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Volume 33, numéro 2, 2008

URI : [https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/scl33\\_2art05](https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/scl33_2art05)

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Éditeur(s)

The University of New Brunswick

ISSN

0380-6995 (imprimé)

1718-7850 (numérique)

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Citer cet article

Marshall, S. (2008). "As if there were just the two choices": Region and Cosmopolis in Lisa Moore's Short Fiction. *Studies in Canadian Literature / Études en littérature canadienne*, 33(2), 80-95.

# “As if there were just the two choices”: Region and Cosmopolis in Lisa Moore’s Short Fiction

SUSANNE MARSHALL

LISA MOORE’S TWO COLLECTIONS of short stories, *Open* (2002) and *Degrees of Nakedness* (1995), have received much attention as notable examples of the Atlantic-Canadian literature. *Open* was nominated for both the Giller Prize, an award of national and international significance, and the Winterset Award for Excellence in Newfoundland Writing, a regional distinction. In fact, Moore presents the inseparability of the regional and the global: if her work is to be read as regional, it must be read as work that explores and redefines what is commonly understood to be regional literature — that is, literature that emphasizes what are considered to be a region’s cultural attributes: a distinct sense of place, a shared social and economic history, a common sense of tradition, a shared dialect. As Lawrence Mathews indicates in the introduction to *ECW*’s special issue on the literature of Newfoundland, although historically Newfoundland critics and writers have focused upon the cohesion of a Newfoundland identity and psyche (7) and highlighted these shared cultural attributes, the generation of writers who have gained recent prominence treat identity quite differently, either questioning and “map[ping] the complexities and ironies that attend the question of Newfoundland identity” (9), as Mathews says of Wayne Johnston, or “demonstrat[ing] the extent to which Newfoundland fiction has moved beyond such concerns” (10), as he remarks of Moore and Paul Bowdring. Moore does emphatically move away from depicting a cohesive model of identity, but her work is, nevertheless, intimately concerned with the construction of regional identity. It is unique in its detailed examination of what Glenn Willmott terms the “contestatory interaction” and “copenetration” of regional and cosmopolitan worlds (146); it draws attention to the very instability of Newfoundland’s cultural attributes and suggests a conception of regional identity founded in the state of constant “flux,” to use Moore’s

word, produced by the dialogue of Newfoundland's particularities both with other cultures and with a Westernized global culture. The stories focus on the intricacies of individual relationships amongst middle- and upper-class Newfoundlanders, for whom both physical travel and at-home encounters with other cultural influences are commonplace: the distinction between what is and what is not a home place is increasingly blurred, dependent not only on topography but on human connection — and disconnection. Significantly, Moore's stories investigate the results of this instability, functioning not merely as a catalogue of "the new Newfoundland," but drawing our attention to the ways in which such negotiations of regional identity and global influences are played out in the minute actions of our everyday lives, infusing them with political import and responsibility.

To investigate Moore's interarticulation of the regional and the cosmopolitan, I want to look first at the use to which Moore puts Newfoundland's physical geography in her stories — namely, in reinforcing in her readers' minds that, as she remarks in an interview with the *Globe and Mail*, "St. John's [is] an international port — and Newfoundlanders travel. They travel for work. So in some ways, though it's a small place, though it's isolated, it's pretty cosmopolitan. My characters reflect that" (Ruth). Her characters live in urban Newfoundland, and so their understanding of place is quite different from the historically rural, outport stereotype of Newfoundland landscape, and connected instead to busy streets, backyards, bars, and chain stores that both are and are not discernibly local. Immediately, this deliberate contestation of the "place" that defines region indicates that Moore's work engages with what David Jordan, surveying the possibilities for regionalism in current literature, calls a "postmodern regionalism" — regionalism that gains from poststructuralist approaches a recognition of the constructed nature of regional identities and a problematization of both geographical and cultural boundaries, that "mak[es] regionalism's borders — those paradoxical middle grounds — its referent" (107). In this model, regionalism is not only very much in conversation with exterior perceptions and influences, but, as Frank Davey points out, also bares its internal disjunctions (16).<sup>1</sup> In the story "Carmen Has Gonorrhoea" we follow the sound of Carmen's name as it moves through the streets of St. John's, "thunders up the hills of downtown, raises the hairs of the leaves of geraniums in the windows of Gower Street, makes the light turn green

