day (‘Free Church of Scotland: Prince Edward Island’, 2008: online).

The immigrants’ religious faith was supplemented by an alternate belief system that owed more to their Gaelic heritage than it did to Christianity or the Scottish Reformation. They were inheritors of the Celts nature-based polytheistic spirituality that, it can be argued, was maintained by their transposition from one relatively isolated region, the Isle of Skye, to another, eastern PEI, while continuing the same economic practices. Peter Narváez suggests that the belief in fairies that persisted in Newfoundland well into the 20th Century was the result of early settlers encountering in their new homes “a cultural environment and economy that approximated previously known conditions” (1991: 340). The Newfoundland settlers emigrated from areas in Ireland and England that were isolated and homogenous and successfully replicated them in the New World. Scottish immigrants to PEI similarly sustained a belief in supernatural phenomena through their relative isolation and by continuing the same economic practices they had for centuries. Perhaps the primary way that these beliefs were maintained was through the Gaelic folk culture which had survived the collapse of the professional classes and which was centered on the Gaelic language: “The oral tradition is inherently intimate as it requires close interaction... People shared songs, stories, witticisms, riddles, weather lore, prayers, beliefs, tunes, dance steps” (Kennedy, 2002). Tales concerning the supernatural were maintained through orality as were historical tales that had a direct lineage to the 12th Century. MacQueen pictures his forebears listening “to tales of warlocks and witches,” and while they retained some skepticism about these creatures, “they were never able to free themselves entirely from the belief that there was a menacing force acting independent of the Natural and of the Divine” (1929: 51).

As Gaelic speakers who only learned English as a second language if at all, the settlers also formed a distinct linguistic group that further isolated them: “Very little English was spoken, and up until the 1880s Gaelic was the language used in all households” (Campion, 2000: 2). In the depositions that were taken by Justice of the Peace Bourke following the murder, there are several references to the language gap and the confusion it caused. Bourke, for instance, quotes Archibald Matheson as saying on May 24th 1859, that “he told the truth yesterday as far as he understood the English” (8). Bourke was Irish and relied upon an interpreter, which caused additional linguistic difficulty. According to the oral stories, Bourke directed the interpreter to ask the deponents if they had been involved in the crime in any way: “When this request was rendered into Gaelic, it came out as ‘Confess, whether you have committed the crime or not’” (Campbell, 1977: 33-34).

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Like the Selkirk pioneers who settled in Belfast, the Scots who came in 1829 were also linked by shared familial and communal ties that were part of their Gaelic heritage: “Gaelic society was structured around the family and was resolutely rural. Gaels vastly preferred to migrate in community groups organised around extended families” (Kennedy, 2002). When the *Mary Kennedy* docked in Charlottetown, it carried 84 heads of families who, according to the *Prince Edward Island Register*, “all have relatives already settled in the Island chiefly about Belfast” (Unattributed, 1829: 3). These families settled along the Murray Harbour Road and the Rear Settlement, which was named Lyndale in 1880 after a Skye township (MacQueen, 1929: 100). Lucille Campey notes that not only did they have family on the Island but they themselves were composed of inter-related familial groups: “Like the Belfast settlers... these Uigg settlers were groups of extended families who, even before they set foot on the Island, functioned as a cohesive self-supporting community” (2001: 84).

“The power to narrate, or to block other narratives from forming and emerging,” writes Edward Said in *Culture and Imperialism*, “is very important to culture” (1993: xiii). The Isle of Skye cultural narrative successfully blocked other possible narratives for many years. Indeed, the singularity of purpose that it afforded the settlers allowed the new immigrants to achieve remarkable success in their new home. The Selkirk settlers, for example, arrived in August 1803. By the Spring of 1804, they had cleared the dense forest sufficiently to be able to plant crops (Campey, 2003: 37). There is no reason to assume that the 1829 settlers were any different. Indeed, their preparation and far-sightedness were praised in the *Prince Edward Island Register*, which reported that they had arrived with “12 months provisions and an ample stock of warm clothing” (1829: 3). One advantage the Scots had over other settlers in working the land was that while women in other ethnic groups were “bounded by walls and sheltered from the coarser aspects of life” (Bitterman, 2002: 51), the Scottish women were actively engaged in “outdoor farm labour” (ibid: 53). For the crofters who had a legacy of subsistence farming that required assistance from all members of the family, women’s participation in agricultural work was not uncommon. They had left behind a land of “bleak uncertainties” (Campey, 2003: 14) and were as one entirely committed to their endeavour. Of course, this valorisation of the corporate will in all facets of life – spiritual, familial, linguistic, and socio-economic – can also be regarded as evidence of their historical legacy as islanders accustomed over many centuries to “Living cheek by jowl with people yet keeping a discreet distance from them” (Peron, 2004: 330).

Because of the paucity of the contemporary record, there is considerable evidence of their single-minded achievement but little trace of the cracks in their cultural narrative. It is inevitable that such fissures appeared, however. In part, the erosion of their symbolic system and the pull towards greater cultural assimilation with other Islanders can be attributed broadly to the effects of globalisation. Eric Clark notes globalisation has been going on for several hundred years and is generated by expanding populations and “faster and cheaper means of transportation and communication” (2004: 289). The Scots, more than most cultural groups, had long been part of this process since they had “crisscrossed Scotland and Europe for centuries, looking for work and opportunity” (Herman, 2001: 295). They tended, furthermore, to be more highly educated than most immigrants and thus had some critical perspective on their culture (Herman, 2001: 329).

