



# THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

## Edinburgh Research Explorer

### A Beothuk skeleton (not) in a glass case

**Citation for published version:**

Harries, J 2016, A Beothuk skeleton (not) in a glass case: rumours of bones and the remembrance of an exterminated people in Newfoundland - the emotive immateriality of human remains. in J-M Dreyfus & É Anstett (eds), Human remains in society: Curation and exhibition in the aftermath of genocide and mass-violence., 9, Human Remains and Violence, Manchester Univ. Press, Manchester.

**Link:**

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

**Document Version:**

Peer reviewed version

**Published In:**

Human remains in society

**General rights**

Copyright for the publications made accessible via the Edinburgh Research Explorer is retained by the author(s) and / or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing these publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

**Take down policy**

The University of Edinburgh has made every reasonable effort to ensure that Edinburgh Research Explorer content complies with UK legislation. If you believe that the public display of this file breaches copyright please contact [openaccess@ed.ac.uk](mailto:openaccess@ed.ac.uk) providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.



## **A Beothuk Skeleton (not) in a Glass Case: Rumours of Bones and the Remembrance of an Exterminated People in Newfoundland**

John Harries, Social Anthropology, The University of Edinburgh

### **The emotive immateriality of human remains**

This chapter is about the human remains and how human remains inhabit the public sphere after their exhumation. It is, however, about a curious form of inhabitation. Usually, when we think of things being *in* the public sphere we think of them as being somehow present. In the case of bones we think of them being actually materially, physically, there. Perhaps they are on display in a glass case in a museum. Perhaps they are held within the collections of a university awaiting the possibility of scholarly interest. Perhaps they have been reunited with “their” people (or whichever people have advanced a recognised claim to possess a privileged and proprietorial relationship with the bones) and then have been returned to the earth with due ceremony, but, even at that, even if they are once again hidden from view, they are still locatable, their spot being marked by some architecture of commemoration, so we can return and point and say here lies the remains of someone.

The political life of dead bodies in the public sphere has received considerable attention of late, most of which the assumes presence of these bodies or is oriented toward the processes by which they come into presence as they are exhumed and so (re)enter public life to become embroiled in contemporary politics of memory and sovereignty.<sup>1</sup> In many ways this chapter shares this concern with the political life of human remains; however, it is concerned with rumours and memories of remains that were once visible but now are lost. This is not to say that these remains have vanished altogether. They still are somewhere, but

their whereabouts is unknown, or the common knowledge of their whereabouts is said to be withheld.

In general, one could argue that there is something slightly uncanny about lost objects in that they trouble the distinction between presence and absence. It is, after all, not just a matter of them having once been here and now gone. They could still be close by and so it is just possible that they may reemerge into the public domain, being literally or figurative exhumed, rediscovered in some cupboard or a long locked and forgotten storeroom. This aura of uncanniness may be a quality of any lost object, even those little everyday things that leave our lives without our intention, but it is particularly true of human bones. Why this is so is a complex question, although it has been variously suggested that, beyond their significance within particular cultures of mourning and remembrance, there is something about human remains, something about the fact that they are uncertainly situated between being subject and object, vital being and mere matter, person and thing, that predisposes them to become objects of peculiar concern<sup>2</sup> and so, by extension, the sense that they are vanished yet “near at hand” can create a peculiar disquiet.<sup>3</sup>

In truth, these bones have not “vanished”. Some people know where they are. But for many people they have disappeared and they know not where they have gone. It is also true to say, that they have not really been “lost” through carelessness or accident. They have been taken away and hidden from view. The difference is a question of intent and the attribution of intent. In writing of the “movement of lost effects” (in this case gloves and other bits of clothing) Garry Bissell addresses a situation “where an object that is normally located, placed, and known is abruptly and unintentionally severed from these corporeal bonds and knowledges that serve to maintain these often practical and sometimes meaningful networks of proximate and distantiated objects”.<sup>4</sup> In many ways, I am writing of a similar situation in that I will be discussing something, in this case the body of a child, which was once there and

is now gone (while still being somewhere). However, this loss is not unintentional and everyone knows and agrees it is not unintentional. Its vanishing from public view was a purposeful decision, although who made this decision and why, in the first instance, this decision was made, has been forgotten; nonetheless, even in this absence of clarity there is the assumption of intentionality.

Another point follows from this observation. Bissell, as with many who have recently written about landscapes of ruination and the detritus of abandonment, suggest these are scenes and situations in which things slip beyond the circuits of value and signification which held them in place as objects of some determinant kind. Discovering lost items in their abject state has, then, the potential to allow us to become attuned to the vibrancy of matter,<sup>5</sup> its inherent and anterior indeterminacy, which both elides and is gathered into our projects of constituting objects from the stuff of the world. In this case, however, what remains of the body has vanished but not been lost. It has, therefore, not been “severed from the meaningful networks”; rather it dwells within these meaningful networks but in altered state. In fact, I would go so far as to suggest that its peculiar position of the “lost” body as something which is somewhere (and someone knows where it is) accords it a peculiar kind of meaningful status as one of a class of entities that are present yet withheld – an absence perhaps, but an absence that is not the product of carelessness but an absence constituted in the purposive act of withdrawing and withholding. In other words, as Zoe Crossland argues with reference to the bodies of the “disappeared” in Argentina,<sup>6</sup> absence is something which created and maintained, not inadvertently but through the purposive action of people who are trying to do or undo something in the maintenance of absence.<sup>7</sup> In other words, absences, to quote Severin Fowles, “perform labour”.<sup>8</sup> This may be the work of forgetting, but it may also be the work of remembrance, in as much as such absences may have the effect of “intensifying our emotional or cognitive engagement with that which is manifestly not present”.<sup>9</sup>

In truth, we are addressing a double-absence; for the remains of the dead perhaps inevitably suggests the absence of the living, just as the litter of everyday objects in abandoned English factories suggests the haunting absence of working lives,<sup>10</sup> or a never-used cradle and doll materialise the absences of babies stillborn.<sup>11</sup> The problem is, however, that such evocations of absence assume the presence of the body, or the lost glove, or the empty cradle, as a trace of that which was but is (and will be) no longer, thereby allowing for a theorisation of the immateriality of absence to be enfolded into the study of the materiality of presence.<sup>12</sup> We are, therefore, concerned with the “presenting of absence”<sup>13</sup> in the affective human encounter with the stuff of the world. Meyer and Woodthorpe, for example, write the following about museums and cemeteries:

In cemeteries, we are confronted with absence in the loss of people ... In museums, we are confronted with the absence of the ‘world out there’ and/or the ‘world that once was’. Both sites, hence, do something to and something with the absent – transforming, freezing, materialising, evoking, delineating, enacting, performing, and remembering the absent.<sup>14</sup>

In many ways, this chapter is concerned with the same processes by which absence is materialised, enacted and performed, as well as the complicity of the researcher in these processes. In this case, however, there is the curious problem of the absence of the materialisations by which absence of people once living is made present. It as if one came to a museum and sought out a skeleton displayed in a glass case, only to find that the glass case was empty save for a hook and bit of wire. In fact, this chapter concerns exactly such a situation where remains of a child were once on display in a museum and now have “disappeared”; except in this situation there is not even an empty glass case, nor is there even

the museum, at least not in the same place. This is not to deny that the “maintenance of absence” is a material process which somehow conjures the immanence of that which cannot be brought into presence. After all, even when the glass case has been removed, there are still the memories of those who visited the museum when the remains were still on display, as well as a small collection of documentary traces – old photographs and newspaper articles, hand-written lists, published reminiscences and the jottings of visiting anthropologists – which speak to the fact of a particular gathering of human bones having once being present and laid before the gaze of the paying public.

What wish to suggest, however, is that we cannot simply look past the fact that from most people’s perspective the body has vanished. It once was there and now is not (even as it is still somewhere). Nor can we simply resolve this problem by re-establishing its presence by undertaking a form of archival exhumation, a sort of historiographic disinterment in which the unseen body is once again brought into visibility thanks to the persistence of the researcher. Those of us who are concerned with political lives of dead bodies perhaps tend to focus over-much on these processes of unearthing in which the dead are made present in the (re)appearance of their mortal remains, either as they are undertaken by others, particularly in the exhumation of histories of mass violence, or by ourselves as we piece together biographies of bones through our researches. Additionally, we need to attend to the political lives of that which is doubly-absent.

