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STUDIES
Modernism, Antimodernism, and the Song Fishermen

by Bart Vautour

They are a numerous company, these pretenders to simplicity.
—Raymond Williams, The Country and the City *(20)*

Antimodernism and the New Modernist Studies

Literary modernism did not simply arrive in Canada. It did not alight at Halifax or Montreal from a transatlantic voyage, nor did it cross the forty-ninth parallel as a functioning, consolidated entity. Rather, articulations of literary modernism in Canada emerged through a complex set of material, temporal, and spatial conditions. Traditional scholarship on modernism's "avant-gardist" beginnings has either insisted upon or assumed an immediate and total break from other literary articulations as a constitutive part of modernism. This model often rhetorically projects a break from "older" or "outmoded" traditions despite the healthy persistence of some of those other literary traditions throughout and beyond what is usually regarded as modernism's tenure. While there are certainly instances in which a distinctive break has announced modernism's arrival (the modernist manifesto is perhaps the most ubiquitous tactic used to enact such a break), there are other instances in which the march to modernism has been long, gradual, and interactive with literary forms that seem, at first glance, to be antithetical to a recognizable modernism.

When attempting to trace diverse narratives of the emergence of modernist literature in Canada while at the same time reconfiguring how modernism gets categorized, it is necessary to engage with the discourse of cultural antimodernism. While the critical concept of antimodernism is fairly well established under an historical or Cultural Studies rubric—often a concept employed by critics to point to the commodification of "tradition" and "authenticity"—there is a body of scholarship that points to a number of different modes through which antimodernsim functions. T.J. Jackson Lears, for example, sees antimodernism as "the recoil from an 'overcivilised' modern existence to more intense forms of physical or spir-

itual existence" (xv). Lynda Jessup suggests the term "describes what was in effect a critique of the modern, a perceived lack in the present manifesting itself not only in a sense of alienation, but also in a longing for the types of physical or spiritual experience embodied in utopian futures and imagined pasts" (3). Robin Kelley notices that terms such as "folk," "authentic," and "traditional" are the bread and butter of antimodernism and "are socially constructed categories that have something to do with the reproduction of race, class, and gender hierarchies and the policing of the boundaries of modernism" (1402). However, it is Ian McKay's rendering of antimodernism that is most useful for the following examination of the tensions between literary modernism and nostalgic constructions of Nova Scotia found within the *Song Fishermen's Song Sheets*, as McKay's work is focused on antimodernism as an operative mode of cultural and social production in Nova Scotia.

In *The Quest of the Folk: Antimodernism and Cultural Selection in Twentieth-Century Nova Scotia*, McKay argues that, in the interwar period, rural Nova Scotia tended to be represented by the urban middle class as "a subset of persons set apart, the Folk, characterized by their own distinctive culture and isolated from the modern society around them" (9). Not surprisingly, "innocence" was a dominant motif. Cultural producers in interwar Nova Scotia, he suggests, worked very hard to portray the region as "essentially innocent of the complications and anxieties of twentieth-century modernity" (30). It is important to note the classed assumptions behind this mode of antimodernist cultural production. "Innocence," McKay writes, "denotes the local development of antimodernist conceptions of history and society through a network of words and things diffused by the urban middle class and corresponding, in a complex, indirect, and general sense, to its social and cultural interests" (31). In other words, in the case of interwar Nova Scotia, the urban middle class is seen to deploy tropes of innocence that contribute to the construction of a Folk mythology. The middle class, in turn, claims Folk mythology as its own historicity and satisfies a sense of belonging.[1] More recently, McKay and Robin Bates suggest in *The Province of History: The Making of the Public Past in Twentieth-Century Nova Scotia* that a "semiotic alchemy of antimodernism" was used to "convert [Nova Scotia's] position within the Empire into misty pseudo-Gaelic nostalgia" (378). Indeed, this essay means to interrogate a rather foggy construction of "fishermen" as it gets deployed by a group of literary producers.

For McKay, critical engagement with the discourse of antimodernism—the words and things—must be careful and self-aware. In "Helen Creighton and the Politics of Antimodernism," he elaborates:

> Cultural historians of interwar Nova Scotia (and perhaps Atlantic Canada more generally) must place this peculiar variant of antimodernism at the center of their analysis. To do so is both diverting and dangerous. The "debunking" of the "invented traditions" originating in the interwar period [...] is easy and entertaining. But "exposing" such brazen inventions and easy targets is not the key challenge. The more daunting task facing the cultural historian is to reconstruct the more subtle *politics of cultural selection* and to understand the ways in which contingent and partial readings attain the status of obvious truths. (3, emphasis in original)

Part of the "more daunting task" must also be to re-read and recover narratives within antimodern cultural formations that are counter to dominant strategies of conservative and commercial antimodernism. This type of analysis, I think, should also tease out where those counter-narratives can be located within a broad range of political, social, and economic conditions of cultural production. The task of re-reading antimodernism becomes increasingly daunting when the term is taken out of the vast category of "cultural history" and placed within a literary-historical approach, which forces the literary historian to contend with McKay's conception of antimodernism alongside the recognized rubrics and revamped articulations of literary modernism.

If a critical account of the emergence of modernism in Canada clings to the disciplinarity of a strictly literary-critical or literary-historical trajectory (if there are such strict things), the concept of antimodernism may easily come into conflict with recent developments in "New Modernist Studies."[2] Recent scholarship on modernism has generally worked against reinforcing the ascendancy or sovereignty of the "high modernism" of the Anglo-American kind (such as the Pound-Eliot-Joyce nexus). Instead, as the argument goes, the very principles upon which modernism is categorized need to be rethought and expanded to include articulations that have come from outside the cultural authority of high modernism. Recent years have seen an expansion of modernist categorizations rather than the creation of new literary categories that risk being segregated into their own disciplinarity. Part of the reasoning against creating new disciplinarities comes out of the realization that even Anglo-American high modernism is deeply responsive and reactive to, as well as interactive with, literary formations which have been excluded from the modernist canon. By refusing

to consolidate categories that take high modernism as their opposite, under the rubric of the New Modernist Studies scholars have had success in opening up enquiry into multiple modernisms: competing and coextensive discourses of modernism that find articulation through being situated in multiple subjectivities.

A slight problem arises when a critical practice that is indebted to the expansion of the received ideas about modernism's structuring logic looks towards an operative category such as antimodernism. While it may be tempting to gloss the antithetical character of the term "*anti*modernism," it is important to note that the term did not arise as a direct response to *literary* modernism. Rather, the term (much like literary modernism) is a scholarly categorization of specific strategic responses to particular conditions or problems of modernity. While antimodernist conceptual desires may have close connections to desires to preserve "traditional" literary forms and subjects, antimodernist cultural production is not categorically counter to the innovations and experiments of literary modernism. For example, it is possible to create an antimodernist subject in a poem that experiments with modernist literary forms. It is equally possible for an author to use nostalgic literary forms and conventions without projecting a supposedly simplified version of the past into an uncomplicated utopian present and, sometimes, future. Antimodernism can materialize in literary content, form, or a combination of the two. The antimodernist projection emerges as one strategy for dealing with the displacements and shifting alignments (spatial, temporal, social, economic) of modernity. Literary modernism emerges, at least in large part, from those same changing conditions of existence within transnational modernity.

