

## Revisiting *Rockbound*: The Evolution of a Novel

In *Artistic Experience: Policing the Boundaries of Modernity* (2001), Lynda Jessup introduces antimodernism as a “broad, international reaction to the onslaught of the modern world that swept industrialized western Europe, North America, and Japan in the decades around the turn of the century” (3). Linking her observations to the work of T. J. Jackson Lears and Raymond Williams, she notes the ambivalence of antimodernism as a movement, often accommodating itself to the contemporary while at the same time writing in protest against it. As such, she notes, “it embraces what was then a desire for the type of ‘authentic’ immediate experience supposedly embodied in pre-industrial societies—in medieval communities or ‘Oriental’ cultures, in the Primitive, the Traditional, or the Folk” (3).

Jessup’s comments provide a perspective from which to revisit Frank Parker Day’s 1928 *Rockbound*, a work that, in its evolution from short story to novel, reveals the consistent humanist underpinnings of Day’s antimodernism. Although dismissed by historian Ian McKay in *The Quest of the Folk: Antimodernism and Cultural Selection in Twentieth-Century Nova Scotia* as possibly the “most perfect regional expression” of antimodernist naturalism and essentialism (244), *Rockbound* nevertheless asserts in its celebration of humankind’s potential for courage and selflessness the very qualities that have ensured its ongoing popularity (including its winning CBC Radio’s highly visible literary contest, “Canada Reads,” in 2005). An epic tale of a young man’s quest for fulfillment in the context of family feuds and

elemental survival against the sea, *Rockbound* also carries with it the appeal that island stories have had throughout centuries of recorded Western culture. As liminal places, argues John R. Gillis, islands are appropriate sites for “rites of passage” stories. “We do not just think with islands,” notes Gillis, “we use them as thresholds to other worlds and new lives.” Thus, Greek heroes “turned to islands as a place to shed the mortal self,” medieval Christians found them sites of transcendence, Renaissance writers engaged them as spaces “to imagine new worlds,” and modern day anthropologists turn to them for field work (4). “Today,” adds Gillis, “islands are the places we go as tourists and vacationers to find out who we really are. But as in the past, the island journey is always a sojourn undertaken with the ultimate intention of returning to the mainland somehow changed” (4). In other words, in whatever era humankind has traveled to islands, there is almost always an association with antimodernism. Set apart as it is, the island becomes a symbolic site for continuity, isolation, and, in Gillis’ words, is “the West’s favourite location for visions of both the past and the future” (3).

As Canadian novelist Frank Parker Day returned to his native Nova Scotia in the summer of 1926, island associations preoccupied him. A Rhodes Scholar who had worked on Ben Jonson at Oxford and *Beowulf* at the University of Berlin, Day had been balancing English Department responsibilities at the Carnegie Institute in Pittsburgh and active fiction writing throughout the academic year 1925-26. His story “The Epic of Marble Mountain,” published in *Harper’s Magazine* in September, 1923, had drawn favourable notice and had caught the interest of both Hal Roach and Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer as a potential Hollywood film.<sup>1</sup> Throughout the winter term, he was overseeing the publication of his first novel, *River of Strangers* (New York, 1926; London, 1927), and of his memoir, *The Autobiography of A Fisherman* (New York, 1927). But he was also struggling with the working manuscript of a short narrative that he had tentatively entitled “Ironbound.” At some point prior to 1926, he had read this draft to the Authors’ Club in Pittsburgh.<sup>2</sup> And, in January 1926, he had sought feedback from Nella Broddy of Doubleday, Page & Co. on whether “there is a book in ‘Iron Bound.’”<sup>3</sup> The working story opened with a description of East Ironbound as an island “girt with slaty iron-stained rock, its rounded knolls roughened with scrubby wind-mauled spruces” standing “grimly against the thrust of the sea” (“Ironbound” 4.10.1). The story immediately evoked archetypal images of Atlantic offshore ruggedness already familiar to 1920s admirers of Nova Scotian photographer Wallace MacAskill. His photograph, “Gray