at Rawlins Cross, grows softer, ticklish, near our split-level behind the Avalon Mall" (*Degrees* 67). The story's mapping of the city reduces the mythologizing of such storied spots as Rawlins Cross to their functionality in the daily lives of inhabitants, and connects such places, literally, to the suburban ordinariness of malls, cement trucks, and cul de sacs. In the same fashion Moore demythologizes Signal Hill, reclaiming it in several stories as a site for private interaction and everyday use: making love (*Degrees* 128), getting drunk (*Open* 215), walking in the fog (*Degrees* 63). However, such treatment is inevitably variable, especially as Moore uses Signal Hill for the final scene in the text of her collection *Open*: it remains an iconic, touristic "signal" of Newfoundland at the same time as it performs a private role in individuals' stories and lives. In another story, "Azalea," Moore shifts to the opposite end of the symbolic spectrum, examining the more unprepossessing aspects of the city's geography: she lingers on "the stoplight near Don Cherry's Sports Grill" (*Open* 113) as a location, a place her characters "might be, right now." Here, Moore draws generic suburban infrastructure, with its correspondingly generic chain store (national overtones acknowledged), into the fabric of the city, acknowledging it as place, not merely conduit. Similarly, a recurring landmark in Moore's stories is a corner store called the Fountain Spray: it is referred to several times by a character who decides, deliberately, to continue calling it that, "Though it hasn't had that name for years. Needs, it's called now. Needs" (*Open* 93). Even a quotidian corner store, part of a large North American brand, becomes a place of significance and is revealed to have a layered history that emerges over the course of several stories. In this manner, Moore recognizes the place of the global in local contexts, highlighting the literal "location" of anonymous, standardized, and multinational entities within the web of existence in St. John's, seeing them as more than a monolithic, encroaching force of destruction. As such, Moore directs attention to the continuous modification of local cultures, their dialectic with, and adaptation of, what is "outside" themselves. Her work makes clear that globalization must be approached, as Arjun Appadurai proposes, not as a process of uniform, one-sided homogenization, but rather by taking into account the ways in which myriad global influences are indigenized within specific cultures, and in turn the ways in which specific cultures contribute to this network of "global flows." Thus cultural globalization is a profoundly uneven, contextual process, and one that is, moreover, inevitable:

This is not to say that there are no relatively stable communities and networks of kinship, friendship, work, and leisure, as well as of birth, residence, and other filial forms. But it is to say that the warp of these stabilities is everywhere shot through with the woof of human motion. (33)

“Human motion,” here, can be understood not only to encompass the actual travel of human beings but also the “flows” of companies, commodities, architectures, and methods of social and spatial organization.

Suburbs, as consummate examples of these conjunctions of location and dislocation, are given considerable attention in Moore’s stories. The historical appeal of suburbs has had much to do with the drive to the uniformity of mass culture, an escape from older, closer communities with distinct locales, histories, architectures, and cultures. As Mark Clapson, interrogating the cultural contributors to “suburban aspirations,” notes,

Millions of people experienced [city centres] as overcrowded, insanitary, peopled with undesirables and lacking in both privacy and wide open spaces. Furthermore, most people did not want to live right next to their workplace. Nor did people particularly want to live cheek by jowl with family and friends within the ostensibly close networks of urban communities. . . . For the majority of suburbanites, the social tone of the neighborhood was inextricably related to the quality of the residential environment. People wanted to live with people of similar social class and social consciousness to themselves. (51-52)