What follows, then, is a reading that takes divergent and alternative literary experiments—modernist experiments—as interactive with cultural antimodernism in a dialectical process. This dialectical process recognizes a contradiction that is enabled by the diverse set of cultural and social conditions that occasioned multiple avenues for articulating Maritime subjectivity in the 1920s.[3] I read the texts of the literary coterie who identified themselves as the Song Fishermen and focus on the modernist experimentations that work both with and against the dominantly antimodernist tenor of their periodical—*The Song Fishermen's Song Sheets*—as a way into a discussion of the transitional and alternative literary project of literary modernism in Canada. Within the coterie, the poetry of Martha Ann Leslie, Virginia Clay Hamilton, and Robert Leslie exhibits identifiable formal modernist qualities. The poetry of Joe Wallace, which hardly seems modernist when compared to the poems of Eliot and Pound (or those of Dor-

othy Livesay and F.R. Scott for that matter) because it does not reveal modernist ingenuity through formal experimentation, does reveal tentative steps towards a refiguring of the Maritime poetic subject in modernity without recourse to antimodernist renderings of the Folk. By reading the work of these four poets in addition to reading a larger set of poetic responses to a collective project (a poetry competition) held by the Song Fishermen, an oppositional, modernist poetics of critique can be discerned and held up against the coterie's larger project of cultural selection that is recognizable through its sustained antimodernist strategies and sentiments.

The Song Fishermen

The genesis of the Song Fishermen has been skilfully documented by Gwendolyn Davies in "The Song Fishermen: A Regional Poetry Celebration," where she enumerates the multiple social and literary conditions that led to their formation in the 1920s. The literary coterie, she tells us,

> organized lectures and recitals in Nova Scotia, produced illustrated poetry broadsheets, kept in touch with Maritime writers living outside the region, fostered emerging talent (like that of Charles Bruce), published a memorial to Bliss Carman upon his death, and between 1928 and 1930 channelled their energies into the creation of a poetry publication entitled *The Song Fishermen's Song Sheets*. (138)

While the group had both formal and informal gatherings throughout the 1920s, "by October of 1928," Davies writes, "the group had evolved a dramatic image of themselves as 'Fishers of Song,' a loosely-connected fellowship of literary fisher-folk who culled from the wind, the sea, and the traditional life style of Nova Scotia the poetic catches that defined their province" (141). Alexander Kizuk, in "Molly Beresford and the Song Fishermen of Halifax: Cultural Production, Canon and Desire in 1920s Canadian Poetry," highlights both the "*joie de vivre*" and "*jouissance*" of the group (176–77). In the interests of writing for fun, the Song Fishermen coterie came together through social gatherings at the home of Andrew and Tully Merkel. Indeed, much has been made of the specific socio-economic location of the Song Fisherman's social production in Halifax's South End, at 50 South Park Street.[4] From the autumn of 1928 on, not only were Andrew and Tully Merkel the literary hosts of the group, Andrew also became the curator of the Song Fishermen's literary output through two forms of publication. First was a series of broadsheets called *Nova Scotia Catches* that were published by Abenaki Press.[5] The other publication was a periodical, *The Song Fishermen's Song Sheets*, which Davies describes

as "a series of nondescript but serviceable sheets run off on a mimeograph machine in [Andrew Merkel's] Halifax office of the Canadian Press" (142). Aside from publishing the member's poems,

> the *Song Fishermen's Sheets* also became a vehicle for members' correspondence after the first few issues, affording Bliss Carman, Robert Norwood, Charles G.D. Roberts, and the other non-residents an opportunity to maintain contact with the main Halifax group, as well as to know what was happening to the other members of the coterie scattered from Glace Bay to New York. (142)

Both the poetry and the social news adopted and sustained ocean-going metaphors and figures of speech as an antimodernist, nostalgic strategy for dealing with the changing economic and social conditions of the Maritimes. The Song Fishermen enacted these tropes of the Folk in order to "represent a Nova Scotian voice in poetry at the very same time when rural values and the oral tradition were being eroded by out-migration, a changing economy, and the impact of modern media" (138). In this turn to the Folk, the Song Fishermen employed idealized ocean-going subjects as well as objects related to the sea such as dulse, clams, boats, tides, and Demerara rum, among other things, in order to project and celebrate a pre-industrial, largely fabricated age of classless innocence. While often constructing Nova Scotia as a post-pubescent never-never land ("Canada's Ocean Playground," as it became known),[6] they were also able to use the idealized Folk for their own class-crossing identifications: while sitting comfortably in the South End of Halifax, they could imagine themselves at home in the smelt shacks of rural Nova Scotia. Despite the poetic construction of rural innocence, the poetic imaginary that the coterie created for themselves was constructed with cosmopolitan knowledge, for, as Davies tells us, as "attuned to the developments in modern poetry as were their colleagues in London, Paris, New York or Montreal, the Song Fishermen nonetheless turned to traditional ballads, old sea chanteys, and even Gaelic literary forms in an attempt to evoke what they saw as the essence of Nova Scotia" (138). The cosmopolitan awareness that was present but seemingly omitted in the Song Fishermen's construction of a nostalgic, Folk-driven past presents literary historians with a complicated relationship to unpack vis-à-vis the rising tide of transnational developments in literary modernism.

When putting the Song Fishermen under the scrutiny of literary history, it is important to look through multiple lenses: in this case it is important to differentiate between the symbolic power of the Song Fishermen and the

actual material production of the Song Fishermen as an organized movement. According to McKay, the Song Fishermen were the "only really organized movement" of antimodernist cultural producers outside of the local tourism state in Nova Scotia, but that it was "more a light-hearted, whimsical South End literary salon than a disciplined movement," which nonetheless says something serious about class and leisure in interwar Nova Scotia (*Quest* 227). Despite the lack of discipline and "[d]espite the dulse, Demerara, picnics and poetry," Kizuk tells us, "the Song Fishermen society had a definite organization and structure" (178). In an astute definitional move that accounts for the social and textual make up of the coterie, Kizuk suggests that, "[b]roadly speaking, all of the contributors and subscribers, taken together, comprise the Song Fishermen" (178). As a riposte to his own definition, Kizuk suggests that there was a special, symbolic sub-group made up of Andrew Merkel, Charles G.D. Roberts, Bliss Carman, Robert Norwood, Kenneth Leslie, and Charles Bruce.[7] Kizuk calls the symbolic sub-group "Song Fisher *Poets* (legitimating signatories and titular laurel-bearers)" (178). This group is largely symbolic because they—apart from Merkel's editorial functions and the regular contributions from the young Bruce who lived in Halifax—had very little to do with the actual material production of the *Song Fishermen's Song Sheets*. They were non-resident cultural figures who had already gained some celebrity both nationally and transnationally. Kizuk goes on to suggest that "the *real* Song Fishermen" or what he problematically terms the "Song Fisher *Folk*" were Merkel, Bruce, Robert Leslie, Molly Beresford, Ethel H. Butler, Joe Wallace, and Stuart McCawley (178). For reasons forthcoming, I would certainly add Martha Ann Leslie to this list. Kizuk calls these poets the "Song Fisher *Folk*" because they were the "Haligonians living in Halifax and enthusiastically throwing themselves into the project, not forgetting Stuart McCawley [who lived in Glace Bay]" (178).[8] In deeming the poets who took more active roles in the material production of the group the "Song Fisher *Folk*," Kizuk aligns them with the Folk subjects deployed in the coterie's writing. By blurring the distinction between the poets and their subjects, he minimalizes the cultural power that some of the poets living in Nova Scotia had in shaping non-nostalgic, alternative local poetic subjects. Whether we focus on the symbolic heads of the group or on the material, everyday conditions of the group's literary output matters significantly for the way poetry might get taken up in Canadian literary history. For, the poets who lived in Nova Scotia wrote the modernist poems that I focus on here.

