Newfoundland and Labrador Studies

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Anatomy of a Newfoundland Poetic Monologue

James E. Candow

Volume 37, Number 2, 2022

URI: https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1114002ar
DOI: https://doi.org/10.7202/1114002ar

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Publisher(s)

Faculty of Arts, Memorial University

ISSN

1719-1726 (print)
1715-1430 (digital)

Explore this journal

Cite this note

Candow, J. (2022). “Squire Leamon’s House-Warming”: Anatomy of a Newfoundland Poetic Monologue. *Newfoundland and Labrador Studies*, *37*(2), 1–32. https://doi.org/10.7202/1114002ar

RESEARCH NOTE

"Squire Leamon's House-Warming": Anatomy of a Newfoundland Poetic Monologue

James E. Candow

Folklorist Kenneth Goldstein has defined the monologue as "a solo, stylized, theatrically-mannered oral performance from memory of a self-contained dramatic narrative in either poetic or prose form."[1] The poetic form is usually grounded in actual events, and can be critical as well as celebratory.[2] It is also prone to appropriation and variation, processes by which poets become virtually incidental to their creations. These and other features common to the genre can be seen in Newfoundland's poetic monologues, often called "recitations" locally.[3] While some Newfoundland examples, including perennial favourites "The Face upon the Floor"[4] by Hugh Antoine D'Arcy and "The Cremation of Sam McGee" by Robert W. Service, were imported, others were homegrown. Here I will explore the origin, development, and significance of a local poetic monologue — "Squire Leamon's House-Warming" — and offer alternative versions of it.

I first heard of "Squire Leamon's House-Warming" in the 1980s while researching the architectural history of Hawthorne Cottage, the house of the poem's title.[5] At the time, my interest was confined to the poem's treatment of the origins of Hawthorne Cottage, which, among other things, include an early Newfoundland example of a

house-moving. My curiosity was recently rekindled when I found an annotated typescript of the poem among the papers of Captain Robert Abram Bartlett, whose boyhood home Hawthorne was.[6] Although he spent most of his adult life in New York and the Arctic, Bob Bartlett was, for the first half of the twentieth century, the most famous Newfoundlander on the planet, largely because of his connection to American explorer Robert Edwin Peary, whose claim to have reached the North Pole in 1909 is aging badly.[7] The more certain achievement was Bartlett's role in the *Karluk* disaster of 1913–14, which has been described as "the finest feat of leadership in Canadian marine history."[8] After a quiet period, Bartlett staged an impressive third act as captain of the schooner *Effie M. Morrissey*, which he took to the Arctic on scientific and other expeditions between 1926 and 1940 and then, during the Second World War, under contract with the United States Navy. Tough as nails, Bartlett had a sensitive side that manifested itself in his love of Brigus, his devotion to his mother Mary (Leamon) Bartlett, and his passion for the arts. His annotated version of "Squire Leamon's House-Warming" reflects all three aspects of his character: it was set in Brigus; he and his mother were descendants of the titular character; and it is, after all, a poem. When I found it among his papers, it struck me that if it meant so much to him that he was considering publishing it, then it deserved a closer look.

Built in 1830 at the north end of Cottage Pond, Cochranedale[9] for John Leamon and his wife Susannah (née Norman), Hawthorne Cottage was then called Leamon's Cottage. Cochranedale was part of the vast[10] Gould's Farm, owned by Brigus merchant Charles Cozens, under whose aegis Leamon had immigrated to Newfoundland from his native Blandford, Dorset, England, which also happened to be Cozens's birthplace.[11] While Leamon and Cozens were probably kin — Leamon's mother was a Cozens — genealogists have yet to establish their connection. The Leamons' rural idyll abruptly ended in the fall of 1833 when Cozens went bankrupt, forcing the liquidation of his considerable assets, Gould's Farm among them.[12] Determined to salvage their home, the Leamons had the building removed from its

foundation and, during the ensuing winter, had it hauled into Brigus (approximately five kilometres away) and placed on a new foundation. There it became known as Whitethorn Cottage, after the thorny trees of the *Crataegus* genus that graced the property. Also called Maythorn and May tree (after the month when it usually blooms in England), the tree's rightful name is hawthorn. This would explain why, around the turn of the twentieth century, Whitethorn was renamed Hawthorn Cottage.[13] The baffling addition of the silent "e" was a later development, and one that was not universally embraced by the Leamon/Bartlett clan. Mary Bartlett, for one, used "Hawthorn" on her stationery until her death in 1943.

Despite Cozens's bankruptcy, Brigus, with a population some 1,200, remained a going concern thanks to its role in the vessel-based seal hunt and, to a lesser extent, the Labrador fishery. Each spring during the 1830s, Conception Bay sent some 200 vessels and 4,500 men to the ice fields in search of seals, with Brigus accounting for 30–40 of those vessels and 1,200–2,000 of the men.[14] Most of the vessels that went to the ice were used during summer on the Labrador fishery, and although the labour requirements of the latter were more modest, the two enterprises and related trades, especially shipbuilding, combined to make Conception Bay "the first district in the island of Newfoundland" at the time.[15] Brigus, which ranked third in importance behind Harbour Grace and Carbonear, shared in the general prosperity, and that Leamon did not move there sooner is testament to the power of the agrarian ideal and his unlikely dream of becoming a gentleman farmer on the English model. Once ensconced in Brigus, however, he became a full-fledged member of the mercantile fraternity.

Shortly after the move,[16] the Leamons threw a house-warming to celebrate their arrival. The event would have been lost to history except for a row that erupted between two male guests, which almost resulted in a duel, and for the subsequent appearance of a narrative poem that described how a gathering of Conception Bay's Protestant[17] elite descended into mayhem. The poem was "Squire Leamon's House-Warming."