There were, however, other factors both external and internal that led to their greater absorption into the Island culture and the reconfiguration of their narrative. Unquestionably, the specific characteristics of Prince Edward Island – its climate, its landscape, its flora and fauna, the unavoidable interaction with other cultures, particularly

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the Irish Catholics and English Anglicans – would have problematised the Isle of Skye cultural system and forced adjustments that led towards the formation of a more distinctive Prince Edward Island culture. As William Sewell explains:

every act of symbolic attribution puts the symbols at risk, makes it possible that the means of the symbols will be inflected or transformed by the uncertain consequences of practice. Usually, such attributions result in only tiny inflections of the meanings of symbols (1999: 51).

The climatic disparity between the British Isles and Prince Edward Island was extreme: “The settlers... had not experienced anything like the length and severity of an Island winter” (Weale, 1976: 71). The geographical differences between the Isle of Skye and Prince Edward Island were also striking. While Skye is mountainous with pockets of arable land, PEI has rolling hills, is quite verdant and naturally heavily wooded. Selkirk remarked upon the “extreme contrast” between Scotland, which had been cultivated for centuries and “the boundless forests of America. An emigrant set down in such a scene feels almost the helplessness of a child” (Campey, 2003: 23). Even by mid-19th Century after much of the land had been cleared, there were still areas of dense forest.

Socially, they did not integrate well and so were unable to find any common ground or support with other ethnic groups that might have been considered their natural allies, the Irish Gaels and the Lowland Scots. Setting religious differences aside, the Irish and Scots Gaelic dialects were different enough to make communication in their native tongues difficult, and the Lowland Scots, perhaps more than any other group, were hostile to Gaelic. Most importantly, the proscriptions against Gaelic, which was part of the British program of anglicisation in Scotland and was continued in PEI (Kennedy, 2002), meant that education was conducted in English and children were actively discouraged from using their mother tongue in the Rear Settlement school (Campion, 2000: 2). The assertion of British authority, moreover, was present in every interaction the settlers had with the government, the involvement of the British legal system in the Beaton murder inquiry being a case in point.

Ironically, perhaps the greatest cause of their absorption into the broader culture was their religious practice (Kennedy, 2002). The orthodoxy of the MacDonaldites isolated them from other groups of Highland Scots. Furthermore, although endogamous marital practices were encouraged within the community to promote group coherence, there were limited intra-group marital options. At the same time, the Church’s Calvinistic attitudes discouraged traditional Gaelic cultural activities such as music and dance, which meant, in turn, that young people were no longer inculcated in the culture of their forbears to the extent that they had been in the past. As a result, their ties to the community were weakened, and they increasingly moved away and married outside of the group. It should also be noted that despite the fervid embrace of Scottish heritage noted by MacQueen, the majority of the Scottish population were second or third generation Scots who had been born in Prince Edward Island. The census of 1861 showed that there were 80,857 inhabitants but 78% of the population was identified as being native to Prince Edward Island and only 7% as native of Scotland (*Abstract of the Census*, 1861). For them, Scotland was more a concept than an actuality. Narrative, Bonnell and Hunt suggest (1999: 17), can be regarded as the link between culture as system and culture as practice; the process of decentering the foundational narrative and generating a new one took place in the main gradually over time through a multitude of such actions, attitudinal adjustments, and generational change.

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Cultural Implications of Murder

Occasionally, certain events demand that the meaning associated with existing symbols be constructed in radically new ways. The brutal murder of a close neighbour who, from the existing records, appears to have lived in the isolated and closely knit community for thirty years and whose killer was never apprehended would be such an event. Murder was relatively rare on the Island and unsolved murders were rarer still. Rape, however, may not have been uncommon. In the depositions, Ann Beaton is twice warned by neighbours about being on the roads after dark, even though her walk home would have been barely a mile (Bourke, 1859: 2, 6). Since there were few if any predatory animals to be concerned about - the Island black bear was virtually extinct by 1855 (Hornby, 1987: 9) - the only conclusion is that men posed a danger. Indeed, one of the reasons why the community blamed Archibald Matheson for the murder is that he had a reputation for making unwanted advances to women. In Bourke's depositions, three separate women accuse Matheson of accosting them (1859: 2, 10). Additionally, MacQueen notes that drinking was not socially unacceptable and that rum was provided as a matter of course at community gatherings (1929: 52). While there are few records on the frequency of rape in 19th Century PEI, Karen Dubinsky observes that in Ontario at roughly the same time it was widespread:

Women risked sexual assault from family members, total strangers, and trusted friends. Women were assaulted on Saturday evenings as they strolled downtown streets, Sunday mornings on their way home from church, and weekday afternoons when they returned from school or work. (2002: 166).

The implications of murder are cultural in that symbolically the act calls into question the vast social enterprise comprised of various interwoven cultural constructions: in this case not just the Rear Settlement or Prince Edward Island but the whole of the British Empire and by extension the ruler, Queen Victoria. Michel Foucault points out in *Discipline and Punish* that aside from the victim, the crime is also an attack on the sovereign: "it attacks him personally, since the law represents the will of the sovereign, it attacks him physically since the force of law is the force of the prince" (1975: 47). In 1859, the law in Prince Edward Island dictated that anyone convicted of murder would face public execution, as George Dowey did ten years later in a botched hanging that put a quick end to the practice (Hornby, 1998: 76). J. M Beattie in *Crime and the Courts in England* notes that the spectators to a public execution performed a significant role in the proceedings: "They were engaged in a renewal of community values by their recognition and disapproval of the deviant act committed by the offender on display" (Hornby, 1998:17, quoting Beattie, 1986: 469). To Foucault, on the other hand, the public execution is a ceremony through which a crippled sovereignty is revived: "It restores that sovereignty by manifesting it at its most spectacular... in this liturgy of punishment, there must be an emphatic affirmation of power and of its intrinsic superiority" (1975: 48-49)

If, as Foucault argues, there is in such a situation a cultural expectation of an "emphatic affirmation of power", of a ritual carried to its deliberately punitive end, then its absence must have been profoundly disturbing for the community. The community's theocratic cultural system of signification, moreover, prepared it to expect an 'avenging God' who would restore order and provide resolution. Although Sir Andrew Macphail's description of the murder's effect on the community was written many years later, it conveys the communal distress Beaton's death created:

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Into that world of Orwell, death came once in the most malignant and malevolent form, and created an atmosphere of horror. For years after, a woman would not go out in the dark to take washed clothes from the line. A man who was compelled to visit his own barn by night would awaken a child from sleep for the sake of human company (1939: 35).