Davies suggests "much that has been said about Canadian writing in the 1920s" uses modernism as a "yardstick of literary excellence" (137), and it is for this reason that "a small but distinctly romantic group of Nova Scotian poets" have gone without notice in "standard discussions of Canadian literary history" (138). In order to mount a strong case for the Song Fishermen as important to discussions of Canadian literary history, Davies chooses to highlight the romantic and elide the modernist experimentations that took place within the Song Fisherman group instead of looking for ways in which the "yardstick" might be reconfigured away from evaluative or defensive measurement and towards a reading of how antimodernist and modernist writing in 1920s Canada was often coextensive within publication venues.[10] To be clear, this is not a fault of Davies's scholarship. Rather, it is representative of the critical moment in which the scholarship was produced, before a large-scale critical shift within modernist studies towards the legitimization of enquiry into marginal or spurned modernisms. In other words, the modernist experimentations in the *Song Fishermen's Song Sheets* do not fit easily into a traditional disciplinary rubric of high modernism, so the case was rightly made for the "romantic" character of the group.

In what follows, I want to tease out some poetic experimentations found in the *Song Fishermen's Song Sheets* that might tell a different story about the larger emergence of modernism in Canada. In order to do so, it is crucial *not* to dismiss the cultural antimodernist or formally residual poetic expressions within the *Song Fishermen's Song Sheets*, but to recognize that the more daring poetic experimentations in the *Song Fishermen's Song Sheets* were enabled by the antimodernist cultural authority of what Kizuk calls the "legitimating signatories and titular laurel-bearers," even when those experimentations were often poking fun at the very authority of those symbolic ringleaders (178). Rather than modernist articulations emerging only from radical movements (e.g., student politics at McGill, antifascist solidarity, among other sites of modernist rupture that distanced themselves from established literary movements in Canada), in this case producers of modernist literature utilized the clout of mostly non-resident, cosmopolitan poets and cultural producers (Roberts, Carman, Norwood, and Logan) who had established wide networks of publishers and audiences for their work prior to the transnational modernist turn in poetry and who, in the waning years of their careers, turned to nostalgic constructions of the rural homeland of their youth.

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The Song Fishermen and Modernism

Raymond Williams's *The Country and the City* takes the "city" and the "country" as oppositional and coextensive social, geographic, and material spaces that enabled the production of a vast amount of British literature. Following the examples of McKay's critique of the construction of the Folk in Nova Scotia and Williams's enquiry into the spaces which governed the production of pastoral and counter-pastoral poetry, I want to consider how the Song Fishermen, as a cultural formation that contributed much to the construction of the Maritime Folk, can be read as complicit in fostering their own counter-tradition. While the overriding motif of the Song Fisherman is one of playful antimodernism focused not on the hills and valleys of traditional pastoral poetry as much as the peaks and troughs of the ocean, the *Song Fishermen's Song Sheets* also include instances of sophisticated modernist experimentation. While Kizuk focuses on the non-modernist figure of Molly Beresford in order to draw out the implications of interactions between the more prominent members of the group and an "unmarried woman, recent immigrant, [and] amateur poet" (180), I want to focus on examples of strategic literary experimentations that present alternatives to the dominant critical narrative of antimodernism as the only sustained trope among the sheets of the Song Fishermen. I begin with a strong example of modernist composition: the sixth issue of the *Song Fishermen's Song Sheets*, dated 6 December 1928, headlines Martha Ann Leslie's concrete poem, "Poor Bob," which is worthy of inclusion here in its entirety:

The sink's full of
Three days'
Dirty Dishes
Scales
Of fish
Float in the
Scummy
Fry-pan
On the floors are
Crumbs
But the
Broom
Is upstairs
There's
Dried
Fried
Eg

g
On page
36 of the
Buck
In the
Snow
Which is
Propped open
With a wet
Rag and a can of
Chipso
And
Hell
The fire
Is
Out
That's where
I'm going.

(1)

As the poem moves down a single page from left to right and back to the left side of the page again, it explores the contradictory ground of poetry in domestic space. The poem enacts an ironic form of lament; more pity than lament, really. The non-gendered speaking subject's inventory of domestic failure begins with the informal, apostrophized contraction of the first line, accompanied by lines that indicate a lapse in traditional performance of efficient domesticity. While the culinary remnants—fish scales floating in a scummy frying pan—invoke the Song Fishermen's prevailing subject of fishermen and the sea, all that is left of the coterie's celebrated, masculine act of fishing are the dregs. This fosters a gendered implication that it is the activity of men, and not women, around which the coterie's predominant poetic subject is formed. To push the analysis further, the poem's domestic subject undermines the coterie's sustained gendered figuration of fishermen that is incorporated into the body politic of the "fishers of song," those male poets who dominate the *Song Fishermen's Song Sheets* in number and certainly in cultural authority.

The domestic begins to make incursions into the poetic sphere with the poem's structural and figural volta, where dried egg appears on page thirty-six of Edna St. Vincent Millay's *The Buck in the Snow and Other Poems*, which was published in the same year Leslie composed her poem. Within Leslie's poem, Millay's book of poems is propped open with a wet rag, but the rag is wet from washing neither dishes nor floors. The book is also

propped open with a can of "Chipso." This incursion of a commercial product (a brand of laundry soap) into the domestic space of the poem suggests that neither the rhetorical situation nor poetry itself is outside of the banalities of modern branding, commercialism, and domestic necessity. The poem ends with a deep sense of frustration: the final six lines of the poem begin with what appears to be an exclamatory expletive, "Hell," which can be initially read as the speaker's reaction to the fire being out. Upon reaching the final two lines, though, it becomes apparent that the fire being out is subordinate to the "Hell" to which the speaker is sardonically self-condemned, one presumes, due to the inadequate domestic performance of either the speaker or another, unnamed person.

