

Chapter 5

"She made the cannonballs, and he fired them"

Irish Newfoundland Women and Informal Power in Family and Community



On 22 July 1822, Ellen Veal (also Vail) appeared before the justice of the peace at St. Mary's to lodge a complaint of assault against her neighbor Mary Bowen. Two



days earlier, Mary had been entertaining her friends Ellen (Nell) Tobin and Mary Molly in her home. The women were chatting companionably while Mary Bowen nursed her baby and puffed contentedly on her pipe. Suddenly, Ellen Veal appeared in the doorway and demanded to know why Mary "shoud have caried Lyes and storys up the harb[or]" about her deceased husband and a Mrs. Bishop, and why she was spreading rumors that her daughter had received a pair of shoes from James Barry (with all that may have implied).

Ellen had heard this scandalous news from Catherine St. Croix, who had, in turn, heard the gossip from the same Nell Tobin who now sat comfortably in Mary's house. Mary told Ellen to stop making "an oration" of the matter and ordered her to leave the house or she would "turn her off." Ellen "swore God if She did, she woud break the Bucket over her head" and stood her ground. Mary put aside her nursing child, and tried to push Ellen away, but Ellen resisted; she broke off the pipe in Mary's mouth, and battle commenced. Witnesses Nell and Mary could not swear who had struck the first substantial blow, but all agreed that the defendant won the upper hand in the resulting fracas, for Ellen retreated with "blood running."¹ Case File 8

This court case illustrates plebeian women on the southern Avalon deploying power—through verbal wrangling, physical brawling, and gossip—in ways that clashed with hegemonic discourses on femininity in contemporary Britain. Within the English common-law tradition by the eighteenth century, women were viewed as dependents and virtual possessions of fathers or husbands, incapable of controlling their own property, skills, and labor. Most restricted was the married woman, the *feme covert*, who could not own property in her own right, enter into contracts without her husband's permission, sue or be sued. Meanwhile, Enlightenment thought was underscoring the division between the public (rational, active, individualist, masculine) sphere and the private (emotional, passive, dependent, feminine) domain. Female domesticity was glorified as

women's lives were channeled towards marriage and motherhood. Late eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century evangelicalism reinforced the dichotomy of "public" man and "private" woman as it shaped middle-class ideals of female domesticity, respectability, passivity, and dependence.²

Newfoundland was a British fishing station and, later, a colony during the study period, and these discourses were certainly infiltrating Newfoundland society through its British legal regime and an emerging local middle class of administrators, churchmen, court officials, and merchants, many of whom maintained strong ties with Britain.³ But how did these constructions of womanhood play out within the essentially plebeian Irish community on the southern Avalon, where community formation was still in its early stages and where gender relations were very much contested terrain?

In day-to-day life, Irish women in the area exercised considerable authority in their families and communities, and continued to function in public spaces throughout the period. This was true of married women as well as those who were single or widowed, for although the law of coverture dictated that a husband and wife became one legal entity in the person of the husband, the vital roles of plebeian women as co-producers and reproducers in family economies ensured that their identity in most everyday contexts was not subsumed in marriage. In this, they were similar to their counterparts in rural Ireland, at least in eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century rural Ireland, where women derived considerable status from their role as co-producers in a mixed farming and domestic textile economy. Within both settings, married women exercised relative autonomy in the running of their households and also had significant influence over matters outside the home. While a façade of patriarchal authority was usually maintained in both cultures, women frequently directed male decision-making behind the scenes. Clarkson describes this family power structure in Ireland as "matriarchal management behind a patriarchal exterior."⁴ The oral tradition on the southern Avalon offers a more homespun equivalent: "She made the cannonballs, and he fired them."⁵

The strong family matriarch has been identified in other maritime cultures as well. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur, for example, observed the ability of women in eighteenth-century Nantucket whaling families "to transact business, to settle accounts, and in short, to rule and provide for their families" while their husbands were at sea.⁶ Laurel Thatcher Ulrich notes that wives of New England fishermen and merchant sea captains stood as deputies for absent husbands—keeping accounts, defending shore property from encroachments, acting as attorneys, supervising the planting and harvesting of crops, and attending to other family concerns.⁷ Sally Cole discusses the autonomy and decision-making power of

pescadore women of Vila Chã, Portugal, which grew out of their vital roles as fishers, marketers, and household managers.⁸ However, women's authority in these contexts was linked to long-term absences of men in terms of their fishing activities. This has no explanatory power for the southern Avalon, where most men fished near their homes and also remained in their home communities in the off-season. There, the authority of Irish Newfoundland plebeian women emanated from something other than the status of proxy husbands or fathers.

The Family

Within fishing families, there were gendered spheres of authority that were linked to the sexual division of labor, with some overlapping where work routines coincided. Men made decisions about fishing, for example, but both women and men in family production units exercised authority over the curing process. Indeed, women usually shouldered greater responsibility in processing when men spent more time on the water in the height of the fishing season. As both men and women shared gardening and haymaking responsibilities, most married couples jointly discussed matters such as the timing of planting and harvesting or the types of crops to be grown. The dominant authority in matters respecting home and family, however, was generally the woman. Most men "didn't know what end went foremost" around the house, and left household affairs and child rearing to the women, occasionally intervening in disciplinary matters when their help was solicited by their wives.⁹

In terms of the day-to-day management of household resources, women's authority was paramount in many families.¹⁰ Of course, this was self-evidently true of women who enjoyed the status of *feme sole*, but married women were also the primary household managers within the plebeian community on the southern Avalon. In carrying out this responsibility, women had to balance the requirements and contributions of large households that, in some cases, included domestic and fishing servants as well as family members. Their power as household managers extended to the allocation of any amounts (usually small) of cash the family may have accumulated. In addition, women who were part of a family production unit in the fishery often oversaw, from behind the scenes, the tabulation of the family's account with the supplying merchant. While the male "head of the family" generally went to the merchant's store to settle up in the fall, he was often acting on the advice of a wife or mother who had actually kept track of the various supplies issued to the family and the amounts of fish and oil provided to the merchant in return. Thus, the family matriarch usually had an accurate idea of the balance of the family account, and if her husband or son did not conclude the negotiations with the merchant to her satisfaction, she would send him back to have the account adjusted accordingly. Indeed, it was not

unknown for the woman herself to pay a visit to the merchant's premises to fine-tune the balance.

It is difficult to say how far back into time this practice of account-keeping extended; it was represented by informants as common practice within the family production unit, certainly in the latter decades of the study period, but it may have been in evidence in the traditional planter fishery as well. In a 1793 court case, for example, in which a servant was suing Trepassey boatkeeper James Warne for outstanding wages, Warne's wife was required to testify because it was she who kept the household accounts.¹¹ Evidence of women keeping accounts and dealing with merchant suppliers certainly appears in the literature on colonial America, so southern Avalon women would not have been out of step with their contemporaries elsewhere in exercising this duty.¹²

According to the oral tradition, women's general ability to manage the household's resources—to make very little stretch a long way during hard times, and to put a bit aside in good times—was critical to family survival. Indeed, most informants felt that it was more important for a woman to be a *good manager* than for a man to be a *good provider*, for no matter how successful a man's economic activity was, a poor female manager could squander the proceeds and leave the family very badly off; by contrast, the wife of a bad provider could make ends meet if she judged consumption and allocated resources carefully. The female household manager could, therefore, "make or break" a family, and the wife who could see her family through the "long and hungry month of March"¹³ was prized indeed. Audio Sample

A woman's powerful status within the household extended into widowhood. Even when a man bequeathed the family home and property to a child or children, it was done so with the understanding that his wife not only would be looked after, but also would continue to have a substantial say in the running of the household. The mother was usually still *the boss*, and inheriting children would continue to respect her wishes after her husband's death. Audio Sample

Of course, women on the southern Avalon did not universally experience this substantial degree of informal power within the family. There were some "who didn't have any say; they just kept the children coming, washing and cooking for them, and died before their time."¹⁴ And a woman who did exercise strong influence within the family was still expected to maintain some façade of deference to patriarchal authority for the outside world. If a woman stepped beyond this limit, if she was too domineering in public, she was labeled a *real boss*. Kathleen Brown discusses the equivalent figure in colonial Virginia: the *scold*, who subverted gender hierarchies by attempting to dominate her husband.¹⁵ Yet the term *boss* did not carry quite the same stigma as *scold*, for

the southern Avalon label often carried with it a degree of grudging respect—an acknowledgment of strength of character, particularly for women who had to take over in the absence or default of male authority. Audio Sample Nonetheless, most marriages were partnerships, according to oral informants. While the patriarchal family was the ideal in hegemonic discourse, there was a significant gap between this rhetoric and the reality of power relations within plebeian families in the area. Brown's conceptualization of a gender hierarchy that was fairly fixed, yet occasionally besieged by women, therefore seems too rigid for discussing gender relations on the southern Avalon in the period of early settlement.

The concept becomes even more problematic with evidence that the scope of plebeian women's informal power extended beyond the family to the community. Oral informants agreed that most women had considerable influence over how the family was represented in the larger community by the men—at public meetings, for example, or at the merchant's store. The veneer of patriarchal authority was maintained in the presence of a male family representative. As one informant explained: "Well, the man was *supposed* to be in charge [laughs]. That was the way it was given down. But a woman had to have a voice too, you know."¹⁶ Audio Sample Another pointed out that a man going to a meeting "would be well-informed [by his wife] before he went" as to what his opinions should be.¹⁷ So women would generally let their views be known, even in matters outside the home, and their husbands generally respected their advice. And there were other areas of community life in which women deployed informal power as well, suggesting that gender was very much in the process of negotiation during the study period.

The Economic Sphere

As we have already seen, Irish plebeian women on the southern Avalon were an intrinsic part of the economic life of their fledgling communities, as mistresses and servants in fishing households, as washerwomen and seamstresses, as shopkeepers and tavernkeepers, or as proto-professionals. And increasingly, Irish Newfoundland women moved into the essential role of shore crew for the household production unit in the fishery, working on stage head and flake to produce saltfish for the marketplace. Their presence at these public sites of economic production and their vital and recognized contribution to the process was an important source of power for these women, even into the twentieth century

Further evidence of women's participation in the public economic sphere can be seen in mercantile journals and ledgers, which indicate that women were a significant part of the exchange economy of the area. Surviving Goodridge ledgers for the years 1839 to 1841 provide a comprehensive picture of women's

involvement at Renews, albeit for a limited time frame.¹⁸ Women's accounts also appear in the Sweetman records.¹⁹ Unfortunately, these books are not intact, even for limited years, and many accounts are merely loose leaves in files; but the entries reinforce the conclusions that can be drawn from the Goodridge records.²⁰ Appendix C provides a detailed (but by no means exhaustive) overview of the types of women's accounts and economic activity revealed by these mercantile records. The following discussion will draw from these examples, with links to appropriate sections in the Appendix.

Although women's names appear far less frequently than men's in the ledgers, a significant number of women held accounts in their own names and in a variety of capacities. The intact Goodridge ledgers provide some indication of the frequency of this phenomenon. Thirty-nine women headed accounts with the firm in 1839, forty in 1840, and forty-four in 1841. In each successive year, there was an attrition of some customers and the addition of others, such that the total number of women holding individual accounts for the entire three years was actually sixty-eight. Still, there was a good deal of continuity in women's presence in the ledgers, for half of them were repeat customers, with fourteen heading accounts in two years and another twenty appearing in all three ledgers. This was a significant level of participation by women in the local economy, given the modest population of the area, and particularly the small number of local adult women. (In 1836, there were 146 women aged fourteen and over in Renews; in 1845, the total was 153. Adding adult women from nearby Fermeuse, a community which also dealt with Goodridge's, the totals for the two years were 247 and 272, respectively.)²¹

Only one of these female account holders was identified as a widow, although this was most likely also the status of Catherine Kenny, who headed the account of "Catherine Kenny and Sons," and Rachel Welsh of "Rachel Welsh and Son." Two others were specifically identified as married women, who were operating accounts separate from those of their still-living husbands. It is highly unlikely, however, that the remaining female account holders were all single, given population figures; some may have been widows, but it is likely that a number were married women holding accounts with the firm as if they were *femes sole*.²² This is reinforced by the fact that few (and often no) supplies of basic foodstuffs appeared in the majority of these accounts. Most listed supplies of soap and materials necessary for washing and sewing, along with extras such as sugar, shoes, and senna tea. The inference can thus be drawn that many of these account holders were married women whose food supplies were debited to the accounts of male household heads, but whose separate economic activities warranted separate accounts in the merchants' books.

Still, some women were obviously household heads in their own right (see

Appendix C, section 1). Rachel Welsh and Jane Careen were two such independent householders, for family supplies and credit were advanced in their names. In addition, women such as Catherine Kenny, Mary Morris, Sarah McCarthy, Mary Murphy, and Dorothy Cantwell headed household units that were producing oil and saltfish for market. A larger number of women account holders were washerwomen and seamstresses (see Appendix C, section 2). Supplies for washing and sewing were advanced to them and then contra'd against the accounts of their customers through the merchants' ledgers. In addition, a significant number of women in the Renew's area paid for supplies advanced to them through work on the Goodridge's flakes (see Appendix C, section 3). And many combined a package of paid services—shore work, sewing, washing, cooking, and the sale of poultry, hay, or oakum—which attracted payment either directly from the firm or in third-party transactions involving mutual customers of the women and the merchants (see Appendix C, section 4). Occasionally, wages of women servants or of servants employed by women appeared—some in direct payment from the firm, others in third-party transactions through the employer's account with the merchant supplier (see Appendix C, section 5). Payments of rent to and from women were also sometimes transacted through the merchants' ledgers (see Appendix C, section 6).

Women, like men, obtained supplies on credit and settled up in the fall. Julia McCarthy of Renew's provides a good example. Her



accounts with Goodridge's for 1839 to 1841 are shown in Table 5.1. Julia had a number of local customers, including some of the Goodridge family, for whom she washed or sewed for piece rates. Her supplies were generally paid by a contra entry that credited her account while debiting the account of her customers. In addition, in 1841, Julia received credit for working on the Goodridge's flakes and for selling hay to the firm. In 1838, Goodridge's gave her an abatement in order to balance her account. In 1840, Julia was fortunate enough to break even. In 1841, however, she had a debt of 3s. 5d. that was carried forward to the next year. In no year, then, did she receive any cash, but she was able to keep her head above water with the paid work she performed. In this respect, she was like most of the firm's customers, both men and women.

Nonetheless, twenty accounts headed by women did contain entries of cash payments made either to the women themselves or to others on their behalf. The total number of payments involved was twenty-nine, and most were made in the autumn, after settling up.²³ With the exception of two large cash amounts paid to and on behalf of Mrs. Alan Goodridge (£32.2.7 and £9.17.5, respectively), all other cash amounts were £2 and under, and nineteen were under £1. Still, the fact that these women were able to earn cash through their economic enterprises was significant in an economy that saw little cash in circulation. And several

women, rather than drawing cash, had their profits applied towards the debt of a male relative, likely a husband or father.²⁴

A number of women who dealt with Goodridge's had credit balances in the fall of the year (three in 1839, six in 1840, and six in 1841). Similarly, the Sweetman records indicate credit balances for eight women in both 1802 and 1843 (the only years for which itemized lists are available). Some of these balances were quite substantial (see Appendix C, section 7). The majority of women, however, barely broke even or carried over some level of debt to the following year. This was a classic feature of the truck system in Newfoundland, and, indeed, it was not unusual to see "bad debts" appear among the entries in accounts for both men and women. Some of the entries in the Goodridge ledgers—seven in 1839, seven in 1840, and nine in 1841—related solely to women's bad debts, without any other indication of economic activity (similar entries for men were far more numerous). But in only two cases (one in 1839, one in 1841) were the amounts written off completely by the firm (one other debt, in 1840, was paid by a male relative). In every other case, balances were carried forward, indicating that the firm had some expectation of women being able to pay their debts over time.

Although women account holders were not as numerous as men, then, they were present in the records in significant numbers and participated in the exchange economy in ways that were sometimes distinctive, but more often typical of the merchants' broader clientele. Furthermore, any discussion of women's participation in the exchange economy must include the invisible presence of women in the accounts of male household heads. Fish and oil credited to many of these accounts were produced by family work units that relied upon the labor of women. And many of the goods appearing under the names of male household heads were used by women in household production, using labor and producing goods that were assigned no market value and therefore not included in formal business accounts of the day. Furthermore, merchant books did not record networks of informal trade that involved women—the exchange of eggs for butter, for example, or milk for wool: what Johanna Miller Lewis describes as an "underground economy" which helped women in many early colonial communities keep their families clothed and fed.²⁵

Some useful comparisons can be drawn with women's participation in the exchange economy of late eighteenth-century Horton, Nova Scotia.²⁶ Elizabeth Mancke finds women appearing in Horton's merchant ledgers primarily as consumers (almost always through men's accounts) of unfinished goods for household production, concluding that "women consumed to produce and men produced to consume."²⁷ This gender differential was not quite so clear-cut on the southern Avalon. Granted, women there did *consume to produce*, often through accounts in men's names, but they also *produced to consume* as part of

family work units that provided the chief commodity of the local exchange economy. And a number engaged in some form of independent economic activity, performing services for customers in order to purchase goods, often small luxuries, for themselves and their families.

Mancke interprets the predominance of men's names in the Horton business accounts as an indicator of women's subservient social status. While the same can be said in relation to the southern Avalon in terms of formal legal status, especially of married women, the ledgers may not have been an accurate portrayal of how gender relations played out on the ground. In setting up their books, merchants or their agents and clerks would have been mindful of the law of coverture, which dictated that a husband was responsible for his wife's debts. But this concession to patriarchal authority in the books did not necessarily reflect the reality of family power relations. Furthermore, both Goodridge's and Sweetman's were obviously willing to extend credit to women in their own names when they performed some autonomous form of economic activity, regardless of their marital status. Mancke also finds that account balances in women's names in Horton tended to be small: none over £10, and most under £3. In the Goodridge records, by contrast, thirty-three accounts contained balances of £3 or more, of which nine were over £10. Furthermore, some very high balances (debit and credit) appear in women's accounts in the Sweetman books (see Appendix C, section 7). Even allowing for some inflation in prices and earnings between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and possible differentials based on region, these findings are still highly suggestive of a higher level of independent economic activity for women on the southern Avalon than in Horton.

Finally, Mancke interprets various examples of women's receipt of third-party payments for goods or services as confirming women's subordinate social condition through servitude and wages. But the economic agency of their southern Avalon counterparts is apparent. Indeed, the incomes these women made from selling their goods and labor were essential contributions to their family economies, or, if single, to their own survival. Granted, their participation in activities such as washing, sewing, and service indicated their lower social status, but one must be careful in viewing their positioning solely through the lens of gender, for they were in no more servile a position than many fishermen in the area. Indeed, in one way, they were more independent, for the income from paid washing and sewing had a value that, unlike most aspects of the truck system, could be negotiated with their customers and was not "fixed" (or perceived to be fixed) by the merchants. While rates among different providers in a community were often similar in any given year, this can be attributed to competition rather than the heavy hand of the local merchant.

