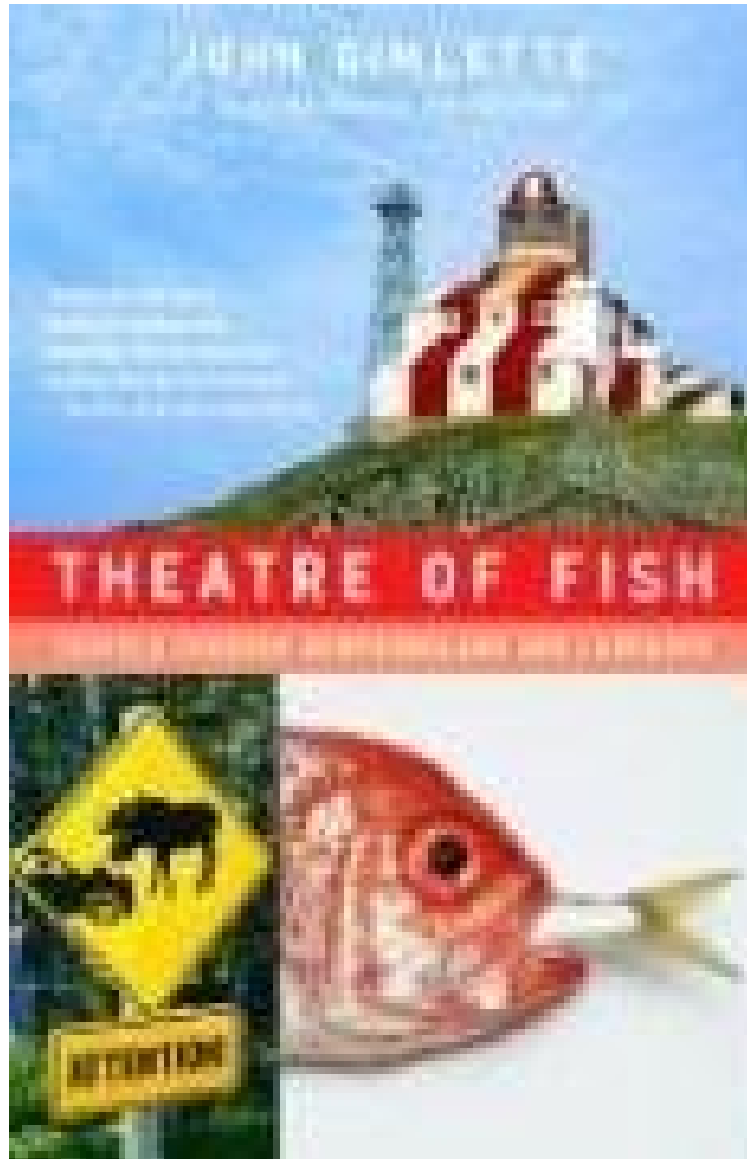


[Read now] Theatre of Fish: Travels Through Newfoundland and Labrador

Theatre of Fish: Travels Through Newfoundland and Labrador

John Gimlette

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John Gimlette : Theatre of Fish: Travels Through Newfoundland and Labrador before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Theatre of Fish: Travels Through Newfoundland and Labrador:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. A Dark Vision Beautifully Rendered By David Elliott Part gonzo travelogue, part anthropology, part history of an resource apocalypse, "Theatre of Fish" manages to range from profound to hilarious - with occasional detours into the barely comprehensible. For combating the latter it pays to

bookmark the glossary of regional expressions - plus have the internet ready for Inuit and technical terms. The author is above all things a great listener, piecing together family histories and kinship which as it happens link to his own. The tales are mostly tragic, of the centuries long gold rush that was the cod fishery characterized by a level of lawlessness and hardship that makes our wild west sound tame. For one thing, these desperadoes are still at it. Ostensibly retracing the journals of his great grandfather who served as a doctor in the area, the author fleshes things out by interviewing the descendants of patients. While good conversation, the more dramatic the better, seems the primary criteria for mention in the book, the general population seems remarkably well endowed in this regard. It seems all Newfoundland is a stage, peopled with characters apologetically, blatantly, charmingly, horrifyingly human. The dialects are archaic, the cursing world class, the life choices and behavior frequently bad - but as they're also hospitable, a fine adventure is had. Conversations with old timers read like the opening of a time capsule, recalling bare livings earned from a depleting fishery, killing whales, clubbing seals, and frequently getting killed in turn from storms and ice - bodies turning up in fishing gear and taking the return trip salted among the fish, or stacked on deck in the attitudes in which they froze. As with the best history, it also provides a view forward. After all, it is the story of a seemingly endless natural resource, one that endured for half a millennium in the face of ever more sophisticated harvesting by fleets from around the world - then suddenly collapsed. It's a story ancient, contemporary and yet to be - all at the same time. The account comes in two parts, the twisted tale of Newfoundland's European visitors (the vast majority enduring virtually as slaves), and the even more desolate Labrador where the native people are still reeling from contact. To find Newfoundland on the map head northeast from Maine, passing Nova Scotia, then crossing a hundred miles of water. The island of Newfoundland is the size of Italy, with half million inhabitants clinging to the coast, water being nearly the only means of travel. Which is not to entirely dismiss Route 1 - numbered as in only - a road built in the 90s. Head further north and you're in Labrador, back on the mainland but among a population of just 30 thousand (for 3,000 square miles per inhabitant). It also enjoys ferry service when the Atlantic isn't frozen and is traversed by a road. Any romantic notions you may have of the frozen north will unlikely survive the actual horror and savagery related here. As it happens the locals are quite vocal about not being quaint. Your moralist too may be shaken in his beliefs as he encounters the local take on niceties. Even simply bearing witness as the author does - and not being the sort to search for answers as he says - he finds questions and contradictions piling up. Consider the natives of Labrador. You take a people sublimely adapted to surviving in a sort of watery version of outer space, and relocate them for their own good into subdivisions with satellite TV, snowmobiles and convenience food. Stripped of ten thousand years of life experience hunting seals and caribou they find themselves with zilch: no identity, belief system, or occupation, utterly adrift in an alien (read our) world. No wonder they respond like captive animals, trashing their government issue housing, hating outsiders, the dole and themselves - and exhibiting periodic bouts of suicide and murder. To illustrate, supply ship crews have learned to drop their loads on the docks at dawn and depart to avoid rock throwing children. It's the South Bronx north - and 1200 miles east - where polar bears and wolves roam the streets at night. What's to be done when every solution tried has been ineffective at best, and frequently genocidal? So grows the pile of traits admirable and despicable, ways of life that "no longer work," yet remain precious. It seems that by embracing this very human talent for contradiction that Gimlette portrays so capably that we might learn how to respond. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. wouldn't recommend to someone planning a trip there By Barbara N Lawrence Some interesting historical references, but I don't agree with much else. Have traveled to Newfoundland a number of times, and I feel he did not capture the real Newfoundland, its friendly, welcoming people. Very dark, wouldn't recommend to someone planning a trip there. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Good read. By Kate This is tongue in cheek at times, and while I can't quite agree with all that is said, my memories proceed this author's life, and living there is slightly different from hearing the stories a half a generation or generation later. Well written it does capture the fierce independence of the place and the anger around the collapse of the cod industry, which was not caused by the dorymen for sure, or the Portuguese schooners that provisioned in St. John's harbour and set sail without auxiliary engines to spend a season at sea filling their ships with cod. It was the factory ships that came later with their nets and drag lines scooping up more tonnage than nature could replace. Good read.