An analysis of Leslie's experimentation with spatial form and reversal of the gendered expectations of the Song Fishermen coterie can be pushed further. The page of *The Buck in the Snow* to which Leslie refers (thirty-six) contains a single, four-line poem entitled "To Those Without Pity." Millay's rhyming couplets consider the value of poetry in others' eyes:

> Cruel of heart, lay down my song.
> Your reading eyes have done me wrong.
> Not for you was the pen bitten,
> And the mind wrung, and the song written.
> (1–4)

Taken up by Martha Ann Leslie and placed within a domestic mise-en-scène, the citation of Millay's book and the specific poem (which is obviously not textually reproduced for Leslie's audience) is somewhat ambiguous. We could read the speaking subject of Leslie's poem as a generalized reader of Millay's poem, Millay's very specific addressee, or, alternatively, someone who is able to manifest the pity Milay's addressees lack. The new addressees-once-removed of Leslie's poem—the addressees who have only been referentially acknowledged as the unpitying readers of Millay's poem—could find their parallel in the "Bob" of the poem's title, that is, if Bob is not the speaker of the poem. Alternatively, the very experimentation with spatial form and publication in *Song Fishermen's Song Sheets* suggests, to me, a more complex construction of an implied reader of Leslie's poem.[10]

In the first edition of *The Buck in the Snow* both page thirty-six and its facing page are dominated by blank space (the facing page—recto—announces only "PART THREE" in the upper left of the page). It is on this blank field that Leslie allows both egg and poetry to intermingle as she metaphorically writes her own poem into the gendered space that Millay's

poetic clout opens up for her. Delving deeper into Leslie's generative appropriation of Millay's book, poetic subject, and voice, we notice that Leslie's poem likewise takes the shape of a propped-open book. Remembering the rag that props open *The Buck in the Snow* is not wet from washing dishes or floors and accounting for the poem's already deep engagement with print and book culture, we can access a more mischievous reading of the poem. This experimentation with spatial form accomplishes the figuration of the *Song Fishermen's Song Sheets* themselves as the rag (as periodicals are sometimes called)—soaked as the pages are in masculine imaginings of innocent oceangoing spaces of physical and spiritual existence—that props open her own poem. Read through this lens, Leslie's poem becomes a critique of the coterie's bourgeois antimodernism and their gendering of cultural authority. The domestic space of Leslie's poem becomes at once local and cosmopolitan as it incorporates cultural and commercial products into the local present instead of distilling an overwhelmingly imagined local past.

Martha Ann Leslie published another poem in the *Song Fishermen's Song Sheets*, this time co-authored with Virginia Clay Hamilton, which explicitly brings desire into culinary space. "Freud en Cuisine," published in the eighth issue of the *Song Fishermen's Song Sheets*, is a free verse poem that takes an angel food cake as its blank canvas which the speaker longs to "sully" and "Ruthlessly to thrust / The realities upon it" (11-13). I suspect their poem is, in part, a response to Charles G.D. Roberts's "Pan and the Rose," his single poem contributed to the *Song Fishermen's Song Sheets*, which appeared in the previous issue. Kizuk holds Roberts's "sexual allegory" as emblematic of the Song Fishermen's literary milieu for which "male human desire was the very root of poetry" (193–94). Further, he suggests that the Song Fishermen "paid homage to the phallic mystery and its power as a drive within a Lacanian and Kristevian Symbolic to engender not only discourse but language itself" (194). For a literary critic so attuned to the psychoanalytic implications of the Song Fishermen's modes of nostalgic, masculine cultural selection, it is curious that Kizuk declines to comment on what may be the most obvious counter-example:

> Bland and vapid,
> Coldly virginal,
> Its sleek white surface
> Disdainful
> Of licentious reds
> And
> Purples—

How it inflames me!
Smugly smirking,
Ignorant of life.
(1–10)

Following "Poor Bob," Leslie's poem written with Hamilton can also be read as an explicit desire to poke fun at, while pushing the boundaries of, the illusory gendered vision of the Song Fishermen themselves. If we read the pages of the *Song Fishermen's Song Sheets* as the (as yet) unidentified "Bland and vapid" canvas or container with its "sleek white surface" and "maiden blankness" (1, 3, 11), we can read the projection of desire into culinary space in the pages of an otherwise overtly masculine, antimodern publication, as an undermining of the ineffectual masculinity presented by the sexualized pretenders of an innocent homeland (the post-pubescent never-never land), of which (according to Kizuk) "Pan and the Rose" is emblematic. The speaking subject of "Freud en Cuisine" does not actually announce that the canvas is a cake upon which the sullying desire is projected until the post-climax, end of the poem:

Drooping and humble,
It shrinks
Quiescent before me;
Its virtue spotted---
The angel-food cake.
(28–32)

This post-climax finale figures a flaccid penis—signaled, in part, by the triple hyphen's erasure that might complete the utterance of another culinary creation—the infamous British pudding, spotted dick. The poem does not clearly project female desire onto the pages of *Song Fishermen's Song Sheets* through a rapturous maneuver. It is less about sex and more about seizure of symbolic cultural authority as well as the elevation of the domestic as something worth reifying in poetry. Given the contradictory reversal of gendered expectations of who gets to pretend innocence in a traditional past invented through masculine cultural authority, Leslie and Hamilton have out-manned the men by seizing the Song Fishermen's desiring authority and using it for both provocation and humiliation in the realm of poetic production.

Indeed, "Freud en Cuisine" began a conversation in the pages of the *Song Fishermen's Song Sheets*. In the very next issue, King Hazen published a response in sonnet form. "Aux Cuisinieres" replies to Leslie and

Hamilton with overburdened, nostalgic poetic language and conventional rhyme:

> Oh, Virginia Clay and Martha Ann,
> You write with cold sophistication,
> Of things beyond the ken of man,
> Albeit full of sweet suggestion.
> (1–4)

Choosing not to respond using formal experimentation akin to "Freud en Cuisine," Hazen inadvertently recognizes sophistication in Leslie and Hamilton's free verse. At the same time, though, he codes their poetic dexterity as cold and "beyond the ken of man" (3). Using the plural pronouns "our" and "we," he keeps his poem and the universalized man out of the feminized culinary domain:

> Subsequent, with persistence,
> Our thoughts return, with glad surmise,
> To those delights so evanescent,
> And with regret we realize,
> With souls that are far from complacent,
> That Time alone prevents us woo
> More Angel Cake and have it too.
> (8–14)

More proving the point of "Freud en Cuisine" than "rising" to its challenge, King Hazen responds by presenting a universalized, male speaking subject who has failed to address Leslie and Hamilton's representation of the *Song Fishermen's Song Sheets* as "Bland and vapid." Instead of taking their point about desire in poetry existing within the commonplace language of domestic space, he further mythologizes desire through proverbial reference. The conversation continues in the next issue, number ten, when Martha Ann writes in prose: "Tell King Hazen that if he'll come to the farm sometime I'll attempt to make him a lascivious looking and lovely Angel Cake, and give him plenty of time to woo it, and a tin box to keep it in afterward" (6). I read the offer of a "tin box to keep it in" is a sarcastic quip aimed at deflating his too literal reading of the sublimated implications of "Freud en Cuisine." Desire and poetry, for Leslie and Hamilton, are not things to be put in a "tin box" to be kept culturally stagnant or universal. Instead, desire and poetry commingle in the everyday poetic subject made more accessible by poetic innovation and experimentation.