Clapson does not assess the draw of suburbs to those living in predominantly rural areas, but many of the same reasons apply: both the old city centre of St. John’s and Newfoundland’s small outposts, for example, offered the same communal closeness and mixed-class living that suburbanites sought to avoid. Clapson’s analysis indicates that as suburbs grew during the mid-twentieth century, suburbanites’ conceptions of community changed: as they rejected older models of community, and devalued traditionally important interpersonal connections based on family and location, they simultaneously desired a new form of community based on class identification or, as Clapson points out, aspiration. Seeking to redefine themselves, then, suburbanites turn not to old foundations of identity but to newer ones supplied by the accel-

ated material culture of twentieth-century America. Similarly Robert Fishman, echoing the concerns of 1950s cultural critic David Riesman, warns of the conformity inherent in the suburbs he calls “bourgeois utopias.” This conformity, he argues, is founded on a “principle of exclusion” (4) that ironically enough turns against itself, as the mass-production techniques and media outlets created to service these very suburbs produce a situation in which “culture is necessarily reduced to a lowest common denominator, the crass conformity of which will act as a barrier to individualism and freedom” (200).

In highlighting suburban life in Newfoundland, Moore juxtaposes the utopic ideal of this exclusionary, yet mass culture with its opposite, the utopic ideal of an exclusionary, yet communal regional identity, examining Newfoundlanders’ sometimes simultaneous desires for each, and exposing through their contrast the limitations and darker consequences of adhering to either. For example, in “Carmen Has Gonorrhoea,” Moore presents a dystopic suburban Newfoundland that nevertheless clings to its promise of a better life. Moore chooses cement trucks as the presiding spirits of the story, symbols of transformation of the landscape and growing suburban sprawl. Comically, these offer hope and possibility to the protagonist as she wills them to run down a romantic rival, but in a serious sense the trucks gesture metaphorically to her aspirations for status, measured on a material level, and her desire for the erasure, the smoothing over, of her husband’s past. Pertinently, the contest between the protagonist and her rival, Carmen, is presented in terms that explicitly contrast suburban with rural space and lifestyles. In a moment of feverish anger, the protagonist surveys her territory: “The lawns of all the houses between my house and the mall spread out before me. New frost stiffens them. Beyond is the mall parking lot” (*Degrees* 67). Here, her position both in and above this suburban landscape, surveying it proudly, marks her affiliation with its associated ideals of individual ownership, materialism, “newness,” and “stiff” correctness. In contrast Carmen, the castanet-tapping bossa nova singer at Bar Baric, the fetish bar situated at the bottom of the hill, is an outlandish distortion of rural values and attributes — physical beauty, superstition, musicality, and earthy energy — whose disembodied, siren voice infiltrates suburbia and threatens the protagonist’s fiercely imagined and defended idyll. Further, Carmen is associated with the protagonist’s mother-in-law, in whose guise traditional family connec-

tions become claustrophobic and critical. Both the protagonist and her rival are caricatures disturbing in their malice, in the limitations of their understanding and generosity, and the voraciousness of their desires; the text suggests the reductiveness of their typecast performances of location and identity.

In "Natural Parents," Moore again presents a close examination of suburban space for the purposes of highlighting the interpenetration of mass and regional culture, and the sterility of either scripted extreme. The central character, Lyle, recalls that his girlfriend Rachel's house was "somewhere in Mount Pearl," and had "a real estate guide in the mailbox" (*Open* 76): here, Moore's description emphasizes anonymity and a lack of permanence, and highlights place as commodity. To counter this, however, Lyle remembers the "crackling hope of the new subdivision" (77) that he feels as he moves inside Rachel's house, gaining a clearer idea of the specifics of her life. In a later scene, the kitchen is described as blindingly impervious to human presence: against the "super-modern, reflective black" (78) appliances and fluorescent lighting, Lyle and Rachel's nakedness "boing[s] forward" as an oddity. Moore refuses to allow the reader to imagine another more "natural" space, however, by presenting as an impossible alternative the fetishistic innocence of a Norman Rockwell cookie tin, whose scene of a "a little girl with a pink bow in her hair and her drawers lowered for a spanking" (79) is in ironic contrast to the postcoital nudity of Rachel, the house's "little girl." We are left unsettled, unable to retreat into nostalgic definitions of home, neighbourhood, and space, and having to become familiar with our discomfort.