### **The extermination of the Beothuk**

I have said that this chapter is about the double-absence of the dead in that it is about a body that has disappeared. In fact it is about a triple absence; for the body that has disappeared belongs to a people who have “vanished”. So the bodily remains, which are now no more on

public view, are a metonym for the more general absence of an entire people who once existed as a culture, distinct and entire unto itself. In this case, therefore, the question of our understanding of how the absence of human remains may haunt the public sphere intersects with the question of how the corpses of victims of campaigns of violence and dispossession come to inhabit contemporary articulations of collective identity, especially in circumstances where the act of violent dispossession is foundational to these very articulations. Again, there is some ambiguity here. The body in question is likely not that of an individual victim of violence. The person died as a child, but was buried in an orderly way fully in keeping with the tradition of his (or her) people, strongly suggesting that at the time of the burial these people were more or less going about life as usual. Yet, as will be discussed a bit later, against the backdrop of a history of violence and annihilation this body comes to evoke not just the absence of a living child but the absence of the child's family extended to encompass the entirety of his (or her) people.

The people in question are the Beothuk. The Beothuk were native to Newfoundland, a big island off the north-eastern coast of North America, which, along with the mainland territory of Labrador, is now a province of Canada. In truth we know little of the Beothuk. Their encounters with Europeans were few, mostly unfortunate and by and large they ran when they saw white people coming. Sometimes they left stuff behind to be described by those few Europeans who had a penchant for fashioning written descriptions. Some of this stuff endured to be discovered many years later by archaeologists. From these old written accounts and newer archaeological investigations we know the Beothuk hunted for caribou in the interior, gathered the eggs of seabirds and took salmon from the rivers and seals from the sea. They made their shelter in *mameteeks* fashioned from straight poles of spruce and overlaid by birch bark and deer skin.<sup>15</sup> They usually buried their dead in caves overlooking the sea, digging out hollows and overlaying the body, accompanied by grave goods, with

bark and then stones.<sup>16</sup> They smeared their bodies in red ochre, and so became known by the early European adventurers as the “Red Indians”, acquiring their proper name, albeit rendered in a profusion of different spellings, within the historical record only when a captive woman named Demasduit spoke the word to Reverend John Leigh in 1819.<sup>17</sup>

In the eighteenth century English planters and their servants settled the northern bays of Newfoundland. They fished for cod, made weirs in river mouths to net salmon and set traps in winter to catch fox and martin. There was trouble between the Beothuk and these settlers. How much trouble is hard to say. The northern bays of Newfoundland were at the very fringes of British imperial governance. People did not write things down. Most of what we know of the goings on during that time is a matter of rumour and distant recollection. There is, however, enough talk from that time to suggest that some settlers cruelly persecuted the native people, often on the pretext of seeking retribution for acts of thievery. There is the story of a man named Wells, who coming into sight of “canoe of Indians” shot upon them and saw three of four drop down injured. He followed the canoe ashore and “fired at them again” and so “increased their wounds” and left them to die.<sup>18</sup> There was an old man named Creazy who said to speak of “shooting at and wounding Indians with as much coolness and as little concern as [one] would speak of wounding a duck”.<sup>19</sup> There was the story of John Peyton Sr., an eminent planter and ancestor of a still prominent family, who followed the frozen river to a frozen lake to reclaim some stolen stuff. As he and his party approached the Beothuk fled, save for one cripple man who was found working one of Peyton’s traps into arrow-heads. Peyton took the trap and beat the man to death.<sup>20</sup>

So it went. The Beothuk died. Shot. Choked with tuberculosis. Starving as they lost access to the cliffs, cove and beaches where they had taken capelin, salmon and gull’s eggs. Still there is disagreement about how to understand their death. Some say it was an unfortunate accident of a sort, the Beothuk being a people few in number and eking out a



precarious existence on inhospitable island.<sup>21</sup> Others cite the stories of violence and suggest that this was genocide, if not by any organised design then certainly in disorganised intent.<sup>22</sup> Whatever the case the Beothuk became fewer until in 1829 a young woman, not yet 30 years old, named Shanawdithit died in a hospital in St. John's, the colony's principle port and capital city. The governor sent out expeditions to search for the remnants of her people in hopes to bring them safely into the compass of civilisation. No Beothuk were encountered and so they were declared extinct.<sup>23</sup>

### **Beothuk Bones**

The Beothuk may be gone but they are far from forgotten. Given that this is such a grim it is perhaps surprising that there is a lot of Beothuk stuff about. There are Beothuk novels which pick over the rumours and recollections of old acts of violence to craft vivid account of the cruel treatment and sad demise of a people. There is a whole bunch of Beothuk poems, which, similar to the novels, hymn their passing and mourn their absence in dolorous and portentous tones.<sup>24</sup> There are displays of Beothuk artefacts to be found in museums in St. John's, Grand Falls and Botwood, as well as the Beothuk Interpretation centre at Boyd's Cove. There is a feature film and at least two documentary films.<sup>25</sup> A few years ago a Beothuk musical entertained the tourists at Twillingate.<sup>26</sup> Finally there are the historians and archaeologists who dig through archives or into the earth to know the Beothuk better and publish these contributions to knowledge as articles and monographs.

There is, one could say, a whole culture of recursive revelation that is oriented towards excavating the scene of crime that is foundational to the becoming of Newfoundland as a settler society in which people, in the denial or annihilation of any contestation from those who were here before, came to think of themselves as the natives of the island.<sup>27</sup> It is a

curious and maybe perverse little formula which Terry Goldie caustically summarises as follows: “We had natives. We killed the natives. Now we are the natives”.<sup>28</sup> Only Goldie’s formula neglects the seeming compulsion to return and to keep digging. Nor does it give us purchase on the ambivalence that seems to inhere in this process of excavation, caught as it is between will to repress that which is unsettling and to draw it into expression and so to render intelligible within a public culture of commemoration. After all, it could be easier to forget about the whole thing, but instead we have novels, poems, paintings, archaeological digs and all this stuff.

Which brings us to bones. For some years now, my colleague Joost Fontein formulated a couple of catch-phrases which helped us think towards a more symmetrical account of the ways in which bones came to enter into and create certain effects within the public sphere. We wrote of the “emotive materiality” and “affective presence” of human remains.<sup>29</sup> The idea was not to deny the cultural significance of bones, but to suggest that to better understand this significance we had to account the thingness of bones, that which is both anterior to and animates their constitution as objects within domains of signification. This shifted the focus away from what bones mean to the unfolding relational processes, at once ideational and material, by which bones enter into meaning, while acknowledging that this entry is never complete and there always a remainder, sensed fleetingly in the moment of encounter, which exceeds and is insufficient to the constitution of the object. Within this formulation, unearthing is the process by which stuff come into being as human bones through a material hermeneutics of recognition which, amongst other things, reveals the trace of another, an absent presence who is imminent in but transcends the form and substance of that which remains.<sup>30</sup>

In Newfoundland there have been several such unearthings, in which a Beothuk grave has been discovered and some, or usually all, of the bones removed, transported out of the

wilderness and so brought into the public sphere, perhaps to be put on display, perhaps to be made available to anthropological or anatomical research, invariably, given the dark allure of history of extermination, being valued as a curious relic of an extinct people. The most famous of these “unearthings” is the looting of the grave of Demasduit (she from whom the Reverend Leigh learned the word Beothuk) and her murdered husband Nonosabasut, whose skulls were taken by William Epps Cormack in 1828, subsequently transported to the University Museum in Edinburgh and now reside in the collections of the National Museum of Scotland.<sup>31</sup> But there are others. In 1847 a boy was “gathering brushwood” on an uninhabited island near Burgeo, on the southern coast of Newfoundland. He saw a stick of wood poking out of a cliff of loose stone and, on pulling the wood free, the stones fell away to reveal a cavity beneath. At some point the Reverend Mr. Blackmore arrived and in that cavity he found the “bones of human being wrapped closely round with birch rinds”.<sup>32</sup> He undid this package and took away the skull and other bits of bone, as well as the grave goods: a bone spear, some glass beads and so on. He took them all the way to Montreal to present them, along with an account of their finding, to the museum of McGill University. In 1888 George Hodder of Twillingate explored a cave on Comfort Island, Bay of Exploits. He found the near complete skeleton of a man, covered with birch bark and buried beneath loose stones, along with a “lot of beads and bone ornaments, a lot of birds heads, a piece of iron pyrites, etc.”.<sup>33</sup> He sold the bones to the museum in St. John’s, where they came to be hung as a fully assembled skeleton in a glass case.