Dawn,” exhibited in the Royal Photographic Society of Great Britain in 1924, not only won MacAskill over a hundred awards during his lifetime (Bruce 14), but also escalated his work to iconographic status. By 1929, he had gained recognition in Europe and had also graced a Canadian stamp (Bruce 14). Thus, Day’s description of the Ironbound fleet—“ten stout Tancook-built boats, an oilskin clad giant in each, standing erect, no matter how great the wash of the sea, and sawing patiently with a hand-line on either side of his craft” (4.10.2)—complemented MacAskill’s photographs of seafaring life, in particular anticipating his archetypal “Toilers of the Sea, 1928.”<sup>4</sup> Ironbound fishermen “are sinewy giants,” added Day in his draft story, “and play the part of men but their lives are neither simple nor idyllic. Though there are but fifty souls on the island, though it is far out to sea, remote and unvisited, it is a world in miniature” (4.10.2).

Day’s depiction of the island as a microcosm of the macrocosm not only anticipated Gillis’ observations on islands as metaphors for the West’s understanding of itself (3) but also revealed the way in which Day was envisaging his fictional island as an extension of the mainland. At this embryonic stage of his narrative, however, Day seemed more inclined to address the sociological than the spiritual challenges of living in isolation by the sea. “Disease is there,” he noted; “they live in perpetual dread of cancer and tuberculosis that have thinned the ranks of these island dwellers. The men, great vigorous animals, drink secretly and regard bodily strength and endurance as the greatest virtues; the women who play a decidedly second part, till the soil and are submissive and obedient as they always are in the face of danger” (4.10.2). The tone is deterministic, observant of a species uniquely removed from the gaze of the “passenger standing on the port side of a steamer plying between Halifax and New York.” It also positions the island in the path of a wider cosmic fate, for “some day there will be two islands in place of one and ages hence two shoals marked on the chart with some such legend: ‘Ironbound shoals, five fathoms, dangerous to mariners’” (4.10.1). Thus, while the urban narrator at the beginning of the “Ironbound” draft might yearn for an antimodernist haven “remote, unspoiled, where men lead simple lives” (4.10.2), he quickly disabuses his readers of that possibility by describing not only the social realism of work, illness, and death, but also the physical destruction of the landscape by environmental forces beyond the control of humankind.

The sheer determinism of the draft opening would seem to reinforce historian Ian McKay’s argument that Day wrote *Rockbound* with a “Spencerian

sense of the ‘survival of the fittest’” in mind (244). Certainly, the physicality of hard work, the cold challenge of the sea, and the fisticuffs resolution of the battle for island heroine Mary Mader in the draft narrative all reflect the realism of life on Ironbound. Thus the visiting American artist, Charles Antriquet (resonant of Day’s real life artist friend Charles Amiguet who may have traveled with him to Ironbound in 1926),<sup>5</sup> flinches with distaste when Ironbound-bred dogs sniff out avian prey and devour “with a horrid crunching sound” eggs, birds, and feathers. By contrast, the “sight and sound” (“Ironbound” 4.10.15) are uncompromisingly part of species selection on the island for Mary Mader, who, at the end of the physical fight for her favours, defines a sense of the island’s Darwinian world view by pleading with Harris: “Don’t kill him, Harris, don’t kill him; he is not island-bred like us. He has no chance with you in a fight” (4.10.34).

Yet, as her name suggests, Mary also has regenerative significance in both the short narrative, “Ironbound,” and the final novel *Rockbound*. As she gazes at one of Antriquet’s paintings in the draft story, she agonizes that “My picture tells me that there is something fine in the world that we don’t know about.” Her love of Antriquet’s art, and Harris’ appreciation for fine wood carving, both function as counterpoints to a purely naturalistic reading of the narrative. Feeling “like a prisoner here . . . like the princess in the fairy tale who has lost her kingdom” (4.10.21), Mary seizes the opportunity to travel to the urban United States with Antriquet, prepared to sacrifice agency for knowledge. In doing so, she allies herself with a man who has long ago resolved “that he would work no more for capitalists” (4.10.23), but who discovers that Uriah and his boys on Ironbound during World War I are as much “the slaves of things they covet” (4.10.23) as are the American capitalists whom he has rejected. This recognition of the universality of human nature sends Antriquet back to the two things that are immutable: his love of Mary, who lives for his representations of Ironbound landscape, and the landscape itself:

the power of the rocks, the savagery of the sea, the rude heaving and thrusting of nature, the violence of the gales that had torn the stunted spruces, the glory of the dawn, the mystery of falling night and ignoring the obvious objective things about him, he put these upon canvases with an easy technique that was unusual and uncanny to himself. (4.10.26)