As Moore's stories focus on the urban and suburban landscape, so the wilderness of Newfoundland, the untouched geography that so often serves as shorthand for the "essence" of place, is rarely in evidence. Woods, animals, and even the earth itself are presented, when they are at all, either as inaccessible and foreign to the point of incomprehensibility, or as something mediated by the sub/urban. For instance, in the story "Melody," the protagonist attempts to connect with her dead husband by lying on the earth of his grave one night (*Open* 18). The connection isn't possible: earth here is connected with an unassuageable longing for the past. In "Wisdom Teeth," a character is almost run over by a moose in her yard, and pushes herself into a fir tree to avoid it, "branches all over her face" (*Degrees* 41). Again, this random,

forced and sudden immersion in wilderness carries with it associations of death; however, it is mitigated by the frame of its consequences — a few spilled Campbell's Soup tins, icons of pop culture. Wilderness here remains a momentous but momentary interruption, placed outside of the experience of Moore's characters and having little meaning for them, compared with the tangible, comprehensible framework of the popular culture that defines their lives. In "Natural Parents," wilderness is defined and permeated by the urban: Archibald Falls, site of childhood getaways, is a day trip from the protagonist's summer home, easily accessible to wealthy urbanites and itself suffused with both the "smell of wild roses, and when the wind shifted, a sweet, poisonous smoke from a dump far off in the hills" (*Open* 72). Going further, the story "Sea Urchin" dispenses with wilderness altogether and "replaces" it with technology, in the form of "a Styrofoam painting of autumn leaves on a plywood tree" (*Degrees* 22). Together, these encounters with wilderness work to establish its marginality, to refute the traditional emphasis on its importance in Newfoundlanders' lives.

Moore also makes it clear that the land Newfoundlanders inhabit does not necessarily have to be Newfoundland — that location is not commensurate with culture. Certainly, many of the characters inhabiting the stories Moore sets in Newfoundland originate from beyond its borders: French, Algerian, Austrian, and Nigerian citizens turn up as a matter of course. Likewise, Moore's Newfoundlanders are often seemingly without borders: in the story "Mouths, Open" we encounter a Newfoundland couple in Cuba and a sex worker who flies regularly to Halifax from St. John's for work (*Open* 25). In several stories within each collection characters travel to France and Morocco, including "Meet Me in Sidi Ifni," in which the description of the riotous setting is a deliberate combination of the exotic and the familiar, as it demonstrates the extent of the narrator's intimate acquaintance with the town. Often, too, travel means permanent relocation: in "If You're There," Moore's presentation of three friends, all Newfoundlanders living in Toronto, raises questions about the extent to which we remain affiliated with regions from a distance, and the relationship of belonging to dwelling. Moore's depictions of travel can be read, as ethnographer James Clifford suggests, as a critique of the assumed stability of the culture of the region. Clifford contends that the emphasis on the study of cultures as they "dwell" is an essentialist bias that seeks an idealized authenticity,



seeks to obscure the interactions of cultures within a global modernity; accordingly, a more complete, complex picture is possible through a “focus on any culture’s farthest range of travel” (25) — bearing in mind both that travel is generally a privilege of the upper classes, and that “travel” can be extended to include all manner of contact with other cultures, physical and virtual. This contact results in instances of both individual and group hybridity, of interconnections between cultures that constitute what he calls “discrepant cosmopolitanisms” (36). As a counter to the concept of cultural stability, then, Clifford proposes a model of culture that is always in transition, redefining cosmopolitanism not as a universalizing discourse but as a continuous process of cultural exchange.

Moore presents these opposing views of the “locatedness” of culture in “Grace.” Eleanor, the central figure, considers the desirability of embarking on an affair with Glenn Marshall, a friend she runs into at a party, by considering his interest in her anecdote about visiting the Taj Mahal and being asked to appear in a Bollywood movie:

But Glenn loves Newfoundland. He doesn’t like heat, prefers cool weather. He wouldn’t want to be on top of the Pink Palace with lithe monkeys. She has told him before, she suddenly remembers. She has told him that story before, about the Bollywood movie. Glenn Marshall had been mildly interested. He had listened, but he shook his head and said he’d never go there. Why would he? He loves Newfoundland. As if there were just the two choices: the Taj or Little Island Cove. He loves being in the woods by himself, he has a cabin, can build a lean-to, set snares; he does some ice fishing, he likes the quiet.

