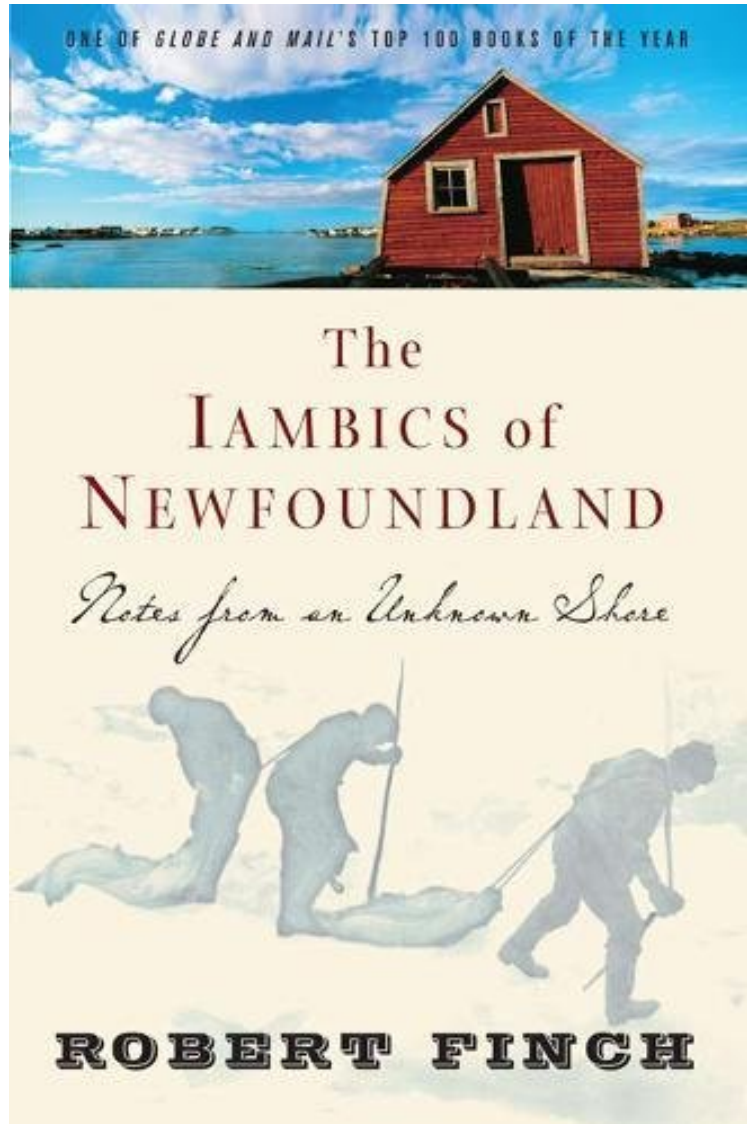


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The Iambics of Newfoundland: Notes from an Unknown Shore

Robert Finch

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Robert Finch : The Iambics of Newfoundland: Notes from an Unknown Shore before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Iambics of Newfoundland: Notes from an Unknown Shore:

7 of 7 people found the following review helpful. Not just another travelogueBy HowardThis is a very different book from Robert Finch. Unlike his previous collections of essays (Common Ground, The Primal Place, Outlands, etc.), which fall more under the "nature writing" category, "The Iambics of Newfoundland" is more tilted toward describing