In general, then, while gender ideology increasingly provided a powerful impetus in many contexts to remove women from the workplace and marketplace or to

devalue the contributions of those who remained, plebeian women on the southern Avalon remained active and essential in the economic sphere throughout the study period as producers of goods and services and as an integral part of the truck system that underwrote the resident fishery. Their participation in productive work, particularly saltfish production, and their significant contribution to the exchange economy (sometimes highly visible, sometimes muted in the merchant account books of the day) enhanced the power and status of these women in their own community.

The Spiritual Realm

The spiritual life of any group is a site of continuous negotiation between the natural and supernatural worlds. The process is enigmatic; the issues, profound; the stakes, unfathomable. Those who are chosen as mediators must, therefore, necessarily enjoy considerable authority and respect within their communities. In various cultures and at various times, women have acted as negotiators and guides through the spiritual landscape, and there is certainly evidence that religion—in both orthodox and informal observance—was an alternative source of female power for the Irish women of the southern Avalon, particularly before the encroachment of ultramontanist²⁸ and the devotional revolution of the mid- to late nineteenth century (see Chapter 8).

These women played an essential role in keeping the Catholic faith alive as the scarcity of priests in the area persisted well beyond the penal regime into the middle of the nineteenth century. Catholic women, for example, performed religious rites and assumed other forms of religious authority during the period under consideration. Indeed, Bishop Michael Fleming complained to his superiors in the 1830s that before the establishment of the Catholic missions in the 1780s, "The holy Sacrament of Matrimony, debased into a sort of 'civil contract,' was administered by captains of boats, by police, by magistrates, and *frequently by women*. The Sacrament of Baptism was equally profaned." He also expressed his



dismay that midwives had taken the authority upon themselves to dispense with church fasts for pregnant women.²⁹ And Fleming may have been unaware that midwives and other women continued to baptize babies at birth to "tide them over" until formal church baptisms took place—a stopgap that reduced the urgency for observing the formal church rite (which sometimes took place months, or even years, after the births).³⁰ In addition, Dean Cleary tantalizingly referred to an incident (in the 1830s or 1840s) in which "the pious women" of St. Mary's took "the sacred fire from the altar to burn a house"—perhaps a rite of exorcism of some sort—at the behest of their priest, Father James Duffy.³¹

Furthermore, the oral tradition indicates that, just as women were the financial managers, so too were they the spiritual overseers of Irish Catholic households. Women, more than men, maintained the rituals and kept the faith alive before the priests came. Indeed, as one informant stated and most others implied: "If it was left to the men, sure there'd be no religion at all."³² Every informant agreed that women played a more vital role in transmitting this facet of Irish Catholic culture to following generations, for "it was women who taught children their prayers."³³ These references suggest that women played an important custodial role in relation to the Catholic faith and, by extension, the identity of the ethnoreligious group in the period of early settlement.

In addition, female figures were prominent in the Irish Catholic hagiology of the area, harking back to the powerful position of goddesses and female druids in the pagan Celtic belief system, a status that carried over into early Celtic Christianity. Indeed, to this very day, the Virgin Mary, St. Brigid³⁴, and "good St. Anne"³⁵ are a triumvirate to be reckoned with on the southern Avalon. The cult of St. Anne was more likely a nineteenth-century phenomenon in the area, arising out of the devotional revolution in the Irish Catholic Church, but devotion to Brigid and Mary was of much longer standing. And while some male saints were invoked on specific occasions (St. Anthony was solicited to help find lost items, for example; and St. Jude, the saint of hopeless causes, was called upon in a variety of predicaments), their influence was not as pervasively felt in everyday life as that of Mary, Brigid, and Anne. Although these women were revered by both sexes (men and women, for example, plaited St. Brigid crosses from straw and erected them over doorways on her feast day for protection throughout the year, and Mary's capacity as a powerful intervener between Christ and man was acknowledged by the entire community), they were (and are) particularly cherished by women—not as the sanitized feminine ideals presented in the church calendar of saints, but as women who once lived worldly lives and who could therefore empathize with the experiences of other women. When asked if women prayed especially to Mary, Brigid, and Anne, one woman informant in the area advised me, "Oh God, yes, sure I'm still at it."³⁶



While Irish women and female saints played an important role in the preservation of Catholicism in the study area, women were also central figures in an informal system of beliefs and practices that had been transported from the home country. On the southern Avalon, as in Ireland, there was an alternative pre-Christian religious system operating in tandem with (and sometimes overlapping) formal Catholic practice.³⁷ Today, there is a tendency to look at these ancient beliefs and practices as quaint folk traditions, grist for the mill of the modern-day tourism industry. But, as Sean Connolly points out in his discussion of the derivative traditions in Ireland, this "body of beliefs and practices... made up a very real part

of the mental world of large numbers of Irish Catholics" in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.³⁸ On the southern Avalon, women were important navigators of this mental landscape.³⁹

A belief in the occult powers of certain persons was part of the ancient belief system, and women featured prominently as mediators between the natural and the supernatural worlds. Women were proficient in reading tealeaves and telling fortunes. Certain women (and men) had special healing powers—the ability to stop blood with a prayer, for example. A widow's curse, by contrast, had the power to do great harm: to wither crops or drive fish from nets, to cause physical injury or even death.⁴⁰ Audio Sample Indeed, a woman's ability to rain down invective on her enemies—as was so ably demonstrated by Betsy Brennan in the loss of her hen (see Chapter 4), or by Jane Holehan of St. Mary's, who allegedly caused the milk of her neighbor's cow to dry up (see Chapter 6) —was a



formidable weapon in her repertoire of conflict resolution skills, for the repercussions of ritual cursing were not to be taken lightly.⁴¹ And women's special powers were woven into the very physical landscape, for places like *Mrs. Denine's Hill*, *Peggy's Hollow*, and the *Old Woman's Pond* (named for the women who had died there) had supernatural qualities that could cause horses to pull up in their tracks and grown men to lose their way.

The Irish inhabitants of the southern Avalon also believed in supernatural beings, and women were again central, either as symbolic figures or intermediaries in deflecting evil from family and other loved ones. The *bibe*, or banshee, for example, was a female figure—an ancient crone whose wailing cry in the night was the harbinger of death. So too was the *old hag* who rode the chest of many a nightmare sufferer through a troubled night. Sheelagh (or Sheila)—in popular belief, the wife or companion of St. Patrick—was blamed for the fierce ice storms and heavy snowfalls that battered the island on or soon after her feast day of 18 March—a consistent weather phenomenon that is still known today as *Sheelagh's Brush* or just *Sheelagh*.⁴²



Women also featured prominently in fairy lore. On the southern Avalon, the belief in fairies was pervasive. The natural environment was filled with evidence of the existence of the little people, for *fairy paths*, *fairy caps*, and *fairy pipes* proliferated in the woods and meadows just beyond the garden gate. Fairies had the power to replace human children with changelings and render all humans, young and old, senseless, or *fairy-struck*. Audio Sample Infants were most vulnerable to their power, for the little people could enter homes and snatch babies from their very cradles. Women played a vital role in protecting their families from these troublesome creatures who moved so easily between the

natural and supernatural worlds. It was women, for example, who made and blessed the bread that had special powers to keep the fairies from stealing their children—the same bread that could help people who were *fairy-led*, or lost in back-meadows or woods, find their way home.⁴³ It was primarily a woman's responsibility to ensure that loved ones, particularly children, who moved beyond the safety of the hearth had a piece of blessed bread, or *fairy bun*, on their person. Bread made on Good Friday had special protective powers, and most women ensured that they made a batch on that day specifically for this purpose—a combination of practices from formal Catholicism and the pre-Christian belief system.



Connolly notes that this overlapping of systems was quite common in Ireland. Some customary observances maintained their original content but acquired Catholic labels; others were modified to fit the Catholic faith (for example, the dedication of ancient holy wells to Christian saints). In some cases, Catholic rituals were incorporated into magical practices (for example, the use of relics to verify oaths, or a prayer to stop blood). Occasionally, the Catholic Church was complicit in this process. The adoption of St. Brigid into the Catholic calendar of saints, for example, demonstrates formal religion's willingness to co-opt aspects of the pre-Christian belief system.⁴⁴ The feast day of the *holy woman of Kildare* was celebrated by the church on 1 February, which corresponds with *Imbolc*, the ancient Celtic feast of fertility celebrating the coming of spring, the return of light after winter's darkness, and the beginning of the lactation of the ewes. The name of the Celtic goddess of fertility was Brigid. Thus, Catholic saint and Celtic goddess were conflated in one entity by the church itself. But more often, it was the Catholic laity who intermixed the two systems, seeing them not as conflicting, but rather as mutually reinforcing as the congregation molded the old and the new into a spiritual *mélange* that lent meaning to their lives.

This mixing of belief systems can also be seen in many practices on the southern Avalon, including those in which women featured prominently. Women used a Christian symbol, the sign of the cross, to give protective power to fairy buns and made special batches of blessed bread on Good Friday, the most sacred day in the Catholic calendar. Women healers put pieces of paschal candles in their cures to give them extra potency.⁴⁵ The accuracy of women's predictions, particularly the identification of future spouses, was greatest on St. John's Eve and All Souls' Night (All-Hallows Eve) in the Catholic calendar, which corresponded to Midsummer's Eve and the Celtic feast of *Samhain* in the ancient calendar, celebrations of fertility and the harvest.⁴⁶

Women also combined formal and informal systems when they anointed their homes with holy water and blessed candle wax to protect their households from general danger and to ward off specific threats such as thunder and lightning.

Holy water was any water blessed by a priest or holy person, but it was ideally obtained from a holy well, reminiscent of the ancient belief in the power of holy and magical sites.⁴⁷ Blessed candle wax was obtained from the priest on Candlemas Day, 2 February. In his 1819 history of Newfoundland, Anglican missionary Rev. Lewis Anspach wondered at the devout observance of this holy day by Catholics, "who most eagerly crowd to their respective chapels to receive a few drops from the lighted blessed candles on their hats and clothes, and a piece likewise blessed by their priest, which they carry home and preserve with the most religious care and confidence, as a protection against the influence of evil spirits."⁴⁸ The Catholic Church promoted the candles blessed on Candlemas Day as a symbol of Christ, deriving from the use of candles in the catacombs of Rome by early Christians who risked their lives to practice their faith. According to Catholic teaching, the bleached beeswax of the candles⁴⁹ represented Christ's "spotless body," the wick, "his Soul," and the flame, "the union of the nature of God with the nature of man."⁵⁰ However, within the Irish community on the southern Avalon, Candlemas was always associated with Mary and a fervent belief in her power to ward off evil. Thus, when women dripped blessed candle wax at the windowsills of their homes, it was Mary's blessing and protection that they sought; and when they dabbed the wax into their children's shoes, they said a prayer to Mary to guide their children's footsteps. Audio Sample

According to local belief, Candlemas was the day when Mary was *churched*.⁵¹ This was an unlikely event in the life of a Jewish woman, but it demonstrates the awe with which Mary was regarded by the Irish community that a feast day for venerating Christ was co-opted to honor his mother instead. A further demonstration of the importance of female saints to the Irish community was the effort to tie Brigid, the *Mary of the Gael*, to the event, even though the two women were not contemporaries. According to local informants, Brigid walked before Mary as she was on her way to be churched, with rays of light pouring from her head to distract attention from Mary's shame. This, they say, is why St. Brigid's feast day is celebrated the day before Candlemas, on 1 February (which, as noted, was also the Celtic feast of *Imbolc*, celebrating fertility, the return of light after the long winter darkness, and the goddess Brigid, who was herself sometimes portrayed with rays of light pouring from a headdress of candles).

Here, then, was not only a conflation of Celtic and Catholic systems, but a conflation of time itself. The tradition of making Brigid and Mary contemporaries already existed in Ireland in other variations. One very compelling version held that Brigid was a midwife to Mary and wet nurse to Jesus, making her a favorite of pregnant women nearing their time of delivery (note, again, the connotations of fertility that hark back to the goddess Brigid). Another portrayed Brigid weaving a web from her ewes (again, a link to the Celtic goddess) to protect the

infant Jesus from harm during the flight into Egypt.⁵² Shirley Toulson describes such contemporizing of Brigid and Mary as a "venture into the spiritual, timeless world that makes nonsense of chronology," a convention that wreaks havoc with history's love of time lines.⁵³ But it was a tradition, with women at its core, that helped Irish Catholic communities on the southern Avalon and in Ireland make sense of their spiritual and natural worlds.

Perhaps the most striking example of the combination of ancient and Catholic practices was the wake. Here, women also played an essential role in the rituals associated with death.⁵⁴ The corpse was usually laid out by a woman or group of women, who bathed the body and then poured the water on the ashes in the fireplace, a ritual that suggests spiritual as well as physical purification. The women were sometimes assisted by a man, especially in shaving the face if the deceased was male; but the cleansing process was decidedly regarded as women's work in which a man might occasionally help. The women then dressed the body in a *habit* that had in most cases been made by a female relative of the deceased, but otherwise by another woman of the community with good sewing skills. A woman would also have made the shroud that covered the coffin and the small white cloth that would be placed on the face of the corpse before the coffin was closed. (Pragmatic and reconciled to the inevitability of death, most adult women kept a habit and ceremonial cloths in readiness for the next funeral in the family.) Throughout the laying out of the corpse, men would cluster outside, waiting for this part of the ritual to be completed before entering the wake-house—a spatial separation that suggests that they were remote from this process of ritual cleansing and preparation.

As in Ireland, the wake itself was a mixed gathering at which stories and practical jokes abounded, "*God be merciful*" pipes were at the ready, and liquor was usually in good supply.⁵⁵ The body was constantly attended until the interment, and women as well as men *sat up* with the corpse overnight to guard its spirit, although the practice varied: in some instances, only men stayed up; in others, only women; more commonly, however, both sexes were in attendance. It was during the overnight vigil that practical jokes were most likely to occur, usually with men as perpetrators and women as victims. The oral tradition abounds with stories of women being terrified by the sight of a corpse smoking a pipe, or its chin whiskers moving, or a body sitting up or rolling over in a coffin (thanks to some strategically tied string). Protestant middle-class observers of the period often denigrated such practices; Robert Carter, a merchant and surrogate in Ferryland, for example, stipulated in his will that there be "No Wakings of my Bodie, I protest against such practices, its very Indecent."⁵⁶ Similarly, modern-day observers might view such rituals and jokes as callous or distasteful. But they actually had important functions in helping mourners cope with the loss

of loved ones and, in a broader sense, re-affirming life, even in the face of death.

Audio Sample

Both women and men attended the mass for the dead and the prayers at the graveside, although, as the nineteenth century progressed, women's presence at the actual burial was being discouraged by the Catholic Church (with limited success on the southern Avalon) as being an unsuitable activity for the "gentler" sex. Another ritual performed by both sexes, but primarily by women, was keening—a ritualistic crying, both at the wake-house and the graveside, to mourn the departed, placate his or her spirit, and mark his or her transition to the afterlife. Anspach observed the practice among the Irish at Newfoundland with some awe and trepidation, describing it as "crying most bitterly, and very often with *dry* eyes, howling, making a variety of strange gestures and contortions expressive of the violence of their grief."⁵⁷ But while keening often struck the outside observer as primitive and strange, it was an accepted and effective mechanism for expressing grief within the Irish community.

Furthermore, this characteristic wailing traditionally punctuated a ritual eulogizing, sometimes in rhyming form that required a fair degree of literary finesse. Anspach did not record this aspect of keening (which is not to say that it did not occur in Newfoundland), but observers in contemporary Ireland commented on this more formal element and the musical quality of the lament. They also noted women's central role in the ritual. A Protestant minister, James Hall, who was generally unsympathetic to Irish Catholic death rites, conceded that "some of the women rhyme extempore and offhand with wonderful facility, particularly when they have got a little (but not too much) whiskey," and others described the "plaintiveness" and "melancholy sweetness" of the crying accompaniment.⁵⁸ Indeed, Angela Bourke points out that the Irish word *caoineadh*, from which the English word *keening* derives, actually suggests, in one of its meanings, a stylized tradition of women's poetry. As late as the eighteenth century, she notes, it was common for women to lead their communities in this public demonstration of grief, and the various emotions expressed in their rhythmic lament—denial, anger, bargaining, sadness, and acceptance—are recognized by modern-day psychoanalysts as necessary stages of the mourning process.⁵⁹ While such emotions would have ebbed and flowed in the keening process and not manifested in the precise stages outlined above, this ritual crying did provide an important outlet for communal mourning. It was a practice, however, that was seen as pagan and heathenish by the Catholic Church, both in Newfoundland and in Ireland, and was aggressively discouraged. By the middle of the nineteenth century, ritual keening was increasingly being represented as self-indulgent caterwauling. (One male informant, when asked about the role of women's keening, told me, "Yes, some of them were real bawlers, alright."⁶⁰) Thus, while most of the other rituals related to death persisted well into the

twentieth century, this one did not. Its disappearance marked a general campaign by Catholic clergy to dismantle the alternative belief system in the area.

Indeed, there was a concerted effort by the Catholic Church to stop ancient customary practices in both Ireland and Newfoundland. Connolly points out that, as early as the eighteenth century, higher church authorities in Ireland were trying to discourage popular supernaturalism because it threatened their ambitions for a monopoly on mediation of the supernatural world and provided alternative mechanisms for meeting the emotional and psycho-social needs of their flock. But many in their congregation were reluctant to part with their customary practices, which helped to explain and control "what would otherwise have appeared as a meaningless pattern of good and bad fortune."⁶¹ Thus, while the church unleashed the full battery of its "machinery of discipline"—the confessional, public denunciation, exclusion from the sacraments, and even excommunication—it found that these measures were effective only to the extent that the congregation was willing to reinforce them through the shunning of non-compliers. Until the people themselves wished to abandon the ancient system, it would persist; the clergy could only lead the people where they, the people, wanted to go.⁶²

The tide turned for the Catholic Church in Ireland in the second half of the nineteenth century as adherence to formal religious practices increased markedly. Emmet Larkin attributes this transition to the devotional revolution spearheaded by Paul Cardinal Cullen, with its increased church discipline and intensification of devotional practices.⁶³ Certainly, these reforms spurred an evangelical revival in the Catholic Church in Ireland. But Connolly very compellingly argues that a more significant impetus came from the dramatic shift in the profile of the Irish population that occurred during the Great Famine. Before mid-century, the overwhelming majority of the population was made up of laborers, cottiers, and smallholders—groups that clung tenaciously to the older belief system. After the famine, this class had been decimated due to death and emigration, and the small farmer class emerged as the backbone of the population, with aspirations to greater respectability that more closely meshed with the wishes of church authorities.⁶⁴ Once again, the priests were leading the people where they wanted to go; the composition of their flock had simply changed.

The Catholic population of Newfoundland also experienced the impact of the devotional revolution through the religious personnel regularly recruited from Ireland, but it did not experience the massive demographic and economic transitions that Ireland underwent at mid-century. As the nineteenth century progressed into the twentieth, many Catholics within rural plebeian culture continued their customary practices in concert with formal religion, and women's roles in this alternative system—both as symbolic figures and as interpreters of

the supernatural world—persevered beyond the period of this study. But this alternative female power was perceived by church authorities as competing with, not complementary to, the church's own status as interpreters of the supernatural. It would be discouraged as part of an effort to impose church and middle-class notions of respectability on the congregation in general, and feminine ideals of domesticity and dependence on Catholic women in particular (see Chapter 8).