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While Martha Ann Leslie, with the help of Virginia Clay Hamilton, did much in the two poems above to disrupt the construction of a Folk space through her modernist critiques, her husband, Robert Leslie, also published poems in the *Song Fishermen's Song Sheets* that disrupt an overwhelmingly dominant antimodernist cultural moment through modernist experimentation. His work is unique for its easy employment of antimodernist nostalgia in some poems and experimental modernist critiques of capitalist and environmental exploitation in others. For example, he published two poems in the eleventh issue—one above the other—that are very different poetic engagements: "Ghosts" and "Marginal Note, March 26/29." Made up of two stanzas with an irregular rhyme scheme, "Ghosts" takes up the seafaring motif so ubiquitous to the group. The opening stanza signals the disappearance of the age of sail:

> Ghosts of the ships
> That furled their sails
> At sailing ships'
> Eternal quay,
> Still haunt the night
> And ride the gales
> That blow the coasts
> Of Acadie.
> (1–8)

While recognizing that wooden sailing ships have neared the end of their economic and technological usefulness, Leslie gives them an eternal presence, an ahistorical location that intimates a universal presence and an erasure of the local colonial and classed implications of the technology of ocean-going modes of transportation and labour. What is more, he constructs the ahistoricity of the sailing ships in the tempestuous and gothic nighttime, suggesting that these ships haunt the modernizing world of the Maritimes because of modernization's very existence. Rhetorical situation firmly in place, the second stanza incorporates the "Ghosts of the men / who drove the ships" into that imagined Acadian past (9–10). Those ghostly men

> Still walk the decks
> When the night tide rips—
> Uneasy eyes
> On Acadie.
> (13–16)

While positioning the ships and the men who drove them in an ahistorical night, Leslie subtly suggests that the disappearance of sailing ships is determined by a confluence of forces, figured in the rip of the night tide. The ships and the men who can no longer actively sail them are afloat and on deck (as opposed to being aloft in the rigging), without agency to navigate around or through the rough forces of the gothic night tide as it creates a large disturbance whereby the outflow of water meets prevailing ocean winds, waves, and currents (a tidal rip). The men look with uneasy eyes on a receding shore as though they continually confront the Promethean predicament of being whisked away each night from "Acadie," an imagined homeland always on the verge of being lost (not a new trope for Acadia, methinks). Leslie's Acadie is one more akin to Arcadian rural ideals than to an Acadian region suffering under the weight of uneven capitalist development.

While Leslie successfully employs an antimodernist idiom to lament the loss of cultural and social tradition in "Ghosts," the nostalgic versification of a receding way of life is simply not present in "Marginal Note, March 26/29":

> Atlas, Arno, Aconda,
> Bathurst, Bedford, Bidgood,
> Capital Rouyn, Cambro,
> Nipissing, Nickle, Noranda,
> Pawnee Kirkland, Ribago,
> Tough-Oaks, Treadwell, Towagamac,
> Flin-Flon, Flintoba, Malartic,
> Falconbridge, Mandy, Osiko,
> Eureka, Bonanza, Swastika,
> Hollinger, Hilltop, Howe Sound,
> Yesterday: Moneta!
> Today: Holes in the Ground.
>
> (1–12)

The first ten lines of the poem, rife with alliteration and assonance, enumerate mining developments through a decidedly unsentimental composition. Leslie's poetic inventory makes plain the scope of the project of capitalist resource extraction. It is with the final couplet that Leslie discloses the contradiction: in the poem's constructed past these mining developments symbolize the cheerful accumulation of capital. Moneta, aside from being an Ontario-based mining development company established in 1910, means "currency" in Italian and originated from he name

of the Roman goddess Moneta. While Moneta is the protector of funds, she also plays a role in warning of financial instability ("Juno" n. pag.). Included in the use of the signifier Moneta is a suggestion that the mining developers themselves should have heeded the inbuilt warnings of hasty industrialization. The final line, in the poem's present moment, strips the mining of any sense of development: no longer are the mines the utopian conveyors of capital; they are now unproductive gaping holes. While the development of resource extraction on an industrial scale ushered in a form of capitalist modernity to diverse regions of North America, Nova Scotia included, an eventual decline in the pace of resource extraction left industrial workers, who had shifted from agrarian to industrial existence, without recourse to sustainable livelihoods.

The fate of these workers would inspire Andrew Merkel, in the eighth issue, to write that the "distress in many of the communities" subject to industrial models of mining in Cape Breton "has become a hardy perennial" (8). That distress over the living and working conditions of the working class in Nova Scotia was the primary concern of the socialist poet Joe Wallace in the 1920s, though no direct poetic manifestation of that distress appeared in the *Song Fishermen's Song Sheets*. Probably the most unrepresentative member of the Song Fishermen coterie, Wallace joined the *Song Fishermen's Song Sheets* mailing list with the fifth issue (21 November 1928) and remained involved until the periodical's dissolution.[11] Though the wider range of Wallace's overtly anti-capitalist poetic production of the 1920s deserves closer attention for its negotiation of shifting poetic subjectivity in modernity, his poems appearing outside of the *Song Fishermen's Song Sheets*—mostly in the *Worker*—are beyond the scope of this study. He contributed six poems to the *Song Fishermen's Song Sheets*, three of which *critically* engage with antimodernist tropes: "A Little Boat Puts Out," "How the Clams Came to Fundy" (written with his second wife, Grace), and—discussed further along in this case study—"The Giant out of a Job."[12]

Utilizing the common antimodernist figuration of ocean-going vessels, "A Little Boat Puts Out" tells of a small boat, the "Drowsy Head," which sets sail "beyond the harbouring arms / Of homey things" (2–3), loaded with

> A store of wondrous merchandise,
> Of fairycraft, and sun-spun gold,
> With visions shaped in curious guise,
> Dreams and ideals crowd her hold.
> (9–12)

In his employment of the coterie's customary antimodernist vessel, Wallace sets up the boat, like antimodernist poetry, as a container of the fantastic and of dreams and ideals more generally, but recognizes (though laments) that loading boats, like poetry, with "visions shaped in curious guise" prepares for a voyage away from a home space where the real encounter with a new age must take place:

> When sunset strikes her wistful sails,
> Verging and merging in the sky,
> The dimmed eye of affection fails--
> Little, and loved, and lost . . [.] goodbye.
> (17–20)

The "fairycraft" that acts as the cargo is, though loved, something to be given up, much like the sustained subjects that the Song Fishermen coterie have overburdened and that must be cast away.

"How the Clams Came to Fundy" also dismisses from active poetic service an oft-treated subject of the Song Fishermen when Wallace suggests, in the opening lines of the poem, that "You've heard enough of Murphy's dulse / In solemn word and jest" (1–2). Wallace does not replace dulse with clams in a one-to-one ratio. Rather, clams are the subordinate subjects of the framed narrative poem. The poem's rhetorical situation consists of an elderly man—Ezra—who is telling the fantastic story of stranded whales morphing into clams in the Bay of Fundy. The narrating voice takes on the subjectivity of a collector of Folk stories who supplies Ezra with rum in order to gain access to his story. The final stanza steps back from the constructed scene to narrate a double bind:

> The tale is done; the rum is gone;
> In ashes die its fires:
> And you know why Fundy, on both sides,
> Is famous for big liars.
> (70–74)

Aside from the actual geography of the Bay of Fundy, Wallace's poem subtly suggests that both Ezra and the story's recipient—"both sides"—are liars and that something has been lost because of their transaction. Wallace recognizes and critiques the uneven power relations between the subject who is gaining access to the story as a Folk commodity and the subjectivity of the teller of the tale.