Aside from the absence of judicial resolution, there were smaller inconsistencies and contradictions that must have also contributed to decentering the prevailing cultural code. One of the unsettling but perhaps inevitable ironies of such a small, integrated community was that Archibald Matheson was one of the jury members who heard the initial evidence and returned a verdict of murder against persons unknown (McDougall, 1859: 2). And Bourke himself would have been perceived as being very much an outsider since he was an Irish Catholic and had been involved in the Belfast Riot twelve years earlier (MacQuaid, 1994: 89).

Beaton's murder, then, ruptured the "thin coherence" between culture as a system and culture as a practice. For psychological survival, the community needed to find a way of ordering the past events into a logical arrangement that provided a cogent explanation for the crime. Lacking legally and religiously sanctioned explanations for Beaton's murder, the community constructed its own theories and stories. While these strategies stray from Christian orthodoxy, it is hardly surprising that they are often consistent with the patriarchal and hierarchical attitudes that prevailed in the community and much of the rest of 19th Century North America for that matter. However, what is also worth noting is that the various meanings that the settlers proposed not only explain events but they also appear to be designed to protect and preserve the community. The spontaneously generated explanations, which came naturally to a people culturally accustomed to creating and telling stories, helped break down the prevailing cultural code and move the settlers towards a more broadly based Island one.

Narrative Strategies

It is important to establish the full nature of the crime itself, as recorded in the coroner's account, since it lies at the centre of what the community was trying to avoid through their explanations:

On the left side of Frontal bone there were seven cuts two of which fractured the scull on the upper part of the head. The front part of the same bone was stove into the scull by some blunt instrument depth about one inch, which forced out a portion of the brain. The eye was burst supposed by the same blow. The nasal bones were fractured... Upon examining the vagina I found that she had had connections with some person some very short time before. Upon examining the external parts I found very great violence had been used. The lips were even lacerated the parts exceedingly discoloured with a considerable quantity of blood on the thighs (McDougall, 1859: 5-6)

"It is clear, "as McQuaid notes, "that she was viciously and violently attacked and raped" (2000: 13). The corollary is that Beaton was killed by a man or men in the isolated community who may very well have lived in their midst for a great many years. Sexual

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assault, as noted, was likely not uncommon, although it rarely manifested itself in murder. It is striking, moreover, that knowledge of the rape did not leak out considering that the jurors were all members of the community and would presumably have had access to the corner's report. At this point in time, it is difficult to know exactly how much detail the community would have understood, but as Macphail's account indicates, they feared the worst.

To accuse a man or men directly without proof would have endangered the patriarchal values of the community; responsibility, therefore, was laid elsewhere: on the victim, an unnamed woman as well as divine intervention. Beaton was an ideal candidate to attract blame in a community with such a cultural bias against women. Bourke quotes Archibald Matheson as saying he told "his wife to keep Ann Beaton (from) the house as it caused some ill will with some of the neighbours" (1859: 8). Although it is not mentioned in the depositions, Beaton was a single mother whose child had been born a little over a year before her death; the father was apparently an unnamed man from the community (Lamont, 1902: 155). There are no statistics available on the rate of illegitimacy on PEI in the mid-19th Century; however, the Isle of Skye with a similar cultural background had one of the lowest rates of illegitimate births in Scotland in 1861 at 10 to 12 illegitimate births in a thousand (Gatley, 2007). It is probable, therefore, that Beaton was treated as an outcast in the Rear Settlement both for being an unwed mother and for having borne a child by unidentified man in the community.

Writers as different as Sir James George Frazier in *The Golden Bough* and Jessica Mitford in *The American Way of Death* have long observed that the way a society deals with its dead reflects its own preoccupations and culture. Beaton's outcast position in the community seems, at least tacitly, to have justified her death. There is no remorse expressed for her by anyone in the twenty-eight recorded depositions. Her mangled body was treated as a spectacle and quite possible as a salutary lesson to those tempted to follow in her transgressive path. The body immediately attracted the congregation that had been exiting the nearby church when alerted by Murdoch Beaton's cries for help (Macphail, 1939: 35). There is some evidence that following the ancient Scottish tradition of memorialising victims of violent death, a cairn was erected at the site where her body was found, but it has long since disappeared (Bennett, 1982, 287; Campbell, 1977: 35) The body was then moved to a barn on Beaton's farm where Dr. Cox conducted his examinations. After the inquest, it was buried in the local graveyard, presumably in Kinross (Unattributed, 1859: 3). When Bourke conducted his inquiry some eleven days after the murder, the body was exhumed (McQuaid, 1994: 88). After the inquiry was completed on May 24, 1859, Ann Beaton was returned to the graveyard but without a marker: "Most believe she is buried in the old Kirk cemetery at Kinross" (Campbell, 1977: 35). There is no indication that there was any kind of ceremonial ritual that took place. This treatment of a woman who, after all, was the victim of a horrendous crime is, of course, reflective of a rigidly patriarchal society in which women's misdemeanours, especially of a sexual nature, were not tolerated by male authority. But it also speaks of a community that wished to elide, both physically and psychologically, the contradiction to its cultural code that Ann Beaton represented in life and in death.