The Information Highway

*Oh I often hear men ask why a woman talks so fast
Nor how she comes by every bit of news
She's from morning, noon and night, from day until
midnight
And the way she use her tongue it beats the news....
There's no use of you beginnin' for to stop a woman's
chinnin'
Whatever you does she's equal to whatever it is
When I am working hard I will find her in the yard
And she's talking to her neighbors o'er the fence.*

-“A Woman's Tongue Will Never Take a Rest,” local
song

The female gossip, whispering through the garden fence, idly destroying reputations and disrupting lives, has been a tenacious image within western culture.⁶⁵ Yet the word gossip in the English language did not always have such associations. Indeed, the term was originally gender-neutral and had connotations of friendship and intimacy, for its etymology can be traced to a late Old English word meaning god-parents or other close friends invited to celebrate a christening.⁶⁶ By the Middle Ages, however, the word gossip had been feminized and denigrated.⁶⁷ Yet we have only recently begun to understand why gossip has so persistently been associated with women and why it has garnered such a high degree of moral and social opprobrium.

Sociologists and anthropologists have been examining and debating the social significance of gossip for some time.⁶⁸ Early writings in these disciplines argued that gossip was an effective method of social control or group preservation, serving to validate communal norms and values and to maintain solidarity by acting as a deterrent to deviant behavior, particularly within small, pre-urban, morally homogeneous groups. These functionalist interpretations of gossip came under attack, however, in the latter decades of the twentieth century. They did not take into account individual motivations for gossip, critics argued, such as the increase in status of the conveyor of gossip as the bearer of secret and important

information. Nor did they represent the dynamics of gossip as a means of distributing information. Yet while new theories addressed these weaknesses, they still did not provide historical insight as to why gossip has been stigmatized and why it has so persistently been linked with women. To address this lack, feminist scholars in anthropology and sociology have brought forward their own explanatory model: that gossip provides a subversive form of female solidarity that threatens male domination in patriarchal societies; it is thus feared by men, who take measures to discredit and defuse it as a shameful, malicious, female practice.⁶⁹

Karma Lochrie follows a similar line of thought in her study of medieval uses of secrecy. Lochrie suggests that from the Middle Ages to the present, the representation of gossip as a discourse of malice, secrecy, and deception and its association with femininity have served to maintain women's status as a marginalized group. Gossip, she argues, was and continues to be perceived as "a resistant oral discourse" of the "other," and the association of gossip particularly with women "serves... to reinforce gender ideology and valorize traditional institutional forms of discourse and authority."⁷⁰

Feminist scholars in sociolinguistics have also developed constructs of dominance and difference in their writings on women's language.⁷¹ In discussing the trivialization of women's talk, Dale Spender observes that men engage in similar forms of talk with comparable functions, but magnify its importance to preserve their advantaged gender position. She argues:

It is not surprising to find that there are no terms for man talk that are equivalent to chatter, natter, prattle, nag, bitch, whine, and, of course, *gossip*, and I am not so naïve as to assume that this is because men do not engage in these activities. It is because when they do it is called something different, something more flattering and more appropriate to their place in the world. This double standard is of great value in the maintenance of patriarchal order.⁷²

However, there has been a tendency among feminist sociolinguists to examine women's gossip only in terms of an articulation of a women's subculture—an expression of women's concerns and values, a means of establishing and maintaining networks of support and cooperation—that is intimate, personal, and very much rooted in the private domain.⁷³ Such writings try to retrieve some of the positive aspects of women's talk. But the danger here is in interpreting women's gossip in terms of an essentialist, homogeneous women's culture that addresses uniquely female concerns and needs; in short, it denies gossip some of its very public functions.

Such interpretations, for example, do not help us understand the complexity of community relations that led to the 1822 confrontation between Ellen Veal and Mary Bowen at St. Mary's—the case that introduced this chapter. Mary, Catharine St. Croix, and Nell Tobin were obviously a part of a unit that transmitted gossip and sexual innuendo about Ellen, her daughter, and her husband. Yet the very next year, Nell Tobin herself had fallen out with the St. Croix family, contradicting the notion that female bonding is intrinsic to gossip.⁷⁴ Furthermore, the gossip deployed in the Veal-Bowen affair did not offer female resistance to patriarchal domination, but rather attempted to enforce hegemonic norms on sexuality, both male and female; indeed, the gossip was as divisive as it was cohesive in terms of female friendships. Thus, while female networking and female resistance are aspects of women's gossip, they do not represent the entire multi-faceted configuration. As Cole has noted in her study of the women of the Praia, gossip should not be examined as a separate sphere for women, but as an integrated part of the social, economic, and political relations of their communities.⁷⁵ It is important to acknowledge diversity and divisiveness as well as commonality in women's experiences, and to anchor such discussions in the contexts in which women have lived.

The southern Avalon in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was a rural, pre-industrial society—a cluster of small populations, each spatially condensed, which facilitated networking even as it mitigated against privacy. In this context, women's gossip in some respects operated differently than it does in the modern urban women's networks often studied by sociolinguists. Here, it is helpful to revisit some of the older, functionalist arguments about gossip in traditional societies, so as not to lose the helpful insights that they offer. Did women's gossip on the southern Avalon serve to stabilize the community when limited formal mechanisms for group preservation and social control existed, and when even informal mechanisms such as kinship ties may have been diluted by the process of emigration?⁷⁶

In her study of the somewhat comparable society of colonial Virginia, Kathleen Brown uses functionalist arguments to portray women's gossip as a source of alternative female power. Through gossip, she says, women created "informal political networks" in which they could "wield influence over the behavior of their neighbors," regardless of sex or status. As "conduits of information" about the character and lives of local personalities, women helped to maintain community standards in colonial Virginia in ways beyond the scope of, and often in competition with, more formal legal institutions.⁷⁷ This interpretation of women's talk is shared by Melanie Tebbutt, who perceives gossip as an "arena for moral and political debate" in which the values of the community were shaped. Women's gossip, she notes, "expressed the politics of everyday living, and as such was an

important vehicle for... [women's] informal power."⁷⁸

Does this conception of women's gossip as a female political network for maintaining communal norms apply to the southern Avalon during the study period? Empirical evidence on women's gossip in the area is limited. Of course, this is historically true of much of women's language, because it was usually verbal in nature and persistently trivialized.⁷⁹ However, some insights can be derived from an examination of the fourteen court cases from the study period involving women in which gossip was a factor: eight defamation of character/slander cases; five cases of assault involving or provoked by gossip; and one case of theft which was pursued because of information obtained through gossip.

A breakdown of the cases in terms of gossip producer, object, and targeted behavior provides the profile shown in Table 5.2. It suggests that women were the predominant gossip producers, while men and women were equally targeted by gossip—women being the objects in six of the cases, men in seven, with a mixed-sex target in the remaining case. All gossipers were from the plebeian community, as were all their targets, with the exception of one. This lends some credence to arguments that gossip was frequently deployed to reinforce standards of behavior within a closed group. Certainly, there was no evidence of the involvement of elite women in these networks. This is not to suggest that middle-class women did not gossip, but that they maintained their own information networks that did not manifest itself in the court records.⁸⁰ Here is an example of class and ethnicity cutting across gender lines to preclude the formation of a homogeneous women's subculture on the southern Avalon.⁸¹ This is also not to suggest that plebeians did not talk about the elite or vice versa, but rather that the power of such talk to do harm was defused by the outsider status of the target. A local merchant, for example, would feel obliged to defend his reputation against scurrilous remarks from someone in his own circle and might initiate a court action for libel; unflattering talk from the plebeian community, by contrast, would more likely be dismissed as merely the grumblings of the "lower orders."

The court records do reveal one object of a woman's gossip from outside the plebeian community: Christopher Valence (also Vallance), who was the largest employer in Cape Broyle in 1800, operating two banking vessels and two shallops, with twenty-four fishermen and eight shoremen.⁸² Valence took his former employee, Henry Currier (also Coryear)⁸³, to court in 1809 for trespass. This obviously incited Henry's daughter, Elenor, to stir up ill feeling in the community towards Valence, for in the very next case on the docket, Valence was charging Elenor with "abusive & threatening language... & reporting falsehoods of him

tending to aggravate the Inhabitants of Cape Broyle against him."⁸⁴ As with many of the court records for the area, details of the case are slim, but the evidence suggests that Elenor may have been playing against Valence's elevated status to rally support for her father within the fishing community. Thus, even when gossip was aimed against an outsider in terms of class, it still functioned to identify and maintain the boundaries of the group.

The breakdown of targeted behaviors in the above profile also points to the monitoring function of gossip. Theft, sexual immorality, witchcraft—these represented substantial threats to community order and suggest that there was a quasi-legal aspect of gossip networks that supplemented the formal legal system. Certainly, the frequency with which female witnesses gave testimony in court hearings (see Chapter 6) indicates that the legal system was at least partially dependent on women's information networks for intelligence on events in the community. Indeed, in one of the cases profiled in Table 5.2, a woman's gossip actually instigated a formal charge of theft. When Ann Bowen of St. Mary's brought her neighbor Mary Money to court for allegedly stealing her brown and blue serge gowns from her garden fence in 1823, she was acting on information she had received from Ansty White. Ansty had told Ann that she had seen Mary's children dressed in clothing of the very same fabric and color; indeed, she had gone to the Money house, inspected the clothing, and satisfied herself that they had certainly been made from Ann's missing gowns. Furthermore, Ansty appeared at the court hearing as Ann's only witness. Yet while the defendant produced two witnesses (a merchant's clerk and her own servant) who testified that she had purchased the material and that she had made the children's clothing several months previous to the theft, the local magistrate did not dismiss the charge out of hand, indicating that he gave some credence to the statements of Ann and her gossiping neighbor, Ansty, or perhaps feared some backlash himself from local gossips. At any rate, he chose the course of discretion and deferred the matter for the decision of the visiting surrogate.⁸⁵

While there is evidence of women's gossip acting in tandem with the legal system, however, it is likely that it more often operated in place of more formal legal institutions. This would be particularly true of all the instances of gossip that did not appear in the court records, but which served on a more day-to-day basis to define and maintain standards of behavior in the community. On occasion, gossip also likely functioned in competition with the formal legal system when elite and plebeian perspectives on justice clashed.

The above cases certainly suggest the deterrent effect that the fear of gossip could have on community members. In all of these cases, people's characters had been called into question, and the fact that these objects of gossip risked further exposure by bringing charges of defamation/slander, or by assaulting the gossip

producer and thus airing the slander in court by a more circuitous route, suggests that the victims were highly concerned about the impact of the gossip on their personal reputations. Indeed, when Margret Dinn called Elenor Piddle a "whore" and a "perjured villain" in the presence of Elizabeth Feagan and Catharine Lannahan, and suggested that "she could say many other things besides against her character," Elenor had an additional incentive to bring charges against the gossiping Margret, for her own husband "threaten'd to breake her bones, if she did not apply to the Court" to clear her good name.⁸⁶

While men and women were targeted by gossip in equal numbers in these cases, there is some evidence that they were targeted in different ways. Brown observes from the language of slander cases in colonial Virginia that gossip helped to perpetuate "gender-specific standards of behavior." A man's reputation, for example, would be tarnished by questioning his honesty and calling him a *perjured rogue*. By contrast, a woman's reputation rested on her sexual morality, and was challenged by terms such as *whore* and *jade*.⁸⁷ Ulrich also notes the frequency with which words like *whore*, *jade*, *bawd*, *strumpet*, and *trull* were used by village gossips against women, and how powerful a form of defamation this was in colonial New England. The only rough male equivalent was the term *rogue*, she notes, although this also had a more general connotation of dishonesty. "For a woman," she argues, "sexual reputation was everything; for a man, it was part of a larger pattern of responsibility."⁸⁸ Such language appeared in only one record of a slander case on the southern Avalon: the *Piddle v. Dinn* matter, above, in which Margret Dinn called Elenor Piddle both a *whore* and a *perjured villain*. This was a mixture of the labels so clearly demarcated by gender in the records of Virginia and New England. However, the female epithet *whore* was invoked in other types of cases, particularly assault matters.⁸⁹ In addition, the breakdown of behaviors attributed to gossip victims suggests a gender dichotomy similar to the findings of Brown and Ulrich: almost all accusations of sexual immorality were leveled at women (one man featured in a multiple accusation); by contrast, four of the five accusations of theft were aimed at men.

Of course, these fourteen cases reveal only a tiny fraction of the gossip that was exchanged on the southern Avalon during this period. However, additional insight on female gossip can be drawn from oral informants in the area. As the song at the beginning of this section demonstrates, the oral tradition supports the perception of gossip as a female preserve: women in groups *gossiped* about personal and private affairs; men in groups *discussed* weightier matters, such as politics, the effect of the weather on fishing or crops, the best fishing grounds, or the price of fish and supplies. Audio Sample This viewpoint was expressed by both male and female informants, indicating that the perception of men's talk as important and women's as trivial has been internalized, a view that may have extended back into the study period.

Still, there was an acknowledgment of the positive functions of gossip. In this regard, most informants differentiated between *useful* gossip, in which women of good character were seen to participate, and the type of spiteful venom spewed by the real *prate-box*. Here was a perceived motivation for female gossip beyond nosiness, idleness, or pure malice. Indeed, when pressed, informants set forth a variety of useful functions of female gossip in the period, which can be summarized as follows: a proscriptive role at a time when there were few formal mechanisms for maintaining order in the community; a leveling function in small communities where it would not do for individuals to set themselves above others or get "too much of a notion of themselves";⁹⁰ a means by which women could express themselves and occasionally give vent to their frustrations, particularly about husbands or perhaps the merchant or parish priest; a mechanism for sharing information among people who had a genuine interest in each other's lives; and a means of instructing the young in preferred modes of behavior by making examples of those who had strayed from communal standards. One informant revealed that her paternal grandmother and her circle of female friends had even developed their own form of pidgin English so that when they were discussing sensitive or private matters, they could not easily be understood by *outsiders* (that is, men and young children). When the informant's father, then a young boy, occasionally intruded on a gossip session, the speaker would say something like, "I-vra ca-vra no-vra sa-vra di-vras ou-vra lou-vra be-vra cau-vra dere-vras li-vra boy-vra wi-vras [I cannot say dis out loud 'cause dere's a little boy with us]."⁹¹ Here, in various local perceptions of the functions of gossip, are all the elements of subversion and resistance, social control and group preservation, social leveling, and networking and cooperation spoken of in the academic texts.

But informants also revealed that women sometimes gossiped because they were simply jealous of what other people had. Thus, any discussion of women's gossip that overlooks the role of envy and rivalry cannot claim to be comprehensive. So argues Cole in her discussion of the concept of *inveja*—a form of envy that resulted in behaviors such as gossip and the use of the *evil eye* in the maritime community of Vila Chã. According to Cole:

Inveja describes the opposition between households that perceive themselves to be competing for resources, both social and economic. Because it is women who are ultimately responsible for managing the household's resources in order to ensure its survival, *inveja* is a powerful presence... in the lives of women.⁹²

As the principal household managers on the southern Avalon, plebeian women would also have felt the pressures of competition for resources in their small communities, a compelling reason to try to ensure that others did not get "too

much of a notion of themselves." Such an interpretation provides some breadth to our understanding of women's gossip, allowing it to transcend gender stereotypes that hold that women always connect while men usually compete.⁹³

Women's gossip, then, was a multi-faceted phenomenon on the southern Avalon. This brings the discussion back to the interpretation of women's gossip as an alternative source of power. Whether it manifested itself as female solidarity or resistance, as a political network that served to identify, maintain, and sometimes challenge group boundaries, or as a mechanism by which women competed for scarce resources, women exercised power in their community through the information network of gossip. The stigmatization of women's talk largely reflected men's desire to defuse its power: for gossip gave women a forum for asserting themselves in groups that often excluded men; it had a powerful socializing function outside the scope of patriarchal institutions; it had the capacity to transform private affairs into public discussions, to make or break reputations.⁹⁴ To some extent, women may even have been complicit in its trivialization, in order to negotiate maneuvering space and maintain gossip networks without formal legal sanction. However, efforts to underplay the impact of women's talk were not an unqualified success, as demonstrated by the slander cases surviving in the records and the general concern in the community about becoming the target of gossip. Despite efforts to belittle it, then, gossip was not a separate sphere for women on the southern Avalon, but rather an integral part of the power relations of the larger community.

What's in a Name?

One of the most obvious indicators that a married woman's identity was subsumed in the person of her husband was her identification by her husband's name. In middle-class culture on the southern Avalon, as elsewhere, women were increasingly addressed only in terms of their husbands' identities: even to people within their own social circle, for example, Sarah Randell became *Mrs. Robert Carter* after marriage, Anne Saunders became *Mrs. Matthew Morry Jr.*, Harriet Skinner became *Mrs. Arthur Hunt Carter*, and Jane Killigrew became *Mrs. John Goodridge*. Indeed, in writing his diary entries, magistrate Robert Carter never once used a married woman's first name—not even that of his own wife—choosing to follow the more formal style of address that, at first glance, might seem merely an affectation, but which also reflected the long arm of coverture.

This can be contrasted with forms of addressing women within the Irish plebeian community, where married women maintained strong associations with their natal families and their pre-marital identities. It was not unusual, for example, for a married woman to use and be addressed by her maiden name, even though she had legally taken her husband's name at marriage (a practice that was common

in Ireland in the period as well).⁹⁵ Certainly women continued to be addressed by their own first names after marriage, sometimes with the addition of *Mrs.* in deference to increasing age (for example, *Mrs. Maggie*). When more than one woman in the community had the same name, the last name of a husband might also be used when speaking of the person, not to them, in order to differentiate them (for example, *Mrs. Maggie Wade* as distinguished from *Mrs. Maggie Sullivan*). In small communities, where there were many common first names and surnames, married women with the same names were often differentiated by the addition of their husbands' first names to their own (for example, *Maggie Tim* as opposed to *Maggie Johnny*, or *Mary Bill* as opposed to *Mary Tom*).

This latter practice could be construed as an indicator of patriarchal domination—a reflection that these women were perceived to be the possessions of their husbands. Given the other circumstances of these women's lives, however, such an interpretation seems rather facile. Certainly, these women's own names were not lost altogether; unlike middle-class women and the "respectable" working class in urban areas, Irish women on the southern Avalon were never referred to within the plebeian community as *Mrs. Thomas Hearn* or *Mrs. Stephen Kavanagh*, for example, but [*Mrs.*, which was optional with increasing age] *Mary Tom* or [*Mrs.*] *Kitty Stephen*. And more distinctive names carried no reference to husbands' names at all (for example, [*Mrs.*] *Julianne*).

