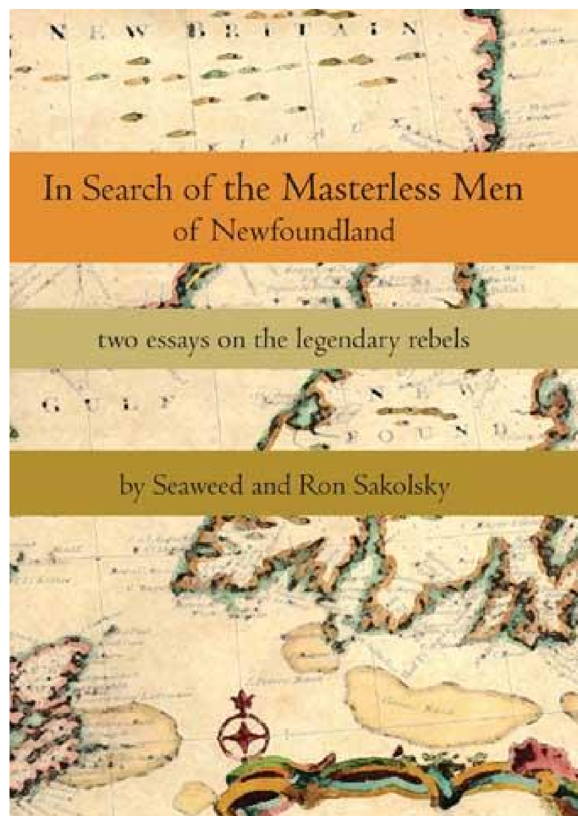
In Search of the Masterless Men of Newfoundland

Seaweed and Ron Sakolsky



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In Search of the Masterless Men: An Introduction

I first became aware of the inspiring story of the Masterless Men of Newfoundland from an essay by Seaweed that originally appeared in *Green Anarchy* #24 (Spring/Summer, 2007) and which can now be found in his book, *Land and Freedom* (Black Powder Press, 2013). In the closing paragraph of that anthology's introduction, he offers the following "open invitation" to all comers: *It is my hope that these articles contribute some original thought, but I would be most pleased if they helped foster a new spirit.*

With this invitation in mind, when I decided to visit Newfoundland in the summer of 2017, I looked forward to exploring further the story of the Masterless Men in the spirit of anarchic revolt with which Seaweed had endowed it.

Shortly after returning from my Newfoundland ramble with lots of new information about the Masterless Men, I ran into Seaweed at the 2017 Victoria Anarchist Book Fair, which is held annually on Coast Salish territory in British Columbia. When I told him about what I had discovered and my desire to engage directly with the mythic qualities of the Masterless Men; he seemed pleased that I had taken up his invitation.

As a result of that book fair conversation, we decided to jointly collaborate on a book to consist of two essays. As his part in this publishing project, he has now slightly revised his original Masterless Men essay, and I have written a responding essay. In his piece, he mentions that "some refer to the Masterless Men as lore or a traditionally told story, one for which there is little documentary evidence. But there are a fair number of facts that are known about the Masterless Men." In my anarcho-surrealist response, I have sought to include poetic facts alongside historically-documented ones because I view both as potentially inspirational to anarchists and surrealists.

In further clarification, though we use the historical term Masterless Men throughout our book, we are quite aware that the quest for "masterlessness" has no gender. The usage of the name Masterless Men refers to a particular group of 18th centuy rebels who fled conditions of servitude and set out to live a life of liberty in the Butter Pot Barrens of Newfoundland. As anarchists, we do not seek to be slaves or masters. Instead of relationships of servitude, we desire ones of individual freedom and mutual aid. The Masterless Men have been an inspiration to us in that quest. However, a rebel group of Masterless Women, or a group of mixed gender outlaws, would also no doubt be inspiring and perhaps even more provocative in some ways. It is our fervent hope that this book on the Masterless Men will encourage future historical researchers to uncover an ever-expanding diversity of anti-authoritarian stories that connect us to all of our masterless ancestors.

For a World Without Masters!

Ron Sakolsky

The Society of Masterless Men

Seaweed

When I began thinking about outlaws and outlaw history I realized that if outlaw just means one who breaks the law, then I could write about the lives of nearly every citizen. So, I define outlaw as one who not only breaks the law, but who survives by breaking the law or consistently lives outside of it. And the more I delve into Canada's past, the more outlaws I discover, many of them worthy of our attention. As an introduction to Canadian outlaw history, here is the story of a group of Newfoundland rebels who survived without masters for half a century.

The story of the Society of Masterless Men (which included women and children), began in the 18th-century settlement of Ferryland, in the eastern Canadian province of Newfoundland. Newfoundland was part of the traditional territory of the Beothuk—a Mi'kmaq-related, hunter-gatherer people who no longer exist as a distinct group, resulting from the invasion and occupation of their lands by the British Empire.

In order to colonize Newfoundland, the British Empire created plantations. These were settlements of indentured servants, primarily Irish, many of them very young—thus their name: the Irish Youngsters—abducted from Ireland by either force or guile and brought to the south shore of Newfoundland where they were literally sold to fishing masters. The price: $50 a head.

In 1700s Newfoundland, the British Navy wielded authority over its seamen with zero compassion, nothing but discipline enforced by abuse and violence. Because there wasn't a local police force, they also helped reinforce the authority of the local fishing masters. These masters were essentially the Lords and Ladies of the villages, living in luxury and security while surrounded by dozens, even hundreds, of indentured servants who fished and labored in the camps processing the catch. These village plantations were primarily set up by consortiums of wealthy merchants in England. British frigates were stationed in the harbors and marines patrolled the town.

The workers in these fishing villages were essentially in bondage. Corporal punishment was routine and everyday life was harsh and brutal. In the small settlement of Ferryland, for instance, there were three whipping posts and a gallows located in separate regions of the town. When a man was sentenced to be flogged for stealing a jug of rum or refusing to work for one of the fishing masters, he was taken to all three posts and whipped at each, so the whole town would have an opportunity to witness the punishment as a warning.

The settlement of Ferryland was founded by Sir George Calvert around 1620, and was also partly intended as a "refuge for …Catholics." I'm not sure if this meant strictly for Catholic servants or if there were any "free" Catholics as well. This was a time of penal law and repression of Catholicism in Britain and at least some Irish Catholics voluntarily came to the New World to escape persecution. Unfortunately, the laws in Newfoundland were the same as in the Old World. The orders given to the governor from 1729 to 1776 were: *"You are to permit a liberty of conscience to all, except Papists, so they be contented with a quiet and peaceable enjoyment of the same, not giving offense or scandal to the government."*

This order wasn't always strictly followed but around the mid 1700s there was a crackdown on Catholicism. In 1743 the governor of the time, Smith, wrote to the magistrate in Ferryland, John Benger, instructing him to be mindful of the "Irish papists" in the area. William Keen, the chief magistrate of St. John's, was killed by a group of Irishmen in 1752. Following this assassination, penal laws were strictly enforced for the next thirty or forty years.

Court documents from the Renews area (the nearest settlement) show the authorities were increasingly fearful of an insurrection. In fact, about fifty years earlier the French war ship Profond attacked Renews, where there were seven "residents" and one hundred twenty servant fishermen, many of whom were Irish. These servantserfs were recorded as not caring who owned the place—that is, they didn't jump up to protect their masters from the attack.

Life wasn't much better for those in the British Navy patrolling the area. Food rations were slim and flogging was common. For instance, keelhauling—dragging a seaman on ropes under the keel of a ship, thereby shredding his flesh on the sharp-edged barnacles—was still a legal punishment even though it frequently resulted in death.

Some like to refer to the Society of Masterless Men as lore or a traditionally-told story, one for which there is little documentary evidence. But there do seem to be a fair number of facts known about the Masterless Men. And, as a matter of context, we know a lot about the injustice of the British Empire and the cruelty of many of its enforcers. We know that indentured servants were brought to Newfoundland and treated brutally, as were the seamen in the Royal Navy. We also know that one Irish-born Peter Kerrivan was among those young indentured servants and abused seamen. Some say he was a reluctant seaman, having been pressed into service.

Sometime in 1750, while Kerrivan's ship was docked in Ferryland, he escaped (historians usually choose the word, "deserted"). Together with two or three escaped fishermen, he helped establish a lookout and base for outlaws to hide in the Butter Pot Barrens, a wild area of the Avalon Peninsula. This was the beginning of The Society of the Masterless Men.

Hunted by the authorities, the Masterless Men soon established a way of life based on subsistence skills and sharing. Apparently, they came into contact with Newfoundland's aboriginal peoples, the Beothuk, who taught the rebels survival skills. They learned how to hunt for food primarily based on the caribou herd on the Peninsula.

At the time, one could be hanged for running away, but nevertheless many young men escaped from the plantations and took up as outlaws. In 1774 a petition written by Bonavista merchants, justices of the peace, and others, was sent to Governor Shuldham, complaining of a number of "masterless" Irishmen who had gone to live in a secluded cove and "were there building fishing rooms." Kerrivan's band of young companions were among the luckiest and best organized.