Beaton was blameworthy according to the cultural values of her community; however, she did not kill herself, and if the Mathesons were not the perpetrators as the justice system had ordained, the events had to be restructured to provide another solution, one that again avoids the actual events of the case. Alexander Doyle, one of the original deponents, told Bourke: "he saw the corpse of the deceased and thought that it was the work of a woman or boy" (1859: 10). Lamont, writing in 1902, picks up this story and

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offers an elaborate tale in which Ann has an assignation with her ostensible lover that is observed by “a jealous third party (a woman) shadowing them with set teeth and a hatchet uplifted” (321). Macphail also offers this explanation noting that “a certain woman was under suspicion to the end” (1939: 35). Similarly, the Campbells concluded: “the little evidence there is suggests that Ann Beaton was murdered by a jealous wife” (1977: 35). As noted, however, the coroner’s report indicates that without question she was raped and savagely murdered. If a man were suspected of being guilty of the crime, the implication is that the community’s entire network of meaning would be profoundly contested. Laying blame on an unnamed woman was a strategy that allowed the community’s values to remain unchallenged.

Another survival tactic was to construct a theistic narrative that would explain the murder, thus shifting responsibility from human agency to a divine power. Given Reverend MacDonald’s hold over the community, it is logical that he would play a central role in such a tale. In Murdoch Lamont’s 1902 biography of Reverend MacDonald, he describes MacDonald conducting a religious revival holding a Bible and a candle and being approached by Ann Beaton. According to Lamont, she was overcome with religious fervour, or ““under the work”” (1902:155), and knocked the candle and Bible from MacDonald’s hands. ““They are both under her feet now,”” MacDonald is quoted as saying, ‘but mark the end of that girl!’” (1902:155). Barely a year later, Lamont continues, “that girl became a mother without being a wife and soon after was foully murdered” (1902: 155). The story is told to demonstrate the prophetic powers of MacDonald - indeed, the chapter heading is “Predictions”. The causal relationship that Lamont draws between Beaton bearing a child and her murder reiterates the blame that was cast on the victim and suggests that Beaton’s story was told as a cautionary tale in the settlement long after her death.

20th Century Prince Edward Island

Edward MacDonald in *If You’re Stronghearted: Prince Edward Island in the Twentieth Century* characterises the province at the outset of the 20th Century as being “remarkable in its apparent homogeneity” (2000: 4). By the mid-19th Century, the “last large tracts of empty land had been taken up, the Island’s frontier had effectively closed, and its pioneer era came to an abrupt end” (MacDonald, 2000: 12). The Skye emigrants were now forced to increasingly interact with the other Island residents. The impact of Prince Edward Island as a specific geographic space populated by specific ethnic groups, in other words, was beginning to have some impact. If symbolic systems are subject to transformation and adjustment as a result of cultural practice from the quotidian to the extraordinary as in the Beaton murder, then island communities will tend to produce a common system of signification shaped by physical delimitation. As Pete Hay rhetorically asks:

Is it too simple to observe that, the longer a community of people lives on an island, and the smaller the island, the stronger the sense of island identity, and of identification with the island? (2006: 25).

The Scots from the Isle of Skye were moving from a rigid monoculture to one that was more pluralistic and integrated with other ethnicities; however, elements of their cultural past have been perpetuated and accepted within the re-configured Island culture, perhaps because both cultures were shaped by an island’s physical delimitations.

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Macdonald qualifies the Island's homogeneity because "within the common origin resided a paradox. Islanders' sense of identity in 1900 was closely bound up with ethnic loyalties" (200: 12). It is arguable, however, that the preoccupation with ethnicity was, in fact, a reflection of a small island's restrictive boundaries which demanded that differences be exaggerated in order to preserve continuity with a cultural past and sustain a current identity.

The retrospective accounts of the Beaton murder can be divided into two different narrative paths, the historical and the folkloric. Both of these draw upon the Scottish roots of the settlers but contextualise the murder within a PEI or regional frame rather than a Skye or Rear Settlement one, signaling the movement towards an integrated Island culture. The historical narrative, as written by Murdoch Lamont, Macphail, the Campbells, and McQuaid, looks back on the past from the vantage point of education, social achievement, and time. Macphail's and McQuaid's accomplishments are particularly noteworthy: Macphail became a famous physician and was knighted by King George V, and McQuaid was a judge in the Prince Edward Island Supreme Court. While all these commentators attempt to be dispassionate and judicious in their observations, they are nonetheless writing from a rationalist perspective that treats other explanations, such as those inspired by the supernatural, with some suspicion. This is particularly true of Lamont and Macphail, who were closest in time and relationship to the main characters in the story, and who shape their work to suit the perceived requirements of their readership. Neither writer, it should be noted, was born in 1859 when the murder occurred.

Lamont's account forty-three years later tends to focus on sensationalistic aspects of the murder and to alter facts to suit his purpose. For instance, he describes the murder site as "the spot which had drunk of human blood" (1902: 323) and refers to the murder weapon as a hatchet (ibid: 322), certainly a more vicious and horrific instrument than a hoe. He places the murder in 1860 (Lamont, 1902: 320) rather than 1859. *The Prince Edward Island Magazine* was an Island periodical designed to appeal to the educated and reasonably sophisticated classes of the Island and the Maritimes. (One of the other articles in the same edition of the magazine was entitled 'The Real New York', for example.) Macphail, on the other hand, was writing his memoirs about a distant and lost past in the *Master's Wife*. He also uses colourful language, such as his description of the blacksmith's forge, the scene of a stranger's mysterious appearance the night of the murder, as "ablaze with light and roaring with sound" (1939: 36). Like Lamont, he is mistaken as to the date of the murder - 1857 rather than two years later - (ibid), and locates the murder weapon as being found alongside the body rather than days afterwards (ibid).