Furthermore, the interpretation of *wife as possession* in the system of nomenclature is even more roundly challenged by another practice in the area: sometimes the wife's name was added to the husband's for identification purposes. An example from Brigus South in the late nineteenth century provides an example just past the end of the study period. In that community, there was a surfeit of men bearing the name Ned Power, so they were differentiated by the addition of their wives' first names to their own: *Sarah's Ned*, *Annie's Ned*, *Bride's Ned*, etcetra. One year, a telegraph operator from St. John's, whose name also was Ned Power, came to work in the community. The newcomer was single, but the system did not collapse in the face of this anomaly, for he was promptly dubbed *Nobody's Ned* by the local residents.⁹⁶

The practice of maintaining personal identity through a form of address is noteworthy, for, in combination with other facets of Irish Newfoundland women's experience, it reinforces a perception of independence and status within their communities. The only encroachment on the practice was the increasing tendency in court records, especially from the late 1830s onwards, to identify married women using their husbands' names. In earlier records, it was difficult to determine a woman's marital status unless it was revealed by the context of the case. But from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, identification forms such as "Sarah Aylward, Wife of James Aylward," "James Kenney and Ellen his Wife," or

even more anonymous forms such as "Mrs. Ryan," "John Bavis and his wife," and "the widow of John Doyle" appeared in the record books. However, this more likely reflected the increasing preoccupations of middle-class magistrates or efforts by recording clerks to gentrify their entries than a change in perceptions or practice within the plebeian community itself.

Collective Actions and Private Wars

Another manifestation of women's influence within the plebeian community during this period can be seen in their public participation in collective actions to enforce communal standards and in individual verbal and physical interventions to sort out day-to-day power struggles within the community. Traditional treatments of the worlds of political activity and public confrontation have tended to treat them as male preserves, but more recent literature has begun to accommodate the presence of women in these spheres of activity and influence.⁹⁷

There is no surviving evidence of any solely female collective action during the period, and women's involvement in incidents involving both sexes has tended to be disguised by later misreadings of the sexually indeterminate language of the day. Such was the case with wrecking and salvaging activities (discussed in Chapter 4), which had strong undertones of plebeian redistributive justice that can be linked to the current discussion. Similarly, women's participation in the two most prominent collective actions during the period—the Ferryland riot of 1788 and the Father Duffy affair at St. Mary's in 1834-35—has been muted by subsequent historical interpretations. As in the case of wrecking activity, gender-neutral collective terms like *mob* and *crowd* have been gendered male, particularly when arrestees in the incidents were men.⁹⁸ But it is difficult to believe that women did not participate in some capacity, and thus it is a legitimate exercise to attempt to interlineate or superimpose their presence, and to retrieve the neutral connotation of collectivities that were reported in contemporary accounts.

The Ferryland riot was a clash between rival Irish factions hailing from Munster and Leinster.⁹⁹ While Irish faction-fighting has often been presented as an almost recreational outlet for grievances that had been nursed for centuries, and certainly ancient grudges provided an enabling mythology, there were usually more immediate causes for particular incidents than the "pure devilment and divarsion" attributed by Prowse.¹⁰⁰ The Ferryland affray was triggered by a jurisdictional dispute between the Prefect Apostolic, James O Donel (from Munster), and a renegade priest, Patrick Power (from Leinster). Power was one of several "strolling priests" whom O Donel had tried to dislodge from the newly established Catholic mission in Newfoundland.¹⁰¹ Power had removed himself to

Caplin Bay, where he proceeded to stir up the district by charging that O Donel was favoring Munster priests over Leinster candidates in his recruiting for the mission. Tensions simmered and then erupted in a large-scale faction fight on the Ferryland downs in the winter of 1787-88.

This was certainly not the first incident of Irish faction-fighting in Newfoundland, for Irish Catholic missionaries admitted that the "ancient feuds between the lay people of Munster and Leinster" had been in evidence in Newfoundland "those 40 years past."¹⁰² But the 118 men who were convicted in the ensuing court cases in September found themselves the recipients of harsh justice—stiff fines (ranging from £1 to £20, with a mode of £5), forfeited wages, floggings, transportation, and banishment—at the hands of the magistrates who represented leading families of the local gentry. As Christopher English has argued, these penalties reflected not only the long arm of the British state, but also "the determination of a small elite to maintain order and their own social and economic prominence" within the growing fishing population.¹⁰³

While the severity of the response to the riot was provoked by class tensions, the motivations behind ensuing events were shaded with ethnoreligious undertones.¹⁰⁴ In the wake of the trials, Anglo-Protestant magistrates, merchants, and traders in Ferryland immediately seized the opportunity to lobby for the removal of the recently arrived Catholic priests from the area. They forwarded a memorial to Governor Elliot, voicing their fear "for the safety of our persons, and property" and requesting military protection.¹⁰⁵ The visiting surrogate at Ferryland, Capt. Edward Pellew, supported their request; he denounced "Pope, Popery, Priests, & Priestcraft" in the courthouse¹⁰⁶ and



informed the governor that the Protestant community had "reasonable grounds" for their fears.¹⁰⁷ One might wonder, then, why these same concerned Protestant inhabitants sheltered the main instigator, Patrick Power, housing him and feeding him for the next four years until he wore out his welcome with mounting debts. O Donel, in the meantime, defended his mission by advising the governor that the "Seneschals of sedition if any there are cou'd be rather found among the Envious Merchantsof Ferryland than among the popish

Priests as the voice of prejudice now runs."¹⁰⁸ The dispute reveals a power struggle between Protestant establishment and the institutional presence of the Catholic Church that most certainly had ethnoreligious nuances, but there is no evidence that these undercurrents bled into the plebeian community (which, at the time, would still have contained a sizeable minority of English Protestants, particularly in



Ferryland itself).

The other major fracas during the study period involved the destruction in 1835 of a large flake on the beach of St. Mary's that purportedly formed part of the mercantile premises of Slade, Elson and Company.¹⁰⁹ This exercise in collective action involved perceptions of grievance based on both ethnicity and class, as the largely Catholic plebeian community, led by the newly appointed parish priest, Father James Duffy, took action against an English Protestant merchant firm and its agent, John Hill Martin (who was also the representative for the district in the House of Assembly and a local justice of the peace).¹¹⁰ In his capacity as magistrate, Martin had refused Duffy permission to build a chapel on a portion of the beach in question; and in his capacity as agent for Slade, Elson, Martin had claimed that title to the beach had been sold to the firm and proceeded to erect a large flake over the entire area. However, the community had long considered the beach to be a commons. An area that had traditionally been used for mending nets and repairing boats and gear, it also served as a right-of-way to the Catholic cemetery and the neighboring community of Riverhead. Martin offered Duffy an alternative site for the chapel on wet, marshy ground, but Duffy declined the offer and organized work teams from his congregation to proceed with the construction of the chapel on the beach.

The ensuing events can be briefly summarized as follows. Duffy petitioned Martin to remove the company flake on the grounds that it constituted a public nuisance. Martin refused and, before leaving for a legislative session in St. John's, ordered the clerks at Slade, Elson to refuse supplies to Duffy. Duffy countered by ordering his congregation to destroy the flake, and on 13 January 1835, a large assembly of people proceeded to chop the flake to pieces with hatchets and burn the debris.¹¹¹ Martin, acting on the advice of Chief Justice Henry Boulton, initiated an action in the supreme court for riot, rebellion, and destruction of property against Duffy and eight other male ringleaders. Duffy was arrested and made to walk to Ferryland, where he was charged before local magistrates who, according to Catholic Bishop Fleming, "could not restrain themselves from giving expression to their satisfaction at having 'caught' a priest."¹¹² Meanwhile, two constables were sent from St. John's on board the brig *Maria* to arrest the remaining ringleaders, but they met with fierce resistance from the community and failed in the attempt. The governor made arrangements with the colonial secretary to send a ship of war with a garrison of soldiers to re-establish order in the area, but Bishop Fleming appealed to the Catholic community for quiet and to the ringleaders, in particular, to surrender. Duffy and the eight fishermen named in the arrest warrants walked to St. John's and turned themselves in, but although two efforts were made to try them (in 1836 and 1837), no witnesses appeared for the prosecution, and the charges were finally stayed.

Women are not immediately obvious in written histories or oral retellings of the Ferryland riot or the Father Duffy affair. No local *Macha Mong Ruadh* or *Grainne Ni Maille* is hailed for leading her people into battle against the enemy, and no reference is made to women within the ranks.¹¹³ But it is difficult to believe that, with such major disturbances in their communities, plebeian women remained completely in the background. Rosemary Jones, in her analysis of the *Ceffyl Pren* tradition in Wales, suggests that there are various forms of female participation in collective actions that frequently go unremarked in traditional treatments of these incidents, such as: informal gossip channels that detect and define aberrant social behavior; social boycott to bring psychological and economic pressure to bear on an offender; spokesperson roles; initial seizure and/or subsequent verbal and physical abuse of an offender; inflammatory roles; and the transmission of the tradition to successive generations.¹¹⁴ One could add to this list various forms of support services such as providing food, tending injuries, and harboring fugitives.

It is highly probable that as the men from Leinster and Munster faced off in Ferryland in 1788, Irish Newfoundland women played an incendiary role or heaped abuse on those from the "wrong" province of the home country. Certainly, in his reporting of the incident, surrogate Edward Pellew noted that "many *People* came and assembled" on the downs, hailing not just from Ferryland but also from the large harbors on either side.¹¹⁵ With such a massive gathering, it is not difficult to envision women at least on the sidelines. And, in fact, it is even possible that some women participated in the affray, for it was not unusual for women in eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Ireland to participate in faction fights, often wielding stockings filled with rocks as weapons.¹¹⁶ The fact that no women were charged in court in the wake of the riots does not disprove such involvement, for authorities were generally reluctant to arrest and prosecute women participants on such occasions because they felt it might diminish the legitimacy of their own police action.

Were there women present in the fighting on the Ferryland downs, then, and was their presence simply trivialized and downplayed by the arresting authorities? And what of other levels of participation? Surely, in the aftermath of the battle, women were involved in tending wounds and hiding ringleaders from authorities (twelve remained at large for some time). As the dispute between Power and O Donel dragged on, these women, as members of the Catholic community, chose to side with either Father Power or the bishop's candidate, Father Thomas Ewer, thereby boycotting the pastoral services of the perceived interloper.¹¹⁷ And, as mothers, they likely helped to pass on a sense of rivalry between the two provinces to the next generation. Granted, the experiences of men and women in the episode were differentiated by gender, but it is highly unlikely that women were not involved at all.

Similarly, while modern retellings of the Father Duffy affair speak only of the men of St. Mary's, it is quite probable that plebeian women were also involved in the action against Slade, Elson. Doubtless, they played an inflammatory role and provided support services. And while the truck system would not have allowed fishing families the luxury of boycotting their supplying merchant, certainly the episode became one more item on a long list of grievances passed from one generation to the next (by women as well as men) that demonized merchants in Newfoundland fishing communities.¹¹⁸

Furthermore, while the nine people who led the incident were all men, a more careful reading of the contemporary historical records suggests that women were directly involved in the episode. The deposition of William Lush, chief clerk for Slade, Elson and witness to the incident, did not specify gender in describing the perpetrators. He stated that in addition to the ringleaders, "*divers other persons* amounting to the number of 80 or upwards [note that there were only 64 adult men living there as of the 1836 census]... were unlawfully riotously and tumultuously assembled" and that "the greater portion of the *people* then assembled" were employed in destroying the flake. He himself heard Father Duffy "order the *persons assembled*" to carry out the demolition. When Lush "spoke to *several persons* then assembled and requested that they would desist," they replied that they could not disobey the orders of their priest. And he heard several others state that "James Duffy had told the *congregation in chapel* to break up and burn the flake and that those who might refuse to do so should have the curse of God and *the congregation* on them."¹¹⁹

In reporting to the acting colonial secretary in St. John's on the subsequent efforts that were made to arrest the ringleaders, Martin similarly spoke of "the outrageous proceedings of the *People*" on the arrival of the brig *Maria* at St. Mary's. Martin had ordered his local constable, Burke, to assist the St. John's constables in effecting the arrests before the presence of the *Maria* was made known. However, Burke advised that its arrival

was already known to the *People*, many of whom had been expecting her—that in coming from his own house he had observed a constant, and unusual quick *passing of lights from house to house*, and which extended *throughout the Harbour*, that he was persuaded that the *People* were on the alert, and he could speak from his own knowledge to the fact of their determination not to suffer any man [referring specifically here to the male ringleaders] amongst them to be taken—and moreover it would, in his opinion, be impossible to take any of them on that night, for if a Constable approached any one of their houses a signal would be made that would bring to it *every person* concerned in the destruction of the flake, and, perhaps, many not concerned as *all the*

People of the Harbour were in some way or other,
related to each other.¹²⁰

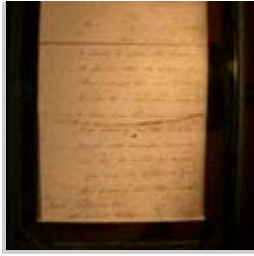
These references to the participants in the action were gender-neutral and suggest that women as well as men contributed to the destruction of the flake and were called upon to ostracize non-participants. Women were also likely part of the signaling system that "extended throughout the Harbour," as well as the menacing presence of the mob that served to protect the ringleaders and prevent their arrest.

This gender-inclusive language contrasts with the accounts of proceedings given by the constables and seamen of the *Maria*, who had to explain their failure to arrest the ringleaders. A seaman from the yacht said that on 13 December, he had been removed from the vessel by "two *armed men*" and brought to a larger group of "30 *armed men*," who questioned him about the numbers of the arresting party and threatened to "make a Sacrifice of him" if he did not answer truly. When Martin sent a man to verify the seaman's story, his informant reported encountering "50 *armed men*" armed with guns, swords, *pews*, and hatchets. Martin ordered local constable Burke to assist the St. John's constables, but Burke advised him that during the night, "his house was beset by a *great number of men* who threatened to shoot him" if he joined the arresting party. Burke felt in such danger that he preferred to relinquish his post rather than "assist on so perilous an occasion"; Martin obliged him by promptly dismissing him from his office. On 14 December, "groups of *men* numbering from 20 to 30, some of them armed," were seen "hovering about," and when a small boat was seen leaving the *Maria*, a group of "*upwards of 60 men*" (apparently, every male adult in the community) ran to where it was likely to land, only permitting the party to come ashore when it was ascertained that there were no constables among them.¹²¹

These accounts very specifically indicate that an overwhelming (and, apparently, ever increasing) presence of *armed men* prevented the arrest of the ringleaders. Yet even here, one is left to wonder whether the participation of women in the mob was discretely omitted. Certainly, if the arresting party was trying to justify to the chief justice and governor its inability to complete its assignment, the menace of a mob of armed men may have provided greater mitigating power than the opposition of a mixed crowd of men, women, and children. It is intriguing that, at the end of his report, Martin suggested that the "place seemed less hostile" by 15 December, and his description of local resistance returned to the more sexually indeterminate terms of *mob* and *crowd*, once again allowing for an interpretation of events that included the presence of women.



A less renowned incident that also likely involved Irish plebeian women occurred in Ferryland district the following



year during the election of a local member to the fledgling House of Assembly. Diarist Robert Carter recorded the battle between his cousin, Lieutenant Robert Carter, R.N., scion of a prominent local English Protestant mercantile family, and Patrick Morris, an Irish Catholic merchant (originally from Waterford) residing in St. John's, with strong southern Avalon connections because of his involvement in the passenger trade to that area. (Web Link) Here was one of the few occasions when ethnoreligious tensions flared in the study area as the large Irish Catholic population in the district rallied solidly behind Morris. Again, the contemporary account is quite gender-neutral in its language. Carter observed that the day before the polls opened, Father James Duffy led a parade around Ferryland harbor "with a green flag, his horse's head stuck with spruce boughs and one in his hand." On the first day of polling, feelings were running high. "Large bodies of *people* assembled from the North and South," Carter wrote on 14 November. "The *crowd* very great in and around the Court. Great show of disapprobation by the *friends* of Morris to those of Carter but the *people* were kept in order through Rev. J. Duffy's influence over them." Indeed, throughout the course of the polling, the district was "tolerably quiet considering all," according to Carter, and certainly did not experience the election violence that plagued Conception Bay and St. John's in the middle decades of the century. However, the menace of the crowd was still acutely felt by English Protestant middle-class families in the district, especially as the episode followed so shortly after the incident at St. Mary's. In the aftermath of the voting, Carter reflected on the ultimate victory of Morris and his fellow liberal reformers, "elected by the populace at the instigation of the Priests, the representatives of the dregs of the People" in his view. "May the Home Government take upon them the rule of this Island or devise some means to put down the amazing excitement now raging between different sects of religions," he wrote. "Protestant and Tory are used as synonymous terms, and down with Tories, and on all occasions by the rabble. God send us his divine protection."¹²²

The involvement of women in the episode again must be read into the sexually indeterminate language of the contemporary account, based on a tradition of Irish plebeian women's participation in collective actions. Although women could not vote, they likely featured prominently in enforcing solidarity within the ethnoreligious group and in intimidating rival factions. This was certainly the case in Ireland. There, Catholic women were urged in chapel to attend at polling stations and mark those individuals who voted against their priests' instructions. They discouraged supporters of rival candidates from attending the polls by threats and physical attacks upon their property and persons, and they participated in election riots, not only in a symbolic role, bedecked in green sashes with green bushes in their hands, but also in physical confrontations with opposing factions.¹²³ There is every reason to believe that Irish Catholic women

on the southern Avalon, with a strong stake in the interests of the plebeian community and their ethnoreligious group, participated in similar ways in intimidating the supporters of Lieutenant Carter.

Female intimidation and incitement clearly played a role in an episode involving the Irish population in a neighboring bay: the effort to run Sweetman's agent, James Hogan, out of Placentia in the winter of 1845-46. "[A] Storm has been raised against me," Hogan wrote to his principals in January. "My life is sought in open day, their is a gang here determined to have my life." Hogan complained that this group was inventing and circulating "heaps of calumny of the worst description... to exasperate the people." His tormentors had ordered the people of the harbor not to ship themselves to him, had attacked his house, "roaring and abusing me threatening my life," and had made several attempts to beat and murder him as well as seamen on board the *Juliet*. This was primarily a local campaign to replace an agent who was seen to be dealing unfairly with fishing families; but there were also factional undertones, for Hogan was from Wexford, and his enemies were apparently threatening to roust all his fellow countymen



with him. Prominent in the events were several local women: "Mich^{ls} [gang leader Michael Baldwin] wife, Norah and Mary among other women haloo them on and encourage them," Hogan wrote; and further, "in the riots lately both Norah and Mary & Baldwins wife Encouraged the gang on the street publicly singing out Now the Y. Bellys (*Yellow Bellies*) and Paddy meaning me should hide themselves."¹²⁴ Here, then, was direct evidence of plebeian women in a conspicuously incendiary role in a communal action of the period—a role similar to that played in collective actions by their contemporaries in Ireland.