Naturally word of the well-organized free men spread and fresh runaways from coastal settlements came to join them. Eventually their numbers swelled to between twenty and fifty men. There were also women, but their numbers are unknown. The literature I found mention the women simply as "wives," although I imagine them as rebellious women sickened by the misery and cruelty that surrounded them who also yearned for a freer and better way of life and joined their outlaw husbands voluntarily.

After a while the group of comrades began trading caribou meat and hides with allies in the remote villages, receiving supplies such as flour, tea, and of course bullets. They also organized stealthy raids against the fishery plantations.

By this time the British authorities, without a police force or militia of their own, were beginning to fear that this group of anarchic rebels would inspire too many others to desertion, so they ordered the navy to track the freedom-loving band down and make examples of them.

However, some years passed before the first expedition against the Masterless Men was organized and by then the rebels had become skilled wilderness inhabitants. Anticipating the first attack or perhaps somehow being forewarned, Kerrivan and his comrades cut a series of blind trails that confounded their pursuers. The party of marines sent to capture them often found themselves lost or led into bogs and impenetrable thick bush.

Eventually the navy did manage to close in on the rebels' camp near their lookout, but they found the log cabins deserted, "with every rag and chattel removed." Taking advantage of their pursuers' confusion, Kerrivan and his friends had moved off north and west. The navy set fire to their little village but had to return to their base without any prisoners. The Masterless group rebuilt their cabins and the navy burned them down again. The navy burned down their cabins three times and each time they were rebuilt.

Two, possibly four, of the rebels were captured and hanged, but the state never did succeed in destroying the Society. In fact, the young runaways who were captured had joined the band only a few weeks earlier and were taken by surprise away from the main body of the rebels. They were hanged with great dispatch from the yard-arm of the English frigate in Ferryland. No other Masterless Men were ever captured after this incident, presumably because this only made the outlaws more cautious.

Some of the tracks that had been carved partly to support their wilderness ways and partly as subterfuge became Newfoundland's first inland roads. In fact, their road system eventually connected most of the small settlements of the Avalon Peninsula.

For more than a generation, the Masterless Men roamed free over the barrens! Over time, perhaps as military rule began to relax or for reasons unknown to this author, their ranks began to dwindle. In 1789, thirty nine years after escaping, four men gave themselves up on condition that their only punishment would be deportation to Ireland, which was agreed upon. Many of the other rebels settled in remote parts of Newfoundland's coast and survived as independent fishermen. Kerrivan, who was never captured, is said to have had a partner, four sons, and several daughters, and is believed to have remained on the barrens well into old age, never returning to civilization.

The children of the Masterless Men gradually drifted out to the coast and settled down in small coves never visited by the navy. They married the children of other outlaws who had settled there generations earlier and together they raised families.

The Society of the Masterless Men is exceptionally inspiring because they succeeded. A group of people voluntarily joined together in common cause and broke free from their masters, most never to be captured nor return to their work prisons.

There is still a lot of land out there. It isn't nearly as overflowing with abundant wild life as it was precolonialism, thanks to the ecocides and environmental devastation wrought by industrialism, but a group of people with a similar world view could perhaps leave the brutal, empty world of the civilized behind and try to live their lives according to principles of voluntary association and mutual aid, supported by subsistence ways. If you live in the Americas, Australia, or New Zealand, keep in mind that much of the land has historic claims to it by their traditional occupants—peoples you could be consulting with, and joining, in their re-occupation efforts and resistance.

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The Saga of the Masterless Men and the Emancipatory Myth of Revolt

Ron Sakolsky

> *It is poetry that gives form to the emancipatory myth. Its spectre haunts the poverty of reality.*
>
> Guy Girard

Upon entering Memorial University's Centre for Newfoundland Studies which is located in St. Johns, I eagerly inquired about obtaining any of the Masterless Men references of which I had become aware during my recent Newfoundland travels. Not only did the reference librarian graciously supply me with copies of all these materials but she in turn suggested others on the same subject that might be of interest to me. Though she was extremely helpful in making these poems, articles, books, and songs available, there was a decidedly cautionary tone in her voice as she confidentially whispered to me, "Of course, you know that the Masterless Men were a legend rather than an historical reality."

While bearing her caveat in mind, my analysis here is not based on a dualistic understanding about myth and reality. Rather than seeking to objectively disentangle myth and legend from documented reality as a way of convincing the reader of the historical accuracy of the Masterless Men story, I will focus my attention upon the ways in which historical and poetic facts can interact in a mutually reinforcing manner to create an inspirational anti-authoritarian saga. In tandem, they can foster an intellectual and emotional climate that sparks rebellion by providing fresh inspiration rather than by referencing tired ideological belief systems. Moreover, such subversive sagas as that of the Masterless Men, even if not conclusively verifiable in every detail, can serve to illuminate the underlying human desires and aspirations that animate the myth of revolt even in the bleakest of times.

During the dark days leading up to the Second World War, surrealist poet and theorist André Breton was preoccupied with the creation of "new collective myths" of revolt that might be inspirational in mounting a counter-attack on what was rapidly proving to be the all too seductive collective dream world of fascist mythology. Today, the neo-fascist political climate of the twenty-first century is similarly being contested both in the streets and within the mythic realms of the imagination. In his seminal effort to explain the dimension of the Marvelous as revealed in myth, surrealist Pierre Mabille has noted,

"*More or less mythical accounts represent in poetic language some basic explanations of the world; they express real history and social life as it has existed, but beyond that, they reflect the permanent passionate needs of the human species*" (Mabille,1998, p.18).

Building on Mabille's insights, contemporary surrealist Paul Hammond has called for a "mythic negation" in which the myth of inevitable servitude is negated by the oppositional myth

of eternal rebellion (Hammond, 2017). It is with reference to the latter oppositional myth that I approach the saga of the Masterless Men.

In keeping with the inspirational potential of collective myths of revolt, the story of the Masterless Men can be understood as an outlaw history involving not only a remembrance of mutual aid among anarchic rebels, but one which especially prizes those who survive by breaking the law or cunningly living outside of it as Seaweed suggests. In this regard, the saga of the Masterless Men, though it may not be based entirely on provable historical fact, reminds us that the poetic truths associated with myths of revolt can act as an antidote to despair even in times characterized by great pessimism. Michael Löwy explains the important distinction between pessimism and despair in a surrealist sense, "*Pessimism is not despair: it is a call to resistance, to action, to liberating revolt, before it is too late, before the pessimism is realized*" (Löwy, 2017, p. 143). Despair, on the other hand, implies the death of the radical imagination.

Imagining A World Without Masters

> By Peter Kerrivan, we are the Masterless Men,
> We have no lord to serve, we live by wile and nerve,
> No more I'll serve my liege, for I've jumped ship you see,
> I'll take my liberty
> And roam these shores.
>
> Fine Crowd (Hugh Scott)
> "By Peter Kerrivan"

What then has proven to be so enduring about the storied exploits of the Masterless Men of the eighteenth century that at least two contemporary folk songs have been written about them (Fine Crowd's "By Peter Kerrivan" and the Masterless Men's "Breakin' New Ground")? In the case of the latter song, the Irish folk group who sing it has even taken on the legendary outlaws' name as their own. In addition to music about the Masterless Men, there have been stage plays, an unfinished movie project, a poem by David Benson, and a problematic biographical novel by Eldon Drodge, entitled *Kerrivan* (Drodge, 2001), which attempts to rewrite the myth in reactionary terms. In essence, the saga of the Masterless Men still speaks to the present because it represents a mythic counterpunch to the prevailing miserabilist malaise of our own times, when misery is considered to be the only possible reality and mutual acquiescence reigns supreme.

In an historical sense, the emancipatory myth of the Masterless Men stands in direct contrast to the physical suffering, social humiliation, and psychological indignities that accompanied the historical institution of indentured servitude, the involuntary naval conscription fostered by the military press gang, and the British Crown's practice of making political prisoners of those who might challenge their authority at home and shipping them off to such overseas outposts of empire as Newfoundland. Moreover, a good part of the Masterless Men's ongoing appeal has always been based upon their identification not only with rebellion against such concrete oppressive circumstances, but with the emotional resonance of their association with radically utopian dreams of land and freedom. As such, they became legendary as rebels against the cruelties that were meted out by the British Empire's naval governors, the economic stranglehold of the West Country merchants, and the conditions of semi-slavery imposed by the fishing masters and admirals.

Ultimately, however, it has been their contagious example of an outlaw life of self-determination and mutual aid that has continued to fan the flames of revolutionary desire.

The history of the term "masterless men" is inscribed in English law. As venerable Newfoundland historian Harold Horwood has explained its origins:

> *The term "masterless men" goes back at least to the reign of King Henry VIII of England, who signed into law Acts of Parliament dealing with beggars and vagrants. In Newfoundland a "masterless man" was a fishing apprentice or seasonal laborer who had run away from a planter or English fishing master or else a deserter from the Royal Navy who had escaped from the floggings, starvation and scurvy that were still the lot of men serving before the mast—'scum of the ports' as their officers called them—swept up by press gangs, shanghaied, and working as slaves in all but name on His Majesty's ships of war* (Horwood, 2011, pp. 142–3).

While the original legal designation of "masterless men" was used to identify a life of vagrancy outside the social order, such a pejorative label was mythically transformed by the Masterless Men into a positive identification with the desirable life of the rebel outlaw. Having chosen vagabondage rather than succumbing to the bondage that they had so narrowly escaped, the Masterless Men are celebrated as romantic deserters from civilization whose flight to the liberty of the wilderness involved a refusal to accept the harshness of a life of institutionalized misery on the Ferryland Plantation or to tolerate the brutalities of shipboard confinement.