The particular unearthing that is the focus of this chapter happened in 1886 when some folks were out berry picking on an island lying at the entrance to Pilley's Tickle in Notre Dame Bay. Or perhaps it was a party of geologists surveying the island for copper ore.<sup>34</sup> No matter. The most published version of the story has it that it was berry-pickers, one of whom, “a boy”, took a step and pushed his foot through a “slight covering” of birch bark.

He tore “up the stones and dirt and found the body of a child”. He and the other berry pickers “carried away the head” of this dead child, as well as “some trinkets”<sup>35</sup> and brought them to Samuel Coffin, a local metal dealer, farmer, merchant and, it seems, amateur bone-collector. Mr. Coffin purchased the head and trinkets and then came to the island and inspected the body in situ. Someone must have then removed the body as well the things that lay with it – two little models of birch bark canoes, a wooden doll, a child-sized bow and arrows and a packet of neatly wrapped dried fish – and brought them to the museum in St. John's, although there is no record of Mr. Coffin having done so, and the *Twillingate Sun*, a near enough local newspaper, has it that a Jabez Tilley discovered the small body and brought it out Notre Dame Bay to exhibit it to the public in the capital.<sup>36</sup>

This then a story of unearthing – a rather uncertain tale of things, stuff, coming into presence as Beothuk bones and so entering the public domain as objects of value, to be sold and passed on, eventually coming to rest as a specimen within the collections of the museum in St. John's. The thing of it is, however, that these bones cannot be seen by you or me, or most anyone else and therein lies the difficulty for notions of affective presence and emotive materiality of human remains; for these very turns of phrase emphasise the process of coming into presence, of being literally and figuratively to hand. In this case, however, these bones have receded from presence yet are still not wholly absent. What we have then is, if you will, an affective absence or an emotive immateriality. What I wish to do for the remainder of this chapter is to consider this strange possibility of affective absence and the ways in which these things that are close by yet not to be seen are enfolded into yet trouble articulations of postcolonial identity. I will do so with specific reference to the body of the boy (for he has always been thought to be a boy) from Pilley's Tickle.

### **Rumours from Eastport**

For me this story of absence began with a rumour: a story told to me by someone, which had been told to him by someone else. In truth this story did not particularly mark me at the time. It was just a bit of gossip told to me because I was (and am) a researcher doing work on the ways in which the people of Newfoundland remember the native peoples who preceded them and how these memories are entangled with the stuff – human bones, bits of iron cold-hammered into arrowheads, middens of shells and so on – which are what remains of a people now said by many (but not all) to be extinct.

The rumour goes like this: Back in 2010 there was a literary festival in Eastport, a small town on the coast of Trinity Bay, Newfoundland. One of the events at the festival was a session entitled “Lost Voices.” Speaking at the session was an artist named Gerry Squires and three writers – Annemarie Beckel, Kevin Major and Bernice Morgan – all of whom had published novels that in one way or another dealt with the story of the Beothuk and the circumstances of their extinction. The artist was to discuss “the Spirit of the Beothuk”, a life-sized bronze statue fashioned according to his design and erected in a grove of trees near the Beothuk Interpretation Centre at Boyd’s Cove. The authors were to speak to “their various approaches to representing an important part of Newfoundland and Labrador history, and how each has attempted to capture the spirit of the Beothuk in prose”. This is, in fact, not the rumour. This is a matter of record.<sup>37</sup> The rumour has to do with what happened after.

Following the readings there was a question and answer session with the audience. One member of the audience got onto the subject of the partially mummified body of the “Beothuk baby”. He (or maybe she) remembered that when they were young they would go to the museum on Duckworth Street in St. John’s. There they would see, displayed in a glass case, the remains of a Beothuk child. Then the child’s body disappeared. It was no longer on display. She (or maybe he) wondered what happened to it. Where had it gone? Was it safe?

Was it lost? As luck would have it a senior member of the museum service of Newfoundland and Labrador was in the audience. He spoke up saying that the child was not lost, but had been long been withdrawn from display and was now in the safe-keeping of the Province, held in an appropriately secure and respectful way, along with the remains of other disinterred Beothuk. As the story was told to me, this off-the-cuff revelation was thought to be somewhat misjudged since, on the whole, the museum service did not (and do not) want to draw overmuch attention to the fact that they have Beothuk bones in their keeping.

There are a couple of interesting things about this little story. The first is the very fact that there was a session at a local literary festival devoted to artists and writers who were “seeking to capture the spirit of the Beothuk” in bronze or words. This is, as I described above, indicative of a more general cultural concern with remembering the Beothuk and mourning their passing; a concern which finds expression in poetry and prose, paintings, songs, displays of artefacts (with accompanying interpretive signage), heritage trails, documentary films, a big bronze statue and so on. There were three authors speaking at the festival, but in truth if one had gathered together everyone who had written of the tragic events that unfolded along the northern bays and in the interior of Newfoundland in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries you could have likely filled the room.

The second interesting feature of this story is the fact that someone remembered a body that was once on display and wondered out-loud what had happened to it. This is an instance of a whole series of stories, rumours and queries about lost or hidden Beothuk bones that I have come across while doing research in Newfoundland. In Point Leamington I was told the story of how some boys had found a skull while scrambling up an eroding bank to better see a crow’s nest. As the story goes, the boys, out of badness, threw the skull into the sea, but word got around and a man from a museum in Nova Scotia came and unearthed more bones, carrying away a crateful, which were never seen again. During the same visit I heard

from a man who claimed to have found a few Beothuk bones when he was a boy, part of rib cage he thought, but these were now lost. Maybe, he mused, his mother threw them out with the rest of his boyhood stuff, his hockey cards and so on. Elsewhere I was told of a man who as a boy had clambered up to a cave on an island in the Bay of Exploits. There he found a finger bone and, drilling a hole through it and, running a string through the hole, long wore it as pendant, until, years later, crippled with arthritis, he buried the bone, thinking it to be the bringer of his misfortune. There was another tale told from Twillingate, Notre Dame Bay, of the old village doctor who kept the skull of a Beothuk on his desk as a candy-dish. The skull has disappeared, but the rumour has that someone made away with it to bury it under cover of night in the local Anglican graveyard. Back in 2008 I interviewed a young man from Baytona, who said he knew of this old man who had found some Beothuk bones. The old man had left these bones lie and would not tell anyone of their whereabouts, feeling that, in the words that were quoted to me, “no good would come of that”. In the folklore archive in St. John’s, I unearthed a story recorded by a student-researcher back in the 1960s who was interviewing an old man named Ted Budgen. Mr. Bugden told of how when he was a boy he was playing baseball and found the skull of a man. It turns out the skull belonged to a Beothuk man and people from the museum in St. John’s came and took the skull and other bones and made them into a skeleton which, for a long time, hung in a glass case in the museum, so Mr. Bugden, when he was in town, would visit the bones he found when a boy. Later, as the story goes, there was a fire and the bones were lost.<sup>38</sup>

The best known of all these stories of bones found then lost is that has to do with the remains of Shanawdithit. Upon her death her skull was removed and studied by William Carson. He then shipped the skull to the Royal College of Physicians in London for further study.<sup>39</sup> The rest of her body was buried in the old Anglican graveyard on the south-side of St. John’s harbour. The graveyard and with it the whereabouts of Shanawdithit’s remains

were lost to the building of railway in 1903. A stone cairn with a metal plaque was erected somewhere near the spot where the graveyard may have been. “Near this spot”, the words on the plaque read, “is the burying place of Nancy Shanawdithit, very probably the last of the Beothics”.<sup>40</sup> The cairn and plaque have since disappeared to make way for the new sewage treatment plant. As for her skull, this was moved to the collections of the Royal College of Surgeons and then was lost, with much else besides, when a German bomb fell through the roof of the College Building and exploded.<sup>41</sup> In 2010 there was another brief flurry of media interest after a local historian, Bob Cuff, claimed that the graveyard where her headless body was buried had been rediscovered.<sup>42</sup> A letter to the editor by Corey Sharpe from Grand-Falls, made the plea that “if and when Shawnadithit's grave is located, she be returned to her place of abode” so as that she finally enjoys “the peace and respect that was stolen from her so many times over”.<sup>43</sup> So far the grave has not been relocated.