The poem's title speaks to the attendees' social status, for in Britain and its colonies, prefixing a surname with "Squire" denoted that the bearer was a gentleman. Originating in the age of chivalry and long associated with the aristocracy, the concept of the gentleman had grown malleable by the nineteenth century, having been adopted not only by merchants and industrialists, but also by middle-class professionals such as lawyers, doctors, educators, journalists, and public officials.[18] The gentlemanly ethic was, at heart, a mode of conduct in which personal honour was paramount. "Honour," said historian Philip Mason, "is essential to a gentleman, and for him honour means not only good name in the eyes of the world but respect for himself — integrity, wholeness, self-sufficiency."[19] Significantly, the non-event at the poem's core — a duel — was a convention reserved for settling disputes of honour among gentlemen. The poem, then, has a decidedly masculine focus, concerning, as it does, the gentleman's world and honour's place within it. Aside from Susannah Leamon, only two other women — Julia Danson and Ann Munden — are mentioned, and neither was physically present. Nonetheless, the entire plot revolved around Julia, the young,[20] unmarried daughter of Harbour Grace magistrate Thomas Danson.

The first of the male principals was Dr. Robert Dobie. Born in 1809 in Kirkaldy, Fife, Scotland, he graduated from the Royal College of Surgeons of the City of Edinburgh in 1828, the same year in which he immigrated to Newfoundland, eventually making his way to Brigus.[21] By the time of the house-warming, he and Julia Danson were engaged. As one of 11 invitees, Dobie had clearly befriended John Leamon, but he also had enemies there that night, and one in particular. Born in Newton Abbott, Devon, England, in 1804, Robert Brown began his Newfoundland career in St. John's with the West Country mercantile firm Newman and Company before starting his own business in Brigus. The poem reveals that he was engaged to Ann Munden, daughter of the Brigus sealer, Captain Nathaniel Munden, who was also present. Since another of the guests, Brigus schoolmaster James "Niner" Harris, described Dobie and Brown as "rivals,"[22] it appears that Brown had

had designs on Julia but that she had spurned him for Dobie.[23] Accordingly, when Brown angrily exclaimed in the middle of the party that "The lady shall not in three months be his wife," and "never for life," it was an expression of what the poet called "green-eyed Jealousy."

Taken aback, Dobie protested that his behaviour and intentions towards Julia were honourable. Instead of calming down, however, Brown called him a "liar" and "a low poltroon,"[24] and promptly bolted from the room. It is interesting to speculate about what might have happened if guest William Maddock Silly, the Cupids shipbuilder, had not intervened to stop Dobie from pursuing Brown. But his counsel to Dobie that "all these your squabbles with glass let us drown" was not likely to be helpful, and, by and large, Conception Bay's finest did not acquit themselves very well that night. This may have been a function of the amount of drink they consumed, which is noted in the poem, and which, ironically, was another hallmark of gentlemanly behaviour.[25] After Silly had seemingly restored the peace, Captain Munden made a mockery of his nickname "Nathaniel the Wise" by quite unwisely telling Brown, who had evidently returned, that "you must meet him or you are no man" — "meet" meaning "duel" — and, adding insult to injury, by threatening to cancel Brown's marriage to his daughter Ann, and along with it an impressive dowry of £1,000. Munden's additional exhortation to "Shoot him Brown, shoot him" raises as many questions about his character as they do about that of his prospective son-in-law.

Brigus sealing captain William Rabbitts (nickname "Billy the Dandy") now piled on, urging Brown to "[b]low him and shoot him, the hungry Scott," before launching a tirade that revealed not just a loathing of Dobie, but of newcomers to Newfoundland in general:

> Enough of this sort have come here for gain,
> And when he is gone enough will remain
> They're nothing except a beggarly set.
> And from such like nothing we get.

Billy the Dandy's rant spoke to the resentment felt by long-time Newfoundland residents[26] towards recent arrivals, a phenomenon that would culminate in formation of the Newfoundland Natives' Society in 1840.[27] That it originated in the 1830s[28] is perhaps not surprising, for Newfoundland's population, which numbered a modest 19,000 in 1803, had reached 75,000 by 1836 owing to unprecedented immigration.[29] Brigus's population broadly reflected the trend, increasing from an estimated 500–600 in 1807 to 1,200 in 1836.[30] For the Norman, Munden, and Rabbitts families, who had all been in Brigus since 1770,[31] the demographic growth that brought crews for their ships and workers for their shipyards was apparently a mixed blessing. In the context of the poem, however, the animus towards newcomers such as Dobie was ironic, since John Leamon himself had only arrived in Newfoundland around 1825.[32] Unlike Dobie, however, he seems to have been shielded by his marriage to a Norman and his ties to Charles Cozens.[33]

Efforts by guests William Stentaford (Cozens's head man and future son-in-law) and John Cozens (merchant and Cozens's eldest son) to defuse the situation were wasted, because Brown suddenly threw a note[34] on the table challenging Dobie to a duel the very next morning. The issuing of a written challenge was straight out of the duellists' playbook,[35] as was much of what followed, but it was nonetheless considered poor form to do it in the heat of the moment.[36] Moreover, if anyone was entitled to issue a challenge, it was Dobie, since "giving a gentleman the lie" — that is, calling him a liar — all but demanded a duel. That it was Brown who initiated it speaks not just to his jealousy, but also to his warped sense of honour. Left with virtually no choice, Dobie accepted and decamped for home. There, fearful of Brown, he ordered his servant, identified only by his first name, "Dicky," to lock the doors and go to bed. Dicky barred the doors all right, but instead of going to bed, gathered the tongs, poker, and roasting skewer ("skiver" in the poem), laid them on the kitchen table, and began to stand guard. Meanwhile, hewing to another of the duel's customs, Dobie made out his will and wrote a letter to Julia using words that would be cited for generations in parts of Conception Bay:

"Oh Julia, lovely Julia dear,
This ink is mingled with a tear,
To think that we so soon must part
Is worse than life's blood from my heart.

"But honour calls me to the field,
And there I'll die before I yield;
No man shall fleece me of my fame
Nor rob me of an honest name.

Though I am called a low poltroon,
That ruffian shall pay for it soon;
Grieve not whatever become of me,
I'll only live or die for thee.

Accept this ring, my dearest love,
I hope we'll meet in heaven above
Where spotless joy we shall renew,
Adieu, sweet Julia, love, adieu."