Who is she kidding, she could never love Glenn Marshall. But . . . things can change overnight. The entire city of Stockholm . . . driving on the other side of the road as though they always had. (*Open* 170-71)

Here, Moore presents us with a tangle of attitudes about cultural purity and exchange, assessed through the discourse of location and travel. Glenn is, perhaps of all Moore’s characters, the one most representative of the traditional cultural identity of Newfoundlanders: he is associated with wilderness, self-sufficiency, outposts and withdrawal from the world, with a perspective that divides the world into the two choices of here and everywhere else. Eleanor rejects such dichotomous thinking; she is representative of both the “everywhere else” Glenn refuses and the

space between, the constant exchanges between Newfoundland and the world — as when she is literally imported into the Bollywood movie, itself a hybrid of Indian and Hollywood film. Eleanor's position, however, involves a kind of loss that is implied here in the use of the reference to Stockholm driving standards: her choice is presented as a move toward global standardization. Her reflection that "things can change overnight," ostensibly an admission that she could change her mind and move toward Glenn, toward an embrace of the tradition he personifies, in itself indicates such a move would not be possible, that she is moving away from him: the metaphor she immediately grasps for this change is Stockholm, indicative of a certain cosmopolitan familiarity with, and exchange with, the world. This is confirmed for the reader because the reference to Stockholm is an echo of an earlier conversation in the story, in which Eleanor's husband holds forth in a discussion that is literally about globalization and the pace of change (*Open* 168).

Just as land and location are deployed in Moore's stories to subvert stereotypes and suggest a changing sense of regional identity in close conversation with global forces, other aspects of Newfoundland's culture are also examined to the same end. In the story "The Lonely Goatherd," Anita and a German traveller, Hans, "discussed what was scenic, the hospitable Newfoundlander, and Jigg's dinner, briefly" (*Degrees* 128). Here, Moore offers a crisp summation and dismissal of the clichéd tropes of Newfoundland life, as defined by touristic expectations — what John Urry has termed the "tourist gaze," a "socially organized and systematized" (1) set of assumptions framed by the tourist's desire for novelty and difference and, frequently in the case of destinations that capitalize upon their reputation as "unspoiled," rural, or historic, the demand for the production of a "reality" and authenticity which can be quite removed from modern Newfoundland life (MacCannell in Urry 9) or which erases certain unattractive attributes of modernity (Urry 88). Hans and Anita acknowledge these tropes and move on to what really interests them, sleeping together. However, Moore recognizes that these clichés are deeply ingrained within both tourist and local populations, and recur almost unconsciously, even when patently ridiculous: in a reversal of the tourist gaze upon the traveller, after Hans leaves Anita "could only imagine him in a hat with a little red feather, shorts with straps, and a walking stick, Julie Andrews' voice echoing off the Alps" (*Degrees* 130). In the story "Grace," Moore also overtly addresses this

paradoxical functioning of cliché and its limitations: Eleanor's screenplay is rejected at first by a team of international producers because her plot, of "*a big record producer from the mainland sweeping a girl off her feet* was a cliché" (*Open* 184). In this assessment Moore points out that the value of overdetermined representations of culture, for the purposes of commodification, has its limitations: that even while global forces continue to demand a quick, conventional sketch of regional cultures, that very stereotype has to evolve to reflect an increasing engagement with global forces themselves to remain believable, and marketable. The version of Eleanor's screenplay that is accepted is a fated romance between a girl and a naked skydiver who lands in a field, combining attractively predictable romantic tropes with a literal embodiment of randomness, which can be read to signify the close, changeable, and instant relationships with the extra-regional that characterize of our increasingly globalized time.