What is suggestive about the rumour from the literary festival at Eastport is there is some odd association between the public culture of commemoration by which the people of Newfoundland remember the “spirit of the Beothuk” and stories of missing bones. This suggestion of association is, indeed, not wholly speculative. Two of the authors who were reading at the “lost voices” event – Annemarie Beckel and Bernice Morgan – had both written novels which feature the story of Shanawdithit’s skull, its post-mortem removal and examination, its transport to London and its eventual loss. Morgan’s novel, *Cloud of Bone*, indulges in a speculative conclusion to the story in which the skull is not actually lost, but finds its way into the possession of an archaeologist, Judith Muir, who is traumatised by the murder of husband and her experience of excavating mass-graves in Rwanda and Yugoslavia. Judith takes the skull back to Newfoundland and gives it to Kyle, an old man haunted by the voice of the spirit of Shanawdithit. The novel ends with Kyle climbing over the south-side hills above St. John’s as snow falls. He walks until the snow becomes so dense and her voice



so compelling that they move beyond time and place into “a white cave that is filled with nothing but story”.<sup>44</sup> Together they stumble and fall into a ravine, still green from the running of a stream, and so the skull will be lost again, enfolded by the moss that “given time, will cover everything”.<sup>45</sup>

### **Archival excavations and discovery of absence**

I will admit that back when I first heard the rumour from the literary festival in Eastport I did not pay it much heed. I had become interested in the afterlife of Beothuk bodies, but my interest focussed mostly on the skulls of Nonosabasut and Demasduit, now held in storerooms of the National Museum of Scotland.<sup>46</sup>

A couple of years later, however, I was rummaging around the internet in search of stuff that may relate to the Beothuk and I came across a list of photographs held in the Royal Commonwealth Society Collections of the University of Cambridge.<sup>47</sup> The photographs had been taken by a man named Alfred Hugh Fisher in 1908. At the time Fisher was employed by the “visual instruction committee” of the colonial office. His job was to travel the extent of the British Empire in order to take photographs which would form the basis of series of lectures, illustrated with lantern slides, which would serve to cultivate an “imperial attitude” in the children of Britain and the British colonies.<sup>48</sup> So Fisher came to St. John’s and took photographs of small fishing boats at harbour and bigger schooners soon to be outward bound for the Labrador fishery, of “fish flakes”, the tables on which the spit cod was laid to dry, and women spreading the fish in the sun, of the stout stone-build Roman Catholic Cathedral and similarly solid Parliament House and of much else besides.

Amongst this collection is a photograph of the Beothuk child, taken at the colony’s museum, which was rather haphazardly housed in the post office building. In the photograph

the skeletal remains are laid upon a wooden board that is supported on either end by glass display cases. The skeleton seems nearly intact. The child lies on its side, facing, as it were, the camera. The right arm is folded across the body. The knees are drawn up to the chest, so it lies in foetal position. A loose covering of cloth or hide hangs about the bones, but seems to have been pulled aside to display the whole of body. Threads hang from the unravelled covering hang down from the board. The eyes sockets are, of course, hollow and there is rough triangular opening where once there would have been the nose. A few teeth remain.

The focus is upon the child's body laid out upon a board, but arrayed around one can see some of the other displays. To the left of the body, as one looks at the photograph, there is a gathering of glass jars, one filled with squid, another with small fish, and others still whose contents I cannot discern. On the wall above the jars there is a photograph of what seems to be three large fish, maybe tuna, hung up by their mouths and another photograph of even a larger fish, or perhaps a small cetacean, balanced on a wooden table. To the right of the body, the contents of cases are mostly obscured, the fall of light making the glass opaque, but it seems the case nearest the photographer, just under where the board holding the child's body rests, may contain a human cranium laid upon its side. At the back and to the right, maybe suspended from the ceiling, is a kayak with a figure, dark-skinned and clad as Eskimo, holding a paddle. Behind that, against the far wall, is a standing glass cabinet, which seems to house stuffed and mounted birds. Besides that is another standing cabinet, narrow and ornately carved on the top, in many ways reminiscent of cabinet that would house the works of grandfather clock. In that cabinet hangs another skeleton. This one, I would assume from its size, belonging to someone who died as an adult and is likely the skeleton unearthed by George Hodder in 1888.

So the part-mummified a Beothuk child once inhabited the public culture of Newfoundland as a museum exhibit. The museum's collection at that time was in a state of

some neglect. The post office was not so happy housing the glass cases of human bones, stuffed birds and stone tools, and consigned them to the building's attic and other out-of-the-way "nooks and corners".<sup>49</sup> In 1907 the museum's curator and champion, James P. Howley, complained that "the present condition of the museum and exhibits, is ... one that reflects little credit on us as a people of intelligence and advanced ideas" and, with the encroachments of the postal service, a museum that had once been "in good order, and compared favourably with any museum of in any town of similar size" was not "but a store room and a very poor one at that".<sup>50</sup> Nonetheless, poor storeroom as it was, the museum remained open to the public from 10 in the morning until 4 in the afternoon every day save Sunday, and, despite the dilapidated and disorderly state of the displays, visitors still came to look upon the curious collection of stuff held within glass cases and arrayed upon shelves. "During the summer months", reported Howley, "almost every tourist and traveller who comes to the city visits the museum".<sup>51</sup> It was not just visitors to the island who sought out the neglected displays. According to Howley (who, admittedly, was interested in promoting the museum as a public good and so worthy of being supported by public funds) "most of the "fishermen and their friends who semi-annually visit St. John's find their way to the museum" and "were keen at observing anything new, and take a deep interest in it, very frequently bringing specimens of some sort with them".<sup>52</sup>

Provoked by this photograph, I set about trying to reassemble the story of how the body of this child was present within the public culture of Newfoundland. This was, as I suggest above, an exercise in archival exhumation by which I attempted to render the body present once more, by drawing it back into visibility and, in doing so, move towards reconstruction the cultures of curiosity which made it a thing worth seeing. As it was, the work of exhumation proved difficult in that the records of the layout and displays of this sometimes troubled museum are highly partial. In an inventory of 1891 the remains of the

“mummified body of a Beothuk child” are listed as being displayed in “Case 13”, which was labelled “Beothuk inhumation” and, besides the body of the child and associated grave goods, included the skull, “thigh bone” and “upper arm bone” of an adult.<sup>53</sup> From the evidence of some scrawled notes on lined yellow paper, we know that Truman Michelson, of the American Bureau of Ethnology, visited the museum collection in 1923 and, although he is better known as a linguist, took a series of anthropometric measurements of Beothuk skulls, including the skull of the child which was noted to still be in “case number 13”.<sup>54</sup>

In 1934 there was another inventory of the museum’s collection under the auspices of the commission of government appointed by British Parliament. By then the former Dominion’s museum was in a precarious and neglected state and the inventory was for the purposes of dispersing the mineral specimens, stuffed birds and old bones to various buildings around the city. Amongst the litter of stuff are listed three full sets of “human bones” as well as “bones”, “bones etc.”, a “forearm of a child”, two “pieces of skull” and three entire “Beothuck skulls”. It is unclear if the body of the child was part of this collection of human remains, but if it was it was packed off and disappeared into storage.<sup>55</sup>

It is likely that the small body once was again on display beginning in 1957, when the museum, now the Provincial Museum of Newfoundland and Labrador, reopened in its new premises on Duckworth Street. In an article announcing the opening of the museum the new curator, Leo English, writes of a display of “a collection of relics of the vanished Beothuck”, boasting it to be “the only collection of its kind in the world”;<sup>56</sup> although he makes no reference of human remains. Another article announcing the opening does however include a photography of the large skeleton laid prone in a glass case. The caption reads: “One of the finest collection of Beothuck relics, including a skeleton and the manner in which these nomads was [sic] buried. The remains lie on a bed of birch rind.”<sup>57</sup> In the years that follow

there is passing mention of a display in various articles and publications. In piece in the *New Lands Magazine* of Autumn 1965, P. J. Wakeham writes that

In the Provincial Museum in St. John's, there is a section which contains the relics of a vanished race, the Beothuck Indians of Newfoundland. In a birch-lined coffin lies a complete skeleton of an exceptionally tall Red Man, and as far as I know the only one of its kind on exhibition in the world. In an adjacent coffin is the mummified body of a Beothuck child, and a fine display of artefacts ...<sup>58</sup>

It seems that sometimes between then and 1974 the display was rearranged and the museum, as whole, was once again in a dilapidated state. An article critical of the condition of the museum of the early 1970s describes a “grimy and uninviting foyer”, the floor littered with “large piles of broken plaster mixed with empty soft drink cans.” “Steep and winding stairs” lead to the museum proper, “a small space” in which “artefacts and paintings, scale models and replicas are exhibited in an attempt to illustrate aspects of the history of Newfoundland”. Amongst these is the Beothuk male skeleton, which had been “nicknamed Charlie” by the author’s children, “who considered him to be the highlight of a museum visit”. This has “been removed from his supine resting place” in the birch-bark lined coffin and, as a photograph attests, displayed as “a pile of old bones” on a shelf. No reference is made to the remains of the Beothuk child.<sup>59</sup> There is, however, a photograph of the child’s remains to be found in Bernard Fardy’s book *Demasduit: Native Newfoundland*,<sup>60</sup> taken by the author in 1976. As with the skeleton on the adult, the small body has been removed from its coffin and placed behind glass on a white shelf. The cloth covering the body seems to have been pulled up, although the bones of the leg, drawn up to the ribs, can still be seen, as well as the skull.