A more celebrated example of plebeian resistance, at least in community folk history, is the existence of a band of outlaws in the Renewes area known as the *Masterless Men*. According to the oral tradition, in the mid-eighteenth century, Peter Kerrivan and some companions jumped ship at St. John's and deserted from the British Navy. They made their way to the *Butterpots* near Renewes, where they lived off the land, occasionally trading with nearby fishing communities. Over time, they were joined by a number of fishing servants who had deserted from service, escaping the harsh conditions imposed by their fishing masters. Despite repeated efforts by the navy to round them up, the band proved elusive, living in portable shacks suitable for quick escape and leaving false trails in the woods. Most remained at large until the traditional fishery, with its abusive masters, collapsed and they were able to move back into a normal existence in various settlements along the coast.

Once again, women do not figure in the narrative proper. But the oral tradition does mention in passing that the Masterless Men married women from local

settlements and raised families in the woods. Peter Kerrivan himself is said to have had four sons and several daughters.¹²⁵ At the Capt. William Jackman Museum in Renew, there is a depiction of the legend along one wall, painted by local artist Dana McCarthy; the mural shows a man and a woman hiding and smiling as two soldiers blunder off in the opposite direction. The oral tradition, then, admits to the existence of *Masterless Women*, even if it does not celebrate them.

While this band are hailed as local folk heroes, scholars are more skeptical of the possibility of long-term survival of such a group, particularly through the island's harsh winters. Nonetheless, the isolated barrens and Butterpots of the area were an ideal place for runaways to hide from authorities,¹²⁶ and the tendency of local residents to harbor deserters was noted in the written record. In 1797, for example, John Dingle, a justice of the peace from Bay Bulls who had temporarily removed to Trepassey after a French attack on his home community in 1796, notified Governor Waldegrave that he had just received news "that several men had been seen lurking in the woods, and that they were judged to be runaways." He then described the difficulty in apprehending deserters, given the recalcitrance of the inhabitants:



...it was then late at night, and the *Inhabitants* of this place were mostly in Bed-knowing that deserters seldom want a resting place, & thinking that the *Inhabitants* might afford them Shelter, M^r. Hunter [a local merchant] and myself considered it as a proper step to apply immediately to M^r. Justice Follett [local justice of the peace] for a Warrant to collect together a large body of constables and armed assistants, and to search the houses of the said *inhabitants* without delay. This was accordingly done and I have the satisfaction to say that the Merchants, and their followers, in their researches, used their utmost endeavours to secure the said deserters,-but I am sorry to add, none were found.



We now thought that by such proceedings as I have mentioned, the said deserters had fled to the westward, but for these two days past, reports are propogated, that the same fellows are still lurking in the skirts of this Town, and these reports, for what I can learn, are not without foundation—M^r. Hunter and myself, have had a consultation on the best plan for apprehending them, and we consider that it will be to no purpose to send the Constables into the woods after them—These civil

Officers are frequently so timid, where such desperate men are the object, and the *common people* in general are more inclined to shelter than give up deserters.¹²⁷

In 1802, Dingle, now back in Bay Bulls, again wrote Governor Gambier respecting the frequency with which deserters from the navy made their way through that community and on to the south, where they found sanctuary and employment with the "inhabitants." He reminded Gambier of the 1797 incident in Trepassey, "when a desperate gang, deserters from the Newfoundland Regiment, were lurking about that place" and the "inhabitants" had refused to cooperate with authorities in rounding them up.¹²⁸ If the harboring of deserters was as effective as Dingle's letters imply, the entire plebeian community—women as well as men—had to be part of the network of sanctuary and the conspiracy of silence.

While the written record is somewhat closefisted with specific evidence of women's involvement in larger-scale collective actions, it is more generous in relation to smaller-scale events. Certainly, the court records for the southern district indicate that plebeian women were involved in very public and physical efforts to enforce community standards and to protect personal and family interests. In some of these cases, the women acted individually; in others, they were part of a small collectivity.¹²⁹

The records reveal various instances of women's use of physical violence to defend family property against perceived encroachment.¹³⁰ The women of the Berrigan family, for example, were a vital force in the family's struggle to maintain possession of their fishing room in Renew's harbor in the 1830s and 1840s. Case File 9 In May of 1835, local merchant and magistrate John William Saunders initiated an action of ejectment against Thomas Berrigan Sr. to recover possession of fishing premises occupied by the Berrigan family on the south side of the harbor. The records do not specify the reason for the action. It is likely that Berrigan was a tenant of Saunders and was being ejected for non-payment of rent, given that Saunders had already launched a successful rent recovery action against Berrigan in 1832.¹³¹ However, the property in the earlier action was not described in the records, and given that family fishing premises often comprised multiple pieces of property, it is not possible to conclude with finality that both suits involved the same property. Furthermore, the presence of Saunders' storekeeper among the plaintiff's witnesses in the 1836 action also suggests that the suit may have been related to a debt for which Berrigan may have entered into a mortgage with his supplier as security.¹³² At any rate, Berrigan entered a demurrer in the second action, but the matter proceeded to trial in November of 1836, and the jury, on hearing the case, decided in Berrigan's favor.¹³³

But the matter did not end there, for Saunders pursued his claim, to the peril of several court officials and, ultimately, himself. By the fall of 1838, Saunders had convinced the court to issue a writ of possession, but he would soon discover that the Berrigans would not relinquish the premises without a fight. In September, charges were brought by deputy sheriff Philip Wright against Anastatia, Edward, Alice, and Bridget Berrigan and Walter Barron for "violently" assaulting him at Renew's on 16 August as he tried to execute the writ of possession. Anastatia was identified in the records as the wife of Thomas Berrigan Sr.; the relationship of the other Berrigan women was not explained, but they were likely daughters, sisters, or relatives by marriage. At the hearing, the defendants were required to enter into sureties to keep the peace for twelve months and to appear in court to stand trial in the next term.¹³⁴

There is no surviving record of an 1839 hearing, but on 31 December 1842, Anastatia, Bridget, and Alice Berrigan were again before the court, along with William Berrigan, to face charges of assaulting yet another deputy sheriff, John Stephenson. Once again, the Berrigans had allegedly obstructed and "violently" assaulted a court official as he attempted to execute another writ of possession for the contested property. Once again, warrants were issued for the arrest of the parties, and on 31 January 1843, they were required to enter into bonds to keep the peace for twelve months and to appear at trial in the next quarter sessions to answer Stephenson's charges. (Anastatia was sick and unable to attend this particular hearing at Ferryland; her bond was sworn before the resident justice of the peace at Renew's, Alan Goodridge.) At the general quarter sessions on 23 February 1843, a grand jury returned a bill of indictment for "Riot and assault" against the defendants, but a petty jury returned a verdict of not guilty.¹³⁵

The final trace of the matter in the court records appears in proceedings initiated on 13 and 14 June 1843. John William Saunders swore a complaint that he himself had been threatened, assaulted, and prevented from taking possession of the fishing room at Renew's by various parties, including James Gearing Sr., Benjamin Wilcox, and yet another lineup of the Berrigan forces: Thomas Sr., Thomas Jr., Edward, and the ever-present matriarch, Anastatia. Saunders claimed that, by this time, he felt that his very life was in danger from the frequent threats and assaults of the Berrigan faction and asked for the protection of the law. This may have been formulaic pleading, but Saunders' frustration was obviously mounting as he exhausted all legal remedies available to him. The charge against Gearing was dropped for lack of evidence, but the remaining parties were once again arrested and ordered to enter into bonds to keep the peace for twelve months.¹³⁶

The matter then disappears from view, and we are left to speculate whether or not the Berrigans were successful in holding fast to their fishing premises. But for

the present discussion, the most significant point is the presence of the Berrigan women in the midst of the struggle. There were variations in the members of the Berrigan family involved in each case, but Bridget and Alice were involved in two of the three incidents, while the family matriarch, Anastatia, was present every time. Their participation was not unusual within the historical context of this fishing-based economy. As essential members of their household production unit, the Berrigan women were defending a family enterprise in which they felt they had an equal stake, using verbal attack and physical force to protect their source of livelihood in the face of perceived injustice at the hands of their landlord/supplying merchant and the formal legal system. Additionally, given that the family was assisted by neighbors in protecting their property and that petty juries on two separate occasions found in the Berrigans' favor, it is likely that their defiance enjoyed some support within the plebeian community.

A comparable incident was reported in *Renews* in 1853-54. Deputy Sheriff Francis Geary complained that when he tried to execute a writ of ejectment against John Bavis, he was assaulted by Bavis and his wife. A warrant was issued for John's arrest, but when four constables showed up at the house to take him into custody, his wife stood in their way and swore that he was not going anywhere. Meanwhile, a mob had gathered outside the house with bludgeons in their hands, threatening to rescue Bavis if the officers tried to take him by force. The constables were outnumbered and forced to retreat, with the mob following after them, shouting and hissing at them.¹³⁷ Again, a woman played a key role in a public, collective action to protect family property and, in this case, her husband's person as well; and the family's resistance to the officers of the crown had the backing of the plebeian community, reinforcing what they perceived to be decent treatment for the Bavis family, regardless of what formal laws and court orders had to say on the matter.

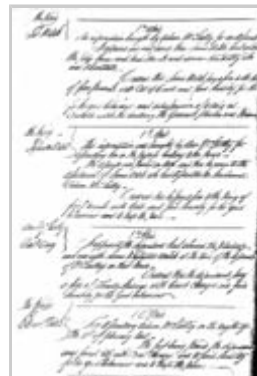
Women were not always acting from a defensive position in property disputes that appear in the court records. In at least one case, a woman was the aggressor in both a property dispute and a related assault. In 1835, Jane Hayley of Cape Broyle was brought before the magistrate by Henry Coryear of the same place. Henry complained that Jane "had dispossessed him of a piece of Ground Granted to him and driven off his Servant with a Hatchet threatening further Violence if molested." Ultimately, Jane relinquished the claim and agreed to pay court costs; but her use of verbal threats and physical confrontation to dispute possession of the property provides further evidence of women deploying power in the community in the period of early settlement.¹³⁸

Plebeian women rose to the defense of more than real property. Maintaining one's good name was important within the community, as Ellen Veal vividly demonstrated in the episode that introduced this chapter. Elenor Evoy of

Ferryland provides another example, for she was involved in several incidents in which her family business and personal reputation were at stake. Case File 10 She and her husband, Michael, owned one of the public houses in the district in the 1790s.¹³⁹ Indeed, although the liquor license for her tavern was officially in Michael's name up to his death in 1798, it is likely that Elenor had much to do with the running of the establishment, and she may have been the sole operator. Certainly, it was Elenor who defended the integrity of the business against aspersions cast by Michael Ryan of nearby Caplin Bay. In July of 1795, Ryan complained to the magistrates that Elenor, along with several other local women, had assaulted him and battered him with stones outside the Evoy public house. In their defense, the defendants claimed that Michael had "several times behav'd Rude to them, and as a Punishment they were Determin'd to Hustle him." The women were given small fines and reprimanded.

The following week, Elenor filed a petition in which she gave her own version of the episode, claiming that Michael had provoked the rock-throwing incident outside her establishment with his rude comments. She herself had not cast any stones, she claimed, but had simply advised him to move on for his own good. In response, he had threatened to beat her and defamed her character, accusing her of keeping a bawdy house. Elenor took particular offense at this slur against herself and her business and asked the magistrates for redress. Michael explained that he had spoken "from passion" because the girls were tormenting him, but he was fined £5 pounds (later reduced to 5s.) and ordered to keep the peace.¹⁴⁰ Throughout the proceedings, there was no mention of Elenor's husband; it is evident that it was *her* reputation and *her* business that were being defended, and the magistrates acknowledged her right to do so, despite the principle of coverture, which should have required her husband's attendance in the courtroom as her legal personality.¹⁴¹

By 1799, Michael Evoy had died and Elenor's name appeared on the liquor license for the first time. By the taking of the Carter census in 1800, however, Elenor had married a James Welsh (also Walsh), and the liquor license thereafter appeared in his name. Still, Elenor, as the experienced tavern-keeper, likely continued to run the business. One night in late March of 1803, Elenor and her new husband James, his brother, Sylvester, and Elenor's son (by her first husband) Patrick Evoy broke into the house of another publican family in Ferryland—Adam and Ann McLarthy—and assaulted and "ill-used" them. According to the several informations laid, Elenor and James took on Adam McLarthy while Sylvester and Patrick harried Ann in the passageway of the house. The records are not specific about the cause of the assault, but given that the McLarthys also owned a local public house, the episode



very much has the appearance of a turf war between two rival firms, and the women—Elenor and Ann—were right in the thick of the fray. This time, Elenor and her cohorts were fined and ordered to keep the peace. Elenor's fine was 50s.—significantly less than the £5 each imposed on James and Sylvester, but more than the 20s. levied against her son Patrick (whose role was more that of an accessory).¹⁴²

The court records reveal other instances of women's involvement in family feuds. On 27 June 1823, Ellen (Nell) Tobin (the same Nell Tobin who had witnessed the Ellen Veal-Mary Bowen affray the previous year) brought a complaint of assault against Ann St. Croix. Ellen attested that she had confronted Ann at a Mrs. Linehan's house that same day and "asked her the reason why she so abused my Sister-and [was] often in the habit of th[r]owing rocks at me and my Brother." In response, Ellen claimed, Ann "took a stick from out of the fire and struck me several times on the face." Three days later, in a related case (the records are sketchy, but the matching surnames in this small community suggest a link),¹⁴³ Bridget St. Croix (presumably a relative of Ann) complained that on the previous evening she had encountered Thomas Tobin (possibly Ellen's brother and the victim of Ann's rock-throwing episodes), who had "accosted" her and said, "now you vagabond [w]hore I have you." Bridget told him that she "woud not be wishing for him for a pair of Shoes to touch me." Thomas responded to her provocation by grabbing the broomstick she was carrying and striking her several times. He left her with the dire warning "that he would watch us day and night—to be revenged."¹⁴⁴

The cause of the dissension between the two families is not clear. It may have dated back to an 1820 episode in which Catherine St. Croix had accused Martin Tobin of stealing two cotton shirts, although this may have been merely an earlier symptom rather than the cause of the tensions.¹⁴⁵ But what is certain is that women of the Tobin and St. Croix families were very much involved in their families' quarrels in ways that conflicted with hegemonic ideals of female passivity and fragility. Case File 11

Another case involving bad feelings between families involved the Dooleys and Kenneys of Renew. On 12 September 1850, Maurice and Mary Dooley and their stepson complained to the magistrates that James Kenney and his wife, Ellen, had repeatedly threatened their lives, and they asked for the protection of the law. Warrants were issued for the arrest of the Kenneys, and they were brought into court by Constable Sullivan and required to enter into security to keep the peace for twelve months.¹⁴⁶ The motive for the harassment in this case was not stated in the records, but it is highly probable that Ellen Kenney and Mary Dooley, like Elenor Evoy and the Berrigan women, were attempting to assert or protect their families' interests.

There is also a record of one case of assault involving a woman's defense of her children, although the fact that she had struck other children in the process landed her in hot water with the local court. On 24 October 1820, Ann Prichet was charged with beating and wounding two children belonging to Bryan Dunn. Ann admitted that she had given "two strokes" to one of the children, but argued that she had been acting in defense of her own children, who were being "ill used" by the others, and in response to "provoking words to herself." The court acknowledged that Ann had not been acting out of "malice," but ordered her to pay a fine of 5s. plus court costs, as well as to give security that she keep the peace for twelve months. Ann refused to provide the security and was committed to the local jail, indicating that the magistrates were not deterred by her sex in treating her like any other recalcitrant defendant.¹⁴⁷

In general, plebeian women on the southern Avalon were not reluctant to use physical violence in sorting out their daily affairs. There were 111 complaints of assault involving women (all from the plebeian community) brought before the local courts during the period, and while fifty related to male assailants of female victims, sixty-one involved female aggressors.¹⁴⁸ Furthermore, these female assailants were not particular about the sex of their victims: thirty-two were women and twenty-eight were men (with child victims in the remaining case). Most episodes involved the use of threatening language and/or physical assault, with a variety of motivations: defense of personal reputation, employment disputes over wages or ill-treatment, defense of family business, enforcement of community standards, and defense of family property. Given the unfortunate economy of local court clerks in recording details, there was also an assortment of cases in which the motivation for the assault remains a mystery.

In 1839 and 1840, for example, Margaret Ryan of Caplin Bay appeared before the magistrate to respond to two separate complaints by neighbors: first, of assaulting and threatening Catharine Reddigan and, later, of using violent and threatening language against John Rossiter and his family.¹⁴⁹ In 1841, John Crotty, a fisherman at Cape Broyle, complained of being assaulted and beaten by Johanna Morrissey and asked for the court's protection.¹⁵⁰ In 1851, Mary Buckley accused Mary Ann Pendergast of striking her on the head with a water bucket, causing a "severe cut on her Head" and making the "Blood to flow copiously from the wound" and all over her clothing.¹⁵¹ In 1844, Arthur H. O. B. Carter brought charges against Bridget Dullanty for throwing stones at him, "severely wounding" him, and "thrusting a stick at him."¹⁵² This was Bridget's second offense; she had already been convicted of an assault against a party named Cose in 1837.¹⁵³

Certainly, there was a variety of such cases, and while we do not always know the motivations for the defendants' actions (and doubtless not all were noble), the

physical assertiveness of these women and the court's matter-of-fact handling of these matters suggests that these women's violence was no more shocking to the community than men's, indicating a certain fluidity of gender relations within the plebeian community and demonstrating that these women felt they had the right to use verbal and physical intimidation in the public sphere. Examining colonial New England, Ulrich arrives at a different conclusion respecting women's violence, noting that when women used physical force, "they broke through a powerful gender barrier. Violent men were still men; violent women became superwomen, amazons, viragoes."¹⁵⁴ On the southern Avalon, however, the gender "barrier" was more a highly permeable membrane through which plebeian women easily moved in their daily transactions, despite hegemonic discourses on "women's place."

Of course, there were also seventy-one reported female victims of assaults, ranging from threatening language and ill treatment to more serious physical and sexual assaults. The breakdown by sex of the accused in these cases was thirty-two women and fifty men (with multiple defendants in several cases). In feminist scholarship, male violence against women—actual or potential—has been implicated as a mechanism of patriarchal control. Yet it is evident that on the southern Avalon, the use of physical violence was not gender-specific, and cannot be readily examined as a milieu characterized by a pattern of male aggressors and female victims.¹⁵⁵ Furthermore, it is important to note that plebeian women in the area evidently felt that it was their prerogative to take their abusers to court. Only three were represented in actions initiated by their husbands (who had also suffered an assault or destruction of property during the incidents); the remaining sixty-eight victims provided depositions and appeared in court themselves when summoned to give testimony against their assailants. These women perceived themselves as individuals with rights that deserved the protection of the legal system, and they were not deterred by notions of female respectability and self-sacrifice from pursuing these rights in a public forum.



Conclusion

Brown's and Ulrich's frameworks for discussing gender in colonial America, with concepts of fixed gender hierarchies or gender barriers occasionally stormed by exceptional women, are too rigid for examining the complexity of gender relations on the southern Avalon in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Gender in any context is constantly under negotiation and renegotiation—a dynamic process, in which gender hierarchies are constructed, legitimated,

contested, and either maintained or redefined.¹⁵⁶ And I would suggest that there are contexts in which the process is likely to be more vigorous, the negotiations more aggressive. A period of immigration and early settlement—such as unfolded on the southern Avalon from the mid-eighteenth to mid-nineteenth centuries—provides just such a hyper-dynamic situation, when understandings of gender are in greater flux.