It was at this point that an apparently chastened James Harris — he had, after all, interrupted a perfectly good party to goad Brown — knocked on the door and, after being admitted by Dicky, begged Dobie to withdraw from the duel. The doctor not only refused, but asked Harris to "stand my friend" in the morning, i.e., to be his second, which was another prerequisite of the duel. That Dobie did not yet have a second speaks to his rashness in agreeing to meet Brown so soon. Seconds, who were essential to the conduct of duels, not only had to establish the time and place where a duel was to be conducted, but, if possible, were to try and reconcile the combatants and forestall the clash altogether.[37] Getting nowhere with Dobie, Harris departed for Robert Brown's abode in hopes of persuading him to do what Dobie would not. Here the narrative abruptly ends, but since the duel never took place, it would appear at first glance that Harris managed to talk sense into Brown. There is, however, an alternative explanation,

for there was someone else at the house-warming who is not mentioned[38] in the poem, and who had every reason to keep the duel from happening. That person was the poet himself.

Exactly who wrote the poem and how and when it saw the light of day have long been unclear. In 1998, the late John Northway Leamon, great-great-grandson of Hawthorne's original owner, declared in his history of Brigus that it was written by John Sharpe, was published "around 1841," and was reprinted in the *Harbour Grace Standard* in 1911, "70 years after its initial printing."[39] More recently, author Maura Hanrahan echoed Leamon's attribution of the poem to John Sharpe, but asserted that it "first appeared in the *Harbour Grace Standard* in 1841."[40] This, however, is silly, because the *Standard* did not begin publication until 1859. Unfortunately, Leamon and Hanrahan both overlooked the work of historian Henry Francis Shortis, who in 1920 attributed the poem to James Sharpe, and thus essentially got the poet's name — James Sharp[41] — right.[42] In 1924, Shortis would refine his observation that Sharp "held a position with the Court House" in Harbour Grace by correctly stating that he was the high constable there.[43] His additional contention that "A book of his poems was printed, but unfortunately not a copy can be found to-day," is plausible given the centuries-long tradition of publishing poetry and songs in chapbooks and broadsides.[44] And while early Newfoundland newspapers did carry poetry, a search of available issues published between 1834 and 1842 has failed to locate "Squire Leamon's House-Warming." Given its inflammatory nature, I would be surprised if it appeared in any newspaper until 1911, and I also suspect that it may have been published anonymously and perhaps even posthumously.

Born in Dunfermline, Fife, Scotland, in 1793, James Sharp came to Newfoundland around 1814 and settled in Harbour Grace, eventually finding employment there as a police constable.[45] By 1835 he had succeeded the venerable William Martin as high constable, and he would serve in that capacity until his death on 18 January 1842.[46] A stereotypically money-conscious Scot, he was not shy about asking for raises, at least one instance of which was reported in the press.[47] As a constable,

he earned additional pay at election time for registering voters and compiling the district voters' list, but elections only came around so often.[48] His occasional employment as an auctioneer seems to have been the chief means of augmenting his income.[49] As for his literary output, which doubtless paid no bills, a reminiscence in the *Harbour Grace Standard* in 1908 said that he was "possessed of skill as a writer, blended with the strain of Scotch wit," and that "he often in the papers commented upon current events."[50] Unless he did so anonymously, I would be surprised if he often commented on current events, as it would have been unusual for someone in his profession to be so outspoken. There is no question, however, that in 1839 he had a public spat with the editor of the *Carbonear Sentinel and Conception Bay Advertiser*, Thomas Westlake Spry, whom he ridiculed in poetic form in the *Conception Bay Mercury*[51] for his liberal principles and, as well, for "being a native of Newfoundland," a slur which demonstrated that newcomers, even relative newcomers such as Sharp, could be as disdainful of long-time residents as residents were of them.[52] Spry's pointed appeal to the reform-dominated House of Assembly to "look sharp to this salary-seeking champion" showed that he knew his critic well, but it came to nothing.[53]

Sharp's background has implications for the interpretation of "Squire Leamon's House-Warming." First, as a native of the same Scottish county as Robert Dobie, Sharp might have been predisposed to favour him. The appearance of his poem is said to have caused "quite a sensation," and no wonder, since he painted a damning portrait of Conception Bay's old and new guard alike. Indeed, he must have become a pariah with some of the people named in the poem, including John Leamon, for whom the appellation "Squire" could be read ironically rather than as a sign of respect. But he is unfailingly sympathetic towards one person, and one person only: Dr. Robert Dobie. It is therefore possible, even likely, that Sharp wrote the poem to vindicate Dobie and to expose the others for their churlishness towards him. Second, as a police constable, Sharp would have known that duelling was illegal — hence the secrecy with which most duels were conducted.[54] Since he would have compromised himself had he allowed Dobie and Brown to proceed, we

cannot rule out the possibilities that he either sent James Harris to reason with them, or that he personally met them at the appointed time and place and ordered them home. Many a duel was quashed at the last minute by the arrival of police who had been tipped off by insiders; in this case, the insider would have been an actual police officer.

In the absence of the original, the earliest printed version of "Squire Leamon's House-Warming" remains, as John Northway Leamon contended, the one published in the *Harbour Grace Standard* of 10 February 1911 (Appendix A). Except for a couple of obvious copying errors and a minor spelling change, Bob Bartlett reproduced that version in its entirety. It was also the basis of the version that John Northway Leamon included in his history of Brigus.[55] Although Leamon corrected wrongly spelled surnames and expanded the annotations, he also merged some stanzas, misspelled or misread numerous words, and even invented a new one by substituting "rhaked" for "baked" in the sixth stanza. He also ignored a crucial remark by the *Standard*'s editor, James Denson Munn, that "Our attempts to fill the gaps in the piece are indicated by brackets. — Ed." Munn's new material included three entire stanzas near the end of the poem, in which he expressed frustration with the poet's failure to say whether the duel took place, and to identify who "won the maid." Bartlett, for his part, retained Munn's brackets, but Leamon deleted them and, for reasons known only to himself, added new ones to the last stanza.

