

## Patrick Warner. *There, there.*

Ruth Roach Pierson

---

Volume 22, numéro 2, autumn 2007

URI : [https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/nflds22\\_2rv11](https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/nflds22_2rv11)

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

---

### Éditeur(s)

Faculty of Arts, Memorial University

### ISSN

0823-1737 (imprimé)

1715-1430 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

---

### Citer ce compte rendu

Pierson, R. R. (2007). Compte rendu de [Patrick Warner. *There, there.*] *Newfoundland Studies*, 22(2), 572–575.

kopf, and other survivors who ended up in Newfoundland and Labrador, giving the immense tragedy a human face and dimension.

The last two sections of the text focus on the Jewish community and the relationship between Jews and their non-Jewish neighbours. Here we read about synagogues, community leaders and organizations, cemeteries, etc, mostly in St. John's but also in other locations such as Stephenville and Corner Brook.

This is an excellent preliminary text. As McGrath herself states, she had envisioned a pamphlet with some basic information on the Jews of the province. But the book grew to its present size and scope. The flaws of the book are therefore understandable and forgivable: for example, there are errors in the bibliographic information; the section on post-World War II contains more information about the period before the war than after; and, frustratingly, there is no index — it is therefore difficult to find specific information. But the greatest problem is the lack of numbers. Although the focus is on archival material and individual stories, demographic statistics would provide a perspective *vis-à-vis* the non-Jewish population of the province and a comparison with the rest of Canada. What is needed now is more fieldwork, more research, and a comprehensive text. The last two parts of McGrath's book will be extremely useful for anyone interested in further research, either on a personal or societal level: an annotated listing of Jewish family names for Newfoundland and Labrador will help people interested in tracing their family history; and the extensive bibliography is a guide to further research. Let us hope that graduate students take up the challenge and delve further into the history of this area.

Sonia Zylberberg  
Concordia University

Patrick Warner. *There, there*. Montréal: Signal Editions, 2005, ISBN 1-55065-200-1

THE EVOCATIVE TITLE of Patrick Warner's splendid new volume calls to mind the famous sentence with which Gertrude Stein dismissed Oakland, her childhood home. Initially, only one of the poems in this, Warner's second collection, carried a Steinian resonance for me — "The Howard Johnson," which concludes the book. Not Steinian in syntax or diction, but in the recognition, as demonstrated in "There is no there there," of the formlessness, the vapidness of so much of contemporary society. Stein fingered the suburb; Warner, the chain hotel. Stein expressed this recognition with her characteristic repetitiveness, her playing on the multiple meanings of a single word; Warner, more discursively with lines like "Loneliness pours from the air conditioner," and "Hours spent here amount to nothing," the "here" a non-place "where the weight of evidence leans / toward one's never having been" (64).

The second echo I heard in Warner's title was of the soothing words a mother utters to calm a distraught child. And, indeed, I encountered "There, there" used in exactly that way in the final lines of Warner's marvelous "The Pig Narrative," when the son remembers his mother comforting him:

*There, there, you said. There, there, my pet.  
Never repeat yourself. That's my advice. (56)*

On second reading, I also heard a kind of Steinian reverberation in the irony of "Never repeat yourself."

The words "There, there" are definitely polyvalent. In "Something Better," the only poem in the book that struck me as not completely convincing, the "there" signifies not only the future, that which lies just beyond "The here and now," but also physical positionings in a sexual context:

... the place where I and cloud and naked girl  
map out with cries of there and there.

....

There.

And there. (46)

Why does this poem fail to convince me completely? A reflective poem, it sets out not only to examine the ephemerality of the moment but also to argue the impossibility of "The present moment" being experienced without being spoiled by the sense that "what comes next is always better than what was" (45). In addition to this sentiment's youthfulness (for there comes a time, as one ages, after which one is fully aware that the best in many instances has already occurred), the proposition belies Warner's own highly developed talent, attested to by so many of his poems, for living in the moment, for attending with passionate precision to what confronts and engages him in the "here and now."

To my mind, the special power of Warner's poems derives in some large measure from his ability to enter and inhabit an action, a sight, a process so completely as to make it immediate to his reader as well. Consider the truly masterful "The Bacon Company of Ireland," in which his unflinching look at the slaughtering of pigs captures the cruelty ("don't we know / that they are as intelligent as us?") and at the same time transforms it into opera, ballet, modern dance, domestic drama (30-31).

And consider also the delightful tripartite "Capelin," replete with, *de rigueur*, a married couple of "Come-from-aways" (16) and a playful jibe at the anthropologists who study the quaint mores of outport Newfoundlanders:

574 *Reviews*

Now my friend takes a mouthful of beer  
and sprays the air above the dance floor.  
An anthropologist will see in this a signal. (17)

But what truly dazzled me in this poem is the explosion of similes in Part III (Warner himself comments on their profusion) that go beyond mimicking to incarnate the very thing he's describing, the explosion of a capelin run on the shore:

The beach rocks crackle, and every assault  
brings another simile: a million castanets,  
home-fries dumped in a deep-fat fryer,  
wind-up dentures chattering on a table top,  
a wound flushed out with hydrogen peroxide. (18)

For Patrick Warner, there is a great deal of “thereness” here and there — in, for instance, “Water Street West,” “Back of the Brow,” “Freshwater Bay,” and “Dusk, Near the Cape Spear Road,” the four parts that make up the long “Hike” (38-39). In this poem, Warner evokes the multitudinous “there” with olfactory and tactile exactitude by means of his penchant for monosyllabic words and spondaic and trochaic feet, as in

The hot pine funk knocked down by sea breeze,  
....  
Bleached white plastic bottle buoys. (38)

And like a true Newfoundlander, Warner has a particularly sharp eye and ear for the world of water, pond as well as sea. See and hear how he zeroes in with such perfection of detail and analog on the casting of a line toward the edge of a pond in “Faux Perch Plug-Bait”:

He looks toward the target,  
somewhere out there,  
past the water lily pallets  
and fly-speckled periscopes.  
....  
He watches the billowing line fall,  
soft as an eyelash,  
and the slack line corkscrew  
across the surface. (23)

And there you have it: Warner's gift for casting a spell with the sure-wristedness of an experienced fisherman.

He may see himself or believe others see him as oafish, lumbering, bear-like (60), but if there is any bearishness to the poetry of Patrick Warner, it is of the delicately eating wild berries sort, for this is a bear that writes poems eschewing the grandiose in order to attend to the small gritty or exquisite moment, poems like “November Imagines April and Beyond”:

Mornings, when the desire to do  
just to make things bearable  
is miraculously absent  
a green leaf will unfurl

through a pause in mid-phrase, in mid-  
sentence, mid-way through the spiel  
that begins each day with waking  
and ends with sleep. (50)

“Soft as an eyelash,” indeed.

Ruth Roach Pierson  
Professor Emerita OISE/UT