Every British ship owner or captain who brought desperate and impoverished men from Ireland to serve in the fishery was expected to maintain shipboard discipline by any means necessary. The punishment measures that could be mercilessly meted out to offenders by these masters included the use of the dreaded cat-o-nine-tails, repeated dunking into the icy sea while lashed to the yard arm, or even the horrors of keelhauling. Moreover, masters had to see that they took the same number of men back with them when they returned across the sea. The object of the latter law was to prevent "masterless men" who had finished their indenture from "running loose in the colony" (Horwood, 2011, pp. 142–4). Keeping this legal stipulation in mind, it must have been especially threatening to the Crown for an unvanquished band of Masterless Men to be freely living in the wilds of the Butter Pot Barrens beyond the civilized boundaries of law and order.

For those escaped indentured servants who had worked on the plantations, the duress of the life that they had fled had consisted of a constant litany of trials and tribulations. According to B.D. Fardy, "*Their life was a harsh and spartan one. Most found accommodations in the lofts of fish stores, or under fish [drying] flakes and stages, or built their own shacks or tilts. The lucky ones found lodging houses which cost them most of their pay by the end of the season. These star boarders were referred to as dieters. For most of them it was a lean diet indeed"* (Fardy, 2005, p. 148). The autocratic power of the fishing masters was absolute and their punitive exercises of authority were backed up by the force of the British Navy. But the Navy had its deserters too. One of them, the Irish-born Peter Kerrivan, who is said to have been shanghaied or involuntarily pressed into service, would become a celebrated folk hero remembered as a catalytic agent for the anarchic rebellion of the Masterless Men when he and a few companions jumped ship in 1750 and escaped to the desolate barren lands of the Avalon Peninsula where they would freely roam for the next fifty to one hundred years.

Breakin' New Ground

We'll take our freedom back
And come home once again.
Breakin' new ground

Masterless Men
"Breakin' New Ground"

The above lyrical excerpt from a song by the contemporary singing group known as the Masterless Men is built upon a collective mythology that posits seizing one's freedom as a form of "coming home." In this ballad, "home" is not so much one's place of birth since Kerrivan was not originally from Newfoundland when he jumped ship, but a mythical place. In one sense, the poetic idea of "home" is about returning to that besieged enclave within ourselves where the resilient spirit of resistance dwells. Over time, however, as the actual rebel encampment grew, the liberty embodied by the Society of Masterless Men became physically rooted in the land itself as both a place of refuge and a place to defend. It was the wild and unconquered interior of Newfoundland that was their home, and it was the freedom of that lawless barren land that called out to the exploited of colonial Newfoundland to reject the hierarchical ways of civilization.

While the Butter Pots are situated inland from the Southern Shore of the Avalon Peninsula, the coastal outports have always played a similar role as the barrens in Newfoundland popular culture in that they are likewise seen as falling outside of the grasp of domesticated society.

For that reason, during my recent Newfoundland travels, I visited a few of the outports that still exist. Originally only accessible by water, many isolated outports have now increasingly been either joined by rudimentary overland roads or their populations have been "resettled" elsewhere at the impetus of the government after the cod fishery went belly up at the end of last century. One of the many unanswered questions about the Masterless Men is where did they go when they disbanded sometime in the eighteen hundreds. The consensus seems to be that many melted into the safe harbors provided by those scattered outport communities where they could remain invisible from the prying eyes of law and liege. With this in mind, the continuing allure of the Masterless Men can be seen as being directly related to the recurring folkloric myth of "comin' home," in this case to the more autonomous communitarian life that the outports still continue to symbolize today in the Newfoundland cultural imaginary despite concerted government efforts to eradicate them in practice.

As Farley Mowat, who lived in Newfoundland for a time, noted in regard to the historical dissolution of indentured servitude there, "*Some served out the full indenture period and then slipped away to take up the outport way of life. A great many others drew the breath of freedom early and ran off to hide themselves in bays and inlets where they became 'livyers' (people who 'live here')*" (Mowat, 1989, p. 64). Mowat himself was certainly aware of the history of the Masterless Men. During a visit to Ferryland, he was able to persuade local resident historian Howard Morry to share the oral history of the village with him. Then, in the company of the Morry children, Mowat walked the rugged tolts, rocky hills, and forests of the caribou barrens, rambling over traces of the trails that the Masterless Men had originally built, and hiked up the 1,000 feet high lookout peak on Butter Pot Mountain located in the general vicinity where their camp had once been located.

Mowat has described the Masterless Men as "*a loose-knit outlaw society somewhat in the romantic tradition of Robin Hood. The Masterless Men were never subjugated. Gradually, they melded with coastal fishermen settlers, and to this day their blood runs strongly in the veins of the people*

of the Southern Shore." (Mowat, 2016, p. 31). His pointed mention that the Masterless Men were "never subjugated" represents an important touchstone for understanding their mythic appeal in relation to Newfoundland's proud culture of resistance. After all, Newfoundland only joined Canada (or, as Newfoundlanders say, Canada joined them) in 1949. It was a close vote that was won by the forces of confederation under strained economic circumstances rather than because of any strong nationalistic allegiance to the Canadian state on the part of Newfoundlanders. The history of Newfoundland's Grand Banks cod fishery was one of being subjected to international exploitation by competing countries for hundreds of years before Canada even existed as a nation state. In conjunction with its lucrative fishery, colonial Newfoundland had an economic history of predatory merchant elites that systematically mandated the near enslavement of those termed "apprentices" to the Fishing Admirals. In contrast, the history of the Masterless Men celebrates the rebellious lives of those transplanted seasonal laborers who escaped their indenture, or refused to return to Ireland when it was up, and instead ran off to join the outlaws in the wilderness.

Tales of Robin Hood

> *Mythical Robin Hoods are never captured because their cause must live on, even if it fades out for generations and must be reborn in popular sentiment rather than real life.*
>
> Paul Buhle

Of interest to us here is Mowatt's previously cited comparison of the eighteenth century Masterless Men to the mythic and beloved twelfth century folkloric outlaws Robin Hood and his Merry Men. Though Robin Hood's actual existence has never been proven by hard facts, it is indisputable that the folk-memory of his associated myth has retained its inspirational power as a poetic tale of rebellion from medieval times into the twenty-first century. However, in the Disneyfied version of Robin Hood that is most widely encountered these days, he is said to have been of noble blood and that the object of his rebellion was to restore peace and justice in the land through returning the "good" King Richard the Lionhearted to the throne that had been usurped by the "bad" Prince John while the former was away righteously slaying heathen

Muslims in the grisly Holy Wars known as the Great Crusades. The Masterless Men were decidedly not blueblooded or monarchistically-inclined. Having themselves been victimized by British colonialism, their mission was not to restore the royal order, but to evade, taunt, and subvert it. As David Tighe has put it in decrying the sanitization of the Robin Hood legend, "*The early tales of Robin Hood were better; more violent and anti-clerical. Less about the supposed good King, and not about King Richard and Prince John at all.*" (Tighe, 2011, p.2).

Historically-speaking, the royalist version of the Robin Hood legend is actually a view of Robin Hood that only first gained currency in the sixteenth century. It is not supported by the earliest Robin Hood ballads, such as "A Gest of Robyn Hode," in which Robin accepts the king's pardons only to later repudiate them and return to the forest. All told, of the many Childe ballads that were assembled near the end of the nineteenth century, thirty-eight were Robin Hood-centered. In fact, the oldest surviving ballad from the thirteenth century,

"Robin Hood and the Monk," gives even less support to the picture of Robin Hood as noble partisan on behalf of the "true king." In these early ballads, Robin is a yeoman, that is a commoner (neither knight nor peasant). If he is noble, it is because his deeds are noble rather than his

ancestral lineage. Nor was there, until the sixteenth century, a mythical noblewoman named Maid Marian whose role was to serve as the genteel love interest of the attractive renegade. Prior to that era, a "Marian" and a "Robin" character had both been associated with the pagan May Day celebrations of the fifteenth century in which she was crowned as the "Queen of May" to his "Lord of Misrule." Before then, the "Marian" of the May Games had been derived from a French folktale about a shepherdess named "Marian" and her shepherd lover, "Robin." Even earlier, the "Marian" figure was more closely linked to the land as a fertility goddess with "Robin" as a sort of Green Man consort.

Even though the Newfoundland legend obviously implies a gendered myth of freedom given the male-defined name of the rebel band itself; often included in the mythology is the subtext that in the course of their friendly trading interactions with the settlers, the outlaws found female partners who provided links to the outside world for their kinsmen, husbands, and lovers. In that case, maybe there were many "Marians" rather than one. Dawe has even gone so far as to say: "*Because of the gang's status amongst the Irish population, some of the relationships were likely approved by the parents of these young women*" (Dawe, 2011, p.11). As to offspring, there is no mention of the existence of children in the outlaw camp. However, it has been speculated that their imminent arrival might have been the impetus for an outlaw to leave the barrens for some secluded outport fishing village where he and his mate could raise a family.

