



ISSN 2754-5547

<https://doi.org/10.52230/JVON5553>

**Peter Thompson, *Nights below Foord Street: Literature and Popular Culture in Postindustrial Nova Scotia***

**Tom Halford**

**To cite this book review:** Peter Thompson, *Nights below Foord Street: Literature and Popular Culture in Postindustrial Nova Scotia* by Tom Halford, *Journal of Australian, Canadian, and Aotearoa New Zealand Studies* 1, issue 2 (December 2021): 150-151, <https://doi.org/10.52230/YZMN7636>

CC BY-NC-ND 4.0

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>

Peter Thompson, *Nights below Foord Street: Literature and Popular Culture in Postindustrial Nova Scotia* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2020). 182pp. Paperback. C\$34.95. ISBN: 978-0-7735-5934-9.

There are a handful of great books about the culture and the literature of Atlantic Canada. A few of them include *Anne of Tim Horton's* by Herb Wyile, *Setting in the East* by David Creelman, and *Studies in Maritime History* by Gwendolyn Davies. I would place Peter Thompson's *Nights Below Foord Street* among this list. His focus on the hyper-local is perhaps one of the most accurate and honest shifts for studies of a region that is far from uniform. He pushes the study of Atlantic Canada beyond the book and into the world of popular media in his discussion of *Trailer Park Boys*. Furthermore, the topics he covers, such as resource extraction and white trash bodies, are important and timely.

One of the strengths of Thompson's book is its focus on Northern Nova Scotia and the hyper-local. For anyone who knows Atlantic Canada, it has regions within regions. Newfoundland is such a distinct place for example from the rest of the provinces, and Western Newfoundland is incredibly different from the Avalon peninsula. To talk about Atlantic Canada as one place risks missing the nuance that Thompson articulates so clearly.

Thompson's focus on mixed media represents another noteworthy shift in Atlantic Canadian studies. He covers everything from the big literary names such as Alistair MacLeod to Lynn Coady, but Thompson also discusses popular TV shows such as the aforementioned *Trailer Park Boys* and films such as *Poor Boy's Game*. In doing so, Thompson is able to cover the cultural expressions and racial tensions of the region where he grew up, tracing a history of Anglo Nova Scotia and critiquing the way the ruling classes have romanticized the past and defined masculinity by hard work to mobilize and manipulate working class bodies. The use of mixed media works well in this sense, capturing a wide range of expressions from film and TV to the visual arts about what it means to live in a place such as Nova Scotia.

From the crisis of masculinity to the discussion of white trash bodies, there were a number of highlights to *Nights Below Foord Street*. The chapter detailing how trash is coded in *Trailer Park Boys* was brilliant. As a fan of Lynn Coady's work, I was particularly interested in what Thompson had to say about her novels. Furthermore, as someone who is familiar with Thompson's scholarship, his work detailing responses to coal mining and post-coal mining were new to me and captivating. Finally, I found the discussion on the crisis of masculinity (which perhaps should be termed the confusion of masculinity) to be illuminating since it has been a subtext of my experience growing up in Atlantic Canada. With expertise, Thompson details the way that Atlantic Canadian artists have discussed this topic.

One aspect that I do question is perhaps too picky. In Thompson's reading of *The Antagonist*, I feel that he frames Grix, the novelist who uses elements of Rank's past for minor details in his creative work, as a victim. My reading is that the two threaten each other in complicated ways. Rank physically threatens Grix, but Grix trespasses on family tragedy. He extracts data from Rank's life and uses it for his own intellectual work. Is there some lesson here for academics and artists? This is just one small critique of an overall brilliant study.

*Nights Below Foord Street* poses timely questions for scholars of Atlantic Canada. What happens to older notions of masculinity and femininity when they are no longer defined by work and resource extraction? In post-industrial settings, why and how do the same people who were defined by work suddenly become white trash bodies? Perhaps, most curious of all, when one can look back and pinpoint as Thompson does, how a region's culture is highly manufactured, such as Northern Nova Scotia's Scottishness, what are we manufacturing now in Atlantic Canada?

*Tom Halford, Memorial University of Newfoundland*