33

Unlike his poems in the *Song Fishermen's Song Sheets* that criticize the coterie's antimodernism by deploying the expected antimodernist tropes and scenes only to construct a reversal, "The Workingclass to Saccho and Vanzetti" is unique among the poems of the *Song Fishermen's Song Sheets*. Wallace's poem, published in the tenth number, was so alien to the urban middle-class antimodernism of the Song Fishermen that Davies positions his work as symptom of the demise of the *Song Fishermen's Song Sheets*:

> it was probably inevitable that the *Song Fishermen's Sheets* would someday change in tone as the "old things" of Merkel's romanticized Nova Scotia altered, and shades of this had already appeared in the *Sheets* with the publication of Wallace's "The Working Class to Saccho and Vanzetti" [sic] (13 April 1929) and "The Giant out of a Job" (23 June 1929). (145)

Indeed, Wallace's poem has nothing to do with the antimodernist construction of Nova Scotia as a Folk space. Somewhat surprisingly, the Song Fishermen allowed and supported the publication of a poem that responds to a transnational debate around the arrest and execution of two Italian-American anarchists, Ferdinando Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti.[13] Rather than writing a personal lament, Wallace makes the whole of the working class his singular speaking subject:

> I brought them forth
> With my deepest pains,
> I nourished them
> From my dearest veins,
> I cradled them
> With my sweetest breath,
> And I walked with them
> As they went to death...
> As I went to death.
> (1–9)

Wallace constructs the working class as a parent figure who has physically sustained the two men and then accompanied them to their death. Unlike the dead men, the declarative working class will "never rest / Till I break the shackles / Of the world's oppressed," and then the working class identifies itself as "the world's oppressed" (24–27). The poem is not overly complex or innovative in its use of language. What is significant is that it participates in a transnational outpouring of leftist literary support for the plight of the two men and brings that support to the pages of the antimodernist *Song Fishermen's Song Sheets*. Remembering that antimodernist

cultural production is a classed set of strategies that project a supposedly simplified version of the past into an uncomplicated, innocent present, we can see Wallace's poem breaking new ground for poetry's contemporary engagements within the space of the *Song Fishermen's Song Sheets* as the transnational working class infiltrates the middle-class space of Folk innocence. Wallace could not have published the poem without some degree of support from the middle-class editor. More than just support from the *Song Fishermen's Song Sheets* editor, in the eleventh issue Kenneth Leslie (who would himself turn increasingly to modernist experimentation as well as to the left) writes that Wallace's poem "is an arrow in the throat of despair. He has spoken the burden of those who suffer when justice bows to power—he has spoken directly, bravely, beautifully" (1). In a coterie dominated by a cultural climate of jolly antimodernism, Wallace was able to shift the poetic subject away from constructions of nostalgic innocence. Indeed, Wallace's work—using conventional rhyming verse to develop alternative subjects in modernity—helps to open up the possibilities for modernism: his fellow poets, such as Kenneth Leslie, may have been less prone to resisting experimentations with form and diction when they were less determined to write about an imagined past.

While the poems of Martha Ann Leslie reveal that the Song Fishermen allowed for poetic experimentation and alternative, gendered constructions of the modern poetic subject, the juxtaposition of Robert Leslie's poems shows that the *Song Fishermen's Song Sheets* acted as a literary space where contributors could present both antimodernist cultural tropes as well as non-traditional poetic experimentations that enact critiques of capitalist modernity. Wallace's participation in the Song Fishermen coterie gives a unique counter-example to bourgeois antimodernism even though his poetic practice does not necessarily engage in modernist formal experimentation. Though these examples look to individual author's overall engagement with the ocean-going discourse constructed around the Song Fishermen as a literary collective, another way to critically engage with the ways in which the antimodernist coterie was complicit in fostering its own counter tradition of modernist experimentation is by looking at the many responses to an inclusive poetry contest they held towards the end of the publication's run, for which each member was asked to respond to a single subject. While the literary competition that emerged at Lake Geneva in 1816 and produced such influential works as Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1918) and John Polidori's *The Vampyre* (1819) is slightly more legendary than is the Song Fishermen's literary competition that was announced in the eleventh issue of the *Song Fishermen's Song Sheets*, they both provide,

in a literary historical context, telling examples of how divergent products can arise from a single evocation within a coterie. In the case of the Song Fishermen, the members of the coterie were asked to write a poem about the already mythologized "Cape Breton Giant," Angus MacAskill.

The Boat Exploit

The editors of the *Song Fishermen's Song Sheets* took their cue for the contest from the closing lines of the eighteenth chapter of *The Cape Breton Giant* (1926) by James D. Gillis.[14] The last paragraph of the chapter is reproduced in the eleventh issue, directly below Robert Leslie's "Ghosts" and "Marginal Note, March 26/29," under the heading "ALL HANDS ON DECK: Announcement Extraordinary": "The boat exploit would be a very choice subject for a poem. Possibly the day will arrive when one of our poets will weave a wreath of poesy about that boat, a large, lettered wreath so worded as to spell the immortal name, Angus MacAskill" (8). With the reproduction of Gillis's entreaty in the eleventh issue, poems were solicited—recalling tropes of masculine physical prowess—from each of the "able-bodied fishermen" but the contest was also open to poets outside the group (8). Each contestant was required to use a *nom de plume* and to submit his or her entry to the Abanaki Press in Halifax. According to the editorial particulars, the contest was a way for the Song Fishermen to "make a worthy contribution to the festivities in course of preparation for the annual meeting of the Canadian Author's Association at Halifax, June 25–28" (8).

After enumerating the rules of the contest, Merkel reprints the whole of the "The Fishing Boat Exploit" from *The Cape Breton Giant*, wherein Gillis explains that there are "either two versions of the same exploit, or there are two sister exploits," but that "it differs nothing, as one thing is certain, viz., 'something was attempted, something was done' and that something was prodigious in the extreme" (59). Both stories involve MacAskill helping to haul a boat ashore and other men playing a trick on him by either pulling the boat in the opposite direction or attempting to pull the boat farther out of the water than MacAskill preferred, at which time MacAskill pulled the boat in two, separating prow from stern. In his mythologizing of MacAskill as a Folk-hero, Gillis also figures super-human violence as a potential characteristic of "our hero" as, in one version, he has MacAskill throwing a man "disdainfully up in the air, where he described an arch or semi-circle, landing twenty feet away, more dead than alive with fear and pain" (59). Further, Gillis asks: "What would an ordinary citizen be in his vice-like grasp?" (60). While attempting to make MacAskill a larger-than-

life synecdochic symbol of the Cape Breton Folk, Gillis makes a somewhat contradictory assertion of the super-human feats and intimidations needed to construct him as a demigod-like Folk-hero, a construction that relies on the protagonist being both physically and mythologically set apart from the everyday Folk.[15]