This interjection of external randomness typifies Moore's approach to the representation of Newfoundland identity. Gone is the paradigm of self-sufficiency described by a taxi driver in "Grace" when, he says, "I had a wife who could make a meal out of nothing. You had your moose, you had your garden. I got a different wife now, different altogether" (*Open* 155). Not only a different wife, but a different life: the everyday lives of Moore's characters are filled with encounters with other cultures, themselves also in states of translation, such as the sudden memory of a man in Morocco wearing a djellaba and Adidas sneakers (*Degrees* 62). Although these encounters demonstrate the incompleteness of such translations, they are evidence of the increasing availability of global commodities, as when, in "If You're There," the protagonist remarks "For a long time you couldn't get shiitake mushrooms in St. John's. Lemongrass we have" (*Open* 122). Foreign goods do not remain foreign, however, but are incorporated into the existing culture and made familiar: in the same story, a South Asian fruit reminds the protagonist of the beach at Cow Head because of its vibrant colour (133). This process of familiarization, Moore reminds us, is always political as well as personal, indicative of relations of global trade, exploitation, and power. This is made more overt when, in "Mouths, Open," the items of exchange are not benign, literally consumable fruits and spices but instead a Cuban prostitute and HIV (*Open* 31).

Moore's characters' experiences of history, like their experiences of place and culture, are personal and fragmented, dependent more on

memory and its arbitrary revisions than on a shared sense of past, which for them has dulled to a vague mythology. For example, the opening of the story “Haloes” is narrated in a fairytale tone that demonstrates that regional history seems to have faded into legend: “Once the fish in the harbour of St. John’s were so thick and silver they slowed sailing vessels. The great fire of 1892 razed the city when it became imperfect” (*Degrees* 133). Likewise, for the women in “Grace,” the pace of cultural change has been so rapid in Newfoundland that their own childhoods seem inaccessible:

Constance grew up around the bay, an only child, raised by her grandmother. She says she was bathed in the kitchen in a big galvanized tub in front of a wood stove. Can this be true? She remembers when television arrived in Newfoundland. They all gathered in one house to watch. She’s a chef with a Master’s in Religious Studies. Medieval witches. (*Open* 157-58)

Here, ironically, ancient practices like witchcraft are of more interest, and are more available as objects of study in the lives of these women, than their own recent local history. In this respect, Moore not only illustrates but also draws attention to the effects of postmodern life on the perception of history — that, as Stuart Hall observes,

The more social life becomes mediated by the global marketing of styles, places, and images, by international travel, and by globally networked media images and communications systems, the more identities become detached — disembedded — from specific times, places, histories, and traditions, and appear “free-floating.” (622)

Overwhelmingly, the history represented by Moore is personal, individual history, not global, national, or even regional history. This relentless individuation seems to hinder her characters in their interactions with others: they are often reluctant to discuss their pasts; they seem impenetrable or mysterious to other characters; and their fragmentary memories, though explored in the narrative, are rarely articulated to others. This is notable, since a significant portion of Moore’s texts is taken up by these flashes of memory, often layered within each other. For example, in “Grace” Eleanor remembers her meeting with film producers, in which she drifted into a memory of the first time she read pornography (*Open* 199). Consistently, Moore emphasizes the ways in which history,

on a subjective, individual level, can be a barrier to human interaction rather than common ground.

Moore's characters' continued, or perhaps residual, connections to place can occasionally be located in metaphors that return to specific cultural practices and places, and in expressions that reflect a distinct dialect. However, as often as not, these culture-specific phrases and images are deployed to place local difference in the context of others' linguistic differences or expectations, or to self-reflexively highlight the attention paid to differences in dialect. As Cesare Poppi comments in a discussion of the interconnections of local and global, it is often "because all other cultural traits have become widely homologated to the wider context that the language issue is stressed as the defining marker of difference" (291). Moore, aware of this iconic status of linguistic difference, at times plays deliberately with her readers' expectations of difference in language and metaphor. Accordingly, her texts are, for the most part, written without drawing attention to accent or dialect, making the few times she does so more apparent. In only one story, "Wisdom Teeth," are there a few phrases that stand out as being part of a discernibly local dialect: someone falls "arse over kettle" (Degrees 41); another declares "That's some long life together" (40). Such phrases are subtly deployed in the text, not meant to stand out as being especially colourful but rather to be understood as ordinary talk. They contrast, in the same story, with the egregiously transliterated drawl of a Toronto building superintendent: "Youse don't have no pets, youse don't have no parking, youse pay heat, weese pay hydro" (33). Perhaps because the Newfoundland accent has been the focus of so many stereotypes, Moore contrasts it with a phrase calculated to make her readers smirk with its repetitiousness and heavily adulterated vernacular.