Arrayed by the head, so close as to be only touching, are the small deerskin shoes that were found in the grave back in 1886.

Nowadays, as the story from Eastport attests, the body is no longer on display. As best as I can ascertain, the remains of the Beothuk child were withdrawn from display sometime in the mid- to late-1970s, most likely in 1976 when the museum was temporarily closed for an extensive refurbishment and the whole-scale redesign of its displays.<sup>61</sup> The current museum is now housed in The Rooms, a purpose-built heritage centre constructed to resemble two salt box houses, complete with red peaked roofs; albeit two salt box houses connected by an atrium of tinted glass and built on such a scale that they almost dwarf the adjacent Catholic Cathedral. In the museum there are still displays of stuff, some of which has been inherited from the collections of Howley, once housed so precariously in what was the post office building. There are the stuffed birds and kayaks and arrowheads fashioned from chert and baskets sewn of bark. There are, however, no bones on view. The bones of the child, the skeleton of the adult in a glass case, the cranium fallen on its side, none of these are to be seen by the visitor.

### **Memories and the affective encounter with bones unseen**

There is nothing surprising in this. There has been a profound change in attitudes and policies concerning the display of human remains, and in particular the remains of indigenous peoples. The Vermillion Accord on Human Remains adopted by the World Archaeological Congress in 1989, advocates “the respect for the mortal remains of the dead” which “shall be accorded to all, irrespective of origin, race, religion, nationality, custom and tradition” and recognition and respect for “wishes of the local community and the relatives or the guardians of the dead”.<sup>62</sup> Museum services have variously engaged with the ambiguous notion of

“respect” and the requirement that any local communities of concern must be involved in decisions concerning the management, display and disposal of collections of human remains. In Newfoundland there is no written policy pertaining to how best to manage the collections of indigenous remains kept by the provincial government, but there is a clear sense that the public display of these remains is problematic and potentially disrespectful, both of the dead and of wishes and values of the living First Nations peoples of Newfoundland and Labrador. So they are withdrawn from view, held within the public domain, but discretely so.

This, for me, raises the interesting possibility of affective absence that haunts the near-contemporary scene of remembrance in Newfoundland. This possibility is situated within, and so expresses, a problematic ambivalence in our understanding of the emergence, or unearthing, of human remains. On the one hand, it could be argued that this unearthing, interpreted within a Freudian topology of repression, may be considered as an ethically engaged project of excavation that, by disclosing that which has been hidden, serves as a means of making manifest histories of violence and dispossession, which are immanent in present yet unspeakable within hegemonic articulations of identity and belonging. On the other hand, and contrariwise, it could equally be argued that the entry of indigenous bones into the public domain as skeletons held in glass cases does nothing to undo histories of violence, but in fact extends these histories into the present by asserting an interpretive proprietorship over the other; a proprietorship which is realised in the project of bringing bones into presence and so domesticating their excessive thingness and unsettling alterity as they are constituted and stabilised as curiosities and specimens through the work of measuring, cataloguing, labelling, displaying and looking.

The question of the emotive immateriality of human remains intersects therefore with the broader questions of memory, forgetting and the ways in which the violent acts of annihilation and dispossession which are, particularly in colonial settler societies,

foundational to the emergence of the postcolonial nation. One can track this intersection in some of the memories that people shared with me during a research visit in 2014 concerning their visiting the remains of the child, often when they were, in fact school children.<sup>63</sup>

In sifting through these recollections one thing that strikes me is how most felt no fear, or guilt, or at least remember this absence of feeling in their childhood selves. They recall their trips to the museum and seeing the child. Sheldon LeGow, who visited the museum in the 1950s and early 1960s, “fondly” recalled “two sets of human remains: one was an adult skeleton lying in a glass case not too far off the floor... The other was not far from that, it was of a child in the foetal position and it appeared to be mummified in that there was skin on it and it was intact” and Paul Collins, who visited as a child in the 1960s, described “the display as containing the body of a child resting in the foetal position and an adult skeleton laid out in full length on a bed of red-coloured bark”. Predominantly the people who shared their reminiscences with me remember their childhood selves as being “*fascinated*”, but not afraid or repelled. Geoff Tooton, who visited the museum on school trips and with boy scouts in the early 1960s, remembered that “those showcases with the human remains would have been the first exhibit to which, with boyhood vigour, we would have rushed”, and that his “impression would have been of *fascination*”. Kenneth Lawton, recalls that the display of Beothuk remains was “the most interesting and therefore most talked about exhibit among us children”. Sheldon LeGow also remembers that “as a kid” he was “*fascinated by*” the displays of Beothuk bones and that “they didn’t cause” him “any anxiety because they were human remains”. Rick Barnes, who also visited in the late 1950s and early 60s, said that he and his schoolmates “meant no disrespect as we stared, *fascinated*, at the brittle remains”. Susan Rockwood Khaladkar, who as a child visited the old museum “almost every other week”, also does not think that she and her childhood friends “were



shocked or horrified or even sympathetic. I think,” she reflected, “we were mainly just *fascinated*”.

So, more than anything, these remains, as a spectacle held with in a glass case *fascinated* and it seems that what fascinated above all else was the felt intimacy and proximity of the dead human. At least as described in these reflections, this intimacy was felt in a quality of familiarity, in the sense that they were someone like *us*, but someone exposed, naked in death before the gaze of the child-visitor. In the words of Jo-Ann Connelly, “the child's remains really struck a chord with me and made me feel a connection with the Beothuk that the text book did not”. For Rick Barnes the “presence” of the remains “drove home the idea that the Beothuk were very real and made of bone and flesh like us”. Gordon Power, described it thusly:

It was the seemingly petrified child folded up into itself that made the big impression, life lasting as it turns out. You see that person seemed to be naked to my untrained eyes? It seemed as if I could see wrinkled skin. The face was partially visible (perhaps completely and I was afraid to have given it further scrutiny) as were the legs and feet, etc.

For Ivan Morgan, the intimacy with mummified remains of dead child was enacted in a sympathetic touching of his own body. In his words: “I wasn't traumatized but I remember wondering about it for some time. And it clearly had an impression as I can still recall it. I remember sitting in our front yard looking at my hands and my knees and contemplating the bones underneath”.

What is marked, however, is the lack of remembered guilt felt by these children descended from the white settlers of Newfoundland. There is no “man named Wells” opening

the wounds of injured Beothuk with further shot and leaving them to die, or John Peyton Sr. clubbing man to death with an iron trap. There is, in this feeling of proximity and sympathetic identification, something of an undoing of histories of violence and dispassion, to be replaced by a curious mixture of voyeuristic fascination and a sombre sense of mourning as one would feel at family funeral. The one exception is Amanda Spurrell, who remembered her childhood self “feeling very sombre, as though I was attending a funeral or graveside” and also “feeling somewhat guilty that my ancestors may have something to do with their demise”.

But this is not to say that the stories people told me are devoid of any guilt or anxiety about the ambivalent politics that surround the display of the remains of an exterminated people. The point is that they describe these feelings as coming *after*, when they had become adults and looked back to remember a display that is now no longer there. Geoff Tooton describes this shift in sentiment in the context of the changing attitudes to the display of human remains described above:

It was probably during the early 1990s that my feelings started shifting about the Museum’s display of human remains when I first became aware of news reports about the growing worldwide controversy surrounding the repatriation and reburial of the remains of indigenous people. I gradually began to understand the argument the descendants were making that the remains of their ancestors had been exploited in most cases for archaeological science and, in my case, for fleeting boyhood sparks of fascination.

Paul Collins, who visited the museum as a child in the early 1970s, sound a similar note of regretting the fact that as a child he felt no regret:

I don't recall feeling any revulsion at the fact that these were human remains on display, nor do I really recall anything in particular being said about it in class. Sad to say, I think we all just look at them as we did the stuffed animals or the whale skeleton that were also on display.