Henry Francis Shortis, whose version of the poem appeared in the *Evening Telegram* of 19 November 1924 (Appendix B), dropped all of Munn's changes but introduced a host of new ones. He randomly replaced punctuation and quotation marks with dashes, introduced spelling mistakes (for example, "beldam" for "bedlam" in stanza 19), altered dialogue ("It's false" for "You're a liar" in stanza 15), and made several word substitutions (among them, "crow" for "caw" in stanza 41). Moreover, after conforming to the 1911 version up to stanza 22, he combined its 23rd and 24th stanzas, 30th and 31st, 37th and 38th, and 40th and 41st to accommodate his deletion of Munn's changes. As a result, while the 1911 version contains only one stanza longer than

four lines,[56] Shortis's has five, giving it a very uneven appearance. And, like Munn before him and John Northway Leamon after, Shortis, in his introduction, misconstrued the duel as a contest for Julia Danson's hand in marriage. Robert Brown was already engaged to Ann Munden, whose own father pressured his potential son-in-law to issue the challenge. Brown was trying to assuage a twisted sense of honour, and Dobie had to accept in order to maintain his reputation.

It is noteworthy that the version of the poem in the *Standard* was submitted by an anonymous contributor. In his or her introductory remarks, the contributor noted that recitations of the poem were "in great requisition on St. Valentine's Day," and this — recitations at special times of the year — was typical of poetic monologues. The contributor further stated that the verses were "[g]iven from memory," which might explain the lost lines and the misspelled surnames in the *Standard* version — Doby for Dobie, Cousins for Cozens, Seeley for Silly, Stantaford for Stentaford — all of which were nonetheless phonetically correct. Oral transmission suggests that this version may have differed from the original in other ways as well.

Variations on and outright appropriations of the original printed versions of poems are common occurrences with poetic monologues, which tend to assume lives of their own after their authors send them into the world. Folklorists categorize those who engage in such practices as "presenters," whose function is to serve as intermediaries between poets and audiences.[57] Presenters can be either "preservators," who reproduce originals as faithfully as possible (Bartlett), or "confabulators," who manipulate texts for their own purposes (Leamon, Munn, and Shortis). Accordingly, things that might initially seem to be plagiarism or carelessness are, to the folklorist, evidence of "a vital living tradition."[58] Not for nothing, then, did John Northway Leamon refer to "Squire Leamon's House-Warming" as "a sort of mental heirloom" in his family.[59]

The poem retains an air of mystery because it is unfinished. It is possible that James Sharp's original had additional stanzas that brought the narrative to a close, and that these had been lost or forgotten by the time the poem re-emerged in 1911. But deliberately unfinished poems

are part of the English literary canon, and we cannot rule out the possibility that this one ended exactly as Sharp intended. Balachandra Rajan has distinguished between incomplete poems, "which ought to be completed," and unfinished ones, "which ask not to be finished, which carry within themselves the reasons for arresting or effacing themselves as they do."[60] "Squire Leamon's House-Warming" is a strong candidate for the latter category, since Sharp could not have finished it without disclosing his identity and possibly his role in quashing the duel. This might also explain the final stanza, in which he seems to anticipate criticism because of the poem's lack of a resolution:

> Now critics, clap your wings and caw
> Pick out every hole and flaw,
> The author's back to scratch and claw
> For want of sense.

If this is indeed the case, Sharp did not want for sense at all, and the last line, like the poem's title, can be read ironically.

Ultimately, "Squire Leamon's House-Warming" offers a view not just of the gentleman's world in a British colony, but of a society fraught with tensions between long-time residents and recent immigrants. This, I feel, makes it more relevant than poetic monologues that originate outside Newfoundland and that do not speak so directly to the lives of its residents. And whereas "Squire Leamon's House-Warming" was written sometime between 1834 and 1842, most of the island's poetic monologues date from the late nineteenth and eary twentieth centuries. If, therefore, it is not the oldest Newfoundland example of the genre, it is certainly one of them.

The literal quality of poetic monologues is reflected in the fact that all of the people who appear in the poem were real. What, then, became of our main characters? Robert Brown's boast that Robert Dobie and Julia Danson would never marry proved hollow, because they were wed in St. Paul's Anglican Church, Harbour Grace, on 29 September 1835. Sadly, Robert and Julia were to be as star-crossed as their fictional quasi-

namesakes, Romeo and Juliet.[61] On 22 July 1837, Robert died in Brigus at age 28, with one obituary stating that he had expired after "a few days illness," and another describing him as "a complete martyr to his profession," hints, perhaps, that he had contracted some fatal malady in the course of his work.[62] Modern claims that he died from suicide are nonsense.[63] Julia was not long following him to the grave, passing away at her parents' home in Harbour Grace on 4 October 1838 after a "lingering illness," and leaving behind a son, Robert Thomas Dobie, born 24 June 1836 in Brigus. He became a Church of England clergyman and left Newfoundland in 1875 to become minister for Port Hill Parish, Prince Edward Island.[64] The surname seems to have disappeared in Prince Edward Island after his son Hector Danson Dobie moved to New Brunswick around 1920. A dairy farmer, Hector acquired land in Devon (now part of Fredericton), most of which he sold to the federal government in 1946 for the erection of veterans' housing. The 200 or so small, affordable homes that were subsequently built there are known to this day as "Dobies."[65] Robert Brown never did marry Ann Munden or collect that fat dowry, but he recovered soon enough, wedding Fanny Legg on 3 November 1836 in Carbonear. He later moved to St. John's and became co-founder and manager of the Commercial Bank of Newfoundland. He died on 20 January 1894 and left an unfortunate legacy in the form of his bank's failure later that year, which, along with the simultaneous collapse of the Union Bank, destroyed numerous mercantile firms and threw the colony into economic and political turmoil. His daughter Agnes Beater Brown married Thomas Raffles Job and gave his name to their son Robert Brown Job, who became a titan of the Newfoundland business community.

A Note about the Poems

In Appendix A, I have corrected minor spelling mistakes, surnames excepted, and have left the idiosyncratic punctuation and quotation marks intact, along with the square brackets and the words within. The poem in Appendix B is copied verbatim.

Appendix A: Squire Leamon's House-Warming, *Harbour Grace Standard*, 10 February 1911, page 2

1. Squire Leamon had his pretty cottage removed
   By the advice of his friend and her whom he loved,
   Three miles is the distance, perhaps it is more,
   Such a great undertaking was not known before.

2. The building was finished and all was complete,
   The bedrooms and parlor and kitchen were neat.
   He said to his partner, his dear loving wife,
   Come see the sweet residence intended for life."

3. She viewed it all round; great was her surprise,
   She turned to her husband with kind, loving eyes,
   Dearest of husbands, I am now three times blessed,
   I and my children a cottage possess.