Moreover, though it cannot be factually verified, it is possible that a certain number of women who were also desirous of liberating themselves from the settled way of life of the villages might have picked up stakes and lighted out for the barrens to join their outlaw lovers or even might have arrived by themselves to seek their own fortunes independently as full-fledged outlaws rather than as mere appendages to their husbands and lovers. The latter would most likely have been adventurous runaways from the miseries of poverty, the tedious work of drying and salting the cod for shipment abroad, and the household drudgery associated with the large families of the settlements. Given their oppressive circumstances, we can assume that some of these women were probably quite ready to jettison their subservient connection to the British royal enterprise and embrace the freedom of the outlaw life. Though not typical, historical instances of rebellious women running off to share the outlaw life with men in mixed-gender bands are not unknown.

Whatever may have been their gender politics, Robin's Merry Men and the Masterless Men were both legendary for establishing communities of evasion and resistance outside the boundaries of civilization, whether in the wilds of Sherwood Forest or in the unmapped reaches of the Butter Pot Barrens, and whether resisting the Sheriff of Nottingham and his men or the Royal Navy's Marine Police patrols. As to the latter, like Robin Hood's merry band, the Masterless Men no doubt enjoyed playing deceiving pranks on their naval police pursuers by constructing false and misleading trails into the uncharted interior of the Avalon Peninsula. These blind diversionary paths led to nowhere in the maze of thousands of narrow lakes (some deep enough for canoes and others not), ponds, brooks, and bogs, and amongst the ubiquitous goowithy shrubs and the daunting three to four feet deep underlay of matted dwarf spruce that would have surrounded the outlaws' camp in the Butter Pot Barrens.

The rebellious laughter that had once resounded through the mythic greenwoods of Robin Hood's England, now echoed in the tuckamore of Newfoundland, adding to the frustration of the tricked, befuddled, and bewildered enforcers of sovereign authority. When Newfoundland-based film director Linda Conway was contemplating making a film on the Masterless Men, she stated in an interview that she too had the Robin Hood storyline in mind. Moreover, as she explained the

importance of legend to the historical relevance of her ultimately unrealized film project: "*When someone from the outside says, that's a great story but it's only a legend, for someone in Renews (just south of Ferryland) the legend is their story, they are telling you who they are, with metaphors and symbols. When I first heard the legend of Kerrivan the appeal of it spoke to challenging the establishment and finding your own place*" (Conway, 2010, p. 23). While this legend involves the storied resilience of the Masterless Men in upending His Majesty's colonial authority, those particularly irreverent stories that made their English overlords look foolish were undoubtedly the favorite fare of many Irish colonial subjects in Newfoundland who liked nothing better than a good joke at British expense.

Troubling Colonial Rule

> *The British Navy, they come in search of we, Our trails through bog we lead, We disappear.*
>
> Fine Crowd (Hugh Scott) "By Peter Kerrivan"

With their wilderness outlaw camp located in a stateless autonomous zone, the Masterless Men were able to occasionally swoop down from their mountain stronghold to raid the stored wealth being guarded by the British naval authorities and in effect to challenge the colonial economics of the encroaching Newfoundland state-information. In this regard, the outlaws' nomadic mobility was also a useful survival tool in case of retaliatory attacks by colonial naval detachments acting to protect the immensely profitable exploitation of the Newfoundland cod fishery. For such defensive reasons, mobility was actually built-in to the Butter Pot housing stock. The Masterless Men's legendary shack town consisted of rude makeshift dwellings (using spruce poles and bark) so that nothing of value would be lost if the inhabitants needed to leave on short notice or if their primitive houses were set aflame by the civilized forces of law and order. Only once, over a period of fifty years or more, did the Naval police manage to capture any of the ever so fleet and nimble Masterless Men. On that one occasion, the Navy patrols were able to take as prisoners anywhere from two to four luckless lads (depending on which account you favor) who are said to have been disoriented green recruits who had just arrived at the rebel camp from Ferryland and Caplin Bay.

These so-called "Irish Youngsters" were taken prisoner near the Masterless Men's hastily abandoned hideout after having been cut off from the main band. For their newly-minted association with the Butter Pot outlaws, they were subjected to the cruel punishment of being strung up by the yardarm of a British naval ship in the Ferryland harbor. The hanging of the captive rebels was meant to be a public spectacle that would serve both as a warning and a moral example to "evil doers" who might be tempted to challenge royal authority in the future. The powers-that-be notably used the same moralistic language of good and evil that contemporary governments use against those who they deem to be "terrorists" today. Oral history provides us with an eyewitness remembrance of that momentous execution day by Howard Morry's grandmother, Chris, who was but a child of five when her mother took her from Aquaforte to Ferryland so as to witness in person the gruesome hanging of the "Irish youngsters" (whose limp bodies she tells us remained hung up to rot all day in the sun) for the antiauthoritarian crimes of "sedition" and "civil disobedience."

In regard to the ethnicity of the hanged men, David Dawe makes the argument that in order to fully understand the wrath of the colonial government towards the Masterless Men and vice versa, it is necessary to address not only their refusal of bondage, deportation, or debtor's prison, but their ethnicity as Irishmen. Ethnic controversies about the Irish presence in Newfoundland, go back to the invasion of the Newfoundland colony by France in 1762. At that time, some Irish dissidents who were rebelling against their own colonization by the British, had joined the Catholic French in their bid to take the colony away from Protestant England. Later, during the time of the Masterless Men, what might have been weighing heavily on the minds of the British colonial authorities was the infamous murder of prominent English merchant and magistrate William Keen of St. Johns in 1754. Keen had a long history of using his judicial office to harass the Irish, and his death set off a wave of antiPapist hysteria that swept over the colony when it was discerned that nine Irishmen and one Irish woman had committed the homicide in the course of a robbery. As a result, the British governor severely curtailed the religious freedoms of Irish Catholics to harass them as representing what he considered to be a growing menace to (Protestant) society. Nevertheless, Irish Catholics continued to practice their religion underground in communities like Renews where, as legend has it, secret midnight masses were regularly celebrated at the "Mass Rock" though it was a penal offense to do so.

While the myth of the Masterless Men is a secular one, it has been most widely embraced by Newfoundlanders of Irish descent as being their story of rebellion against not only indenture and naval press gangs but in opposition to the anti-Irish policies and practices of the British colonial authorities. In relation to this Irish cultural context, some have speculated that such harsh treatment by British colonial rulers may have had unintended consequences in relation to the increased influence of the Society of Masterless Men, which appeared in some accounts to have the trappings of an Irish secret society more than an outlaw band. In any case, as David Dawe has put it, the resulting "*anti-Catholic campaign certainly contributed to the rapid growth of Kerrivan's little band which was quickly gaining a reputation for its bold raids upon merchants of the Southern Shore*" (Dawe, June 20, 1998, p. 104). In the charismatic figure of Kerrivan, the myth of the Masterless Men spanned the ocean to encompass both the barren lands of Newfoundland and the "old sod" of Ireland, where he had been born.

In 1788–89, a spate of religious riots erupted that shook the foundations of Ferryland and its nearby outports and reverberated beyond to the Butter Pot Barrens where the inexperienced "Irish Youngsters" would soon be ensnared in the course of events. These were not anti-Catholic riots per se, but colonial power struggles between rival Catholic factions, which came to a head

when Father James O'Donel was formally recognized by the British authorities as the officially-approved Catholic prelate to preside over the Irish flock in Newfoundland. His appointment did not sit well with supporters of his rival, Father Patrick Power, one of several "rogue priests" who were more inclined to revolt against the British authorities than to seek official recognition from them.

As to whether the Masterless Men played any role in this fracas, according to local historian B.D. Fardy, "*Just how much contact or how much influence the Masterless Men had with the settlements of the Shore is not known for certain, but the authorities were convinced that they had too much. Apparently, it was not the only donnybrook throughout the winter and colonial officials had their suspicions that Kerrivan's Society of Masterless Men had more than a little to do with the disturbances, if not instigating them, then at least encouraging them, given their dislike of the British authorities*" (Fardy, 2005, pp. 157–160).

Enter Captain Edward Pellew of the Royal Navy, who as Surrogate Judge of the Colonial Court for the Ferryland area, was reputed to be “a most bitter enemy to Roman Catholics” (Fardy 2005, pp. 158–160).Acting on his prejudices, Pellew persuaded the colonial Governor, Admiral Sir Mark Milbanke, to send him to Ferryland in the HMS Winchelsea to quell the ethnic disturbances, warn the rogue priests that they faced expulsion if the disturbances did not cease, and hunt down the Masterless Men—whose contagious example of lawless rebellion had to be surpressed for law and order to prevail. In 1791, the one hundred thirty one men thought to be involved in the riots were tried by Pellew himself as Surrogate Judge. He sentenced all of them to fines, and some to the lash, for the crimes of “aiding and harboring rioters” or “riotous and unlawful assembly” in relation to the 1788 disturbances.