Rick Barnes remembers that as child "I believed" the dead Beothuk "ruled over the museum and library from their polished wood and glass case on the upper floor; they were the pinnacle of all the words and things and ideas gathered there" but now as an adult he feels that "it's chilling now to think they were pulled from their resting place to be ogled by white-faced children on rainy day.." Similarly Ivan Morgan, finishes his reminiscence with some more recent history, recalling that "in the 1980's I worked with a local aboriginal group and was present at a meeting when several loudly complained to a government minister how their bones had been put on display like animals" and he remembered thinking: "Yup".

It is perhaps a coincidence that this intrusion of a history of violence, dispossession and annihilation is bound-up with affective *absence* of Beothuk remains. If their presence, their proximity, the fact that one could press one's face to the glass and looking into the eyeless face of a dead child, created the possibility of a felt intimacy, "a connection with the Beothuk" that went beyond and exceeded the histories narrated in text books, these reminiscences suggest that this proximity seemed to elide the possibility of a recognition of absence constituted in the very violence that is at the heart of Newfoundland becoming a settler society. In other words, the fact that these remains are lost or with-held, at once present somewhere yet absent, and so defer any possibility of the experience of likeness or a sympathetic sense of kinship or fellow-feeling (realised when we see the knee cap of a long dead child part shrouded in the deerskin legging of an adult and then touch our own to find them similar), is what opens a gap within which there is some acknowledgement that this is

*another* history, unassimilable into our own. The recognition of violence is, thereby, made possible by a Beothuk Indian not in a glass case.

## Bibliography

Anthony, J., 'Samuel Coffin', in W. Jackman, B. Warr & R. Bragg (eds), *Remembrances of Robert's Arm*, p. 9 (Corner Brook, Nfld.: Western Star Publishers, 1995)

Assiniwi, B., *The Beothuk Saga*, trans. by Wayne Grady (New York: Thomas Dunne, 1996)

Anstett, É & Dreyfus, J. M. (eds), *Destruction and Human Remains: Disposal and Concealment in Genocide and Mass Violence* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014)

Bartlett, S., 'Shanawdithit's graveyard found', *Evening Telegram*, 13 March 2010

(<http://www.thetelegram.com/Living/2010-03-13/article-1448239/Shawnadithit-graveyard-found/1>, accessed May 28 2015)

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

Bennett, J., *Vibrant matter: A political ecology of things* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009)

Bille, M., Hastrup, F., & Sørensen, T. F. (eds), *An anthropology of absence* (London: Springer, 2010)

Bissell, D., 'Inconsequential materialities: the movements of lost effects', *Space and Culture* 12 (2009), 95-115

Black, S. M., Marshall, I., & Kitchener, A., 2009, 'The skulls of Chief Nonosabasut and his wife Demasduit - Beothuk of Newfoundland', *International Journal of Osteoarchaeology* 19:1 (2009), 659-677.

- Bleyen, J., 2010, 'The materialities of absence after stillbirth: Historical perspectives', in J. Hockey, C., Komaromy, & K. Woodthorpe (eds), *The Matter of Death: Space, place and materiality*, pp. 69-84 (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010)
- Bradshaw, M., 'The history of the Newfoundland Museum: the past – the present', *The Trident* 4:1 (1977), 1, 3
- Budgel, R., 'The Beothuks and the Newfoundland mind', *Newfoundland and Labrador Studies* 8:1 (1992), 15-33.
- Cadow, J. E., 'Obligatory Beothuck poem', *Newfoundland Quarterly* 82 (1986), 11
- Cassman, V., Odegaard, N. & Powell, J. (eds), *Human remains: guide for museums and academic institutions* (Landham, MD: Rowman Altamira, 2006)
- Crossland, Z., 'Violent spaces: conflict over the reappearance of Argentina's disappeared', in C. M. Beck, W. G. Johnson & J. Schofield (eds.), *Matériel culture: the archaeology of twentieth-century conflict*, pp. 115-131 (London: Routledge, 2002)
- Crummey, M., *River Thieves* (Toronto: Anchor Canada, 2002)
- Dawe, T., 'In there somewhere', in E. H. King (ed), *Modern Newfoundland verse: poems from the Newfoundland Quarterly 1971-1987*, pp. 16-17 (St. John's, Nfld.: Harry Cuff, 1987)
- Delisle J. B., 'Nation, indigenization, the Beothuk: A Newfoundland myth of origin in Patrick Kavanagh's Gaff Topsails', *Studies in Canadian Literature/Études en Littérature Canadienne* 31:2 (2006), 23-45
- Duff, S., 'The Newfoundland Museum', *The Trident* 7 (1974), 6-7
- Edensor, T., 'The ghosts of industrial ruins: ordering and disordering memory in excessive space', *Environment and Planning D*, 23:6 (2005), 829-849
- English, L. E. F., 'The New Museum', *The Christmas Annual XIX* (1957), 20
- Fardy, B., *Demasduit: native Newfoundlander* (St. John's, Nfld., Creative Publishers, 1988)

Filippucci, P., Harries, J., Fontein, J. & Krmpotich, C., 'Encountering the past: unearthing remnants of humans in archaeology and anthropology', in D. Shankland (ed), *Archaeology and anthropology: past, present and future*, pp. 197-218 (Oxford: Berg, 2012)

Finding March March, directed by Ken Pitmann, Red Ochre Products in association with the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 1988.

Fowles, S., 'People without things', in M. Bille, F. Hastrup, & T. F. Sørensen (eds), *An anthropology of absence*, pp. 23-41 (London: Springer, 2010)

Goldie, T., *Fear and temptation: the image of the indigene in Canadian, Australian, and New Zealand literatures* (Montreal, Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1989)

Gushie, W., Interview with Ted Bugden, 1966 (Memorial University Folklore and Language Archive 66-020 TAPE F303/C343, 344, 345)

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

Holly, D., 'The Beothuk on the eve of their extinction', *Arctic Anthropology* 37:1 (2000), 79-95

Horwood, H., 'The people who were murdered for fun', *MacLean's Magazine*, October 10 1959, 27, 36, 38, 40, 42-43.

Howley, J. P. 'Catalogue of the specimens in the museum', 1891 (Provincial Archive of Newfoundland and Labrador, James Patrick Howley fonds, MG 105)

Howley, J. P., Letter to Hon. J Augustus Clift, minister of Agriculture and Mines, Jan 8 1907 (Provincial Archive of Newfoundland and Labrador, James Patrick Howley fonds, MG 105)

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

Jerkic, S., 1993, 'Burials and bones: A summary of burial patterns and human skeletal research in Newfoundland and Labrador', *Newfoundland and Labrador Studies*, 9:2 (1993): 213-234

- Krmpotich, C., Fontein, J., & Harries, J., 'The substance of bones: The emotive materiality and affective presence of human remains', *Journal of Material Culture*, 15:4 (2010), 371-384
- Lear, E., Inventory of items in the Newfoundland Museum, Sept 1 1934 (Provincial Archive of Newfoundland and Labrador, Newfoundland Museum Published Inventories, File MG 105.64)
- MacKinder, H. J., 'The teaching of geography from an imperial point of view, and the use which could and should be made of visual instruction', *The Geographical Teacher* 6:2 (1911), 76-86
- Major, K., *Blood Red Ochre* (Toronto: Doubleday Canada, 1989)
- Marshall, I., *Reports and letters by George Christopher Pulling relating to the Beothuk Indians of Newfoundland* (St. John's Nfld.: Breakwater, 1989)
- Márquez-Grant, N. & Fibiger, L. (eds), *The Routledge Handbook of Archaeological Human Remains and Legislation: An international guide to laws and practice in the excavation and treatment of archaeological human remains* (London, New York: Routledge, 2011)
- Marshall, I., *History and Ethnography of the Beothuk* (Montreal, Kingston: McGill-Queen's Press, 1996)
- Maunder, J., 'Museum Notes - The Newfoundland Museum: origins and development', 1991 (<http://www.therooms.ca/museum/mnotes2.asp>, accessed on 28 May 2015)
- Meyer, M., 'Placing and tracing absence: A material culture of the immaterial', *Journal of Material Culture*, 17:1 (2012), 103-110
- Michelson, T., 'Notes on the anthropometric measurements of Beothuk skulls', 1923 (National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Museum, NAA MS 1320)
- Morgan, B., 2008, *Cloud of Bone* (Toronto: Vintage Canada, 2008)
- Myer, W. E., 'Anthropological notes', *American Anthropologist*, 25:4 (1923), 585-588

O'Neill, P., 'Red Indian Lake', in C. Rose (ed), *Land, Sea and Time, Book Three*, p. 18 (St. John's, Nfld.: Breakwater, 2002)

Pastore, R., 'The collapse of the Beothuk world', *Acadensis* XIX:1 (1989), 52-71

Patterson, G., 'The Beothiks or Red Indians of Newfoundland', *Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada*, Sect 2 (1892), 123-171.