These writers, then, are crafting a narrative; they apparently value logic and reason but are not averse to using whatever sensational details they can to titillate their readers. The folkloric narrative, on the other hand, is not confined by the requirements of rational explanation but, as Dorson notes in *American Folklore*, it draws upon "the oral tradition channeled across the centuries through human mouths" (1959:2). Folklore can take a wide variety of different forms including ballads, legends, folktales, village festivals and so on. The settlers of the Rear Settlement had brought with them the Gaelic folkloric tradition and put it into practice in relating the death of Ann Beaton. Indeed, they were accustomed to incorporating events or phenomena in the outer world into a comprehensible but supernatural narrative pattern:

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The world about them seemed full of ghosts and fairies, and every unusual occurrence and dream had its mysterious significance. If a star were seen to fall, or a light to hover near a home, it presaged therein an early break in the family circle. (MacQueen, 1929: 51).

The Beaton historical texts, for instance, mention the story of the local blacksmith reporting he had worked late that night and that near midnight a stranger had briefly entered his workshop and then had departed. This incident is transformed into a supernatural tale involving a wicked spirit at the forge: “The marks of the hammers (on the murder weapon) had been made by no human hand” (Macphail, 1939: 36).

Various other folkloric explanations of the murder, which tap into the superstitions and folk beliefs of the Scottish settlers, emerge in the four Beaton historical texts. One such belief is that if the murderer touched the body of the deceased, blood would gush forth from the wounds. “At the inquest,” Lamont writes, “every adult in the district placed his or her hand on the remains, but no blood appeared” (1902: 322). This custom is characterised as “an old Highland superstition,” and, indeed, it is recorded in Margaret Bennett’s anthology, *Scottish Customs: From the Cradle to the Grave*, in a passage from 1878: “The opinion prevailed till not very long ago, and even yet lingers, that in a case of murder, if the murderer touches the corpse, blood flows from the wounds” (2004: 219). Dorson, however, suggests that this custom is not exclusively Scottish but is an ancient belief of Western civilisation found in various different countries: “The *Nibelungenlied* and Shakespeare’s *Richard III* contain the same folk belief, and so do registries of legal trials” (1959: 32). There is evidence that this belief still was present in Ireland as recently as 1978 (Opie and Tatum, 1989: 270). Dorson and Bennett cite several actual trials both in Scotland and the United States in which the murderer was identified and convicted as a result of this practice. One such case, that of the death by drowning of Sir James Standfield, led to the conviction as a accessory to murder of his son, Philip, who placed his hand on his drowned father’s head which resulted in blood gushing forth.

This narrative emerged in the aftermath of the murder despite the fact that there is some doubt as to whether or not it could have actually occurred. As noted earlier, the inquest took place immediately after discovery of the body and was completed by the next day, May 15-1859. It is difficult to imagine that “every adult in the district” could be assembled so quickly in 1859 simply because of communication and transportation barriers. If Lamont is referring to the Bourke’s investigation, moreover, it is unlikely that the Irish outsider and representative of the British legal system in charge of the investigation would have permitted this practice. Whether or not it occurred, the custom can be regarded as a divine method of asserting social order in the face of an event, like murder, that devastates the community’s values. In the Standfield case noted above, the custom is explicitly defined as “God’s usual mode of discovering murder” (Dorson, 1959: 32). Since this belief invokes the broader construct of religious faith, it references one of “the totalising master narratives of our culture, those systems by which we usually unify and order (and smooth over) any contradictions to make them fit” (Hutcheon, 1988: x). In the Rear Settlement version of the narrative, the fact it did not produce a murderer is “smoothed over” to use Hutcheon’s expression, by relating that the woman suspected of the crime did not participate in touching Beaton’s body (Campbell, 1977: 34), thus perpetuating her guilt and preserving the integrity of the narrative.

Many of the tales inspired by Ann Beaton’s death focused on the site where her body was found at the rear of her brother’s farm where the land dips down into a hollow formed by the Montague River (‘Shocking Murder’, 1859: 3). After the murder the site was

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called Goblin or Goblin's Hollow, the name that appears in the title of the three articles on the murder. The Campbells record several stories collected in the community of individuals who had suspicious incidents in the hollow long after the murder. One couple was passing through the area by wagon late one night and their horse started, throwing the woman from the carriage. The husband, however, was not thrown and claimed that the Bible he was carrying protected him from mishap (1977: 34). Macphail tells of an Islander who had moved to the United States but still remembered as a boy passing through the hollow: "As he came over the rise of ground even by day he 'would shut his eyes, put the whip to the horse' and never open his eyes until he had traversed the valley and reached the hill on the opposite side" (1939: 35). Similarly, Lamont relates how small boys during the day would tie a coin in a handkerchief and lodge it in a tree at the murder site and then dare one another to retrieve it after dark (1902: 323). Clearly, the hollow was a site that emanated a malevolent, otherworldly energy for the community. However, it is not the only hollow on PEI that was thought to be haunted. In *The Legends of Prince Edward Island*, F.H. MacArthur includes two legends, 'The Legend of Kellow's Hollow' and 'The Legend of Sleepy Hollow', that involve Island hollows peopled with supernatural creatures. The Washington Irving story of the same name as the latter legend suggests that this association with hollows was not confined to the Island. Indeed, Irving's description of the effect the hollow has on local inhabitants could equally be applied to Goblin Hollow: "They are given to all kinds of marvelous beliefs, are subject to trances and visions, and frequently see strange sights, and hear music and voices in the air" (Irving, 1820: online). Hollows presumably tend to be associated with the supernatural because they are often hidden and somewhat distant from human habitation, collect fog or mist, and distort sound.