Most who were so sentenced were deported to Ireland or else shipped off to some desolate penal colony. Fardy speculates that many of these might otherwise have become Masterless Men, and that those who stayed were forewarned about the consequences of doing so which acted as a “great deterrent” to any of them who might have been entertaining the idea of joining up with the outlaws (Fardy, 2005, p. 152). The records show that one of those convicted in 1791 was a Thomas Kerrivan, who was fined, sentenced to thirty nine lashes, and sent “home” to Ireland. Dawe speculates that he might have been related to Peter Kerrivan of the Masterless Men (Dawe, 2011, pp 7–13). Or perhaps he simply was expeditiously rounded up with little evidence against him in the first-place other than that he shared the Kerrivan name. Of the two hundred men convicted in absentia, some included those legally designated as “Run Aways,” who were threatened with having their “sentences executed if they return.” By widely publicizing their pending sentences, the British authorities were not only seeking to threaten any deserters who had already escaped from bondage with retroactive punishment, but were pre-emptively trying to discourage any lower case “masterless men” that might be contemplating escape from actually becoming uppercase Masterless Men in the future.

To end the colonial troubles, Pellew employed what today would be called a bad cop/good cop strategy. It consisted of combining the recent memory of his harsh crackdown on the rioters with a new guarantee of religious freedom for Catholics brokered by Father O’Donel in 1791 in return for the latter’s assurances of loyalty to the Crown. If his strategy worked, Pellew could then turn his attention to concertedly pursuing the Masterless Men. According to Fardy’s speculation on the success of Pellew’s plan to use the Masterless Men’s supposed involvement in the riots to discredit them enough in the eyes of the local loyalist population to facilitate their aforementioned capture and subsequent hanging:

> “Perhaps because of the ill feelings that had surfaced as a result of the recent riots, he (Pellew) learned the identities of several of the members of the Society and determined to capture them. Over the next year, he was successful in capturing four Society members near the Butterpots. They may have been stragglers cut off from the main band or even escaped convicts from St. John’s but Pellew was determined to have his examples” (Fardy, 1005, p. 16).

However, rather than accepting such a speculative scenario of betrayal and treachery as the conclusion to the story of those unlucky captives who were hung by Pellew; poet David Benson has contributed his own ending of solidarity and poetic justice to the legendary tale.

In Benson's poem, "The Masterless Men of the Southern Shore," he describes a post-hanging scenario in which the outlaws obtain revenge for the judicial murder of their fallen comrades. In this scenario, he says of the uncaptured outlaws:

> *They came to the coast before dawning The frigate at anchor was moored. And stealthily cutting her cables, She drifted and wrecked on the shore.*
>
> (Benson, *Tickle Ace*, 1997, p.9)

While some, like Fardy, place the date of the hangings as "soon after the riots" of 1788–89; Chris Morry, in her *Oral History of Ferryland* entry, recalls the date of the hangings as not being until 1810 or thereabouts, which seems to be a very long time after the initial capture of those hanged. Her remembrance, if accurate, would add another decade or more to the usually allotted fifty-year longevity of the Masterless Men as a rebellious force with which to be reckoned. Whatever the actual date of the hangings, most historians contend that the numbers of the Masterless Men were already in decline as 1800 approached. Nevertheless, one story contends that not long after the 1810 date that Morry remembers, some of the Masterless Men were offered the chance of making a shift from being "land pirates," who raided the storehouses of the wealthy merchants and the lucrative colonial reserves of the Southern Coast, to becoming seafaring privateers during the War of 1812 between the British and the Americans. As such, they were licensed as pirates by the British government, which turned a blind eye to their criminal records, allowing them to be legally forgiven in return for their willingness to prey upon enemy American ships. In return they could keep any captured loot that they might find on board.

Conceiving of the Masterless Men as transitioning from the role of land pirate to seagoing one is not such a stretch of the imagination when one remembers the trenchant words of pirate captain Charles Bellamy, which are applicable to both: "*They vilify us, the Scoundrels do, when there is only this Difference, they rob the Poor under the Cover of Law, forsooth, and we plunder the Rich under the Protection of our own Courage*" (Bellamy in Iskashato, 2017 p.80). While these remarks are reputed to have been made by Bellamy to the defeated captain of a rich merchant vessel in 1720 (thirty years before the origins of the Masterless Men), others have claimed that they came from the mouth of pirate captain Sam "Black Sam" Bellamy instead. However, since both pirates plied the Western Atlantic, including Newfoundland waters, it hardly matters mythically as to which pirate is being quoted. Alternately, some have even speculated that neither pirate said these words, but that they came from the pen of pirate chronicler Daniel Defoe. Regardless of their source, the class analysis which informs the words rings true even in the twenty first century in regard to Somali pirates, many of whom were formerly fishermen as had been the case with the Masterless Men. Accordingly, Somali pirates have stated in their defense against state charges of "terrorism" that they were only "pillaging the pillagers." (Iskashato, 2017, pp. lX and 80).

In any case, by the 1820s and 1830s, Newfoundland's civil laws on property ownership had become somewhat less onerous in their impact. Not coincidentally, some local historians place 1820 as the date by which the last of the outlaws left the Butter Pots or died off (Dawes, 2011, p. 12). In a scenario much loved by reformists, the disappearance of the outlaws is attributed to the fact that by that time it had become possible for a poor man without land title to make an independent living without having to become an indentured servant subject to the autocratic command of the planters or the fishing masters in order to survive. He could even legally become

a smallholder rather than a transient laborer forced to return to Ireland when his indenture was up. He could dream of building his own small house, raising a family, and living off the sea with his dory docked in some nearly stateless outport with no meddling magistrates or naval police patrols to trouble him much. Squatters could even build houses on unoccupied crown land and claim it as their own after a generation or so had passed. While being an independent fisherman was still a hard life, it was by that point less constrained, and, as such, might have appealed to at least some of the outlaws.

Long before the cod fishery went belly up due to industrial overfishing in the twentieth century, many former Masterless Men had simply faded into the fog of some remote outport cove without leaving a trace of themselves behind, other than their descendants who are still around today with names like Kerrivan, Kervin, Caravan, and Kier. Perhaps even John and Wilf Curran, the brothers who were both founding members of the contemporary Newfoundland folk group called the Masterless Men, are distant kin, especially since they were both born in Ferryland. And maybe this explains why these musicians have been the most generous assessors of the historical longevity of the Masterless Men by listing in the liner notes to their *Breakin' New Ground* recording that their rebellion had a one hundred year history of resistance to the state from their wilderness perch in the Butter Pot Barrens that lasted from 1750 to 1850.

Beyond Domestication

> *They were men without masters*
> *Deserters who scoffed at the law*
> *The worst kind of rebels of all*
>
> David Benson

Of course, not all of the Masterless Men dreamed of living a settled life. It is speculated that those Masterless Men who didn't choose to melt into the outport life decided instead to remain in the Butter Pots. In any case, none were ever captured again. Much to the dismay of the colonial authorities, Kerrivan was never reputed to have been caught and was said to have continued to live to a ripe old age in the wild sanctuary of the interior that had been his home for over half a century. At his death, he was said to have left four sons, several daughters, and an unmarked grave. By leaving behind the life of a British naval seaman that had been forced upon him, to take refuge on land, Kerrivan had in a certain sense "gone native" as a fugitive from the authoritarian reach of European civilization. While the evidence of the involvement of the Masterless Men with the indigenous peoples of Newfoundland is sparse, their direct contact with any indigenous peoples living in the interior would have been very likely. In this regard, the mythic story of the Masterless Men's reputedly harmonious relationship with their outcast counterparts among native peoples in wilderness climes offers a much more emancipatory model for European-Indigenous encounter than the all too familiar British colonial drill of invasion, conquest, theft, and settlement.

According to *Oral History of Ferryland*, during the late 1700s, Robert Carter, an English planter who was the most prominent landowner in the Ferryland settlement, reportedly shot and killed anywhere from one to three "Indians" (the exact number being dependent on which account is accepted) who appeared by surprise one day on the Western hills above the town. As Dawe notes,

> “If this report is true, it may prove that natives were still living on the Avalon Peninsula during the years of the Masterless Men and so there might well have been contact between the two groups*” (Dawe, 2011, pp. 11–12). If so, this still leaves the question of whether Carter’s murderous encounter was with the Beothuk. As Dawe puts it, “*Should it be true that there was a friendly exchange between the Beothuks and the Masterless Men, it may well be the only prolonged example of such in Newfoundland history” (Dawe, 1998, p. 106).

However, such historians as Dawe, Horwood, and Fardy all agree that Carter’s encounter was highly unlikely to have been with a Beothuk. In their estimation, those shot were most likely Mi’kmaq, since by that late date the Beothuk were probably extinct (as a direct result of genocide). However, local folk tales persist in imagining a sort of kinship between indigenous peoples and the masterless defectors from European civilization, and some of these stories even suggest that a few Beothuk might have remained on the Avalon Peninsula. It has been speculated that some Beothuk might have joined forces with the Masterless Men as a means of mutual survival since both groups were hiding from those hostile colonial forces that doggedly sought to exterminate them in the interests of bringing law and order to the colony.

In any case, whether or not the Beothuks were already extinct by the time of the Masterless Men, or in the final stages of decline, indigenous people in contact with the Masterless Men were probably either predominantly or exclusively the Mi’kmaq. The Mi’kmaq were originally from Nova Scotia, but had been repopulated by the Acadian French when the latter established a Newfoundland colonial presence at Placentia. During the war between the French and the English at the turn of the eighteenth century, the Mi’kmaq had allied themselves with the French. However, once the war was over and the French governor’s need for the Mi’kmaq warriors was ended, he officially condemned what he now retrospectively considered to be their “savage brutality” and ordered them to be expelled immediately. The Mi’kmaq ignored the order and refused to leave the area. In geographical terms, Placentia’s location in relation to the Butter Pots would have certainly put them within range of the Masterless Men by an overland route through the barrens, and so probably it was through contact with them that the Masterless Men would have learned many of their wilderness survival skills in unfamiliar terrain.