Pittman A., 'Shanadithit', in C. Rose (ed), *Land, Sea and Time, Book Three*, pp. 38-40 (St. John's, Nfld.: Breakwater, 2001)

Renshaw, L., 'Missing bodies near at hand: The dissonant memory and dormant graves of the Spanish Civil War', in M. Bille, F. Hastrup, & T. F. Sørensen (eds), *An anthropology of absence*, pp. 45-62 (London: Springer, 2010)

Robben, A., 'Governing the disappeared-living and the disappeared-dead: the violent pursuit of cultural sovereignty during authoritarian rule in Argentina', in F. Stepputat (ed), *Governing the dead: Sovereignty and the politics of dead bodies*, pp. 143-162 (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014)

Rowe, F., *Extinction: the Beothuks of Newfoundland* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1977)

Ryan, J. R., 'Visualizing imperial geography: Halford Mackinder and the Colonial Office Visual Instruction Committee, 1902-11', *Cultural Geographies* 1:2 (1994), 157-176.

Shanaditti: the last of the Beothucks, directed by K. Pittman, National Film Board of Canada, 1992

Sharpe, C., 'Shawnadithit deserves dignity', *Evening Telegram*, March 22 2010  
(<http://www.thetelegram.com/Letter-to-the-editor/2010-03-22/article-1458615/Births-1847>, accessed on 25 May 2015)

Stealing Mary, directed by Tim Wolochatiuk, Windup Filmworks, 2006

Stepputat, F., ed., *Governing the dead: sovereignty and the politics of dead bodies*. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014)



Stockley, E. C., 'Excerpts from Shanadithit: The Musical', in C. Rose (ed), *Land, Sea and Time, Book Three*, pp. 68-70 (St. John's, Nfld.: Breakwater, 2001)

Such, P., *Riverrun* (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin & Company, 1973)

Thompson, W. E., letter to J. Laws esq., 29 January 1953 (Centre of Newfoundland Studies, file Shanawdithit)

*Twillingate Sun*, November 20 1886, 4.

Verdery, K., *The political lives of dead bodies: Reburial and postsocialist change* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013)

Wakeham, P. J., 'The Story of the Beothuck Indians of Newfoundland', *New Lands Magazine*, 8, Autumn (1965) 19

Watts, E., 'Wanatoake', in C. Rose (ed), *Baffles of wind and tide*, p. 129 (St. John's, Nfld.: Breakwater, 1974)

Webber, G., *The Last of the Aborigines: A Poem in Four Cantos* (St. John's: The Morning Post, 1851)

Williams, H., 'Death warmed up the agency of bodies and bones in Early Anglo-Saxon cremation rites', *Journal of Material Culture*, 9:3 (2004), 263-291

---

<sup>1</sup> See F. Stepputat, ed., *Governing the dead: sovereignty and the politics of dead bodies*.

(Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014) and K. Verdery, *The political lives of dead bodies: Reburial and postsocialist change* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014).

<sup>2</sup> See Verdery, *The political lives of dead bodies*, pp. 27-29 and H. Williams, 'Death warmed up the agency of bodies and bones in Early Anglo-Saxon cremation rites', *Journal of Material Culture*, 9:3 (2004): 263-29.

---

<sup>3</sup> See L. Renshaw, 'Missing bodies near at hand: The dissonant memory and dormant graves of the Spanish Civil War', in M. Bille, F. Hastrup, & T. F. Sørensen (eds), *An anthropology of absence*, pp. 45-62 (London: Springer, 2010).

<sup>4</sup> Bissell, D., 'Inconsequential materialities: the movements of lost effects', *Space and Culture* 12 (2009), 95-115 at p. 98.

<sup>5</sup> J. Bennett, *Vibrant matter: A political ecology of things* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009).

<sup>6</sup> Z. Crossland, 'Violent spaces: conflict over the reappearance of Argentina's disappeared', in C. M. Beck, W. G. Johnson & J. Schofield (eds.), *Matériel culture: the archaeology of twentieth-century conflict*, pp. 115-131 (London: Routledge, 2002) at pp. 119-123.

<sup>7</sup> See É Anstett & J. M. Dreyfus, *Destruction and Human Remains: Disposal and Concealment in Genocide and Mass Violence* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014) and A. Robben, 'Governing the disappeared-living and the disappeared-dead: the violent pursuit of cultural sovereignty during authoritarian rule in Argentina', in F. Steeputat (ed), *Governing the dead: Sovereignty and the politics of dead bodies*, pp. 143-162 (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014).

<sup>8</sup> S. Fowles, 'People without things', in M. Bille, F. Hastrup, & T. F. Sørensen (eds), *An anthropology of absence*, pp. 23-41 (London: Springer, 2014) at p. 27.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> T. Edensor, 'The ghosts of industrial ruins: ordering and disordering memory in excessive space', *Environment and Planning D*, 23:6 (2005), 829-849.

<sup>11</sup> J. Bleyen, 'The materialities of absence after stillbirth: Historical perspectives', in J. Hockey, C., Komaromy, & K. Woodthorpe (eds), *The Matter of Death: Space, place and materiality*, pp. 69-84 (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010) at pp. 80-82.

---

<sup>12</sup> See M. Bille, F. Hastrup, & T. F. Sørensen (eds), *An anthropology of absence* (London: Springer, 2010) and M. Meyer, 'Placing and tracing absence: A material culture of the immaterial', *Journal of Material Culture*, 17:1 (2012), 103-110.

<sup>13</sup> Meyer 'Placing and tracing absence', p. 105.

<sup>14</sup> M. Meyer, & K. Woodthorpe, 'The material presence of absence: A dialogue between museums and cemeteries,, *Sociological Research Online*, 13:5 (2008), quoted in Meyer 'Placing and tracing absence', p. 104.

<sup>15</sup> I. Marshall, *History and Ethnography of the Beothuk* (Montreal, Kingston: McGill-Queen's Press, 1996), pp. 223-226.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, p. 398-410. S. Jerkic, 'Burials and bones: A summary of burial patterns and human skeletal research in Newfoundland and Labrador', *Newfoundland and Labrador Studies*, 9:2 (1993), 213-234.

<sup>17</sup> Marshall *History and Ethnography of the Beothuk*, pp. 434-435.

<sup>18</sup> I. Marshall, *Reports and letters by George Christopher Pulling relating to the Beothuk Indians of Newfoundland* (St. John's Nfld.: Breakwater, 1989), p. 138.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, p. 134.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, p. 137.

<sup>21</sup> See D. Holly, 'The Beothuk on the eve of their extinction', *Arctic Anthropology* 37:1 (2000), 79-95, R. Pastore, 'The collapse of the Beothuk world', *Acadensis* XIX:1 (1989), 52-71 and F. Rowe, *Extinction: the Beothuks of Newfoundland* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1977)

<sup>22</sup> H. Horwood, 'The people who were murdered for fun', *MacLean's Magazine*, October 10 1959, 27, 36, 38, 40, 42-43.

<sup>23</sup> J. P. Howley, *The Beothucks or Red Indians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1915), pp. 231-232.

---

<sup>24</sup> Amongst the novels which relate a fictionalised account of the story of the Beothuk and their demise are *Ottawah, the Last Chief of the Red Indians of Newfoundland* (1848), Peter Such's, *Riverrun* (1973), Kevin Major's *Blood Red Ochre* (1989), Anne-Marie Beckel's *All Gone Widdun* (1999), Michael Crummey's *River Thieves* (2001), Bernard Assiniwi's *The Beothuk Saga* (1996) and Bernice Morgan's *Cloud of Bone* (2008). This list is certainly not exhaustive. There is even more poetry. So much that James Cadnow entitled one of his verses the "Obligatory Beothuk Poem" (2001). It begins with the lines "all the tortured white artists in the world couldn't put you back together again". Amongst these are George Webber's "The last of aborigines" (1851), Al Pittman's "Shanadithit" (2001), Tom Dawe's "In there somewhere" (1987) and Enos Watts' "Wanatoake" (1974).