The results of the contest were published in the fourteenth number of the *Song Fishermen's Song Sheets*, skipping over the thirteenth number, which is a memorial to Bliss Carman in pamphlet form. The fourteenth issue, the "Convention Edition," is dated 23 June 1929, in time for the CAA's annual meeting. While Davies is correct to suggest that the Song Fishermen arranged for Gillis himself to "judge the anonymous entries," he did not necessarily have the task of picking the winner (146). His judgement took the form of critical comment following each printed poem (with the exception of Molly Beresford's poem which was received too late to be sent on to Cape Breton). It is clear that there were at least two judges whose opinions were as disparate as the poems entered into the contest. The editorial announcement suggests that the "brilliance of the contributors has been the confusion of the judges. They differed so widely in their choice, that to bring their views into any sort of agreement was conceived an utter (or stark) impossibility by those editorially involved in this hazardous (not to say foolish) undertaking" (1). The frustration expressed in the opening editorial is reflective of the incongruent poetic responses to Gillis. The editorial goes on to summarize the entries:

> The local grasp and tang of Stuart McCawley, the magnificent balladry of Effie Barns, the profundity of Andrew Merkel, the superb Celticism of Michael Curry, the Miltonic vision of Ethel Butler, the apocalyptic scope of Joe Wallace, even the destructive poison-gas of Bob Leslie,—all these witness the peculiar inspiration inherent in James Gillis'[s] succinct description of this simple yet strong (or heroic) incident. (1)

There were, in fact, nine contest entries printed in the fourteenth issue.[16] Stuart McCawley (of Glace Bay) was announced as the winner and awarded a crown of dulse. Ethel H. Butler's "The Fishing Boat Exploit: A Ghost Song of The Cape Breton Giant," Michael Curry's "Euchd A Bhat Lascaich," Effie MacDonald Barnes's "Big John MacAskill," and the winner of the contest, Stuart McCawley's "You Can't Take Your Fun Off Of Angus" all actively maintain and support antimodernist cultural tropes through traditional modes of versification. Four of the nine contestants took Gillis very seriously when he called for a "lettered wreath so worded as to spell the immortal name, Angus MacAskill," by submitting acrostic

poems (60). Katherine F. MacDonald's "Laureation: That Fishing Boat Exploit," Molly Beresford's "Song of the Boat," and Andrew Merkel's "The Fishing Boat Exploit" all utilize the convenience of the fourteen letters of the "Giant's" name to write sonnets. While MacDonald's sonnet exhibits uncomplicated construction aside from a healthy amount of hyperbole to plead that our "praises" continue to "ring to biceps so pliant" (14), Merkel's sonnet makes MacAskill himself the addressee:

> Angus, such feats are gone, and done, methinks.
> Sadly the world admits a slow decay.
> Keelsons are kindling-wood and kings are kinks.
> Idly the weak remain to greet the day.
> Lifting is left to cranes.--And no one drinks.--
> Let everything, O Giant, be cast away.
>
> (9–14)

Unlike many of the constructions of the Folk whereby a mythologized past is constructed in the poem's present, Merkel writes a lament that positions modernity as a slow decay, though the presence of cranes would suggest technological and logistical progress. Merkel's reference to abstaining from alcohol is a direct response to the ninth chapter of *The Cape Breton Giant*, "MacAskill Would Take a Glass," wherein Gillis provides an sober apology for the fact that MacAskill "took a glass of rum, brandy, or whiskey occasionally" but had "our hero been of the present day," Gillis writes, "we may be sure that he'd be an advocate of total abstinence" (36). Unlike Gillis's far-fetched hagiography of MacAskill and deep moralizing about the folly of alcohol consumption, Molly Beresford, in "Song of the Boat," demonizes MacAskill by turning the boat that he ripped asunder into the speaking subject of the poem:

> Know you he marred me, tossed me broken on the shore,
> I can go seaward never, never more,
> Left useless, helpless, where the salt tide never strays.
> Lord, do Thou judge him who...his friend...betrays!
>
> (11–14)

While maintaining the antimodernist, ocean-going conceit of the group, Beresford's poem is unique for its discharge of Angus MacAskill from active service in the construction of in idealized innocent Folk figure, hero or not.

The two poems that present the biggest challenge to the antimodernist construction of the Folk and that help to create a modernist counter-tradition are Robert Leslie's "The Boat Exploit (A Very Choice Subject for a Poem)" and Joe Wallace's "The Giant Out of a Job." While Robert Leslie used a poetic inventory to document and critique capitalist development in "Marginal Note, March 26/29" by listing mining developments around North America and then de-developing mines in a poetic turn from past to present, Leslie's "The Boat Exploit (A Very Choice Subject for a Poem)" consists of an alternative inventory, or collage, composed of words and phrases found throughout James D. Gillis's *The Cape Breton Giant*. There is no doubt that the language of Gillis's book is bombastic, grandiloquent, and at moments, ridiculous. In other words, he is an easy target for mockery. For example, in his Introduction to *The Cape Breton Giant*, Gillis writes:

> The fact that, as a rule, only one exploit is portrayed in each chapter makes the reading of this book far from tiresome. The memory is not overtaxed, and at the close thereof "all draw long breaths and hope that another rapid is near." The above quotation is from the illustrious writer, Principal Grant. It is used in a metonymical sense, of course. (x)

Leslie incorporates this and many other choice words and phrases into his poem. To extend the above example, the sixth stanza of Leslie's poem explains that "One exploit is picked for portrayal, / Thus not overtaxing the memory. / You'll "all draw long breaths" at the finish— / (The quotation's of course metonymical)" (18–21). Ian McKay suggests that Gillis became a sort of object for display for the urban middle class who were "content to pat the head of a decontextualized Cape Breton barbarian" (*Quest* 236). Indeed, I concur with McKay's assessment of the Halifax cultural producers' adoption of Gillis as "a sort of mascot" but I do not believe that is what is happening in Leslie's poem. Whatever the "cultural context" or "logic behind Gillis's use of language" or literary production, his diction and form become culturally dislocated at a site of urban reception—the book was published by T.C. Allan and Co. in Halifax (236). Leslie takes Gillis to task for his mythologizing of MacAskill, and by extension the other Song Fishermen who follow suit. Leslie, I think, is unique for his exposure of the insincerity of his colleagues. The poem's reproachful satire conveys the emptiness and inappropriateness of the antimodern subject and idiom in modernity. His poem ends without actually relating any of MacAskill's story:

The details need not be imparted
For details are often forgotten.
Another method is chosen
(But not at all as a substitute)
And how the boat exploit transpired
May be left to the reader's conjecture.
(53–58)

Leslie, in the end, does not participate in mythologizing the action of the "Boat Exploit" because, as it turns out, it is *not* a "very choice subject for a poem" (Gillis 60). Further, Leslie has caught on to the fact that *The Cape Breton Giant* has failed to construct Angus MacAskill as the protagonist of his own life. Rather, Gillis has situated himself—with or without intention—at the centre of his own narrative as the grandiloquent narrator and, as a result, the stereotypical Folk figure.

Unlike Leslie's poem, Wallace's poem mythologizes, to be sure, but the poem constructs the poetic subject differently than does the majority of poems in the *Song Fishermen's Song Sheets*. "The Giant Out of a Job" has three constructed moments: a mythologized past, an industrial present, and a socialist future.[17] The first three of the eight stanzas construct an all-encompassing past:

Time was the tribe, the gens, the clan
Gave birth to the brotherhood of man --
Those were the days when king meant can.