As David Benson poetically recreates the relationship between the Masterless Men, indigenous peoples, and the largely autonomous coastal outport communities:

> *They learned from the Bush-Born Indians, Took food from the barrens and trees, They ate of the ducks and the partridge, The caribou, beaver, and geese.*
>
> *They came in the night to the outports and traded their furs and their meat, receiving the things that they needed musket balls, powder, and tea.*
>
> (Benson, 1997, p. 90)

This poetic excerpt presents us with a picture of a thriving black-market economy, and so offers a very different picture of the Masterless Men than the official colonial accounts in which they are depicted as a criminal gang of ne’er do wells who callously stole from the poor and terrorized the local settlements to the point that the much-preyed-upon settlers would petition Mother England for protection.

While Dawe makes no Robin Hoodesque allusion to "stealing from the rich to give to the poor," neither does he frame the Masterless Men as the simple plunderers of Newfoundland that the merchants and fishing masters repeatedly complained about to the colonial authorities. As Horwood explains the alternative economics of evading colonial authority, *"The Masterless Men traded surreptitiously with settlers in out-of-the-way fishing villages, exchanging meat and hides, and probably furs as well, for such supposed essentials as flour, molasses, and rum. If they couldn't get these essentials in any other way, they stole them from the fishing rooms where they also took nets, cordage, guns, and ammunition—things that they found difficult to obtain by trade"* (Horwood, 2011, pp. 145–146). Unlike the colonial elites whose wealth they freely re-appropriated for themselves, the Masterless Men did not seek to do the same with the other financially less-well-off residents of the coastal communities but preferred to cultivate trade relationships instead.

According to a description of the Masterless Men taken from the remembrances of Howard Morry of Ferryland and John Hawkins of nearby Cape Broyle, as has been quoted in *The Oral History of Ferryland*, *"They were 'country-men,' who had learned to live and hunt like aboriginals. The caribou herd was their staff of life. They lived mainly on meat and learned to dress deerskins, and used them for clothing almost exclusively. They were semi-nomadic, following the deer"* (Morry and Hawkins in Horwood, 2011, p. 145). In addressing their social interactions with the settlers, Fardy points to the nexus between this type of "country-men" economy of self-sufficiency and the mutuality of the trade economy:

> *They hunted, trapped, and fished in the interior and traded with the nearby settlements for other staples. In exchange for fresh country meat, caribou and their hides, they bartered with the settlers for salt pork and mutton, flour and vegetables like potatoes, cabbage and turnips which would keep over winter, and tea and molasses. They also got their supplies of powder and shot from the settlers which allowed them to continue their hinterland lifeway. When trade was not possible it is said, they resorted to stealthy raids when they took what they wanted or needed. But it is said they never took from the poorer fishermen or planters. This gained them a reputation as a sort of band of Robin Hoods although it cannot be said with the same certainty that they gave to the poor* (Fardy, 2005, p. 155).

Like Fardy, most historians agree that the relationships between the Masterless Men and their peers who lived a more settled life in the coastal villages were predominantly ones of mutual aid.

Clashing Myths

> *Those navvy boys we rob and tease. We steal their flour and beans, they'd take our liberty!*
>
> Fine Crowd (Hugh Scott) "By Peter Kerrivan"

Enter Eldon Drodge. Without any substantial evidence to back up his claims, Drodge, whether consciously or unconsciously, shifts the emancipatory myth of the Masterless Men in a reactionary direction in the pages of his biographical novel, *Kerrivan*. Contrary to their mythologized place in Newfoundland history as formidable anti-authoritarian outlaws, he depicts the Masterless Men as a small group of about a dozen or so petty pilferers and thieves, good-hearted brutes,

despicable informers, and wanton pillagers, who treacherously preyed upon the downtrodden for a few short years in the middle of the eighteenth century until order was thankfully restored by the authorities. However, the real treachery in the story is its sacrificing of the emancipatory myth of the Masterless Men on the altar of a ludicrously unlikely alliance "made in heaven" between Drodge's plastic–saint-of-aKerrivan and the humble Father Fabian O'Donnell, who, as a beloved Renews priest, secretly supplies the wanted outlaws with benevolent "packages of kindness" to help them get through the harsh Newfoundland winters. Either the author has invented the character of O'Donnell out of whole cloth or perhaps he might have been partially modeled on the historical priest, James O'Donel, previously mentioned here for his collaborationist loyalty to the crown.

In any case, Drodge has opted to make the priest into a sympathetic character in order to remake the story of the Masterless Men into a conservative morality tale. His novel features the titular Kerrivan, enshrined in hierarchical terms as the "undisputed leader." Drodge's Kerrivan character is an individual hero whose moral fortitude is head and shoulders above that of his ragtag gang of inept misfits and psychopathic scoundrels. No other recounting of the legend of the Masterless Men identifies any of the group by name other than Kerrivan, who was documented in the historical record as a result of having had a price put on his head for jumping ship. Unlike the story of Robin Hood's merry men, there is no mythic equivalent to Little John and Friar Tuck in the Butter Pot-based camp of the Masterless Men. Undaunted, Drodge has simply invented a hackneyed cast of characters to populate his equally-clichéed novel in a failed attempt to give it some dramatic weight.

For starters, he quickly dispenses with the anarchic qualities of the Robin Hood myth of "stealing from the rich and giving to the poor" by having the Masterless Men stealing from the poor instead. Simultaneously, he scuttles the qualities of self-sufficiency and solidarity nwith the oppressed that have always animated the myth of the Masterless Men, and replaces them with a reformist emphasis on "good works" and the pastey kind of charity for the poor displayed ad nauseum by the devoted Father Fabian. Here Drodge essentially has attempted a hostile takeover of the Masterless Men myth by championing the benevolent authority of the humble parish priest, whose vows of poverty make him the true arbiter of morality. Perhaps the most absurd aspect of the novel is Drodge's conceit that the Masterless Men could have ever survived as rebel outlaws for very long if their relationship to the settlers depended upon surreptitiously receiving priestly charity on the one hand, and, on the other, conducting pitiless raids designed to scrape the crumbs from the tables of the poor rather than building relationships of mutual aid with them.

As a whole, Drodge's book raises an important dilemma for those interested in the subversive power of emancipatory mythology. Because legends cannot ever be fully documented by facts, even the most emancipatory of myths, like that of the Masterless Men, can be robbed of their radical attributes and appropriated for more conservative ends. In this case, Drodge has essentially converted the profanely illuminating poetic imagery that constitutes the iconic myth of the Masterless Men into the prosaic tawdriness of a religious soap opera. In his clumsy attempt at redefining the metaphoric, symbolic, and analogic power of the dethroning myth of masterlessness, he replaces it with his own lusterless parable of reformist acquiescence to church and state. However, in spite of Drodge's effort to push the mythology of the Masterless Men in a reactionary direction, his novel has not succeeded in challenging what continues to be the emancipatory nature of their mythic status in Newfoundland culture. Nor are his fabrications taken seriously in either historical or folkloric circles. In the epilogue, Drodge actually admits that the

revisionist story which he has just told within the book's covers is a "fictional account" that is only loosely based on more representative accounts of the Masterless Men that are available in *The Oral History of Ferryland* or have been published by such historians as Harold Horwood and Farley Mowat. While it is certainly true that over time there has been much conjecture about the legend of the Masterless Men, there is a fine line to be drawn between historical investigation, elaboration, and outright distortion. In his melodramatic morality play of a novel, Drodge unconvincingly attempts to turn an inspiring myth of revolt against authority into a twisted and misleading account of predatory bandits rescued from their sins by the redemptive intercession of a dedicated Catholic priest.

In Drodge's revised version of the Masterless Men myth, Kerrivan is idealized as a sort of Christ-like figure whose nobler aspirations are not reflected in the larcenous behavior of his backwoods disciples. In keeping with Drodge's fictionalized account, rather than raiding the merchant larders and government warehouses of the rich, the Masterless Men turn from engaging in occasional instances of petty theft to repeatedly stealing the meager possessions of the poor coastal villagers in predawn raids that eventually become sadistic, even murderous, onslaughts necessitating the intervention of the colonial authorities at the settlers' urgent request. Within Drodge's alternate universe, the Masterless Men prey upon those at the bottom of the social ladder. In a weak attempt at creating dramatic tension, Drodge gives us the devilish Nate Johnson character, invented to be Kerrivan's arch rival within the outlaw band. Much to Kerrivan's dismay, Johnson leads the outlaws even further astray in victimizing the hapless poor until the good Father Fabian finally comes to the rescue. Of course, it would be an exaggeration to characterize the Masterless Men as innocent choir boys or to contend that the destructiveness of their actions might not sometimes have exceeded or violated the social justice ideals of their myth. However, even in practical terms, it is extremely doubtful that they could have survived the British search and destroy parties for so long without having had a solid relationship of mutual respect with the local villagers whose trade and protection they needed in order to survive, and who would have been more likely to betray them if they had been victimized by them.