Peter Narváez (1991) identifies such sites as "liminal spaces" where "one might experience the benign or the malignant" (1991: 338). Narváez argues that the berry picking grounds in Newfoundland represented such a site and provides a number of accounts of individuals, mostly women, having been abducted by fairies there. Like the mid-19th Century residents of Lyndale, many Newfoundlanders lived in isolated, homogenous communities where those who transgressed cultural values risked ostracism. The fairies "provided culturally acceptable justifications for deviance, thereby extricating participants from embarrassing situations and potential shame" (ibid: 354). These behaviors included a range of transgressions including "extreme tardiness, premarital sexual relations, infidelity, incest, child molestation, wife battering, and sexual assault" (ibid). The supernatural qualities of Goblin Hollow provided the Lyndale community with a similar locus in which responsibility for the murder could safely be passed on to malicious spirits rather than attributed to one of their own. 'The Ballad of Ann Beaton', an unpublished ballad by Donald Lamont, born eight years after the murder according to the Census of 1881, is the most sustained folkloric response to the murder.

In Lyndale there once lived a maiden,
And fair was the cottage she stayed in.
But light was her step and short was her stay,
She was borne to the graveyard so early away.
She was borne to the graveyard so early.

One evening she went out to ceilidh
The evening passed freely and gaily
Then started she home, in the night all alone,
Oh, the murderer, where did he lurk in the way?
Oh, the murderer, where was he hiding?

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Perhaps she was happy to meet him,
And smiled on him gaily to greet him
But her eyes opened wide at the axe by his side,
'Oh, put from you that axe, you murderer!' she cried.
'Oh, put from you that axe, you murderer!'

The hollow was lonely and woody,
And Annie outstretched there lay bloody.
Till her brother chanced by, and they heard his shrill cry,
"Oh, who has murdered my sister this way?"
"Oh, who has murdered poor Annie?"

The lassies that live there in Lyndale,
Will milk before twilight will dwindle.
And they'll cast wary eyes at the cross where she lies,
Where sounds are heard there unearthly, they say.
Where sounds are heard there unearthly.

As the years roll on in the story,
As told by the aged and hoary.
They remember the time of this horrible crime,
In that hollow where poor Annie Beaton once lay.
In that hollow lay pale Annie Beaton.

As Malcolm Laws explains in *American Balladry*, the majority of ballads both in Britain and North America were written in response to real life events that were publicised in newspapers: "Hastily composed and carelessly printed, (the ballad) was distributed largely among people of little education, who desired sensational stories simply and dramatically told" (1964: 55). North American ballads covered a wide range of generic topics, including lumberjacks, sea voyages, disasters, and, appropriately in this instance, murder. The murder ballad has been popular in the folk culture of the Atlantic region as a means of shaping information about a sudden death into narrative form. In Newfoundland, for instance, fully ten per cent of the 190 songs and ballads gathered by Eric West in 1978 concern murders (McNaughton, 1984). In Prince Edward Island, both French (Labelle, 1984: 11) and English murder ballads have been collected. One PEI murder ballad bears some similarity to 'The Ballad of Ann Beaton' and is reproduced in slightly different forms in both *Folksongs from Prince Edward Island* and *Drive Dull Care Away: Folksongs from Prince Edward Island*. Entitled 'The Murder of Mary Tuplin', it relates the story of Mary Tuplin who was shot to death by her lover, William Millman, in 1887 near Margate, Prince Edward Island.

Both ballads adhere to the balladic form called the murdered-girl ballad. "The basic situation," Laws explains, "that of the girl lured from her home and brutally disposed of by her lover or fiancé, is echoed in quite a few American texts" (1964: 22). In *Poor Pearl, Poor Girl: The Murdered-Girl Stereotype in Ballad and Newspaper*, Anne Cohen argues both newspapers and ballads follow certain stereotypes that include set scenes, language, plots, and characters (1973: 4). According to Cohen, there are three stock character types in these ballads - "The Murdered Girl, the Lover-Murderer, and the Grief-Stricken Family" (1973: 80-81) – and four stereotypical scenes:

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In ballads of the murdered-girl type there is a luring scene, in which the lover entices the girl away to a lonely spot; there is a murder scene, in which the girl pleads on bended knee for her life; there is an abandoned-body scene, in which the body is described in its setting; sometimes there is a regret scene in which the murderer deplores his deed. (ibid: 95)

The formulas act as narrative constructs that shape the way events are recorded and understood by their audience. The foreshadowing of her death captured in repeated lines, “She was borne to the graveyard so early, away”, (I, ll. 4-5), for example, is characteristic of the murdered-girl formula (McNaughton, 1984). The plots, moreover, tend over time to adhere to the formula and to shed particulars, even those that are especially striking. In the variants of the Pearl Bryan ballads that Cohen examines, there is no mention that she was beheaded, presumably because dismemberment falls outside the conventions of the story (1974: 105). Similarly, Lamont describes the murder weapon as an axe rather than a hoe, a much more prosaic implement.

‘The Ballad of Ann Beaton’ was written by Lamont at least several decades after the murder, and as a result his sources were not newspapers but the community and its oral tradition. The plot tells the story of a young woman, a “maiden” (I, l.1), who goes to a ceildh, or social gathering involving music, dance and story telling. She is accosted on the way home by someone, who murders her with an axe. Her body is later found in a hollow by her brother. Young women will get their chores done before darkness falls, mindful of Ann Beaton’s fate of which they are reminded by “unearthly” (V, ll. 4-5), sounds emanating from the murder site. Cohen makes the point that the greater synchronicity between the event and the ballad, the more likely it is that the ballad will contain verifiable facts about the occurrence. “Conversely”, she adds, “the more distant in time a topical ballad is from its subject, the more prone it is to lose or falsify detail” (1974: 45). In ‘The Ballad of Ann Beaton’, there is some correspondence between the formulae and the actual circumstances of Beaton’s murder. The brother, Murdoch Beaton, who found the body, represents the family, although not with the full sentimentality of the formulaic “aged parents” of the model (Cohen, 1974: 39). And the body was, indeed, found in a remote spot, which again is typical of the murdered-girl model and consistent with folkloric associations with the hollow.