Moore's local metaphors and similes work in the same way as her deployment of accent. For example, in "Natural Parents" Lyle thinks that the feeling of ice cubes on his chest is "like flankers spat from a fire" (*Open* 78). There is no attempt to explain the term, although it is vaguely discernible from its context. As Marjorie Pryse observes of dialect, the result is a signalling of familiarity between regionalist narrators and readers (32). In the same story, however, Lyle observes that reading Heidegger is "like someone copying pans of ice, desperate to cover distance, grasping a difficult phrase only long enough to leap to the next" (74). Here, there is more explicit context, to signal to uncom-

prehending readers the meaning of “copying;” Moore’s usage is intended to accommodate both regional and extra-regional readers.

Apart from these rare instances, however, Moore’s more prominent metaphoric vehicles do not reference dialect or local cultural knowledge, but signify place in an extremely broad sense — they recall fish. In various stories, characters comment that “his tongue in my ear sounds like a pot of mussels boiling, the shells opening” (*Degrees* 52); or they compare a noise to “lobsters dropped in boiling water” (*Degrees* 71); or observe that “trays of food float through the party like a school of capelin” (*Open* 199). Moore also uses dolphins, crabs, phosphorescence, and whales. This is all the more noticeable because, while Moore’s writing is intensely imagistic, she actually uses few metaphors, relying instead on close description of sensuous detail. I suspect, therefore, that Moore’s closely affiliated marine metaphors are working on two levels. On the one hand, they can be read straight. Like the metaphors I’ve mentioned previously, they denote a regional community of readers, and simultaneously mark their difference from others. Beyond this, I suspect Moore’s overdetermination of seafood can be read as a wink at the extra regional reader’s consumption of such exoticisms, the delight in their tang of authenticity. Likewise, Moore steers even closer to sheer camp, in a torrent of metaphor, at the end of the final story in *Open*, “Grace.” Eleanor, three sheets to the wind, indulges in the drunken fantasy of steering the ship of her life, and the party, from the helm of the bathroom sink: “She won’t abandon her post, even in the face of this brick shithouse of a wave;” she is “at sea” (204-06). This section of the story is a recital of clichéd melodrama, full of both pain and parody. Such double-edged writing celebrates linguistic difference but mocks the fetishizing of it, in the same way Moore treats cultural difference on the whole.

Moore’s picture of Newfoundland as a “travelling culture,” evident in her representations of the region’s place, culture, history, and language, is not unproblematically positive. Frequently her characters react to both the overt and underlying changes in their circumstances with panic and a sense of loss: they resist and are yet caught up in change; it is liberating and dangerous. Perhaps the most compelling way Moore explores this, and one that is used in almost every story, is through her depictions of the breakdowns of marriages. In “Close Your Eyes,” Maureen contemplates her partner’s demand that they have an open marriage: “Maybe I could enjoy it, she says. She holds her cigarette

under the tap. I can see a tremor in her hand. Freedom, she says" (*Open* 103). Here, Moore evokes the pain of this supposed freedom, the sense of dislocation and extinguishment it can create. Similarly, in "If You're There" the protagonist reflects generally on her growing estrangement from a friend: "I want to tell Jeremy this: We come apart. But that's no newsflash. Everybody knows we come apart. That's why we cling so desperately" (*Open* 129). Here, the banality of change is in stark contrast to the tremendous emotion it induces, and Moore acknowledges the validity of the impulses that lead people to draw back, to resist change when it feels like "coming apart."