3. It looks so complete, so handsome, so neat,
   Pray send for your friends and give them a treat,
   You know that your friends are always mine
   Invite those you love best to come here and dine.
   And the ladies my guests shall be,
   To have a chit-chat-chat and good cup of tea."

4. So out went the notes for eleven to dine,
   And sit down to bottles of good old port wine,
   Meanwhile the good spouse began to prepare,
   The best of her viands with prudence and care.

5. The beef it was roasted, the beef it was boiled,
   A brace of tame ducks, and another of wild,
   A side of good mutton cleverly baked,
   And mealy potatoes, the crust of them caked.

6. A large turkey cock, a fat pampered goose,
   The carver might give to his guests what they choose.
   A stuffed roast pig, its tail was turned round,
   A neat boiled tongue, the best could be found.

7. With pudding and custard, pastry and pies,
   The bright knives and forks would dazzle your eyes,
   The plates they were pretty and placed with due care,
   The best manufacture of Stafford stoneware.

8. Some said the dinner was elegant, good,
   More opened a button and made room for more food.
   Suffice it to say that each guest had his fill,
   And plenty they had with a hearty goodwill.

9. The cloth was removed, and down came the port,
   Then Harris began with his glee and his sport,
   For Harris you know is the funniest soul
   That e're passed round a bottle or fathomed a bowl.

10. The jokes and the songs went around with each sinner,
    Who would not be merry with wine after dinner?
    Each joined in his glass, each joke had its song,
    Then green-eyed Jealousy joined in the throng.

11. Says he, "All your pleasures I'll soon cut short,
    I'll give you pain for pleasure, and ransom for sport."
    "Two rivals are here," good Harris did say,—
    "Whether Doby or Brown shall gain the day."

12. "A guinea for Doby," quoth Harris, laid down
    "I'll cover that guinea," replied Mr. Brown.
    "The lady shall not in three months be his wife,
    And, if I rightly judge, never for life."

13. The Doctor threw at him a wide vacant stare,
Sullen his looks, and revengeful his air
Said he, "I ne'er yet had any underhand dealings
Or trifling sport with any maid's feelings."

14. "You're a liar," Brown replied, "and a low poltroon,"
Immediately rushing with spite from the room.
The doctor uprising went towards the door,
And the rest of the party stood on the room floor."

15. Seeley got hold of the Doctor, and Seeley did say,
For Seeley you know has a persuading way,
"Come Doctor, come Doctor, I pray thee sit down,
And all these your squabbles with glass let us drown."

16. The Doctor replied, for he is a Scot,
"A lamb when he's cold, and a lion when hot."
Again, as it's said, the glasses went round
As wine warmed their hearts so mirth did abound.

17. Up gets Skipper Nath, Nathaniel the wise,
With eagle-like eye and a fist of great size—
"Brown you must meet him or you are no man.
You never shall marry my daughter Ann.

18. The thousand I promised, I never shall give;
You never shall have it as long as I live.
"Shoot him Brown, shoot him," 'tis little I feel,
Shooting a hood or a bedlam seal."

19. Then Billy the Dandy he rose to the floor,
For Billy you know makes a terrible roar,
It ought to be settled while they are both hot,
Blow him and shoot him, the hungry Scott.

20. Enough of this sort have come here for gain,
And when he is gone enough will remain
They're nothing except a beggarly set.
And from such like nothing we get.

21. Up gets Stantaford, modest and mild,
For William you know, would not hurt a Child,
"It's a sin to encourage the spilling of blood,
The affair may be settled, if right understood."

22. Up gets John Cousins, solemn and sage
He had just arrived from Barren Isle Ledge,
Quoth he, "my friend, hear reason's voice,
And listen while thus I give wholesome advice.

23. "If one of them fail, the other must die,
[Two erst friends in death will thus causelessly lie.]
How dreadful the thought that anyone here,
Before his Creator in blood should appear."

24. All went harmonious, when in stepped Brown,
And a note for the Doctor on the table threw down;
The challenge was Short, and the paper was small:
"I'll meet you at nine with pistol and ball."

26. "I'll meet you where?" the Doctor cried.'
"On Danson's" Brown quickly replied
"Accursed be he who attempts to divide,
Till one of us fall or die side by side."

27. "Double cursed be he who attempts to flinch,
We'll meet foot to foot, and fight inch to inch,"
Thus spoke the Doctor: he sprung from the floor
As lightning flashes, he rushed to the door.

28. Home straight he went, calling "Dicky attend,"
Light me two candles and fire, Dicky friend,"
Dicky trotted upstairs, in each hand a light,
Stirring up the fire saying "Master alright."

29. "Now Dicky," said Doby, "make all the doors fast,
Go to thy bed, sleep sound, take thy rest.
If a knock at the door pretend not to hear,
[Nor noise at the front, nor kick at the rear.]

30. Dicky obeyed Doby's word as a law;
Poor Dicky could see, and sadly foresaw,
That something had happened his kind loving master,
So armoured himself against every disaster.

31. The tongs and the poker, and long roasting skiver,
[He took from their places, with boding and shiver,]
He placed them in order on the long kitchen table,
Said he then, "I'll die or fight while I'm able.

32. "No vagabond rascal, whoever he be
Shall injure the doctor or shall trouble me,"
Meanwhile the Doctor was making his will,
Writing his letters with prudence and skill.

33. "Oh Julia, lovely Julia dear,
This ink is mingled with a tear,
To think that we so soon must part
Is worse than life's blood from my heart.

34. "But honour calls me to the field,
And there I'll die before I yield;
No man shall fleece me of my fame
Nor rob me of an honest name.

35. Though I am called a low poltroon,
That ruffian shall pay for it soon;
Grieve not whatever become of me,
I'll only live or die for thee.

36. Accept this ring, my dearest love,
I hope we'll meet in heaven above
Where spotless joy we shall renew,
Adieu, sweet Julia, love, adieu."

37. The letter was sealed, and the ring enclosed,
His deeds and his papers with care disposed;
When lo a loud knocking was heard at the door,
That moment poor Dicky stood armed on the floor.

38. "Who's there," Dicky cried, with voice loud as thunder,
"Harris," was the answer, as the locks went asunder,
[Harris walked in, at Dicky's weapons undaunted
And Dicky soon saw his arms were not wanted.]