The other stock elements of the murdered-girl story are more in keeping with the stereotype than with the facts as we know them. There is a luring scene, although in this instance it is more an encounter than enticement. There is also a pleading scene in which Ann says ‘Oh, put from you that axe, you murderer!’ (III, l. 5). Since the killer was unknown, Lamont had to invent a generic killer lurking in the woods waiting for Ann. As a result, one of the essential stock characters – the lover/killer - in the murdered-girl formula is so genericised as to be anodyne, especially when compared to the vivid murder scene in ‘The Murder of Mary Tuplin’. Millman tells Mary: “‘I once did love you dearly, but to me you’ve brought great shame.’/Then he drew a pistol from his belt and fired thru her brain” (Dibblee, R and D, 1973: 71). This lacuna in ‘The Ballad of Ann Beaton’ also affects the four stock scenes since without a flesh-and-blood murderer there can’t be a regret scene or an authentic pleading scene. Of the two remaining scenes, the killer’s innocuousness diminishes the impact of the luring scene, leaving the “abandoned body scene” as the major parallel between the actual circumstances and the formula.

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Perhaps the greatest gap in ‘The Ballad of Ann Beaton’ between the murdered-girl formula and the circumstances of the Ann Beaton murder is the character of Ann herself. “According to the stereotype,” Cohen observes, “the victim of the murder must be young, trusting, and innocent... she was a ‘young girl,’ ‘a fair young maiden’; she was ‘young and gay’” (197: 81). Similarly, Ann Beaton is characterised in formulaic terms as a “maiden” who “gaily” spends an evening away from her “fair” home (I, ll. 1-5). The actual Ann Beaton, on the other hand, was forty years old; while there are no statistics on life expectancy on PEI in the mid-19th Century, a woman born in Scotland in the mid-1850s could expect to live to the age of forty-four (Registrar General, 2005). She was, in other words, a mature woman who was also industrious and quite aware of the dangers of being on the road at night. One deponent says that she suggested to Ann that she consider spending the night at her neighbours, to which Ann replied that she had too much to do the next day (Bourke, 1859: 6); however, she told her hosts, the McPhersons, as she set out to return home, that “it would be wiser for her to keep (to the) main road” (Bourke, 1859: 3).

This disjunction between the stereotype and the documented evidence suggests that it is the character of Ann Beaton, not the actions recorded in the ballad that is its major focus. While the depiction of Ann in the ballad superficially conforms to the formulaic portrayal of an “innocent” young woman, there are suggestions that her innocence may be tainted. The character in the ballad, for instance, appears overly eager to leave her “fair” cottage in order to go socialising at the ceilidh. Even the way that she greets the killer is suggestive that her innocence may be corrupt and that this is more of a tryst than a chance encounter: “perhaps she was happy to meet him/And smiled on him gaily to greet him” (III, ll. 1-2). In the second line of the ballad, Ann is described as being “light in her step” (I, l. 2). On the face of it, “light” means delicate and airy; however, the *Oxford English Dictionary* lists one of the definitions of light as being “wanton or unchaste” when used in reference to a woman. This usage was current as recently as Hardy’s *Jude the Obscure* in 1895, and doubtlessly Lamont’s audience would have understood the pun, especially those of whom knew of Beaton’s reputation as an unwed mother. This reading of Ann’s character is at odds with another feature of the murdered-girl formula that is that “the detailed description of the cruel murder helps to create sympathy for the innocent victim.” (McNaughton, 1984)

This view of Ann’s character in the ballad suggests that Lamont is using the murdered-girl formula for another purpose: that of moral instruction on the dangers of licentiousness. And the lesson is taken to heart by the industrious maidens who get their milking done before nightfall, and don’t venture out at night presumably because of the “unearthly” (V, ll. 4-5) sounds emanating from Beaton’s grave. It should be noted that this kind of pat moralising is not unknown in the ballad form. Cohen cites the following lines that conclude one of the Pearl Bryan variants: “So now young ladies take warning/Before it is too late/Of the crime that the boys committed/In the old Kentucky state” (1974: 90). Nonetheless, it is difficult not to regard ‘The Ballad of Ann Beaton’ as Lamont, a Free Church of Scotland minister, using the ballad form as a didactic tool to instruct young women on the dangers of debauchery. It was written long after the event itself and the creative energy that derives as a spontaneous response to a recent and horrific crime had evaporated. ‘The Ballad of Ann Beaton’ does not appear to have been collected and was not found in any of the collections of Prince Edward Island folklore consulted: Arsenault (2002), Ives (1999), Gledhill (1973), Dibblee (1973) and MacArthur (1974). It is also not known to Celtic musicians from eastern PEI (Sharratt, 2008). The reason may well be that in ‘The Ballad of Ann Beaton’ Lamont uses a folkloric medium for edifying

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purposes; its ersatz quality, coupled with Lamont's lack of prosodic skill and the missing killer, have limited the attractiveness of the ballad to later generations. Nevertheless, this work constitutes a type of narrative account of the murder and one that is part of the cultural mosaic of present day Prince Edward Island.