Furthermore, while feminine ideals of domesticity and passivity were powerful proscriptive conventions, they were not automatically adopted by plebeian and working-class communities. Thus, while middle-class constructs of femininity were increasingly influencing Newfoundland society, they did not easily insinuate themselves into Irish plebeian culture on the southern Avalon. Women's essential role in community formation and economic life, their powerful position in an alternative belief system, their strong sense of individual personhood, and their deployment of informal power in the community mitigated against the adaptation of gender ideologies that did not fit local realities. And because the southern Avalon remained a pre-industrial society into the twentieth century, plebeian women's status did not undergo the erosion experienced by their counterparts in the industrializing British Isles.

In rural Ireland, women were increasingly marginalized from agricultural work in the nineteenth century, particularly from the post-Napoleonic War period onwards—a trend that was exacerbated not just by mechanization, but also by a shift in production from labor-intensive tillage to pasturage. The mechanization of dairying and the contraction of the domestic textile industry also reduced women's income-earning capacity, and the result was a critical decline in their status as essential producers in their family economies. This slide, gaining momentum from 1815, became precipitous at mid-century. The collapse of the potato culture by the 1840s and 1850s led to a decimation of the cottier and laborer class that had relied so heavily on female productive work. It also brought to a virtual halt the extensive practice of subdivision and partible inheritance that had permitted virtually universal and early marriage. The remaining farming class in Ireland was more inclined to practice impartible inheritance and primogeniture: one son inherited, and represented an eligible partner for one daughter of another farming family, who was, in turn, expected to bring with her a sizeable dowry. Marriage became increasingly restricted as families' hopes and financial resources focused on the inheriting son and the first-married daughter. The remaining children became "surplus"—particularly daughters, whose wage-earning opportunities were fewer than their brothers' in the changing socioeconomic milieu. As a result of massive economic and demographic reorganization in nineteenth-century Ireland, then, there was a significant depreciation of women's worth as both producers and reproducers—a decline to which many responded by emigrating.¹⁵⁷

Similarly, in England in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, accelerating enclosure and the loss of customary rights, the masculinization of farm labor and dairying under capitalist agriculture, and the mechanization and industrialization of cottage industries led to the devaluation of women's labor and the channeling of women's work into sweated labor in cottage manufacturing or into dead-end, low-paying jobs in factories. This was a process in which working-class men were complicit: with increasing competition between the sexes for work, male trade unionists spearheaded a quest for a male breadwinner's wage by espousing female domesticity and denigrating women's paid work; meanwhile, male Chartists incorporated female domesticity and passivity into their bid for working-class "respectability" and the vote (an effort which many working-class women initially supported, until the process led them to a double shift of paid work and housework because the male breadwinner's wage remained elusive).¹⁵⁸

The devaluation of women's economic contribution in both Ireland and England was accompanied by a decline in women's status, and they struggled to assert agency within the confines of increasingly patriarchal family and work contexts. Along the southern Avalon, however, the economy continued to rely on family production in its main industry, supported by a multi-faceted package of subsistence agriculture and supplementary income-earning ventures in which women still played a prominent and essential role. In addition, the very broad (almost universal) male franchise in Newfoundland likely warded off any political incentive within the plebeian community to pressure women into lives of genteel respectability.

Thus, while gender ideology and feminine ideals of domesticity, fragility, and dependence increasingly circumscribed the lives of many women elsewhere, Irish plebeian women on the southern Avalon enjoyed considerable status and exercised significant authority both in family and community during this period. Within families, they shared in decision-making over mixed-sex work processes and were the sole authorities in routines performed by women. They were also the primary household managers, juggling resources with consumption demands and monitoring family accounts with local merchants. Women also shouldered responsibility and wielded power outside the home in the day-to-day life of community. They remained active and essential in the economic sphere: in subsistence production, the fishery, and other forms of economic activity, and as an integral part of the exchange economy that supported the resident fishery. They also acted as custodians of the Catholic faith and as interpreters of the supernatural within an alternative belief system—roles that not only gave them considerable status but also placed them in the vanguard of preserving the ethnoreligious identity of the Irish Catholic community.

Plebeian women also deployed power through their information networks.

Women's gossip—whether it manifested itself as a means of group identification and preservation, a site of female resistance, or an expression of competition among women in their roles as household managers—was a component of power relations within the larger community. And in collective actions and individual interventions, women publicly flexed their muscles (often literally as well as figuratively) as they negotiated space for themselves and their families in the social, economic, and political life of their community. Thus, while plebeian women were barred from the exercise of formal power by their gender and class, within the plebeian community, their access to informal power was considerable, indicating that gender relations were very much a shifting territory in the days of early settlement, and that perhaps women not only made the cannonballs, but fired them too.

Notes:

Note 1: PANL, GN 5/4/C/1, St. Mary's, 116-17 and 119-20, *Ellen Veal v. Mary Bowen*, 22 July and 1 August 1822. In the 1 August hearing, both parties were found culpable and required to enter into bonds of £5 each to keep the peace and be of good behavior for twelve months. Note that although some of the last names above were of English derivation, these family lines had been incorporated into the Irish Catholic population. back

Note 2: See, for example: Constance Backhouse, *Petticoats and Prejudice: Women and Law in Nineteenth-Century Canada* (Toronto: Osgoode Society, 1991); Linda Cullum and Maeve Baird, "'A Woman's Lot': Women and Law in Newfoundland from Early Settlement to the Twentieth Century," in *Pursuing Equality: Historical Perspectives on Women in Newfoundland and Labrador*, ed. Linda Kealey, Social and Economic Papers, no. 20 (St. John's: ISER, 1993), 66-162; Anna Clark, *The Struggle for the Breeches: Gender and the Making of the British Working Class* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987); Sonya O. Rose, *Limited Livelihoods: Gender and Class in Nineteenth-Century England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992); Jane Rendall, *Women in an Industrializing Society: England, 1750-1880*, Historical Association Studies (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990); and G. S. Rousseau and Roy Porter, eds., *Sexual Underworlds of the Enlightenment* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988). back

Note 3: Up to the early nineteenth century, most were Anglo-Protestant, and many returned to Britain after stays of varying lengths on the island. Even those who remained in Newfoundland maintained strong family, commercial, and/or professional connections with Britain. There was a smaller Irish mercantile and professional elite in Newfoundland as well; but, while this group achieved increasing prominence in St. John's in the nineteenth century, their counterparts on the southern Avalon—a small, predominantly Protestant group of Irish merchant-planters—had wound up their interests in the area by the late eighteenth century. back

Note 4: L. A. Clarkson, "Love, Labour, and Life: Women in Carrick-on-Suir in the Late Eighteenth Century," *Irish Economic and Social History* 20 (1993): 30. By contrast, Errington notes that Upper Canadian farming families were distinctly hierarchical and patriarchal, the image of the "good wife" presented as "caring, quiet, [and] submissive"—although Errington's reliance on middle-class sources may have skewed her findings somewhat. See Elizabeth Errington, *Wives and Mothers, Schoolmistresses and Scullery Maids: Working Women in Upper Canada, 1790-1840* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1995), 33 and 39. back

Note 5: This phrase was first encountered with EW, interview by author, Calvert, 21 July 1999, but it also resurfaced, or a similar opinion was expressed, in most interviews conducted. back

Note 6: Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer* (London: J. M. Dent, 1912), 146-47. back

Note 7: Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *Good Wives: Image and Reality in the Lives of Women in Northern New England, 1650-1750* (New York: Knopf, 1982), 39-42. back

Note 8: Sally Cole, *Women of the Praia: Work and Lives in a Portuguese Coastal Community* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991). back

Note 9: Quotation from QSF, interview by author, Cape Broyle, 22 July 1999; similar information was imparted by all informants. back

Note 10: Carol Berkin also notes the essential role of women as household managers in colonial America, where they were "expected to manage resources, time, and the available labor to best advantage, balancing production against maintenance, the needs of daily consumption against long-term supply, and the particular capabilities of servants and children against their assigned chores." See Berkin, *First Generations: Women in Colonial America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1996), 28. back

Note 11: PRL, 340.9 N45, Trepassey–St. Mary's, 15, *Thomas Murphy v. James Warne*, 20 November 1793. back

Note 12: See, for example: Kathleen M. Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race, and Power in Colonial Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994); de Crèvecoeur, *Letters*; and Ulrich, *Good Wives*. back

Note 13: March was a critical period in Newfoundland fishing households, when the winter's diet was virtually gone and the spring supplies had not yet been advanced by merchants. This expression, and the terms *good/bad manager* and *good/bad provider*, were used by most informants in discussing this issue. A similar theme on the importance of women's household management strategies to family survival appears in literature on urban working-class families. See, for example: Bettina Bradbury, *Working Families: Age, Gender, and Daily Survival in Industrializing Montreal* (Toronto: McClelland and Stuart, 1993); Elizabeth Roberts *A Woman's Place: An Oral History of Working-Class Women, 1890-1940* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984); and Ellen Ross, *Love and Toil: Motherhood in Outcast London, 1870-1918* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993). However, these women occupied a more marginal place in family economies, despite their essential economic coping strategies, because, with the increasing separation of home and workplace in industrializing areas, women's contribution was perceived as secondary as the rhetoric of the male breadwinner and female domesticity intruded in their lives. back

Note 14: ESF, interview by author, Cape Broyle, 25 August 1999. back

Note 15: Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches*, 28-29. Thompson also notes the use of the ducking stool and scold's bridle in eighteenth-century England. See E. P. Thompson, *Customs in Common* (London: Merlin Press, 1991), 501. back

Note 16: AG, interview by author, Ferryland, 21 July 1999. Similar thoughts were expressed by other informants. back

Note 17: EW, interview by author, Calvert, 30 August 1999. Other informants provided similar information. back

Note 18: PANL, MG 473, Goodridge Collection, 1839 and 1841 ledgers; MHA, Goodridge fonds, 1840 ledger. back

Note 19: PANL, MG 49, Sweetman Collection, various files in boxes 2 and 3. Place of residence was often not given, so it is difficult to identify which of the women whose names appear in these accounts were strictly from the study area. Those who were not, however, were from neighboring areas and thus still serve to illustrate the points raised here by next-best approximation. back

Note 20: Other sources confirm these findings. Similar entries appear in a business journal found in the White-Maher house in Ferryland before its demolition in the 1960s; the journal is currently in the possession of HE of Ferryland. Although the business is not identified, the customer names are from the local area, and while the journal entries are

dated 1881-82, they reflect the continuation of a system of exchange that was in place during the study period. Further evidence of women's involvement in the exchange economy can be found in the court records, such as third-party transactions in merchant and boatkeeper accounts entered in evidence as well as outstanding accounts presented by women themselves for payment. back

Note 21: *Newfoundland Population Returns*, 1836 (St. John's: n.p., 1836); and *Newfoundland Population Returns*, 1845 (St. John's: Ryan and Withers, 1845). back

Note 22: The more fragmentary Sweetman records also hint at this. Contrast, for example, the accounts of "Mrs. Jas. Mullaly" and "Mrs. Ths. McCarthy" with those of "Widow Lamb" and "Widow Conway." back

Note 23: There were exceptions, such as Mary Plece (also Please or Pleace) and Ann Huffman, household servants with the Goodridge family, who appeared to receive cash wages semi-annually. back

Note 24: For example: Catherine Shannahan's 1839 profit of 19s. 8d. from her work as a laundress was applied towards the account of Mathew Shannahan (1839 ledger, fol. 384). Margaret Leary had 10s. from her 1840 profits paid to "Thomas" at St. John's (1840 ledger, fol. 339). Washerwoman Mary Butler had 1s. 10d. from her earnings applied towards the account of William Butler and was still able to draw cash in the amount of £1.10.0 in November (1840 ledger, fol. 340). Mary Neill's 1841 profit of 10s. 4d. from selling hay to Goodridge's was applied towards the account of William Neill (1841 ledger, fol. 248). Nancy Gerian earned sufficient wages from her work on the Goodridge flakes in 1841 to have 14s. 2d. applied towards the account of Thomas Gerian and still receive cash in the amount of 5s. (1841 ledger, fol. 306). back

Note 25: Johanna Miller Lewis, "Women and Economic Freedom in the North Carolina Backcountry," in *Women and Freedom in Early America*, ed. Larry D. Eldridge (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 195. Lewis discusses evidence of women's economic activity in the business books of Rowan County, North Carolina; she observes, however, that working for a living was usually a life phase experienced by women before marriage or in widowhood, in contrast to my southern Avalon findings. More like their southern Avalon counterparts were women in frontier Pennsylvania, who were essential members of their family production units after marriage and appeared regularly in merchant account books, regardless of marital status. Some maintained their own accounts, while most others transacted their purchases through husbands' and fathers' names, even borrowing cash on account. See Judith Ridner, "'To Have a Sufficient Maintenance': Women and the Economics of Freedom in Frontier Pennsylvania, 1750-1800," in *Women and Freedom*, ed. Eldridge, 167-90. back

Note 26: For the comparative context of Horton, see the discussion in Mancke, "At the Counter of the General Store: Women and the Economy in Eighteenth-Century Horton, Nova Scotia," in *Intimate Relations: Family and Community in Planter Nova Scotia, 1759-1800*, ed. Margaret Conrad, Planter Studies Series, no. 3 (Fredericton: Acadiensis, 1990), 167-81. back

Note 27: Mancke, "At the Counter of the General Store," 171. back

Note 28: In Roman Catholicism, *ultramontanism* was an emphasis on the supremacy of the pope in Rome, who lived *ultramontanus*, or "beyond the mountains [south of the Alps]" from the perspective of northern Europe. This doctrine advocated centralization and a move away from the ecclesiastical peculiarism of churches of individual nations. Its influence was increasingly felt in the Irish Catholic Church through the nineteenth century, particularly from mid-century onwards, and the transition was marked by an increasingly patriarchal influence on the Irish Catholic congregation. back

Note 29: Monsignor Michael Anthony Fleming, "The State of the Catholic Religion in Newfoundland Reviewed in Two Letters by Monsignor Fleming to Rev. P. John Spratt," (Rome, 1836), 90; italics added. back

Note 30: This information comes from the oral tradition. back

Note 31: RCAASJ, Fleming Papers, 103/32, "Dean Cleary's Notebook," 29. back

Note 32: The direct quotation came from EO, interview by author, Calvert, 26 August 1999, but most informants made a similar observation. back

Note 33: This observation echoed through numerous interviews. Just as women are credited by oral informants for maintaining the Catholic faith in the past, so too are they primarily blamed, especially by older informants, for current-day lapses in religious practice. To illustrate the enormity of the problem of declining maternal guidance in the spiritual realm, one elderly woman in Calvert exclaimed in exasperation: "Sure now they [children] blesses themselves back-foremost!" IV, interview by author, Calvert, 23 August 1999. back

Note 34: The cult of St. Brigid has spread with the Irish diaspora. Brigid (ca. 455-525), or the *Mary of the Gael*, was possibly a female druid before she converted to Christianity. She founded a mixed religious community (not unusual for the Celtic world) at Kildare, and some sources indicate that she may have been ordained a priest, and possibly a bishop, by Mel, bishop of Ardagh. She is said to have had intimate relationships with both a male bishop, Conlaed, and a female member of her community. When she was brought into the formal Catholic calendar of saints, however, her life story was sanitized. She was made into a model of Christian womanhood, virtue, and piety, and her mixed community was transformed into an exclusively female order of nuns. See: Peter Berresford Ellis, *Celtic Women: Women in Celtic Society and Literature* (London: Constable, 1995), 27-29 and 146-50; and Shirley Toulson, *The Celtic Year: A Month-by-Month Celebration of Celtic Christian Festivals and Sites* (Shaftesbury: Element, 1996), 73-81. back

Note 35: St. Anne was Christ's maternal grandmother. She, too, is represented by the Catholic Church as a model of self-sacrificing Catholic womanhood—particularly for wives and mothers—and is the patron saint of housewives in the Catholic calendar of saints. back

Note 36: ESX, interview by author, Calvert, 19 July 1999. back

Note 37: In the following discussion, information on the pre-Christian religious system in Ireland is taken primarily from: Sean J. Connolly, *Priests and People in Pre-famine Ireland, 1780-1845* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1982); Sean Connolly, "Popular Culture in Pre-Famine Ireland," in *Talamh An Eisc: Canadian and Irish Essays*, ed. Cyril Byrne and Margaret Harry (Halifax: Nimbus, 1986), 12-28; George Casey, "Irish Culture in Newfoundland," in *Talamh An Eisc*, ed. Byrne and Harry, 203-27; Danaher, *Irish Country People* (Cork: Mercier Press, 1966); Deirdre Mageean, "To Be Matched or to Move: Irish Women's Prospects in Munster," in *Peasant Maids-City Women: From the European Countryside to Urban America*, ed. Christiane Harzig (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), 57-97; Padraic O'Farrell, *Superstitions of the Irish Country People* (Dublin: Mercier Press, 1978); and W. G. Wood-Martin, *Traces of the Elder Faiths of Ireland*, vol. 2 (London: 1902; reprint, Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1970). Information on the corresponding system on the southern Avalon comes primarily from oral interviews conducted in 1999 and 2000, although Casey's "Irish Culture" was again useful in this regard. Some additional information on customary practices associated with death derives from undergraduate papers at MUNFLA, particularly: Zita Johnson, "Calendar Customs and Rites of Passage at Renews," MUNFLA ms. 68-011D, unpublished research paper, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1967-68, 30; and Andrew O'Brien, "Wake, Funeral and Burial Customs in Cape Broyle," MUNFLA ms. 68-016C, unpublished research paper, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1967-68, 7-10. back

Note 38: Connolly, *Priests and People*, 100. back

Note 39: The following discussion focuses on aspects of the system that had a particular female component. It does not include the myriad other beliefs and practices in which men and women participated equally (e.g., the belief in good luck charms and omens of misfortune). back

Note 40: Belief in the power of a widow's curse persisted in the area into the twentieth century, as demonstrated by the anecdote on the audio clip, collected from ESF, interview by author, Cape Broyle, 25 August 1999 (with the request that the parties' last names remain anonymous). back

Note 41: This was true of the derivative tradition in Ireland as well. Patricia Lysaght observes that ritual cursing was often a means employed by women in exacting revenge against enemies and authorities who had caused them harm. It was not a ritual to be

entered into frivolously, as the curse, once uttered, had to fall somewhere, and if undeserved by the intended recipient, would recoil on the invoker. See Patricia Lysaght, "Women and the Great Famine," in *The Great Famine and the Irish Diaspora in America*, ed. Arthur Gribben (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999), 21-47. Wood-Martin also notes the potential for curses to return to the utterer; see Wood-Martin, *Traces of the Elder Faiths*, 57-58. back

