

**Paul Rowe. *The Silent Time.***

**Sharon Pajka-West**

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Francis Colbert. Uncle Val is an homage to a style of storytelling rather than a comic persona — it fits into a Newfoundland oral culture rather than seeming to be a piece of theater that has been adapted for radio.

Just as Uncle Mose spoke of a way of life in a fictional outpost that was fast changing, so Uncle Val speaks of suburban Newfoundland that was changing. I remember the Peckford years in St. John's. I can still feel the promise and skepticism that oil wealth was just around the corner and big changes were soon to happen. And as a young man from Gander, I too had a detachment from "town." Listening to the show again — I had heard some of the broadcasts when they were new — reminded me of the changes in the city and province over the last 20 years. The show seems of its time, but does not seem dated.

Jeff A. Webb  
Memorial University

Paul Rowe. *The Silent Time*. St. John's: Killick Press, 2007, ISBN 1897174179.

*THE SILENT TIME*, BY PAUL ROWE, is a charming novel that introduces readers to Leona Walsh, a young woman raised in Three Brooks, Newfoundland in the early 1900s. At 17 years old, Leona endures more than many contemporary readers can imagine. For as long as she remembers, her mother has been dead and she has been raised and tormented by her drunken father and pesky brothers. Although she cleans, gardens, and cooks for her family, she must forfeit her place at the table for the unruly men all while being taunted and teased. It is actually a stuck teapot lid that leads her to her freedom and her future husband, Paddy Merrigan. Described as a "short, stout, impish" man, Paddy has a knack for fixing teapot lids, among other things, and possesses the quality of not giving up on anyone, including an old cat Leona considers dead. After bringing the cat back to life, Paddy and Leona have a brief courtship where Paddy promises to take her away to Knock Harbour on the island of Cape Shore. Once there, he promises that neither the shore, nor he will ever hurt her.

Within days of the proposal, Leona is treated as a princess by her new "sisters" and marries Paddy in a church wedding that is held inside of a school house. During the ceremony she promises to be his wife and she also promises her future children that they, unlike her, will be educated. By 1904, the happily married couple is raising three young sons when a shipwreck changes their lives forever. Leona, convinced that she can quickly and secretly board the wrecked ship and collect goods for their home, escapes the sinking schooner with a cardboard case and a small seaman's chest. The "lucky find" opens Pandora's Box which ends the few happy years they have enjoyed. This time, Paddy's ability to heal and never give up on anyone does not save his family. Leona is left alone and under investigation by Arthur Duke, the Deputy Colonial Secretary to the Prime Minister of Newfoundland.

Twenty years pass and a politician campaigning for election visits Knock Harbour and learns of a deaf child named Dulcie. Her existence is as much of a mystery as her mother's. After living secluded as a "madwoman" from neighbors and becoming a bootlegger, Leona's only companionship was her daughter. Dulcie's father is considered another one of Leona's secrets. The politician, William Cantwell, having his own regrets and secrets, makes young Dulcie's education his highest priority. However, he must first convince Leona to allow her daughter to attend the School for the Deaf in Halifax, Nova Scotia, where she would live for ten months of the year. The politician must also convince the government to pay for such an expense while Arthur Duke, still angry with Leona regarding the shipwreck's missing treasure, creates obstacles.

Although Dulcie is not the main character, her storyline guides the entire novel, including the early connection between Leona and her daughter and the way they communicate through home signs. Once Dulcie leaves for Halifax and learns to read and write, the stamps which Leona affixes to her letters reveal other mysteries. Nevertheless, the secrecy of Leona's past and the distance do not interfere with the mother and daughter bond. Leona takes comfort in honouring the promise she made on her wedding day; her daughter is being educated.

Dulcie is a believable character who loves Knock Harbour but acknowledges that Halifax, with friends and teachers with whom she can easily communicate, has become her new home. In the end, Leona's secrets are revealed but it is Dulcie who ultimately discovers a means to her own future.

Newfoundland's financial ordeals are also apparent throughout the novel. By the 1930s, the nation is about to surrender its independence to resolve such problems. While it begins to enter its own silent time, Leona and Dulcie's period of silence has ended.

Rowe tackles poignant issues concerning the education of deaf children. The speech teacher and Principal Batstone were both educated at the Braidwood Institute which supported oral methods of education, while Batstone's wife, Claire, is an advocate of the use of sign language and having a deaf teacher on staff. She reads books by the Abbé de L'Epeé, an advocate for sign language and even believes in Dulcie's potential to become the school's first deaf teacher once she has finished high school and has attended "Gaudillet College in Boston." Rowe clearly researched the history of deaf people and deaf education; however, while he incorporates historical references such as the Braidwood Institute and the Abbé de L'Epeé, a Deaf Education pioneer known as "the father of the deaf," I am unsure why Rowe includes the fictitious "Gaudillet College in Boston" instead of the actual Gallaudet College in Washington, DC which was established in 1864 and would have accepted deaf women as students during Dulcie's time.

This rich, multilayered story has a strong sense of place in Newfoundland and a compelling plot that reads much like a play. Rowe excels at creating dynamic and believable characters with intriguing relationships. As a reader, I became emotion-

ally invested in the outcomes of each character. While this is the author's debut novel, it is certainly one of the finest works that I have read.

Sharon Pajka-West  
Gallaudet University

Stuart Pierson. *Hard-Headed and Big-Hearted: Writing Newfoundland*. Edited by Stand Dragland. St. John's: Pennywell Books, 2006, ISBN 1-8944-6391-9

STUART PIERSON WAS NOT, at first glance, a charismatic teacher. He spoke quietly, avoided theatrical gestures, and rarely made eye contact. He wore the same outfit to every class — dark jeans, a turtle neck of some bland colour, black shoes — and he almost always brought a cup of the abysmal coffee that the Arts cafeteria brewed. He did not encourage conversation outside of class: though his door was often open, he did not welcome students to drop by for chit-chat. He insisted on calling us only by our surnames. He was not an excellent lecturer: he was neither a fluid nor an animated speaker; he was apt to become bogged down in minutiae; and his lectures could be far from edifying. I remember one lecture on Gibbon that, as I discovered when I got home, he had cribbed almost entirely from the introduction to the Penguin edition of *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. When asked a question or pausing to consider a point, he often touched his glasses in a manner that suggested shyness. He taught two generations of undergraduate students, but only a handful knew of his large life outside the classroom. Most of his students (myself included) were part of the first post-Smallwood generation, caught between outport culture and suburban St. John's. We were only dimly aware that there was an arts community, let alone that Stuart was a major figure in it.

But Stuart Pierson was the best teacher I ever had. He inspired me to become a historian, and not a week goes by that I don't think of him. For those of us fortunate enough to take one of his seminars, Stuart opened up not only a new world of intellectual history, but also new ways of thinking. He was, as Stan Dragland explains in *Hard-Headed and Big-Hearted*, a tremendous intellectual who had mastered the Western canon. But, unlike many of his colleagues, he was not a pedagogue. He may have towered over us intellectually, but he never tried to intimidate or belittle his students. In a Department known for its nastiness, Stuart's intellectual generosity stood out. He offered a type of meta-knowledge (a knowledge about knowledge, if you will), rather than a demonstration of how much he himself knew. For Stuart, history was about questions rather than answers. He is the only professor I have met who was willing to admit publicly that he did not know something important. Not only did he ask students open-ended questions, but he actually listened to their answers. He may have been friends with Gerald Squires, the Pratts, and numerous other cultural luminaries but, in the classroom, he was *our* Pierson.