It's hardly surprising that many of these folkloric responses to murder can also be found elsewhere in North America since it was populated in large part by the same ethnic groups - the Scots, Irish, English, and French - who settled in Prince Edward Island. Kennedy notes that belief in the supernatural often persists long after the culture that produced it has died away (2002). However, the island context and the paradoxical sensibility it imposes on its inhabitants have helped to sustain elements of the Skye culture long after they might have dissipated elsewhere. As noted, Prince Edward Island has one of the few remaining Free Church of Scotland congregations remaining outside of Scotland. Its web site specifically notes that it draws its inspiration from Donald MacDonald and the Disruption: "Dating from 1843 but with its roots in the Reformation, the Free Church of Scotland owes its distinctive title to its historical struggle to remain "free" from state interference" ('Free Church of Scotland: Prince Edward Island', 2008: online). The survival of this philosophy, which has a direct lineage to the mid-19th Century Skye culture, suggests that the Island environment has helped foster a strong continuity with the past.

The paradoxical island context has also helped maintain the supernatural as a plausible explanation for Beaton's death. McQuaid, who, it must be stressed, had access to the coroner's report and acknowledged the rape, writing at the end of the 20th Century, observed: "If Ann Beaton's death cannot be accounted for through an analysis of all human factors... It may... be found, if not within the natural realm, but rather within the realm of the supra-natural" (2000: 16). Additionally, there is a legend that she can be seen at night standing in distress beside the Queen's Road near the spot where her body was found but only by those who don't know her story (Livingston, 1998). Given the complexities of supernatural narrative transmission discussed by researchers such as Gillian Bennett in *Alas Poor Ghost: Traditions of Belief in Story and Discourse*, this tale deserves greater exploration in the field, particularly the pairing of knowledge with blindness and ignorance with sightedness. At the very least, it testifies to the endurance of the folkloric rendering of Beaton's murder.

Conclusion

What is striking about the historical and folkloric versions of Beaton's story is that they continue to adhere to the narrative strategies developed by the original settlers, even though the cultural environment has significantly altered. The brutal description recorded in Cox's report is never fully acknowledged. Even McQuaid persists in this view by invoking the supernatural as a legitimate explanation. It is as though directly addressing the facts of the case - that Beaton clearly was raped and murdered by a man or men who in all probability lived in the community for many years - would transgress the unseen boundary that allows Islanders to live successfully within their delimited world. The community is still sensitive to the implications of Beaton's death. The strategy of developing culturally acceptable explanations of her death, therefore, continues because in some way it permits the community to continue to exist.

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The murder of Ann Beaton was one incident in which the powerful Isle of Skye cultural code was problematised and the need to re-establish cultural signification was a noteworthy step in the Rear Settlement's integration within the larger Island community. The failure of the official narrative, whether theocratic or legal, to provide resolution affected to lesser or greater degrees all Islanders. The 20th Century historical narratives, despite their rationalist perspective, have maintained and disseminated the folkloric accounts of the murder. Islands are paradoxical places where, despite the apparent homogeneity, policing the borders to avoid unpleasant truths is a necessary device for ensuring the community's continuance, even if the crime itself took place almost 150 years in the past. Lamont concludes his 1902 article with the mistaken observation that community had forgotten the murder:

But now the Goblin's Hollow is in a rich and verdant field with a beautiful grove beside it, and the lads go whistling through it at night and past the heap of stones that marks the spot where the body was found in the edge of the grove (1902: 323).

Clearly, he underestimated both the power of Beaton's story and the equally powerful effect of islandness over time upon a human community.

End Notes:

¹ The PEI Archives houses these documents. The coroner, J.M. McDougall, prepared a report that is signed by the twelve members of the coroner's jury and was submitted with an explanatory note to the Lieutenant Governor. The coroner's report includes sworn depositions establishing that Ann Beaton left home around 4 pm on May 12th, 1859, that she visited several neighbours, and that her brother, Murdoch Beaton, was working in Orwell from May 10th-13th and did not leave during that time. Also included in the coroner's report is the autopsy report by Dr. Frank Cox. Bourke's depositions consist of eleven pages of accounts taken from various witnesses. Bourke's writing is terse and difficult to follow since he often does not use prepositions or consistent punctuation. As an illustration of his style, the following is taken from his account of Murdoch Beaton's testimony: "Murdoch Beaton brother to deceased woman states he left home on Tuesday the 10th, went to William Carr to work, left them on Friday evening the 13 instant, went home, got home about 5 o'clock that evening was not home from Tuesday until then" (1859: 1).

² This record of events is developed from the primary materials: the inquest documentation, the depositions, and the newspaper accounts from 1859.

³ Cox does not explicitly state she was raped, although he does report that "she had had connections with some person" a short time before her death and that she had suffered significant injuries on her upper thighs and vagina. Former Supreme Court MacQuaid, who had access to Cox's autopsy, does conclude she was raped (2000:13).

⁴ The spelling of the name has been standardised. In Bourke's deposition it is spelled both Matheson and Matthewson. Matheson is the spelling used by Archibald Matheson and his brother Angus whose names were recorded as members of the coroner's jury.

⁵ The map is based on the map of Lot 57 drawn by Roderick Campbell in 1860.

⁶ Malcolm MacQueen identifies Murdoch Beaton as one of the original 1829 settlers (1959: 89), although he does not appear in the 1841 census while the Matheson

brothers, Angus and Archibald, do; however, Beaton is described as the father of Ann Beaton by Margaret Campion in *A Brief History of Lyndale* (9). He presumably named his son, Murdoch, who was Ann's brother, after himself. It is assumed that Ann Beaton, who would have been roughly 10 years old in 1829, accompanied her father on the voyage to Prince Edward Island.

⁷ Uigg is on the Murray Harbour Road several miles from the Rear Settlement. It is named after the similarly named Isle of Skye township, Uig.

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