Rather than dealing with the systemic abuses of colonial justice, Drodge has created contrasting colonial officials that can be played off against one another in much the same way that he does with Kerrivan and Johnson. Accordingly, he inserts a newly-appointed colonial official as a character towards the end of the book: Naval Governor Myles Grimes, presented as a paternalistic and wise statesman. He is in contrast to the cruel and selfcentered preceding governor, Lieutenant Stanford, who had previously hung six of the Masterless Men (including two teenage boys) in the book's concocted version of events. Grimes is yet another benevolent authority figure, while Stanford is employed by Drodge as a villainous foil to buttress the more liberal brand of colonialism represented by his successor. At the conclusion of the book, as a result of Father Fabian's instigation, the Grimes character brings law and order back to the colony, and, in so doing, legitimizes colonial rule. Grimes strikes a deal in which he promises not to hunt down the Masterless Men if Kerrivan in turn promises to end the outlaw band's dishonorable raids on the cruelly-treated villagers, which the repenting outlaw is quite willing to do.

Bearing in mind that these odious raids against the poor had been artificially created by Drodge in the first place, his contrived resolution of the raiding issue allows him to close his novelistic sermon on a cloying note of domesticity. Accordingly, at the end of the novel, Drodge attempts to counter the nomadic myth of the Masterless Men by promulgating instead a redemptive myth of domestication in which Kerrivan finds domestic bliss with the only female character

in the book whom Dodge has conveniently created for just this purpose. She is the long-suffering Hannah Martin, whom the outlaw marries in a wedding ceremony presided over by none other than the good Father Fabian. Kerrivan's legal and religiously-sanctified marriage marks the end of his outlaw life in the wilds of Butter Pot Mountain amongst the Masterless Men. In Drodge's attempted normalization of Kerrivan, the saga of the Masterless Men ends when the outlaw disowns and abandons what had by that point in the novel sadly degenerated into a reign of terror on the settlements in return for a settled family life of his own in a cabin on the edge of the town of Renews. We are told by Drodge that Kerrivan gave up his rowdy ways and lived there contentedly, with his grandchildren close by, until his natural death many years later. In no other mythic accounts of the Masterless Men does Kerrivan ever leave his stateless Butter Pot Barrens refuge to live a domesticated life in the settlements.

In her research on the Masterless Men, Andrea Genevieve Johnston soundly refutes this distorted picture of the Masterless Men as "terrorists at large" that was originally promulgated by the colonial power brokers and then uncritically parroted by Drodge in sycophantic fashion as part of his blatant attempt to rewrite their outlaw myth. As she explains, "*I have not come across a single other source that says the Masterless Men ever 'terrorized' the surrounding settlements. In fact, the majority of the sources state that the Masterless Men had contacts and friends in the settlement with whom they would frequently trade*" (Johnston, 2016, p. 92). As we have seen, stories about the Masterless Men (and others) can be skewed based upon who is doing the telling. If we simplistically rely on official records, which consist mainly of orders given by the British navy to capture the outlaws, we are getting only the viewpoint of the colonial authorities.

Referring back to Dawe's previous comments on the Robin Hood myth, it should be remembered that he only questioned whether the Masterless Men "gave to the poor" not whether they "stole from the rich." As he has further explained the reciprocal terms of the relationship between the Masterless Men and their allies amongst the villagers: "*There is little evidence that Peter [Kerrivan] robbed from the rich and gave to the poor, but there is plenty of evidence that local sympathizers aided the Masterless Men, not only by illegal trading, but also by acting as spies who would show their solidarity by tipping them off whenever there was a plan to apprehend them*" (Dawe, 2011, p. 11).That kind of solidarity would have been impossible to obtain if it were poor folks who were the ones being subjected to the raiding parties. Bearing in mind the elite targets of their raids, the Masterless Men received grassroots support because of their raids not in spite of them.

While many details of the story of the Masterless Men are as misty as the rolling fog of Newfoundland and as elusive as the Masterless Men themselves, we do know that not only did they learn to live off the land by hunting game, gathering wild berries and plants, and fishing for brook trout, but that sometimes they resorted to stealthy raids upon rich merchants and planters. In flipping Drodge's revisionist script back over, his narrative of the Masterless Men as stealing from the long-suffering coastal villagers can be re-conceptualized as one in which it is the more adventurous men and women from among the poor who might have stolen themselves away from the miseries of colonial civilization to steal their lives back again in the freedom of the wilderness environs. Accordingly, they cast off their servitude to colonial masters to cast in their lot with the Masterless Men. In leaving their settled ways behind, they charted an autonomous course through the barren wastelands carving a path toward the inland lighthouse at the peak of Butter Pot Mountain.

Communique from the Stateless Zones

> *Attempts to abandon states or evade state power are universal; they have probably affected every state in the history of the world.*
>
> Peter Gelderloos

While the Masterless Men have typically been considered rebels, the outcomes of their rebellion are often perceived by historians as being reformist in that they were rebelling against the injustices of the system rather than the system itself and so were quite willing to be placated by the granting of legal rights that served to restore the necessary degree of social peace required for the smooth functioning of society. From a liberal perspective, such a reformist result is seen in a positive light. On the other hand, from the Marxist point of view of someone like Eric Hobsbawm, the inevitable trap of reformism laid for such groups as the Masterless Men is in effect attributed to their being "social bandits" rather than "real" revolutionaries who must by necessity concern themselves with seizing state power. Alternatively, from an anti-authoritarian perspective, the Masterless Men would not be understood as "social bandits" in the Marxian sense, but rather as anarchic rebels, closer to what James C. Scott has positively identified as "barbarians," and their Butter Pot Barrens camp would be seen in that context as a "barbarian zone."

Historically, as Scott explains, barbarians are "*uncaptured at the very least and, at worst, represent a nuisance and threat that must be exterminated*" (Scott, 2017, p.221). Since barbarians seek to evade capture by civilization, they have often dwelled in what Scott has called "barbarian zones" which "*most often refer to mountains or steppes. In fact, almost any area that was difficult to access, illegible and trackless, and unsuitable for intensive farming might qualify as a barbarian zone. Thus uncleared dense forest, swamps, marshes, river deltas, fens, moors, deserts, heath, arid wastes, and even the sea itself have been cast into this category by state discourse*" (Scott, 2017, p.228). A complmentary anarchist analysis of early state formation has been provided by Peter Gelderloos in which he examines those rebels who seek to elude or resist statehood. Accordingly, their aim is not to seize state power as Hobsbawm mandates but to abolish it by seizing power over their own lives.

In Hobsbawm's staunch Marxist analysis, the social bandit represents a "primitive" or "archaic" form of social agitation rather than revolutionary action. For Hobsbawm, "*Social banditry, though a protest, is a modest and unrevolutionary protest. It protests not against the fact that peasants are poor and oppressed, but against the fact that they are sometimes excessively poor and oppressed. Bandit heroes are not expected to make a world of equality. They can only right wrongs and prove that sometimes oppression can be turned upside down*" (Hobsbawm, 1959, p. 24). He has further explained his concept of the social bandit in terms of his Marxist reading of the legend of Robin Hood. As Hobsbawm says of Robin, "*He seeks to establish or to re-establish justice or 'the old ways,' that is to say, fair dealing in a society of oppression. That is why Robin Hood cannot die, and why he is invented when he does not really exist. Poor men have need of him, for he represents justice. That is why they need him most, perhaps, when they cannot hope to overthrow oppression but merely seek its alleviation because he represents a higher form of society which is powerless to be born"* (Hobsbawm, 2000, pp.60–61). Hobsbawm, though clearly fascinated with social banditry enough to write an entire volume about it, never allowed himself to get swept up in what he considered to be the romantic myth of "personal insurgence." The latter, no matter how combative its means, he opposed to more serious forms of revolutionary struggle toward Marxist goals.

For Hobsbawm, “the social bandit is an individual who refuses to bend his back, that is all” (Hobsbawm, 200, p.61). But to turn his Marxist edict into a question, is that all? “Refusing to bend your back” is not necessarily a finite act. Such a refusal can provoke a wide range of anarchist forms of rebellion ranging from assertions of individual autonomy to the fomentation of social revolution. It can be the key that one uses to open the door to anarchy rather than allowing oneself to get trapped in the revolving door of state socialism a la Hobsbawm. Moreover, while his use of the term “social bandit” sounds neutral in theory, in historical practice it has not been neutral at all. During the early years of the Russian Revolution, “social bandit” was used to designate those considered to be counter-revolutionaries. It was wielded like a club by the Bolsheviks in order to consolidate their hold over state power by vilifying and purging both individualist anarchists who “refused to bend their backs” to the Soviet commissars and such “unbending” social revolutionaries as those who associated themselves with Nestor Mahkno in the Ukraine. In the bloody history of authoritarian state socialism, to label someone a social bandit has not just been a way of dismissing their revolutionary intentions, but of landing them in the gulag or the morgue.