the people and culture of Newfoundland. To be sure, Robert Finch never made an artificial dividing line between "nature" and "human" in his other books and essays; he has always said that the landscape (of Cape Cod, which is most his other essays are based on) is a living landscape, changed and shaped by natural and human forces (I paraphrase). Nevertheless, if other books are 90% nature writing, this book probably has just 10%, so it reads more like a travelogue. Yet it distinguishes itself from other travelogues because although Finch humbly labeled himself as an "outsider" of this "unknown shore", he really has lived in Newfoundland for extended periods of time, and as always, his ability to observe and write about the details of the human lives and natural environment gives these essays tapestries of nuances, his descriptions of the accents and dialects of the local people are especially vivid and funny. I am very pleasantly surprised by this book because almost all other books by Robert Finch are about Cape Cod, which is all good, and it will take one a lifetime to really know a place. On the other hand, I have always wished he would venture to other places and write about them. Now, how about the Appalachia where you are originally from, Mr. Finch? I am sure you can do it. Back unto the book, the essays are mostly short ones about the local people and culture, but there are three pieces about a sailing trip from Cape Cod to Newfoundland, a caribou hunting trip and a snow crabbing trip, which give this collection some varied pace. The "nature" pieces are relatively few, but where they are, they are vividly detailed and written with clarity, as all other Finch essays. Some even have an ethereal quality (such as the one about jellyfish). Whether you want to know about the people and culture of Newfoundland, or just want to read a good travel book or some masterfully written essays, you should read *The Iambics of Newfoundland*. You will feel the rising and ebbing of the tide, the gentle rolling of the ocean and the undulating tundra. 4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. Excellent - and great in combination with other books on Newfoundland. By a reader. Excellent book - enjoyable and well-written. Finch, a naturalist who has focused on Cape Cod, has taken trips to Newfoundland since the 1980s. Not having traveled there myself, I cannot attest to the accuracy of his portrayal, but it rings true, reflecting its beauty, warts, and all. It is a wonderful combination of the personal (with character studies), historical (on native peoples, European settlement, and shifting economic and political issues since Newfoundland joined Canada in 1949) and especially the natural (in its description of landscape, birds, mammals, hunting and fishing, and sailing). He focuses on life both in the capital (St. John's) and in the rural "outports." I read this book after reading 1) *N by E*, Rockwell Kent (1930), a memoir of the artist's sailing trip to Greenland in 1929, including references to a year Kent lived in Newfoundland in 1914-15; 2) *The Big Why*, an excellent 2004 novel by Michael Winter about Kent's year in Newfoundland; and 3) *The Shipping News*, by E. Annie Proulx (1993), about an Newfoundland migr who returns to his homeland. Also highly recommended is the documentary *White Thunder* (available from Netflix and) which recounts the brief life of American filmmaker Varick Frissell, who shot amazing film in the 1920s of Labrador, Newfoundland, and on seal hunting that was a major way of life during that time. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. This is one of the best written and most fun to read. By Dave. Reading histories and other books about NL. This is one of the best written and most fun to read.

For nearly a decade, Robert Finch traveled around the edge of North America the stunning yet seriously inhospitable island of Newfoundland. Here, he chronicles the people, geography, and wildlife of this remote and lovely place. In beautifully written essays, sketches, and stories, Finch roams from verdant valleys to the rocky cliffs of Cape Spear, from Sandy Cove to Squid Tickle, from the steep streets of historic St. Johns to the moss-covered tundra of the southern coast. As he describes the land, he brings to life the islands diverse array of characters newcomers and old-timers, fisherman, hunters, hitchhikers, and children. Most of all, *The Iambics of Newfoundland* shows readers the island itself an ancient place tucked between provinces, languages, and cultures struggling to find a footing in the modern world.

From Publishers Weekly Well-known nature writer Finch (*The Cape Itself*) presents his impressions of Canada's most remote island, drawing a detailed portrait of a harsh but beautiful world and the hardscrabble people who populate it. And a quirky world it is: Newfoundlanders have a language all their own, wherein everyone is addressed as "boy" and towns have names like "Squid Tickle"; visitors are "almost invariably treated with hospitality, though still referred to as a stranger," and even "if a stranger takes up residence in a village, he is a CFA, or come from away"; one Newfoundland town is still a departement of France, and its residents use the language, food and money of the home country while driving about on John Deere tractors rescued from a 1950s ship wreck; Fifty-five lighthouses line the shores of Newfoundland, more than any other North American province or state, fitting for a people whose lives and dreams are driven by fishing. While Finch's skill at capturing the flora, fauna and landscape of a given area is unparalleled, his writerly skill is at its sharpest capturing Newfoundland's children, parents, fishermen and "strangers," and his blossoming friendships with them, that sets his book apart from other fish-out-of-water travelogues. Though far from a traditional guide, anyone curious about "the unknown shore" will find this an exacting, delightful tour. Copyright Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. From Booklist From acclaimed nature writer Finch comes this curious book about Newfoundland. It's a visually evocative account, full of careful descriptions and fascinating people, but it's not without some missteps. For example: although Finch supplies

readers with a glossary of Newfoundland terms mollyfudge, spudgeland occasionally reproduces the distinct Newfoundland accent, he gives us no real sense of how a Newfoundlander sounds (although, when you get Newfoundlanders talking enthusiastically, they sound like no one else on earth). Another curiosity is that the book captures a Newfoundland that no longer exists: the book describes the author's travels on the island between 1987 and 1996, before several recent political upheavals and before an Olympic gold medal in curling catapulted the province into the limelight. Finch's Newfoundland, then, is neither contemporary nor so old that it takes on historical import. As George Carlin once said, How can you be nostalgic for the concept of "a little while ago"? While the book certainly serves as a competent introduction to Newfoundland and its people, it never quite does its rich subject justice. Pitt, David "Robert Finch is one of our finest observers.... I admire his essays very much for their strength, subtlety, and above all their geniality." -- Annie Dillard