Note 42: The association of Patrick with Sheelagh can be traced to Ireland, although the weather belief is purely local. See: Casey, "Irish Culture," 219; and Bridget McCormack, *Perceptions of St. Patrick in Eighteenth-Century Ireland* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000), 48-49. McCormack observes that Sheelagh was noted for her tempestuous nature and that a possible archetype for her tradition was the *sheela-na-gig*, a female icon associated with protection, productivity, and fertility in the Middle Ages, but transmuted into a talisman to fend off the "sin" of lust by the early modern Catholic Church. back

Note 43: The bread was blessed by making the sign of the cross over the dough before baking, lightly touching down on the dough four times to mark each extremity of the cross. The custom persists today, especially among older women and even among some middle-aged women. They no longer believe in fairies, but they continue the practice as an act of benediction on their families, in the belief that it will help to ward off harm in a more diffuse sense. back

Note 44: See note 34, above. back

Note 45: Paschal candles were used by the Catholic Church at Easter time to celebrate the end of mankind's banishment from heaven (and hence the return of light after a long period of darkness) with the resurrection of Christ after crucifixion and his ascension into heaven. back

Note 46: Another propitious day for predictions was the first of May, or *Bealtinagh* in the ancient Irish calendar, when a ritual fire was lit at the seat of the high king at Tara to celebrate the first day of summer. The first of May is not a significant holy day in the Catholic calendar. But in the legend of St. Patrick, he is said to have lit the first paschal fire on the Hill of Slane on the night of *Bealtinagh*. The fire could be seen from Tara, and the druids warned high king Laoghaire that if this fire was not quenched, it would consume all of Ireland. Laoghaire was unable to subdue Patrick, and hence, the *fire of Christianity* replaced the *fire of paganism* in Ireland. Of course, the chronology here is skewed, for Easter never occurs as late as 1 May, but the symbolic power of the narrative for the emerging Catholic Church was profound, and provides yet another example of the intersection of ancient and Catholic belief systems. See John B. Bury, *The Life of St. Patrick* (1905; reprint, Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1971), 104-8 and 301-3. back

Note 47: Father Duffy's Well, near Salmonier, St. Mary's Bay, provides a local example from this period. Father Duffy led his congregation at St. Mary's in the destruction of a merchant's fish flake in the mid-1830s. When he and eight other ringleaders were walking to St. John's for their trial, they found themselves weary and thirsty, with no source of water in sight. According to the oral tradition, Father Duffy struck the ground with a stick and water sprang forth at his touch. A more recent manifestation of a holy well is the grotto at Renewals, built in the 1920s on the site of the Mass Rock, where Catholics gathered in penal times. It was modeled on the Grotto of Our Lady of Lourdes in France and contains a piece of rock from that shrine. Belief in the spiritual and curative powers of the water from both sites was pervasive on the southern Avalon as late as the 1960s and 1970s, and continues among the older generation today. back



Note 48: Rev. Lewis A. Anspach, *A History of the Island of Newfoundland* (London: Anspach, 1819), 474. back

Note 49: Candles made of tallow or fat were not deemed appropriate for this service, although they were most likely used in small chapels in remote areas such as the southern Avalon. back

Note 50: Rev. Leonard Boase, ed., *Catholic Book of Knowledge*, vol. 3 (London: Virtue and Company, 1961; reprint, Chicago: Catholic Home Press, 1962), 262. back

Note 51: Churching was the formal church blessing of a woman after childbirth. It was

viewed as a ritual of purification rather than thanksgiving within the Catholic congregations in both Newfoundland and Ireland. Churching and shaming will be discussed further in Chapter 8. [back](#)

Note 52: In Christian belief, after the birth of Jesus Christ in Bethlehem, Herod, the king of Judea, was visited by three wise men seeking the new "king of the Jews" whose birth had been foretold by the stars. To remove this potential threat to his crown, Herod decreed that all male children in Bethlehem aged two or under be slain. Christ's father, Joseph, was warned by an angel of the impending slaughter and moved his family to Egypt until after Herod's death, when they returned to Joseph's old home of Nazareth. [back](#)

Note 53: Toulson, *The Celtic Year*, 80. [back](#)

Note 54: Hasia Diner notes a similarly central role of women at Irish wakes; see Diner, *Erin's Daughters in America: Irish Immigrant Women in the Nineteenth Century* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983), 27-28. [back](#)

Note 55: Wakes of those who had died young or under tragic circumstances were perhaps more somber affairs; certainly, they were in the twentieth century. [back](#)

Note 56: PANL, MG 31, Carter Family Papers, file 33, Will of Robert Carter Sr., 29 March 1795. [back](#)

Note 57: Anspach, *History*, 472-73. [back](#)

Note 58: These quotations appear in Connolly, *Priests and People*, 157-58. Diner also notes that a number of contemporary observers in Ireland wrote about "a class of professional keeners, elderly women who made a living mourning the dead." See Diner, *Erin's Daughters*, 28. [back](#)

Note 59: Angela Bourke, "The Irish Traditional Lament and the Grieving Process," *Women's Studies International Forum* 11, no. 4 (1988): 287-91. [back](#)

Note 60: XT, interview by author, Calvert, 19 July 1999. [back](#)

Note 61: Connolly, *Priests and People*, 119. [back](#)

Note 62: Connolly, *Priests and People*, chap. 3, particularly 119-34. [back](#)

Note 63: Emmet Larkin, "The Devotional Revolution in Ireland, 1850-75," chap. 2 in *The Historical Dimensions of Irish Catholicism*, ed. Larkin (New York: Arno Press, 1976). [back](#)

Note 64: Larkin also acknowledges this demographic shift, but places much greater weight on Cullen's efforts in dramatically increasing adherence to formal Catholic practices. [back](#)

Note 65: The epigraph is from a local song, "A Woman's Tongue Will Never Take a Rest," collected in Cape Broyle in 1968. See Andrew O'Brien, "Songs from Cape Broyle," MUNFLA Tape 68-16/490, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1967-68. [back](#)

Note 66: Melanie Tebbutt, *Women's Talk? A Social History of "Gossip" in Working-Class Neighbourhoods, 1880-1960* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1995), 19-20. Tebbutt writes that traces of this older meaning survived in nineteenth-century dialect in Somerset, where gossiping still referred to a christening feast or general merrymaking. [back](#)

Note 67: Karma Lochrie, *Covert Operations: The Medieval Uses of Secrecy* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), chap. 2. [back](#)

Note 68: The discussion in this paragraph derives from a theoretical review by Jörg R. Bergman, *Discreet Indiscretions: The Social Organization of Gossip*, trans. John Bednarz Jr. (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1993), 63-67 and 139-53. The authorities he cites include: F. E. Lumley, B. Malinowski, W. F. Ogburn, and M. F. Nimkoff (social control); Max Gluckman and E. L. Epstein (group preservation); Robert Paine (information

management); Jörg R. Bergman (a social form of "discreet indiscretion"); and M. Weigle, V. Aebischer, R. Borker, D. Jones, C. Benard, E. Schlaffer, A. M. Waliullah, and B. Althans (a subversive form of female solidarity). [back](#)

Note 69: Bergman dismisses this "so-called 'feminist' literature" as lacking in explanatory power. He argues that women are seen as gossip simply because the traditional division of labor has put them in a position to be gossip producers to a greater extent than men. Particularly as washerwomen, maids, and servant girls, he argues, women have had far greater access than men to the private affairs of others, and therefore have been perceived as more likely to be the producers of gossip. Unfortunately, this does little to explain the association of gossip with all women, regardless of occupational group. Furthermore, Bergman himself lists a variety of traditionally male occupational groups—barbers, postmen, small shopkeepers, landlords—who have access to private information and are known to be gossipy (he rather naively rules out others, such as doctors, lawyers, priests, and psychotherapists, because they are prevented by professional codes of ethics from revealing the information). See Bergman, *Discrete Indiscretions*, 63-67. Given this plethora of potential male gossips, Bergman's explanation still begs the question: Why in Western culture has this "morally reprehensible" behavior historically been associated with women? [back](#)

Note 70: Lochrie, *Covert Operations*, 57, and chap. 2 in general. [back](#)

Note 71: See, for example: Jennifer Coates and Deborah Cameron, eds., *Women in Their Speech Communities: New Perspectives in Language and Sex* (London: Longman, 1988); also Deborah Cameron, ed., *The Feminist Critique of Language: A Reader*, rev. ed. (London: Routledge, 1998). [back](#)

Note 72: Dale Spender, in Tebbutt, *Women's Talk*, 1; citing Spender, *Man Made Language* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980 and 1985), 107. [back](#)

Note 73: See, for example: Jennifer Coates, "Gossip Revisited: Language in All-Female Groups," in *Women in Their Speech Communities*, ed. Coates and Cameron, 94-122; and Deborah Jones, "Gossip: Notes on Women's Oral Culture," in *Feminist Critique*, ed. Cameron (1990), 242-50; reprinted from *Women's Studies International Quarterly* 3 (1980): 193-8. Jones breaks gossip down into four categories of women's language: house-talk, scandal, bitching, and chatting. [back](#)

Note 74: PANL, GN 5/4/C/1, St. Mary's: 134, *Ellen Tobin v. Ann St. Croix*, 27 June 1823; and 135, *Bridget St. Croix v. Thomas Tobin*, 30 June 1823. This parting of the ways is discussed below. [back](#)

Note 75: Cole, *Women of the Praia*, 121. [back](#)

Note 76: With few exceptions, Irish immigration to Newfoundland did not follow channels of kinship to any great degree. See John Mannion and Fidelma Maddock. "Old World Antecedents, New World Applications: Inistioige Immigrants in Newfoundland," in *Kilkenny: History and Society-Interdisciplinary Essays on the History of an Irish County*, ed. William Nolan and Kevin Whelan (Dublin: Geography Publications, 1990), 345-404. [back](#)

Note 77: Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches*, 95-100. [back](#)

Note 78: Tebbutt, *Women's Talk*, 1 and 11. [back](#)

Note 79: Tebbutt, *Women's Talk*, 1. [back](#)

Note 80: For example, diarist Robert Carter and his family were estranged from Mr. and Mrs. Wright (likely Thomas Wright, merchant at Ferryland, and his wife, Sarah) for an extended period over a matter that began with "some curtness" on Mrs. Wright's part to Carter's daughter, Eliza, in January of 1834, but escalated when Mrs. Wright began "spreading scandal" about the Carter family. Fences were mended, however, for in August of 1836, Carter noted, "Mrs. and Mr. Wright called to-day after staying away more than 12 months." PANL, MG 920, Robert Carter Diary, 28 January and 22 March 1834, and 9 August 1836. [back](#)

Note 81: The sense of difference between women of the local elite and the plebeian

community is discussed further in Chapter 9. back

Note 82: PANL, MG 205, Pole Papers, 1799-1800. back

Note 83: Appendix A describes a middling group between the elite and plebeian communities on the southern Avalon whose allegiance was primarily with the plebeians, with whom they shared much in terms of work and leisure routines and world view, but who were still connected to the local elite by ethnoreligious and patronage ties. Henry Currier (or Coryear) was one of this group. In the 1800 census, he was listed as a boatmaster for Christopher Vallance; he was also listed as a small-scale employer, with one fishing servant and two dieters in the winter of 1799-1800. Like many fishermen who came out to Newfoundland, however, he was upwardly mobile, and likely moved into the vacuum created by the numerous bankruptcies in the traditional planter fishery in the late and post-Napoleonic War period. By 1817, for example, he was in possession of three plantations, which he devised by deeds of gift to his children. See PANL, GN 5/1/C/9, 31-33, Deeds of Conveyance, 15 March 1817. By 1818, he had hired a clerk for his business and a private tutor for his family at a salary of £15 per year plus washing. See PANL, GN 5/1/C/1, Ferryland, 45, *Kearon Mulloney v. Henry Coryear*, 11 May 1818. So Currier had obviously come up in the world. In the 1809 episode, however, his daughter was still appealing to the family's plebeian connections. back

Note 84: PANL, GN 5/4/C/1, Ferryland, box 1, *Christopher Valence v. Elenor Currier*, March 1809. back

Note 85: PANL, GN 5/4/C/1, St. Mary's, 132-33, *Ann Bowen v. Mary Money*, 9 March and 1 April 1823. The final deposition of the case has not survived in the records. back

Note 86: PANL, GN 5/4/C/1, St. Mary's, 103 and 107, *Elenor Piddle v. Margret Dinn*, 5 September and 13 October 1821. back

Note 87: Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches*, 99-101. Julie Richter also notes that in colonial Virginia, nothing damaged a woman's reputation more than being called a whore. See Richter, "The Free Women of Charles Parish, York County, Virginia, 1630-1740," in *Women and Freedom*, ed. Eldridge, 295. back

Note 88: Ulrich, *Good Wives*, 96-97. back

Note 89: See, for example, PANL, GN 5/4/C/1, St. Mary's, 135, *Bridget St. Croix v. Thomas Tobin*, 30 June 1823; also, PRL, 340.9 N45, Ferryland, *Bridget Murphy v. Catherine Dauton and Mary Whealon*, 28 September 1795. back

Note 90: KO, interview by author, St. John's, 15 May 1998. back

Note 91: IT, interview by author, Calvert, 19 July 1999. back

Note 92: Cole, *Women of the Praia*, 122, and 108-24 in general. back

Note 93: The perception of women as natural bonders and men as natural competitors has been given "scientific" endorsement by writers such as biological anthropologist Robin Dunbar in *Grooming, Gossip and the Evolution of Language* (London: Faber and Faber, 1996). Dunbar argues that grooming, once the primary means of bonding by primates, became unfeasible in human social groups as these groups became larger. Language therefore evolved to replace grooming as the most important method of networking. Furthermore, he says, the chief networkers in primate species have been female because they are more likely to remain in the group in which they are born and give it coherence over time. Language permits group members to exchange essential information about the physical and social world, to identify and form ties with other group members, and to provide support in times of crisis. This type of communication, so necessary to the survival of the group, is more associated with the type of cooperation that typifies the female world. The male world is much more competitive, focused on mating or acquiring resources (status) that will attract mates. Thus when people talk, Dunbar argues, "the women are engaged in networking, while the men are engaged in advertising" (177). back

Note 94: This line of argument appears in Tebbutt, *Women's Talk*, 176; see also 7-9 and 220. Jones makes a similar point in "Gossip," 245. Thompson also notes men's fear of the

power of women's tongues to incite and shame in *Customs in Common*, 333 and 501. back

Note 95: Diner, *Erin's Daughters*, 18. back

Note 96: This anecdote was originally told by Monsignor Francis A. Coady, who had served as a priest on the southern Avalon, to Dr. Cyril Byrne, Coordinator of Irish Studies at Saint Mary's University, Halifax. Dr. Byrne related it to me by email dated 8 September 2000. back

Note 97: This literature includes: Temma Kaplan, "Women and Communal Strikes in the Crisis of 1917-1922," in *Becoming Visible: Women in European History*, ed. Renate Bridenthal, Claudia Koonz, and Susan Stuard (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), 429-49; Rosemary Jones, "Women, Community, and Collective Action: The 'Ceffyl Pren' Tradition," in *Our Mothers' Land: Chapters in Welsh Women's History, 1830-1939*, ed. Angela V. John (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1991), 17-41; Rusty Bittermann, "Women and the Escheat Movement: The Politics of Everyday Life on Prince Edward Island," in *Separate Spheres: Women's Worlds in the Nineteenth-Century Maritimes*, ed. Janet Guildford and Suzanne Morton (Fredericton: Acadiensis Press, 1994), 23-38; Sean Cadigan, *Hope and Deception in Conception Bay: Merchant-Settler Relations in Newfoundland, 1785-1855* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), chap. 4; Maria Luddy, *Women in Ireland, 1800-1918: A Documentary History* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1995), 245-50; Thompson, *Customs in Common*, 305-36; and Ulrich, *Good Wives*, 184-201. Absent from the southern Avalon, however, was the practice—common in the British Isles—of men's use of female disguise either to signal the seriousness of the issue, such that the "weaker" sex would actually cross over gender "boundaries" to involve themselves, or to mitigate their own responsibility and pass off the actions as the work of mere "frail" women. This may reflect the fact that within the plebeian community on the southern Avalon, constructions of womanhood did not incorporate frailty or weakness; nor did most middle-class magistrates harbor such perceptions of plebeian women (see Chapter 6 and 8). back

Note 98: Most of the literature cited in the previous note refers to the general reluctance of authorities to arrest women in these types of actions. back

Note 99: The following account is a summary of information taken from the following sources: PANL, GN 2/1/A, vol. 11, 388-95, 437-41, and 459, various correspondence 1788-89; PANL, GN 5/4/C/1, Ferryland, box 1, *Rex. v. Various*, 17-30 September and 1, 20, and 25 October 1788; Cyril J. Byrne, ed., *Gentlemen-Bishops and Faction Fighters: The Letters of Bishops O Donel, Lambert, Scallan, and Other Irish Missionaries* (St. John's: Jespersen Press, 1984), various correspondence, 62-117; Christopher English, "Collective Violence in Ferryland District, Newfoundland, in 1786," *Dalhousie Law Journal* 21, no. 2 (fall 1998): 475-89; Raymond J. Lahey, *James Louis O'Donel in Newfoundland, 1784-1807: The Establishment of the Roman Catholic Church*, ed. Shannon Ryan and G. M. Story (St. John's: Newfoundland Historical Society, pamphlet 8, 1984), 13-20; and Gerald J. Barnable, "The Ferryland Riots of 1788," *An Nasc* 7 (summer 1994): 4-9. back

Note 100: Daniel W. Prowse, *A History of Newfoundland from the English, Colonial, and Foreign Records* (London: Macmillan, 1895; reprint, Belleville: Mika Studio, 1972), 402. Prowse is actually quoting "an old Irishman" of his acquaintance. back

Note 101: Byrne, ed., *Gentlemen-Bishops*, 98-101, Father James O Donel to Archbishop Troy, Dublin, 24 December 1789. back

Note 102: Byrne, ed., *Gentlemen-Bishops*, 69-72 and 110-11, O Donel to Governor Elliot, 1788, and Fathers Patrick Phelan (Harbour Grace), Edmund Burke (Placentia), and Thomas Ewer (Ferryland) to Cardinal Antonelli, Propaganda Fide, 14 December 1790. back

Note 103: English, "Collective Violence," 487. back

Note 104: It should be noted, however, that although elements of ethnicity and class obviously underscored this event and the later Father Duffy affair, sectarianism was not a primary rallying point in either episode. Despite official concerns about the volatility of the Irish population on the southern Avalon, in terms of ethnoreligious tensions, the district was far less explosive than other areas on the island with mixed Irish and English populations. St. John's and Conception Bay, for example, witnessed significant

ethnoreligious strife. But while these other districts held distinct Irish and English populations, along the southern Avalon, the English Protestant group was almost totally assimilated into the Irish Catholic ethnic group, doubtless contributing significantly to the quiescence of the district. The only large-scale manifestation of ethnoreligious boundaries on record related to the election of 1836 (see below). Sporadic incidents of livestock-maiming may also have had ethnic as well as class undertones (Appendix A). And there was the slightest hint of an assertion of ethnicity in the report of an 1803 court case, in which Nicholas White of Ferryland was charged with assaulting Margret Gibbon on the public road and "tearing her cap for having an orange-Coloured Ribband in it." White admitted the assault but pleaded intoxication. He was fined 20s. and ordered to keep the peace and be of good behavior. See PANL, GN 5/4/C/1, Ferryland, box 1, *Rex v. Nicholas White*, 6 May 1803. back