Thus, the working draft of “Ironbound” resonates with themes commonplace to the mid-1920s when it was written, not least of which is middle class America’s search for therapeutic release from a society of conspicuous

consumption and rapid urbanization. In *No Place of Grace*, T.J. Jackson Lears has argued that “the yearnings of romantic activists” from the late nineteenth century onward “for more intense, immediate experience became common among educated Americans” (107). Thus, Day’s positioning of Antriquet at the heart of his working draft of “Ironbound,” and Antriquet’s artistic renewal in the unindustrialized ruggedness of a Nova Scotian island, underwrite Lears’ perception of an American middle class of journalists, ministers, academics, and literati who “as some of the most educated and cosmopolitan products of an urbanizing, secularizing society . . . were the ‘point men’ of cultural change. They experienced and articulated moral and psychic dilemmas which later became common in the wider society” (*Preface* xvi-xvii).

Day explores these cultural soundings in his working draft by casting his artist figure in the same mode as Canada’s emerging Group of Seven painters, who, in the 1920s, as Claire Elizabeth Campbell in *Shaped By The West Wind: Nature and History in Georgian Bay* has noted, “presented the Bay as an ideal of wilderness, for an urban audience” (146). “Ironbound” creates a similar antimodernist construct, revealing that after Antriquet’s being “three years in the city, the strangeness” of the island inspires him “with many paintable subjects” (4.10.26). A relentless self critic, he destroys most of his work, placing his new pictures beside the one that he had done for Mary Mader three years before “to see if they held up” (4.10.26.). In the end, he succeeds, “making a marvelous pattern of red rocks, blue-green spruces and swirling water.” Humans are as absent from his paintings as they are from the Georgian Bay canvases of the Group of Seven. Thus, a romanticized representation of wilderness landscape becomes Antriquet’s protest against the modernized world. “Knowing,” he says as he leaves the island, “is nothing but feeling is everything” (4.10.28). Or, to quote Campbell in her analysis of the Group of Seven, it is “the meeting of expectation and place, of ideas and geography,” that “produces a series of intellectual and practical adjustments—in ways of thinking about nature and ways of living in a difficult environment.” This process of adaptation is “integral to the construction of regional identity” (139), she adds, a process as true of Antriquet’s artistic creation of difference in “Ironbound” as of the Group of Seven’s dramatic evocation of place along the shores of Georgian Bay.

Significant to any reading of “Ironbound” as the genesis text of *Rockbound* is Day’s conflicted discourse, both the omniscient outsider descending on the island and the culturally-sympathetic insider who had been born in

Nova Scotia in 1881. Having attended Lunenburg Academy for two years in his teens, Day knew Lunenburg as the home of the schooner fleet sailing each spring to the Grand Banks cod fishery and as the eighteenth-century locus for the German-descended inhabitants scattered around the mainland and islands of Mahone Bay. As a young man he had worked in the inshore fishery, sailing with Captain Enoch Mason of the *Nova Zembla*, a schooner briefly referenced in the text of *Rockbound* (192). “How happy and miserable I was then!” he recalled in his 1927 memoir, *The Autobiography of a Fisherman*: “I was seasick most of the time. There was not the slightest convenience, and bobstays are cold and slippery when seas slop round your knees of a brisk morning, but I was learning to be tough and a sailor” (46). But by the time that Day returned to Lunenburg County in the summer of 1926 with his working draft of “Ironbound,” he had also acquired the cultural lens that his fictional figure, Antriquet, brings with him to the island. Educated abroad in Oxford and Berlin and promoted to Lieutenant Colonel on the battlefields of World War I France, Day had become a professor of English and an administrator in institutions ranging from the University of New Brunswick to the Carnegie Institute of Technology in the United States. A great admirer of novelists such as Dickens (“a teller of tales, a creator of characters”) and John Masefield (“spiritualism and fine idealism . . . a fine stylist”), Day had made it clear in a 1920s lecture on modern novelists that, in his view, “the function of the artist is not to depict life photographically but to help us to interpret the beauty of life as it may be, to present to us romance, adventure, idealism, and to reveal the nobility lying latent in every human breast” (“Modern Novelists” K.6.4). Thus, his valorization of Harris, the “Ironbound” fisherman who demonstrates qualities of courage, grace, and self-sacrifice in the face of losing Mary to the artist Antriquet at the end of the short story draft, is consistent with his appreciation of literary works which “are often tragic” but are “full of an inner spiritual understanding of life” (“Modern Novelists” K.6.6).