39. Upstairs Harris stepped, both serious and grave,
"Come Doctor, come Doctor, no bloodshed we'll have;
So far it has gone, it must come to a close,
Or I'll thrash with my crutch, and pull by the nose."

40. The Doctor he says, "you are very kind,
Tomorrow I hope you'll stand my friend,"
"Yes, yes," said Harris, "that friendship shall be,
To cudgel you both if you cannot agree.'

41. "So Doctor good-night, and I wish you some rest,
Let bloodthirsty notions depart from thy breast.'
[And away he trudged to stiff Robert Brown,
And with voice and staff the law laid down.]

42. The night was calm, the snow was deep,
And many a wreath was driven,
The blustering winds were lulled to sleep,
The stars shone bright from Heaven.

43. But nature fierce, nor Peace's calm.
Could lock their souls to rest,
Each bosom felt the dreadful storm
Which flowed within their breast.

44. [Reader, I'd fain to thee impart
What was of this the ending,
Where love of maid filled full each heart,
And made each will unbending,

45. Did Harris' crutch cut short the fight,
And shook they hands across it,
Or did the maid allay the heat,
That rose from wine's hot faucet.

46. The lines are lost that did record,
The details of the story,
Enough that Doby won the maid,
That both saved life and glory."]

47. Now critics, clap your wings and caw
Pick out every hole and flaw,
The author's back to scratch and claw
For want of sense.

Appendix B: Squire Leamon's House-Warming, *Evening Telegram,* 19 November 1924, page 9

1. Squire Leamon had his pretty cottage removed
   By the advice of his friend and her whom he loved.
   Three miles is the distance perhaps it is more—
   Such a great undertaking was not known before

2. The building was finished, and all was complete,
   The bedrooms and parlor and kitchen were neat
   He said to his partner his dear loving wife,
   Come see the sweet residence intended for life.

3. She viewed it all round, great was her surprise—
   She turned to her husband with kind loving eyes,
   "Dearest of husbands I am now three times blessed,
   Me and my children a cottage possess."

4. It looks so complete, so handsome so neat,
   Pray send for your friends and give them a treat—
   You know your friends are always mine,
   Invite those you love best to come here and dine
   And the ladies my guests shall be,
   To have a chit-chat and a good cup of tea.

5. So out went the notes for eleven to dine,
   And sit down to bottles of good old port wine—
   Meanwhile the good spouse began to prepare
   The best of her viands with prudence and care.

6. The beef it was roasted, the beef it was boiled,
   A brace of tame ducks, and another of wild,
   A good side of mutton cleverly baked
   And mealy potatoes the crust of them caked.

7. A large turkey cock, a fat pampered goose—
The carver might give to his guests what they choose.
A stuff roast pig its tail was turned round,
A neat boiled tongue the best could be found.

8. With pudding and custard, pastry and pies,
The bright knives and forks would dazzle your eyes;
The plates they were pretty and placed with due care,
The best manufacture of Stafford stoneware.

9. Some said the dinner was elegant, good;
More opened a button and made room for more food,
Suffice it to say that each guest had his fill,
And plenty they had with hearty good will.

10. The cloth was removed and down came the port,
Then Harris began with his glee and his sport,
For Harris you know is the funniest soul
That e'er passed round a bottle or fathomed a bowl.

11. The jokes and the songs went round with each sinner,
Who would not be merry with wine after dinner—
Each joined in his glass, each joke had its song,
Then green-eyed jealousy joined in the throng.

12. Says he all your pleasures I'll soon cut short,
I'll give pain for pleasure and ransom for sport—
Two rivals are here good Harris did say
Whether Dobie or Brown shall gain the day.

13 "A guinea for Dobie," quoth Harris laid down;
"I'll cover that guinea," replied Mr. Brown—
"The lady shall not in three months be his wife,
And if I rightly judge never for life."

14. The Doctor threw at him a wide vacant stare,
Sullen his looks and revengeful his air
Said he "I ne'er yet had any underhand dealings
Or trifling sport with any maid's feelings."

15. "It's false," he replied, "and you're a poltroon."
Brown immediately rushed with spite from the room
The Doctor uprising went towards the room door,
And the rest of the party stood on the room floor.

16. Silly got hold of the Doctor, and Silly did say,
(For Silly, you know, has a persuading way)—
"Come, Doctor, come Doctor, I pray thee sit down,
And all these your squabbles with glass let us drown."

17. The Doctor replied, for he is a Scot,
A lamb when he's cold, and a lion when he's hot—
Again as its said the glasses went round,
As wine warmed their hearts so mirth did abound.

18. Up gets Skipper Nath, Nathaniel the wise,
With eagle-like eye and fist of great size,
"Brown, you must meet him, or you are no man,
You never shall marry my daughter Ann."

19. "The thousands I promised I never shall give,
You never shall have it as long as I live—
Shoot him, Brown, shoot him, 'tis little I feel
Shooting a hawk or a beldam seal."

20. Then Billy the Dandy, he rose to the floor,
(For Billy, you know, makes a terrible roar),
"Shoot him Brown, shoot him, 'twould be a good deed,
He never brought to this country one bag of good bread."

21. Enough of his sort have come here for gain,
And when he is gone, enough will remain—
They're nothing except a beggarly set,
And from Dobie and such we nothing can get."

22. Up gets Stentaford, modest and mild,
(For Brown you know would not hurt a child),
"It's a sin to encourage the spilling of blood,
The affair may be settled and right understood."

23. Up gets John Cousins, solemn and sage,
(He had just returned from Barren Isle Legge)
Quoth he "my friend hear reason's voice,
And listen while thus I give wholesome advice,
If one of them fall the other must die,
How dreadful the thought that anyone here
Before his Creator in blood should appear."

24. All went harmonious when in stepped Brown,
And a note for the Doctor on the table threw down—
The challenge was short and the paper was small,
"I'll meet you at nine with pistol and ball."

25. "I'll meet you where?" the Doctor cried,
"On Danson's," Brown quickly replied—
"Accursed be he who attempts to divide,
Till one of us fall or die side by side."

26. "Double cursed be he who attempts to flinch,
We'll meet foot to foot and fight inch to inch"—
Thus spoke the Doctor, he sprung from the floor
As lightning flashes he rushed to the door.