<sup>25</sup> The feature film is "Finding Mary March" (1989), directed by Ken Pittman. Pittman also directed the documentary "Shanaditti: the last of the Beothucks" (1982). The other documentary is "Stealing Mary" (2006), directed by Tim Wolochatiuk.

<sup>26</sup> The musical referred to is entitled "Shanadithit: the Musical". Both the words and music are by Eleanor Cameron-Stockley. An excerpt of the libretto has been published in volume three, of *Land, Sea and Time* (2001, 69-70)

<sup>27</sup> See R. Budgel, 'The Beothuks and the Newfoundland mind', *Newfoundland and Labrador Studies* 8:1 (1992), 15-33 and J. B. Delisle, 'Nation, indigenization, the Beothuk: A Newfoundland myth of origin in Patrick Kavanagh's Gaff Topsails', *Studies in Canadian Literature/Études en Littérature Canadienne* 31:2 (2006), 23-45.

<sup>28</sup> T. Goldie, *Fear and temptation: the image of the indigene in Canadian, Australian, and New Zealand literatures* (Montreal, Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1989), p. 157.

---

<sup>29</sup> C. Krmpotich, J. Fontein & J. Harries, 'The substance of bones: The emotive materiality and affective presence of human remains', *Journal of Material Culture*, 15:4 (2010), 371-384.

<sup>30</sup> P. Filippucci, J. Harries, J. Fontein & C. Krmpotich, 'Encountering the past: unearthing remnants of humans in archaeology and anthropology', in D. Shankland (ed), *Archaeology and anthropology: past, present and future*, pp. 197-218 (Oxford: Berg, 2012).

<sup>31</sup> Howley, *The Beothucks or Red Indians*, pp. 192-195, Marshall *History and Ethnography of the Beothuk*, pp. 398-388 and S. M. Black, I. Marshall, I., & A. Kitchener, 2009, 'The skulls of Chief Nonosabasut and his wife Demasduit - Beothuk of Newfoundland', *International Journal of Osteoarchaeology* 19:1 (2009), 659-677, pp. 660-661.

<sup>32</sup> Patterson, G., 'The Beothiks or Red Indians of Newfoundland', *Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada*, Sect 2 (1892), 123-171, p. 157.

<sup>33</sup> Howley, *The Beothucks or Red Indians*, p. 333.

<sup>34</sup> The berry picking story is narrated by Howley, who says he heard it from Mr. Coffin himself (1915, 331). It is repeated in Marshall's *History and Ethnography of the Beothuk*. However, in the entry about Samuel Coffin in a local history pamphlet the find is credited to two geologists associated with Coffin's copper-mining interests (Anthony 1995).

<sup>35</sup> Howley, *The Beothucks or Red Indians*, p. 331.

<sup>36</sup> *Twillingate Sun*, November 20 1886, 4.

<sup>37</sup> The details of the presentations at the "Lost Voices" session of the 2010 "Winterset in the Summer" literary festival can be found at

<http://wintersetinsummer.ca/main/pastfestivals.php?year=2010>, accessed on 26 May 2015.

<sup>38</sup> W. Gushie, W., Interview with Ted Bugden, 1966 (Memorial University Folklore and Language Archive 66-020 TAPE F303/C343, 344, 345).

<sup>39</sup> Marshall *History and Ethnography of the Beothuk*, p. 220.

---

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, p 221.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, p 220. The question as to whether the skull of Shanawdithit has been destroyed or lost seems, however, a little more ambiguous than Marshall suggests. In a letter of 1953, W. E. Thompson, clerk of the Museum of the College of Surgeons of England, notes that much of the collection of the Royal College of Physicians had been transferred into their keeping in 1938, and much of that collection had been destroyed in 1941; however, no inventory of the collection was made after its transfer. Accordingly, in the words of Thompson's letter, "it cannot be said for certain that the skull did not come with" the other material from the Royal College of Physicians, "but there is no evidence" to indicate that it did. It is, in effect, lost. Maybe destroyed. Maybe not. Its whereabouts are unknown.

<sup>42</sup> S. Bartlett, 'Shanawdithit's graveyard found', *Evening Telegram*, 13 March 2010 (<http://www.thetelegram.com/Living/2010-03-13/article-1448239/Shawnadithit-graveyard-found/1>, accessed May 28 2015).

<sup>43</sup> C. Sharpe, C., 'Shawnadithit deserves dignity', *Evening Telegram*, March 22 2010 (<http://www.thetelegram.com/Letter-to-the-editor/2010-03-22/article-1458615/Births-1847>, accessed on 25 May 2015).

<sup>44</sup> B. Morgan, 2008, *Cloud of Bone* (Toronto: Vintage Canada, 2008), p. 442.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> J. Harries, 'Of bleeding skulls and the postcolonial uncanny: Bones and the presence of Nonosabasut and Demasduit', *Journal of Material Culture*, 15:4 (2010), 403-421.

<sup>47</sup> Cambridge University Library: Royal Commonwealth Society Library, Fisher photograph collection, GBR/0115/Fisher, Album 12.

<sup>48</sup> See H. J. MacKinder, H. J., 'The teaching of geography from an imperial point of view, and the use which could and should be made of visual instruction', *The Geographical Teacher* 6:2 (1911), 76-86 and J. R. Ryan, 'Visualizing imperial geography: Halford Mackinder and

---

the Colonial Office Visual Instruction Committee, 1902-11', *Cultural Geographies* 1:2 (1994), 157-176.

<sup>49</sup> J. P. Howley, Letter to Hon. J Augustus Clift, minister of Agriculture and Mines, Jan 8 1907 (Provincial Archive of Newfoundland and Labrador, James Patrick Howley fonds, MG 105), p. 2.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> J. P. Howley, 'Catalogue of the specimens in the museum', 1891 (Provincial Archive of Newfoundland and Labrador, James Patrick Howley fonds, MG 105), p. 75.

<sup>54</sup> T. Michelson, 'Notes on the anthropometric measurements of Beothuk skulls', 1923 (National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Museum, NAA MS 1320) and W. E. Myer, 'Anthropological notes', *American Anthropologist*, 25:4 (1923), 585-588, p. 587.

<sup>55</sup> E. Lear, E., Inventory of items in the Newfoundland Museum, Sept 1 1934 (Provincial Archive of Newfoundland and Labrador, Newfoundland Museum Published Inventories, File MG 105.64).

<sup>56</sup> L. E. F. English, 'The New Museum', *The Christmas Annual* XIX (1957), 20.

<sup>57</sup> *Daily News*, St. John's Newfoundland, 22 Jan, 1957, p. 19. A good deal of that day's paper is about the museum, which had been re-opened by the Lieutenant Governor the day before.

<sup>58</sup> P. J. Wakeham, 'The Story of the Beothuck Indians of Newfoundland', *New Lands Magazine*, 8, Autumn (1965), 19.

<sup>59</sup> S. Duff, 'The Newfoundland Museum', *The Trident* 7 (1974), 6-7.

<sup>60</sup> B. Fardy, *Demasduit: native Newfoundlander* (St. John's, Nfld., Creative Publishers, 1988), p. 13.

---

<sup>61</sup> M. Bradshaw, 'The history of the Newfoundland Museum: the past – the present', *The Trident* 4:1 (1977), 1, 3 and J. Maunder, 'Museum Notes - The Newfoundland Museum: origins and development', 1991 (<http://www.therooms.ca/museum/mnotes2.asp>, accessed on 28 May 2015).

<sup>62</sup> The text of the Vermillion Accord can be found on the website of the World Archaeological Congress: [http://www.worldarchaeologicalcongress.org/site/about\\_ethi.php](http://www.worldarchaeologicalcongress.org/site/about_ethi.php), accessed May 28 2015. For further discussions of the policy pertaining to the excavation and display of human remains see: N. Márquez-Grant & L. Fibiger (eds), *The Routledge Handbook of Archaeological Human Remains and Legislation: An international guide to laws and practice in the excavation and treatment of archaeological human remains* (London, New York: Routledge, 2011) and V. Cassman, N. Odegaard & J. Powell (eds), *Human remains: guide for museums and academic institutions* (Landham, MD: Rowman Altamira, 2006).

<sup>63</sup> In all I collected 26 reminiscences in all. 24 as written accounts which were emailed to me, one as a telephone interview and one as a face-to-face interview. I would like to thank CBC Radio in St. John's and the staff of the *Evening Telegram* (see: <http://www.thetelegram.com/News/Local/2014-05-26/article-3738772/Seeking-memories-of-Beothuk-remains-exhibited-in-museum/1>) for publicising my search for memories and for all who responded to the call.