Accordingly, Moore presents examples of hesitation in the face of change. These seem rooted in a more closed, traditional conception of community and identity. They are, nonetheless, placed in larger contexts that suggest they do not offer real solutions to the problems characters face. In "Azalea," Sara's mother-in-law Bethany has a "list of things that matter in life," a litany of comfort that harks back to an older way of being: "boiled wool, fresh sheets, doeskin gloves, ironed shirts, old-fashioned beans, table butter, the farmer's market" (*Open* 113). Sara, trying to decide whether to accompany her husband to a new job in Montreal, is drawn to Bethany's assurance, and to James, an older man at the farmer's market who embodies the earthy pleasure, sensuousness, and community spirit she values in her present life (119). Sara remains in limbo, unwilling to choose to leave either her husband or her city, yet having to make a choice. Similarly, one of the final images of *Open*, in "Grace," is a weaving, embracing circle of friends at a wedding; this is another tempting vision of coherence and community, and Moore expands it with the return home of Eleanor's errant husband Philip; his recitation of a night spent visiting local landmarks; his fall into bed, intimate signifier of belonging and home; and his sleepy request to her, "Stay here" (215). We must, however, be dubious of this concluding request: though it gestures toward both personal reconciliation and the harmony of local identity and community, Philip is, after all, a man who is writing a book on globalization, and who *is* betraying Eleanor by having an affair.

At the same time Moore asks us to critically assess Eleanor, who deftly negotiates various contradictory positionings of global and local identity as they play to her advantage in her relationships with other

characters. She dismisses Glenn Marshall, as I discussed earlier, for his adherence to a stereotyped Newfoundland culture. Yet the passage also satirizes Eleanor, who self-consciously constructs herself against him, name-dropping exotic places in her cocktail conversation, using cosmopolitanism as a commodity to enhance her own social status. In doing so she reveals a rather touristic naïveté, an approach to others that speaks to cultural distance, not exchange. Eleanor, inconsistently, condemns her rival for Philip's affections, the young ecofeminist scholar Amelia Kerby, for the same arsenal of global engagement Eleanor herself deploys: Amelia's Parisian couture and bungee-jumping, her aromatherapy and her webcam are matched against Eleanor's adventures in south-east Asia. Eleanor and her friends belittle Amelia as a "yahoo" (209), an unsuccessful competitor in a contest of worldliness, and yet try to marshal the forces of community and locality to Eleanor's own defense. Here, Moore demonstrates both the nuance and versatility of such boundary-shifting and its exploitative uses in Eleanor's web of criticism and claiming.

Numerous writers and critics today question whether it is possible to sustain a sense of place, a regional identity, within an increasingly globalized world; they often remain skeptical of the potential of the post-modern for regional literature. While this questioning is essential, it is often framed within a discourse of threat and extinction. Moore's texts, conversely, point to the ordinariness and inevitability of the adaptation of local cultures to global influences; to the always shifting borders between the two, for good and ill; and to the need to be mindful of the uses to which we put these boundaries. Accordingly, her works exhibit a skepticism toward both avowals of regional authenticity and the whole-hearted embrace of global influences; it is rather the conflicted effects of their combinations on which Moore trains her eye. Her engagement, in this sense, is always political, mindful of the interpenetrating effects of global and local spheres upon each other, and the similarly interpenetrating spheres of culture and commerce. Her stories, with their unsparing focus on the celebrations, negotiations, and betrayals of the daily lives of Newfoundlanders, draw attention to what Diana Brydon calls our complicity with the processes and politics of historical and current global and regional change, our contamination by them (141), and, therefore, the weight of our responsibilities within that partici-



pation. While Moore's characters might approach change reluctantly, and experience it painfully, they also acknowledge that we are "most ourselves when changing" (*Open* 31); that we have no choice but, as her title suggests, to remain open.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Davey, however, prefers the term "regionality" rather than postmodern regionalism for this approach (16). Regionalism is, he believes, a term too polluted with connotations of parochialism to be successfully redeployed in this newer sense.

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