27. Home straight he went, calling "Dicky, attend,
Light me two candles and fire, Dicky man,"
Dicky trotted upstairs, in each hand a light,
Stirring up the fire, saying "Master, alright."

28. "Now, Dicky, said Dobie, "make all the doors fast,
Go to thy bed, sleep sound, take thy rest,
If a knock at the door pretend not to hear."

29. Dicky obeyed Dobie's word as a law,
Poor Dicky could see, and sadly foresaw
That something had happened his poor loving master,
So armed himself against every disaster.
The tongs and the poker and long roasting skiver,
He placed them in order on the long kitchen table
Said he then "I'll die or fight while I'm able."

30. "No vagabond rascal, whoever he be,
Shall injure the Doctor or shall trouble me"—
Meanwhile the Doctor was making his will,
Writing his letters with prudence and skill.

31. Disposing of all the papers, he got
From pestle and mortar to small galley pot,
"It's done!" he exclaimed————
When another letter trembled his hand.

32. "Oh, Julia, lovely Julia, dear,
This ink is mingled with a tear.
To think that we soon must part
Is worse than life's blood from my heart.

33. "But honor calls me to the field,
And there I'll die before I yield—

No man shall fleece me of my fame,
Nor rob me of my honest name.

34. Though I am called a low poltroon,
That ruffian shall pay for it soon—
Grieve not whate'er comes of me.
I'll only live or die for thee.

35. "Accept this ring my dearest love,
I hope we'll meet in Heaven above,
Where spotless joy we shall renew,
Adieu, sweet Julia, love, adieu."

36. The letter was sealed and the ring enclosed,
His deeds and his papers with care disposed,
When lo, a loud knocking was heard at the door,
That moment poor Dicky stood armed on the floor.
"Who's there?" Dicky cried with voice loud as thunder,
"Harris," was the answer, as the locks went asunder.

37. Upstairs he stepped both serious and grave,
"Come Doctor, come Doctor, no bloodshed we'll have;
So far it has gone, it must come to a close,
Or I'll thrash with my crutch and pull by the nose."

38. The Doctor he says, 'You are very kind,
To-morrow I hope you'll stand my friend"—
"Yes, yes," said Harris, "that friendship shall be
To cudgel you both if you cannot agree;
So Doctor, good-night, and I wish you some rest,
Let blood-thirsty notions depart from thy breast."

39. The night was calm, the snow was deep,
And many a wreath was driven—

The blustering winds were lulled to sleep,
The stars shone bright from Heaven.

40. But nature's fierce or nature's form
Could not rock their souls to rest—
Each bosom felt the terrible storm
Which flowed within their breast.

* * * *

41. Now critics clap your wings and crow
Pick out every hole and flaw,
The author's back to scratch and claw
For want of sense.

Acknowledgements

I am indebted to the following for pointing me in the right direction, research services, and editorial advice: Melvin Baker, Robert H. Cuff, Mary Dalton, Nelson Dawe, Keith Mercer, Greg Morgan, Don Parsons, Roberta Schwartz, Grace Warner, and Randy Whitten. Also, this journal's two anonymous referees offered profoundly helpful comments.

Notes

1 Kenneth S. Goldstein, "Monologue Performance in Great Britain," *Southern Folklore Quarterly* 40, nos. 1 & 2 (1976): 8.

2 Roger DeV. Renwick, *English Folk Poetry: Structure and Meaning* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1980), 15; Pauline Greenhill, *True Poetry: Traditional and Popular Verse in Ontario* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queeen's University Press, 1989), 37.

3 For excellent overviews, see Wilfred W. Wareham, "The Monologue in Newfoundland," in *The Blasty Bough*, ed. Clyde Rose (St. John's: Breakwater Books, 1976), 196–207, and the relevant portion of *Encyclopedia of Newfoundland and Labrador*, eds. Joseph R. Smallwood et al. (St. John's: Newfoundland Book Publishers (1967) Ltd., 1984), 2: s.v. "Folklore."

4 Often called "Face on the Barroom Floor" because of the influence of the 1914 Charlie Chaplin film of that name.

5 For which, see James E. Candow, *"But Summer Will Come": A Structural History of Hawthorne Cottage* (St. John's: Newfoundland Historic Parks Association, 1996). The house is now a national historic site.

6 Bowdoin College Library, George J. Mitchell Department of Special Collections and Archives, Robert Abram Bartlett papers, Series 3 (M008.03): Articles, notes, reports, lectures, etc. [1896?]–1946, Sub-series 1: Articles, Box 4, Folder 126, "Squire Leamon's House-Warming."

7 Bartlett has been the subject of two major biographies: Harold Horwood, *Bartlett: The Great Canadian Explorer* (Toronto: Doubleday Canada, 1977), and Maura Hanrahan, *Unchained Man: The Arctic Life and Times of Captain Robert Abram Bartlett* (St. John's: Boulder

Publications, 2018). Horwood's unfortunate subtitle aside — Bartlett was not a Canadian — his book is a classic of Newfoundland historical literature. For my review of Hanrahan's tedious polemic, see *Newfoundland and Labrador Studies* 34, no. 1 (2019): 171–73.

8 Thomas E. Appleton, *Usque Ad Mare: A History of the Canadian Coast Guard and Marine Services* (Ottawa: Department of Transport, 1968), 263. For the definitive account of the disaster, see Jennifer Niven, *The Ice Master: The Doomed 1913 Voyage of the KARLUK* (London: Pan Books, 2001).

9 After Sir Thomas Cochrane, governor of Newfoundland from 1825 to 1834, and located roughly in the area of present-day Cupids Crossing.

10 100 hectares.

11 *Encyclopedia of Newfoundland and Labrador*, eds. Joseph R. Smallwood and Robert D.W. Pitt (St. John's: Newfoundland Book Publishers (1967) Ltd., 1981), 1: s.v. "Cozens, Charles."

12 *Patriot and Terra-Nova Herald*, 22 Oct. 1833, 3.

13 "Whitethorn" was still the property's official name in 1886. See Newfoundland, Registry of Deeds, Northern District, Vol. 22, 6 June 1886, 6–8.