Note 105: PANL, GN 2/1/A, vol. 11, 388-89, Petition from the merchants and principal inhabitants of Ferryland to Elliot, undated (likely received by the governor in early October 1788, given its placement in the letterbook and the fact that the governor responded to it on 9 October 1788). back

Note 106: Byrne, ed., *Gentlemen-Bishops*, 73-76, O Donel to Troy, 16 November 1788. back

Note 107: PANL, GN 2/1/A, vol. 11, 391-93, Pellew to Elliot, 9 October 1788. back

Note 108: RCAASJ, O Donel Papers, 100/3/3, O Donel to Elliot, 1788. back

Note 109: This account is taken from the following sources: CO 194, vol. 94, fols. 1-24; PANL, GN 5/4/C/1, Ferryland, box 1, 80-81, *Slade, Elson and Company v. Rev. James Duffy et al.*, 29 October and 3 November 1835; Bishop Michael Fleming, reports and letters cited in Rev. Michael F. Howley, *Ecclesiastical History of Newfoundland* (Boston: Doyle and Whittle, 1888; reprint, Belleville, ON: Mika, 1971), 323-28; Michael McCarthy, *The Irish in Newfoundland, 1600-1900: Their Trials, Tribulations, and Triumphs* (St. John's: Creative Publishers, 1999), 143-61; and Sister Elizabeth Whelan, "History of the Community of St. Mary's," unpublished research paper, 4 April 1972, housed at the CNS, chap. 3, 19-31. back

Note 110: Governor Henry Prescott (Web Link) reported to the Colonial Secretary in 1836 that the entire community was Catholic save Martin, his two clerks, and one servant. See CO 194, 94, fols. 3-10, Prescott to Lord Glenelg, 4 January 1836. back

Note 111: This was not the first time that mercantile premises in the harbor had been targeted by the plebeian community. In 1826, magistrate John H. Martin had written Governor Cochrane of an attack on the premises of William Rideout, in which the perpetrators had stolen stores and attempted to burn the premises to the ground. See PANL, GN 2/2, vol. 1, 29-32, Martin to Cochrane, 13 February 1826. back

Note 112: Bishop Michael Fleming, cited by Howley, *Ecclesiastical History*, 327. back

Note 113: These were powerful and celebrated Irish female leaders of the past. *Macha Mong Ruadh*, or "Macha of the Red Hair," forcibly seized the throne of Ireland from her uncles after the death of her high-king father in 377 BC and ruled for seven years. She lends her name to Armagh (in Gaelic, *Ard Macha*, or "Macha's Height"), the primal seat of Christianity in Ireland. *Grainne Ni Maille* (ca. 1530-1603), or, in its anglicized form, "Granuaile," or "Grace O'Malley," was a Mayo chieftain's daughter who became the commander of 200 fighting men and three raiding ships that controlled the Connacht coastline and harried English shipping in the sixteenth century. She also led trading missions to south Munster and was involved in insurrectionary activities against the English. In the 1590s, she went to London and negotiated a private truce with Elizabeth I. See Ellis, *Celtic Women*, 79-80 and 214-20. back

Note 114: See Jones, "Women, Community and Collective Action." Temma Kaplan's "Women and Communal Strikes," although dealing with urban working-class women of a later period, is a useful discussion of female consciousness activated in defense of family and community. back

Note 115: PANL, GN 2/1/A, vol. 11, 391-93, Pellew to Elliot, 9 October 1788; italics added. back

Note 116: Janet A. Nolan, *Ourselves Alone: Women's Emigration from Ireland, 1885-1920* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1989), 32. back

Note 117: Power was excommunicated by Archbishop Troy of Dublin. See Byrne, ed., *Gentlemen-Bishops*, 88-89, Edict, Troy, 4 March 1789. Still, he maintained considerable support in the district until he left in 1791. In March of 1790, Ewer, acting on O Donel's instructions, renewed Power's excommunication, extending the decree to all who would continue to support Power; Power reciprocated by excommunicating Ewer and all his flock. See Byrne, ed., *Gentlemen-Bishops*, 102-4, O Donel to Troy, 13 June 1790. This brought about an interesting impasse and ironic repercussions, as noted by community historian Gerald Barnable: "Thus are all Ferryland parish people the descendants of excommunicated Catholics." See Barnable, "Ferryland Riots," 8. back

Note 118: Another possible facet of female participation in the incident was suggested to me by one of my oral informants while speculating on the reference in "Dean Cleary's Notebook" to the women of St. Mary's taking fire from the altar and burning a local house at the request of Father Duffy (see above). I have interpreted this action as possibly a rite of exorcism, but my informant suggested that it may have been an act of retaliation in relation to the Father Duffy affair. EW, interview by author, Calvert, 30 August 1999. In either interpretation, there are strong ritualistic overtones in women's use of "sacred fire." back

Note 119: CO 194, vol. 94, fols. 19-24, Deposition of William Lush sworn before Peter Weston Carter, JP of the Central District, 13 November 1835, and before Chief Justice Henry Boulton, St. John's, 24 November 1835; italics added. back

Note 120: CO 194, vol. 94, fols. 11-18, Martin to Joseph Templeman, 22 December 1835; italics added. back

Note 121: CO 194, vol. 93, fols. 11-18, various accounts summarized in Martin to Joseph Templeman, 22 December 1835. back

Note 122: The episode is documented in PANL, GN 920, Robert Carter Diary, 13-23 November and 31 December 1836, and 1 January 1837; italics added. back

Note 123: See various original documentary reports in Luddy, *Documentary History*, 245-50. Here, for example, is an excerpt from the outraged report of *The Tipperary Advocate* of an 1865 clash between rival factions. Note the portrayal of women's involvement as aberrant, maniacal, out of control:

In that yelling crowd of Langanites and O'Beirmites, all entangled and struggling in one heaving billow, young and old, lusty and infirm, male and female, were to be found shouting, whistling, groaning, dancing, foaming with irrepressible rage... here there was a fearful looking scene—well looking, well dressed girls, one a perfect Amazon, bared their arms, wound their shawls tightly around them, and rushed with the mêlée. That woman there, with the black chenille net and lilac muslin gown, is a perfect maniac... there is a little girl of sixteen, her features distorted and her whole frame quivering with frenzied agitation; now she beats the wooden planks and bites everything within her reach! back

Note 124: PANL, MG 49, Sweetman Collection, box 4, file 37, Patrick Hogan to Principals, 2 January 1846. back

Note 125: Note again the specificity in tracing sons compared with the vagueness in tracing daughters in the oral tradition. back

Note 126: As late as 1833, Robert Carter referred to "a gang supposed to be robbers having passed Westward at the back of the Harbours." See PANL, MG 920, Robert Carter

Diary, 29 September 1833. back

Note 127: PANL, GN 2/1/A, vol. 13, 163-65, Dingle to Waldegrave, 28 July 1797; italics added. back

Note 128: PANL, GN 2/1/A, vol. 16, 288-94, Dingle to Gambier, [15 September?] 1802. Note that Dingle's warnings occurred within the context of the United Irishmen Rebellion and the 1800 mutiny in the Newfoundland Regiment, at which time it was felt that every man to the south of St. John's had taken the United Irishmen's oath (see Chapter 2). back

Note 129: The oral tradition is very reticent about female physical violence. Oral informants generally observed that, while women were frequently involved in verbal confrontations, they did not get into physical fights. One informant (VN, interview by author, Ferryland, 9 May 2000) did mention that she used to hear the "old people" talking about women fighting on the beach with splitting knives; however, this was the only example offered. Given overwhelming evidence to the contrary in the court records, however, I am inclined to interpret this reserve as a reflection of the scruples of a later period. back

Note 130: Similar incidents involving plebeian women in periods of early settlement have been described in: Cadigan, *Hope and Deception*; Bittermann, "Women and the Escheat Movement"; Ridner, "Sufficient Maintenance"; and Ulrich, *Good Wives*. back

Note 131: PANL, GN 5/2/C/1, Box 2, 12, *John William Sanders and Co. v. Thomas Berrigan*, 17 September 1832. back

Note 132: The former scenario is the more likely of the two, although either is possible, given the complex evolution of the ejectment action up to the time the Berrigan matters were being heard. In older English law, the ejectment was a trespass action that could be taken only by a leaseholder for damages resulting from having been wrongfully dispossessed of property. By the fifteenth century, the lessee could also seek to recover the remaining term of his lease. This allowed the action to be extended to determine freehold title as well via a legal fiction: *imaginary* lessees were created and one sued the other for ejectment; but in reality, the court was determining the freehold rights of the two "lessors." By the seventeenth century, the most common form of ejectment action was that of "lessor v. lessee." However, it was still used to determine entitlement to freehold as well. Thus, the ejectment of a lessee or the ejectment of a mortgagor in default are both possible interpretations of the *Saunders v. Berrigan* matter. See: David M. Walker, *The Oxford Companion to Law* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), 395; Bryan A. Gardner, *Black's Law Dictionary*, 7th ed. (St. Paul, MN: West Group, 1999), 534-35; and John A. Yogis, *Canadian Law Dictionary*, 3rd ed. (Hauppauge, NY: Barron's Educational Series, 1995), 77. back

Note 133: PANL: GN 5/2/C/4, Writ no. 8, *J. W. Saunders Esqr. v. Thomas Berrigan*, issued 25 September for return 1 November 1836, Action in Ejectment; GN 5/2/C/3, 1835-47 journal, 62 and 64-65, *John W. Saunders v. Thomas Berrigan*, 3 and 5 November 1836; and GN 5/2/C/8, 74 and 76-77, *John W. Saunders v. Thomas Berrigan*, 3 and 5 November 1836. back

Note 134: PANL, GN 5/4/C/1, Ferryland, box 1, *Regina v. Anastatia Berrigan et al.*, 3 and 20 September 1838. back

Note 135: PANL, GN 5/4/C/1, Ferryland, box 2, *Regina v. William Berrigan, Anastatia Berrigan, Bridget Berrigan, and Alice Berrigan*, 31 December 1842, and 31 January and 23 February 1843. back

Note 136: PANL, GN 5/4/C/1, Ferryland, box 2: *Regina v. James Gearing Sr., Benjamin Wilcox, Edward Berrigan, Anastatia Berrigan, Thomas Berrigan Sr., and Thomas Berrigan Jr.*, 13, 14, 20, and 27 June 1843; and *Regina v. Thomas Berrigan Jr.*, 5 February 1844. back

Note 137: PANL, GN 5/4/C/1, Ferryland, box 2, *Regina v. John Bavis and his Wife*, 29 December 1853, and 5 January 1854. back

Note 138: PANL, GN 5/4/C/1, Ferryland, box 1, 67, *Henry Coryear v. Jane Hayley*, 8 and

16 April 1835. Fences were not completely mended between the parties, however, for the following year, Coryear brought Hayley back to court on the matter of an outstanding debt in the amount of £1.16.10 Cy. See PANL, GN 5/4/C/1, Ferryland, box 1, 83-84, *Henry Coryear v. Jane Hayley*, 4 January 1836. back

Note 139: Lists of liquor licenses issued for the district for various years appear in PANL, GN 2/1/A, and GN 5/4/C/1, Ferryland, box 1. back

Note 140: PRL, 340.9 N45, Ferryland, *Michael Ryan v. Elenor Evoy et al.* and *Elinor Evoy v. Michael Ryan*, 21 and 28 July and 3 August 1795. back

Note 141: In fact, Elenor was no stranger to the courthouse. The previous Christmas season, she had been in a fracas with Moses Rowe and successfully sued him for damages to her cloak and handkerchief in the amount of 2s. See PRL, 340.9 N45, Ferryland, *Elenor Evoy v. Moses Rowe*, 29 December 1794. back

Note 142: PANL, GN 5/4/C/1, Ferryland, box 1, *Rex v. James Welsh*, *Rex v. Sylvester Welsh*, *Ann McLarthy v. Patrick Evoy*, and *Rex v. Elenor Welsh*, 1 April 1803. back

Note 143: The entire district of St. Mary's, which included the community of St. Mary's as well as other pockets of inhabitants in adjacent coves and harbors to the north and south, had only 236 inhabitants wintering over in 1825. See CO 194, vol. 70, fol. 227, Governor's Annual Return of the Fisheries and Inhabitants, 1825. back

Note 144: PANL, GN 5/4/C/1, St. Mary's: 84, *Catharine St. Croix v. Martin Tobin*; 134, *Ellen Tobin v. Ann St. Croix*, 27 June 1823; and 135, *Bridget St. Croix v. Thomas Tobin*, 30 June 1823. The disposition of the 1823 cases is not revealed in the existing records. back

Note 145: PANL, GN 5/4/C/1, St. Mary's, 84, *Catharine St. Croix v. Martin Tobin*, 22 January 1820. back

Note 146: PANL, GN 5/4/C/1, Ferryland, box 2, *Regina v. James Kenney and Ellen, his Wife*, 12 September 1850. Although the first names of the Dooleys appear as James and Ellen in the record book, the initial draft of the proceedings (contained in a file folder with the journal) shows that the complainants were actually "Maurice Dooley, Mary his Wife and Step Son." Apparently, the clerk mistakenly transcribed the first names of the defendants for those of the complainants in the final entry. back

Note 147: PANL, GN 5/1/C/1, Ferryland, 117, *Rex v. Ann Prichet*, 24 October 1820. back

Note 148: Note that some incidents of assault involved multiple complaints being brought. Three cases, for example, were general affrays involving both men and women. The number of complaints made was therefore greater than the number of actual incidents reported. Also, there was not necessarily a one-to-one correlation between numbers of aggressors and numbers of victims. In some cases, for example, a single victim reported multiple assailants or, alternatively, one assailant allegedly attacked multiple victims. For a discussion of the significance of the number of cases found, see Appendix B. back

Note 149: PANL, GN 5/4/C/1, Ferryland, box 2, *Regina v. Margaret Ryan*, 13 August 1839, and *Regina v. Margaret Ryan*, 22 July 1840. back

Note 150: PANL, GN 5/4/C/1, Ferryland, box 2, *Regina v. Johanna Morrissy*, 28 December 1841. back

Note 151: PANL, GN 5/4/C/1, Ferryland, box 2, *Regina v. Mary Ann Pendergast*, 16 and 19 August 1851. back

Note 152: PANL, GN 5/4/C/1, Ferryland, box 2, *Regina v. Bridget Dullanty*, 18 April 1844. back

Note 153: PANL, GN 5/4/C/1, Ferryland, box 1, 100, ----- *Cose v. Bridget Dullanty*, 6 May 1837. back

Note 154: Ulrich, *Good Wives*, 191. back

Note 155: This finding differs significantly from Judith Norton's in her examination of assault cases in the planter townships of Nova Scotia in the first fifty years of settlement. Norton notes: "Women were particularly vulnerable in early Nova Scotia. In the forty-five recorded incidents of abuse or assault identified in the early court records, twenty of the victims and five of the assailants were females." See Judith Norton, "The Dark Side of Planter Life: Reported Cases of Domestic Violence," in *Intimate Relations*, ed. Conrad, 185. back

Note 156: See: Denise Riley, *"Am I That Name?": Feminism and the Category of Women in History* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988); and Joan Wallach Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988). back

Note 157: For a discussion of this decline in women's status in rural Ireland, see, for example: Mary Daly, "Women in the Irish Workforce from Pre-industrial to Modern Times," *Saothar* 7 (1981): 74-82; Diner, *Erin's Daughters*; David Fitzpatrick, "The Modernisation of the Irish Female," in *Rural Ireland: Modernisation v. Change, 1600-1900*, ed. Patrick O'Flanagan, Paul Ferguson, and Kevin Whelan (Cork: Cork University Press, 1987), 162-80; Luddy, *Documentary History*; Mageean, "Irish Women's Prospects"; Kerby Miller, David Doyle, and Patricia Kelleher, "'For love and liberty': Irish Women, Migration and Domesticity in Ireland and America, 1815-1920," in *Irish Women and Migration*, ed. Patrick O'Sullivan, Irish World Wide Series, vol. 4 (London: Leicester University Press, 1995), 41-65; Janet A. Nolan, "The Great Famine and Women's Emigration from Ireland," in *The Hungry Stream: Essays on Emigration and Famine*, ed. E. Margaret Crawford (Belfast: Centre for Emigration Studies, Ulster-American Folk Park, and Institute of Irish Studies, Queen's University, 1997), 61-70; Nolan, *Ourselves Alone*; and Rita Rhodes, *Women and the Family in Post-famine Ireland: Status and Opportunity in a Patriarchal Society* (New York: Garland, 1992). Joanna Bourke also notes the shift in women's economic activities through the nineteenth century, which culminated during the period from 1890 to 1914 in the withdrawal of most Irish women into the home. She suggests, however, that this movement into full-time housework was a rational choice in the face of declining opportunities and did not necessarily entail a loss of status for women. Many found housework fulfilling, she argues, and a source of creativity and pride. Women's domestic role helped minimize the risk of poverty because they could "invest" time in children, who would care for them in their old age, and because their family contribution in terms of housework had greater value as they aged than the labor of aging men, who were more likely to enter poorhouses due to unemployment. Housework removed rural women from monotonous and physically challenging agricultural chores, she argues. And remittances from children who had emigrated increased the value of women's reproductive labor. Bourke has certainly located Irish women's agency in the shift to full-time housework. However, her celebration of their withdrawal into domesticity founders under the weight of the costs of the transition, many of which she suggests herself: declining employment and educational opportunities; reduced access to cash resources; increased female dependence on male income earners; decreased participation in all aspects of life outside the non-domestic sphere; a tendency for women to have less leisure time than men because housework was a continual task; and an increased tolerance of wife abuse justified by the wife's unsatisfactory performance of household tasks. Her argument that women escaped economic dependency on relatives through marriage (273-74) is untenable in the face of their increased economic dependence on husbands. Furthermore, she appears to accept the sexual division of labor and wage and education differentials in her study period as givens, without reflecting on the processes by which women's options were channelled so narrowly that they "chose" domesticity. See Joanna Bourke, *Husbandry to Housewifery: Women, Economic Change, and Housework in Ireland, 1890-1914* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993). back

Note 158: See, for example: Clark, *Struggle for the Breeches*; Leonore Davidoff, "The Role of Gender in the 'First Industrial Nation': Farming and the Countryside in England, 1780-1850," in Davidoff, *Worlds Between: Historical Perspectives on Gender and Class* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995), 180-205; Bridget Hill, *Women, Work, and Sexual Politics in Eighteenth-Century England* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989); Theodore Koditschek, "Gendering of the British Working Class," *Gender and History* 9, no. 2 (August 1997): 333-63; Rendall, *Women in an Industrializing Society*; K. D. M. Snell, "Agricultural Seasonal Unemployment, the Standard of Living, and Women's Work, 1690-1860," in *Women's Work: The English Experience, 1650-1914*, ed. Pamela Sharpe (London: Arnold, 1998), 73-120; and Deborah Valenze, *The First Industrial Woman* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995). back