Time was the stream with a rocky rush
Shattered the mountain wre[s]tler's crush --
To spend its strength through plains of plush.

Time was the bard, like mountain spray,
Mirrored the deeds of a mighty day --
Singer and subject pass away.
(1–9)

Wallace fabricates a mythic time-space in which kinship and nature shape the active world. The juxtaposition of a "brotherhood of man" with geological time distils and slows human action to the universal. He follows this comparison with a simile that conflates the Celtic-inflected bard with "mountain spray" (7), the product of the stream's "rocky rush" (4). His bard is a mirror of the merged human and natural world, but the subject—the antimodern poetic subject—and its mirror have become outmoded. The

fourth stanza introduces the present moment: "Time is. To other gods we kneel: / Man gives his speed to the flying wheel, / His outworn strength to the tireless steel" (10–12). This present moment is an industrial moment that stores human capacity for speed in a flywheel and capacity for strength in steel. It is in this industrial, "alien age" that the giant "comes to belated birth" (13–14). In Wallace's poem the actual boat exploit is not a heroic deed, rather, "in a burst of fitful rage, / He rips a boat from its anchorage, / Then sinks resigned to the altered age" (19–21). In other words, Angus MacAskill was not projected back into an antimodernist past, but exists in the industrial, capitalist present as an unemployed worker. The potential heroic deed is projected into a possible future, one contingent on the waking of the sleeping giant: "But what if he wake from sleep to find / A task for his brain and brawn combined -- / Freedom to win and a world unbind?" (22–24). This socialist second coming is consistent with leftist tropes of the early twentieth century that combat oppression with critical praxis—"brain and brawn combined" (23).[18] Because Wallace does not reintroduce the reflective bard who mirrors the "deeds of a mighty day" into the poem's other constructed moments, he intimates a different role for the poet in both the present and a possible future. Just as the giant who could arise to unbind the world through critical praxis, Wallace's subject position as poet in an "altered age" (21) must not be imitative or reflective as is a mirror, but must be projective and expectant in the reformation of the poetic, antimodern subject who has "pass[ed] away" (9). There is a role for heroics in Wallace's poetry, but it is not the distillation of an imagined innocent past. Wallace's hero inspires future deeds.

The members of the Song Fishermen coterie were given a single subject and the majority of the responses maintained the conventions of cultural antimodernism and residual literary form but the poems of Wallace and Robert Leslie (and Andrew Merkel to some extent) are examples of poems which used the opportunity of the contest to challenge the dominant antimodernism of the Song Fishermen's literary project as a whole. Their poems—alongside other poems from across the periodical's run that have been discussed in this case study—confront gendered and classed antimodernist articulations and cultural authority of their moment. A close look at the *Song Fishermen's Song Sheets* also exposes some operative assumptions within our own critical moment. Accounting for the emergence of modernism in Canada must confront dominant critical narratives by searching out ways in which modernism is intensely conscious of, and reactive to, antimodernist cultural authority and residual literary formations. This type of critical recovery also exposes organizational struc-

tures—in this case a collective of literary producers who had "been writing for fun" (1)—and reveals how configurations of power and authority within those organizations both enable and hinder the production of a modernist poetic sphere.

Notes

1 Jennifer Delisle has recently used the term "Genealogical Nostalgia" to describe the desire post-immigrant generations have for the narratives of a homeland in which they don't they participate.

2 Douglas Mao and Rebecca L. Walkowitz suggest that the "New Modernist Studies" was "born on or about 1999 with the invention of the Modernist Studies Association (MSA) and its annual conferences" (737). They suggest that the study of modernism has broadened in scope—in "temporal, spatial, and vertical directions" (737).

3 The term "Maritime," in this instance, points to the poets who were active in constructing the Maritimes and Maritimers as poetic subjects.

4 See Davies 140–141, Kizuk 179, and McKay *Quest* 227–229. More than just a generous host, Andrew Merkel was a "key proponent of historical reconstruction, an important force in the immensely popular cult of the schooner *Bluenose*," who "helped shape Innocence as a mythomoteur in the 1920s and 1930s" (McKay, *Quest* 227).

5 Only three broadsides were published: Merkel's "The Bluenose to the Wind"; Kenneth Leslie's "On the Road to Maccan"; and Charles Bruce's "Ragwort".

6 McKay and Bates suggest Nova Scotia officially became "Canada's Ocean Playground" as early as 1931 (120).

7 To that list I might add the Antigonish-born John D. Logan, who was "then Head of the English Department at the Jesuits' prestigious Marquette University in Milwaukee" (Kizuk 185). He was co-author of *Highways of Canadian Literature* (1924) and he claimed to have taught the first university course in Canadian literature (at Acadia in 1915). He was added to the subscription list in the fourth issue (9 November 1928) and he sent poetry as well as commentary. He provided symbolic *academic* clout.

8 Not all of these figures lived in Halifax proper, but all lived in Nova Scotia.

9 Brian Trehearne makes a similar claim in *Aestheticism and the Canadian Modernists*, when he acknowledges that the *McGill Fortnightly* contained poetry that fell well outside modernist articulation (139).

10 Bob (Robert) is the name of Martha Ann's husband.

11 Wallace became better known in the Soviet Union than in Canada and he remains an under-studied figure within Canadian literary history. James Doyle has written the most thorough scholarship on Wallace's six-decade-long poetic career. See Doyle's *Progressive Heritage* and "The Canadian Worker Poet."

12 "Call the Comely Daughters" and "Night Fishing" are ballad-like love poems that sustain ocean metaphors; "Night Fishing" figures a mermaid as the object of affection.

13 See Temkin, Watson, Avrich.

14 For detailed information on Gillis see McKay's *The Quest of the Folk*, 234–8.

15 The next issue, number twelve, gives additional contextual material on MacAskill. This time, the information comes by way of Stuart McCawley of Glace Bay, who attempts to humanize MacAskill by presenting facts that question Gillis's sensationalist construction of MacAskill as an super-human Folk-hero. McCawley had recently visited with, and thus presents the authority of, Angus's brother, who was "nearing the hundred mark" and who had explained that the "McAskill folks don't like Angus being referred to as a giant. He wasn't abnormal. He was a big, well-proportioned, intelligent, lovable

character, who owned and ran a general store" and he was "not a Freak" (2). McCawley had asked a friend at Englishtown, Ross Macaulay, to interview Angus's brother to get the "true story of the incident" and a short, pithy portrait of the incident is provided under the authority of Angus's brother, wherein the incident takes place at Neil's Harbour and the bow is pulled off another fisherman's boat. McCawley's interpolation, while challenging the construction of MacAskill as a Folk-hero, places him firmly within the realm of the Folk.

16 The editorial leaves out "Laureation: That Fishing Boat Exploit" by Katherine F. MacDonald and "Song of the Boat" by Molly Beresford.

17 Unlike his five other poems that were published in the *Song Fishermen's Song Sheets*, "The Giant out of a Job" has never been reprinted in any of Wallace's collections.

18 See Rifkind 49.

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