14 Shannon Ryan, *The Ice Hunters: A History of Newfoundland Sealing to 1914* (St. John's: Breakwater Books, 1994), 455. Many of the sealers who sailed from Brigus lived in nearby communities.

15 Lewis Amadeus Anspach, *A History of the Island of Newfoundland . . .* (London: Sherwood, Gilbert, and Piper, 1827), 297–98.

16 The poem reveals that the house-warming took place during winter, and also includes a reference to wreaths being blown about by the wind. These clues suggest that the move occurred in December 1833 and the house-warming in early 1834.

17 There was not a single Roman Catholic among the people named in the poem.

18 Philip Mason, *The English Gentleman: The Rise and Fall of an Ideal* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1982), 12; Martin J. Wiener, *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit, 1850–1980* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 14; Wade Ellett, "The Death of Duelling," *Historia* 13 (2004): 64.

19 Mason, *The English Gentleman*, 19.

20 She was born 12 March 1817 and was probably still only 17 years old if I am correct about the time when the poem was set.

21 Nigel Rusted, "Medicine in Newfoundland c. 1497 to the early 20th century," *Occasional Papers in the History of Medicine* no. 14 (1994): 29.

22 All my quotations from the poem are based on the version in Appendix A.

23 John Northway Leamon, *Brigus: Past Glory, Present Splendour*, 2nd ed. (St. John's: Flanker Press, 2019 [orig. pub. 1998]), 360.

24 A low-life and a coward.

25 Richard Hopton, *Pistols at Dawn: A History of Duelling* (London: Portrait, 2007), 43.

26 I am referring here to residents of European descent. Elsewhere on the island there were Mi'kmaq whose ancestors had preceded most if not all European settlers.

27 *Encyclopedia of Newfoundland and Labrador*, eds. Cyril F. Poole and Robert H. Cuff (St. John's: Harry Cuff, 1993), 4: s.v. "Natives' Society, The Newfoundland." See also Patrick O'Flaherty, *Old Newfoundland: A History to 1843* (St. John's: Long Beach Press, 1999), 192–93.

28 Patrick O'Flaherty has dated nativist sentiment to 1836. Our poem suggests it existed before then, but in the same decade nonetheless.

29 John J. Mannion, "Introduction," in *The Peopling of Newfoundland: Essays in Historical Geography*, ed. John J. Mannion (St. John's: Memorial University of Newfoundland, 2003 [orig. pub. 1977]), 6–7.

30 Robert Munro Lewis, "Brigus and the Labrador Fishery: An Anthropological and Historical Study" (MA thesis, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1988), 108–10.

31 As had the Bartletts.

32 Leamon, *Brigus*, 357.

33 Cozens had immigrated to Newfoundland as a cooper with Poole-based merchants George and James Kemp, who opened their Brigus branch in 1800. Thirty years, apparently, was enough for him to be considered a local. We do not know when Robert Brown arrived, but since he was only 30 years old in 1834, he could not have been in the colony for much more than a decade. Why he was excluded from Rabbitts's rant is unknown.

34 Presumably composed while he had been out of the room.
35 Duelling had been codified in a number of texts, notably the Clonmel Rules of 1777.
36 Hopton, *Pistols at Dawn*, 43–44.
37 Hopton, *Pistols at Dawn*, 59.
38 Only eight of the 11 male guests are named in the poem.
39 Leamon, *Brigus*, 358.
40 Hanrahan, *Unchained Man*, 132.
41 Although spellings were loose in the nineteenth century, this is the form that appears in contemporary sources and also on Sharp's headstone.
42 *Evening Telegram*, 24 Jan. 1920, 4.
43 *Evening Telegram*, 19 Nov. 1924, 9.
44 See, for example, Edward J. Cowan and Mike Paterson, eds., *Folk in Print: Scotland's Chapbook Heritage, 1750–1850* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 2007).
45 Keith Mercer, *Rough Justice: Policing, Crime, and the Origins of the Newfoundland Constabulary, 1729–1871* (St. John's: Flanker Press, 2021), 333. I have extrapolated Sharp's birth year from his obituary, which described him as being "in his 50th year." See *Conception-Bay Mercury*, 28 Jan. 1842, 2.
46 Mercer, *Rough Justice*, 374–78. As there is contradictory evidence for his death date, I have opted for the one in the *Mercury*.
47 *Patriot and Terra-Nova Herald*, 7 Oct. 1837, 1.
48 Newfoundland and Labrador (House of Assembly), *Journal of the House of Assembly*, 1839, 168.
49 *Carbonear Sentinel and Conception Bay Advertiser* (hereafter *Sentinel*), 28 July 1838, 2.
50 *Harbour Grace Standard*, 14 Aug. 1908, 4. Readers will please note that in the paper's masthead at the time, it was spelled *Harbor Grace Standard*.
51 Regrettably, the issue of the *Mercury* containing the poem has not survived.
52 *Sentinel*, 22 Oct. 1839, 2.
53 *Sentinel*, 1 Oct. 1839, 2.
54 Ellett, "The Death of Duelling," 62.

55 Leamon, *Brigus*, 360–65.

56 I suspect that all stanzas in the original were four lines long.

57 Greenhill, *True Poetry*, 105–11.

58 Greenhill, *True Poetry*, 116.

59 Leamon, *Brigus*, 358.

60 Balachandra Rajan, *The Form of the Unfinished: English Poetics from Spenser to Pound* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985), 14.

61 I have scoured *Romeo and Juliet* to see if it might have influenced the writing of "Squire Leamon's House-Warming," and concluded that it did not.

62 "The Newfoundlander" Newspaper Announcements, Newfoundland & Labrador GenWeb website, accessed 14 Nov. 2022, http://sites.rootsweb.com/~cannf/sj_news_newf2.htm; *Sentinel*, 29 June 1837, 3.

63 Rusted, "Medicine in Newfoundland," 29; Leamon, *Brigus*, 365.

64 *Minding the House: A Biographical Guide to Prince Edward Island MLAs 1873–1994*, ed. Blair Weeks (Charlottetown, PEI: Acorn Press, 2002): s.v. "Dobie, Hector D." I have been unable to find the Reverend Dobie's death date.

65 See Robert McNeil and Diana Moore, *The Dobie: Post WWII Veterans' Housing in Devon 1947–1962* (Fredericton, NB: privately published, 2017).