Newfoundland is one of the most intriguing places in North America, a land of breathtaking but cruel beauty, populated by some of the saltiest, oddest characters you'll ever find. In *Theatre of Fish*, John Gimlette vividly describes the dense forests and forbidding coastlines and recounts the colorful and often tragic history of the region. He introduces us to the inhabitants, from the birds and moose to the descendants of the outlaws, deserters, and fishermen who settled this eastern edge of North America. Leavened with irreverence and affection, this is an irresistible portrait of life in extremis.

From *Publishers Weekly* Gimlette's account of his journey through Newfoundland and Labrador is more personal than his last travelogue (*At the Tomb of the Inflatable Pig*, set in Paraguay); he's tracing his own history as he follows the trail of his great-grandfather, a nineteenth century missionary doctor. Rather than slowing the pace, the family connection increases his chances of stumbling across weird and wonderful tableaux, and the turns of phrase Gimlette

uses to describe them are as singular and unruly as the isolated and forgotten land he explores ("The sky was clean as a knife," for instance). It's difficult to avoid feeling like a keen sense of the absurd rules the northeastern reaches of North America: bear-fighting goats, an emergency air-landing strip serving the whole world and countless ghost towns left from the heady days when the cod fishing ruled the island; every place Gimlette visits is stranger than the previous. He weaves his ancestor's tale with his own travels and the region's history without creating an overwhelming tangle, although at times his delivery is choppy and truncated with abrupt section breaks. Usually, he eases into each locale, finds the oddest, most garrulous inhabitant and listens to their complaints, theories and family sagas. Readers will be fascinated by Newfoundland's and Labrador's bizarre, often tragic pasts and equally strange presents, and they will be glad it was the eloquent Gimlette who made the trip so they don't have to. 16 pages of photos not seen by PW. Copyright Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. From Booklist

Gimlette's encounter with Newfoundland was inspired by a great-grandfather who participated in one Wilfred Grenfell's 1890s attempts to bring modern medicine to "the Rock," as inhabitants diffidently call their home. Gimlette found a statue of Grenfell but no other permanence to his efforts, which like other projects of colonization over the centuries, failed to prosper. Encountering a sense of historical and contemporary futility on his journey, the British Gimlette strives to see the positive but recurrently admits the negative into his narrative. As travelogue, however, his prose rolls forward engagingly as Gimlette weaves together a forgotten incident and a locale's present appearance and aspirations. He starts and ends in St. John's, taking bus or car to outlying settlements and a ferry northward to inspect Labrador. Many of his stories germinate in the local bar and are as varied as the denizens. Redolent with accents only slightly altered from those of original Irish, English, and French settlers, these tales reinforce Newfoundland's edge-of-the-world reputation and will transport readers to its windswept landscape. Gilbert Taylor Copyright American Library Association. All rights reserved

Newfoundlers themselves must be Gods gift to travel writers. In John Gimlette's frothy treatment, the island is absolutely teeming with impossibly colorful characters spouting nonstop entertainment . . . Gimlette is laugh-out-loud funny. The New York Times Book John Gimlette is attracted to bizarre places and writes about them with often withering irony [and] surrealist panache. . . . An absurd and entertaining book. National Geographic Oddly compelling. . . . The reward is the feast of stories gathered from taverns and ferry rides and old journals: drownings, battles with Esquimaux greenhorns challenging an unforgiving wilderness, folks who still use dogsleds because in tough times, You can't eat a snowmobile. The Washington Post Terrific stuff. . . . A dazzlingly multifaceted portrait of the region. . . . A hugely entertaining book in which the interest never flags. . . . As a descriptive writer, a master of the telling observation and the well-chosen epithet, [Gimlette] is in the highest class. The Daily Telegraph