Moreover, Hobsbawm’s remarks are particularly telling in relation to his dismissal of the inspirational power imbedded in the myth of revolt. Though the subversive potency of such myths is not measurable in the purely material terms prized by Marxists, it has been a baseline contention of this essay that such a myth can act as an inspiration in fomenting and keeping alive the spirit of revolt. However, for Hobsbawm, inspirational ideals are dismissed as illusionary: they cannot be efficiently translated into concrete revolutionary change. In this regard, he mockingly says of those who he considers to be misguided idealists, “*Only the ideals for which they fought, and for which men and women made up songs about them, survive, and round the fireside these still maintain the vision of the just society, whose champions are brave and noble as eagles, fleet as stags, the sons of the mountains and the deep forests”* (Hobsbawm, 1959, p.28). From his perspective, not only are such ideals to be differentiated from material accomplishments, but they are seen as diversionary substitutes that prevent us from attaining revolutionary change by lulling us into confusing romantic myth with revolutionary reality. From such a perspective, he considered anarchists as prone to romanticize social banditry, when what really counts to him is the overthrowing of the capitalist state by means of a Marxist revolution that installs a communist state in its place. With this statist goal in mind, any opposition to or disparagement of the state by those anarchists who romanticize the social bandit is based upon a foolhardy rejection of the pressing necessities of revolutionary struggle.

He is particularly critical of the classical anarchist Mikhail Bakunin for idealizing the social bandit as a “social revolutionary without fine phrases.” To Hobsbawm, such a bandit figure is merely a crude “expropriator” who is resistant to the disciplined form of Marxist political organization necessary to seize state power. Even someone like the insurgent Catalonian guerilla/bankrobber, Sabaté, well known for his inspirational role in the anti-fascist resistance to Franco, is ridiculed by Hobsbawm as being merely an “ideological gunfighter” whose anarchism was based on a “totally uncompromising and lunatic dream” a la Don Quixote (Hobsbawm, 2000, p.121–138). However, as history has clearly shown, it is the Marxist idea of seizing state power to facilitate a future transition toward stateless communism that is truly the lunatic dream.

Rather than conceptualizing the Masterless Men in the baggage-laden Marxist terminology of social banditry, it is my contention here that they are better understood in relation to what James C. Scott has called “the art of not being governed” (Scott, 2009). The men and women who

are the denizens of what Scott refers to as “extra-state spaces” are not concerned with seizing state power, but rather with evading it. As he further explains: “*It is crucial to understand that what is being evaded is not a relationship per se with the state, but an evasion of subject status. For some groups, state evasion is coupled with practices that might be termed the prevention of internal state-making. Relatively acephalous [headless] groups with strong traditions of equality and sanctions against permanent hierarchy seem to belong to this category*” (Scott, 2009, pp. 330–331). Accordingly, Scott’s primary focus is on anarchic practices among “non-subject peoples.” Moreover, the purview of his approach to the study of those “refugees” who are fleeing from state power includes many who were once state subjects themselves. As he has explained in terms that call to mind the Masterless Men, “*Over time an increasingly large proportion of nonstate peoples were not ‘pristine primitives’ who stubbornly refused the domus, but ex-state subjects who had chosen, albeit under desperate circumstances, to keep the state at arm’s length”* (Scott, 2017, p.232).

What Scott calls “secondary primitivism” can assume a process of “voluntary self-nomadization” on the part of those who refuse to be domesticated state subjects. Since such a process can involve moving to “shatter zones” located on the unstable frontiers and hinterlands of state systems, it can be seen as “barbaric.” For Scott, the terms “barbaric” and “barbarian” are not used in the derogatory way that they are employed in mainstream discourse.

As he elaborates, “*Precisely because this practice of going over to the barbarians flies directly in the face of civilization’s ‘just so’ story, it is not a story one will find in the court chronicles and official histories. It is subversive in the most profound sense. Without romanticizing life on the barbarian fringe, leaving state space for the periphery was experienced less as a consignment to outer darkness than an easing of conditions, if not an emancipation”* (Scott, 2017, pp.233 and 234). Certainly, such a subversively emancipatory barbarism is embedded in the mythic story of the Masterless Men.

With Scott’s approach in mind, we can compare the stateless history of the Masterless Men, of whom he was probably unaware, to that of the maroons (enslaved Africans who escaped bondage), which he examines in some detail. Maroons dwell in remote communities outside the authoritarian grasp of the white supremacist slave state. While one cannot simplistically compare the holocaust of slavery to the horrors of indentured servitude or forced military impressment, there are striking similarities. Accordingly, Scott has described life in maroon communities in terms that resonate with the circumstances of the Masterless Men:

> *Runaway slaves clustered in precisely those out-of-theway places where they could not easily be found. They chose, when possible, defensible locations accessible by only a single pass or trail that could be blocked with thorns and traps and observed easily. Like bandits, they prepared escape routes in case they were found and their defenses failed. Shifting cultivation, supplemented by foraging, trade and theft, was the commonest maroon practice. Outside the law by definition, many maroon communities lived in part by raiding nearby settlements and plantations. None it seems were self-sufficient. Occupying a distinctive agro-ecological zone with valued products, many maroon settlements were closely integrated into the larger economy by clandestine and open trade* (Scott, 2009, p.190).

Aside from any similarities between the Masterless Men and the maroons based upon the former’s remote location in the barrens and the trade relationships with the settlers that helped

to sustain them, the Butter Pot outlaws were rebelling against a Newfoundland colonial environment that in a related manner had its own plantation system of indenture to the fishing masters, in which British attitudes toward their colonial subjects of Irish heritage often went so far as to exclude the latter from the "white race."

Interestingly, in terms of our previous discussion of social bandits, we can contrast Scott's positive reference to bandits in his description of the maroons as rebels who have successfully avoided the incursion of the state with Hobsbawm's assumption that bandits are not truly successful revolutionaries because they fail to seize state power. In this regard, it is important to note that a refusal to seize state power does not imply quiescence on the part of oppressed groups. Precisely because of its remote and stateless location on the Virginia-North Carolina border, the maroon community residing in the Great Dismal Swamp was able to become a hub for slave insurrection and rebellion across the Tidewater region of the American South. As Neal Shirley and Saralee Stafford have explained the crucial significance of the Great Dismal Swamp to the sustenance of that maroon community: "*The impassibility of the Great Dismal Swamp and the mythology that surrounded it provided protection to those early maroons, making their recapture cost-prohibitive and dangerous. In providing a commons beyond the boundaries of capitalist life, the role of wilderness was fundamental to the resistance of the swamp maroons*" (Shirley and Stafford, 2015, pp. 24 and 46). As a site of this resistance, the Great Dismal Swamp served as a wilderness base from which insurrectionary raids on surrounding plantations to free other enslaved Africans could be launched.

In mythic terms, those autonomous guerrilla enclaves engaging in evasion and resistance to the slavocracy are what Kevin Van Meter lauds as vibrant "counter-communities" about which "guerrillas of desire" can create "stories that set fire to the imagination" (Van Meter, 2017, p.56). One of my favorite of such stories, "The Legend of the Great Dismal Maroons," comes from James Koehnline. Written and illustrated by him in the form of an epic poem, it can be found in the book, *Gone To Croatan: Origins of Drop-Out Culture in North America*, of which he and I are the co-editors. When I first read Seaweed's article on the Masterless Men, my initial reaction was to think that it would have fit perfectly in the *Croatan* book. In that volume, Koehnline poetically illuminated the anarchist implications of the "mysterious" disappearance of the "Lost" Roanoke Colony, located in what is today called North Carolina:

> *The white colonists had deserted.*
> *Raleigh's agents could find no trace of them on the mainland and the Indians just shrugged their shoulders.*
> *Perhaps they were hiding out in the nearly impenetrable*
> *Great Dismal Swamp nearby.*
> *Perhaps four hundred years ago,*
> *these Maroons of four continents*
> *held a big pow-wow,*
> *dedicating themselves to the fight against slavery*
> *Even then.*
>
> (Koehnline in Sakolsky/Koehnline, 1993, P.83)

Conclusion

The real tradition of humanity is not one of acceptance but revolt.

Pierre Mabille

In searching for the "truth" about the Masterless Men, it is not wise to either naively claim that such myths and legends are entirely based upon objective fact nor to cynically claim the opposite. Instead, the poetic truths that are revealed in mythic stories reflect the unbridled dreams and desires of those who tell them. Those truths that encourage individuals and groups toward spirited resistance to enslavement and inspire anarchic practices of freedom are always made up of more than just the officially recorded facts. As Johnston has conjectured, "*It is no wonder then that the Legend of the Masterless Men has survived for so long because not only are the paths the men cut still visible to this day, but some of their ghosts still haunt the shores reminding everyone of a time when a group of men stood up against injustice and tyranny and escaped a life of slavery*" (Johnson, 2016, p. 95).

The anarchist potential of the emancipatory myth of the Masterless Men lies in its inspiring combination of refusal, evasion, disappearance, insurrection, selfdetermination, mutual aid, and a hearty comradery. Such a myth challenges the miserabilist resignation that is at the paralytic core of both individual despair and mutual acquiescence. Rather than placing itself within the straitjacket of an impoverished reality, the immanent quality of the emancipatory myth portends a continuously more radical expansion of the presently confining parameters of the possible. Accordingly, our mythic recounting of the saga of the Masterless Men herein is not meant to be a static and sentimental exercise in historical nostalgia, but rather is put forward as a fluid and impassioned call for an emancipatory re-imagining and poetic transformation of reality in the anarchic context of land and freedom.

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