Nowhere is this essentially romantic approach so clearly articulated as in Day’s own personal memoir, *Autobiography of a Fisherman*, where he cites *Pilgrim’s Progress* and *Swiss Family Robinson* as imaginative benchmarks in building a retreat in the wild. More specifically, the wilderness provided him with a therapeutic outlet, an escape physically and mentally from what he described as the burden of “the city in winter” before he could be released into the freedom of the summer months:

In the city, I write endless letters in my office, I am busy over executive work, I rush about day and night getting only half enough sleep, my mind full of ambitious and often angry thoughts. But in summer, all is different: in a country almost untouched by man, I get up fresh and clear-eyed to watch the sun rise out of the forest and chase the mist wraiths from the lake, I take my canoe and paddle over to the still-water for trout, I swim in the cool clean water, I gather pond lilies and berries in season, I cut the wood or hoe my garden or drive back the forest of alders that is forever encroaching. I explore some new part of the forest, boil my kettle by some singing brook, and lie in the sun for hours. (73-74)

Day's rhetoric of urban-rural wilderness tensions, particularly as it informs the first working versions of *Rockbound*, is consistent with popular anti-modernist perceptions of the early twentieth century already alluded to in the works of various commentators ranging from T.J. Jackson Lears and Ian McKay to Lynda Jessup and Claire Elizabeth Campbell. The "brain-fag" (Jasen 112) described by Day in *The Autobiography of a Fisherman* was a popular middle class concern, notes Jasen in *Wild Things, Nature, Culture, and Tourism in Ontario: 1790-1914*, creating a perceived need throughout North America for recuperative rural holidays. Expanding on Lears' analysis of middle class yearning for therapeutic escape, Jasen notes the way in which sojourners from the city sought new sensations in rugged landscapes and "engaged in a quest for signs" (7). That this questing was part of a much wider international antimodernist reaction against "overcivilization" is not only germane to her analysis but also to that of Ian McKay's discussion in *The Quest of the Folk* as he situates Day's *Rockbound* in the popular attitudes of its time. "From the late nineteenth century on," notes McKay, "and across the western world, skepticism about 'progress' and fear that unprecedented social and economic changes were destroying the possibility of 'authentic' experience (and even undermining the basis of selfhood itself) shaped social thought and cultural expression across a wide ideological spectrum" (31). Although McKay is particularly sensitive to the way in which Nova Scotian "local cultural producers," amongst them Frank Parker Day, foregrounded Nova Scotian society and history in their fiction and art to satiate "the international cultural marketplace" (31), he nonetheless finds Day's realistic portrayal of fishermen's work and of small community in-fighting in *Rockbound* "refreshingly" different "from the portrayals of tidy, idyllic fishing villages in other accounts" (243). However, Day's merits do not outweigh his demerits, argues McKay, for he interprets Day as representing "Nature as all-powerful and determining" (244). As such, he argues, Day's "fisherfolk" remain

“rockbound,’ inarticulate human figures locked in an all-determining landscape of coastal rock and sea” (245).

Yet, what McKay’s thesis overlooks in *Quest of the Folk* is Day’s belief in man’s inherent nobility, a conviction not only developed in his fiction but also articulated in his personal writing. Not unlike D.H. Lawrence, notes John Ferres, Day celebrated nature as “the great life force,” and in *Rockbound* he links that life force to “natural morality,” the “generous instinctive spontaneity of those living in harmony with nature,” and “a new generation that is liberated and enlightened” (107). Day saw World War I as challenging that spirit of liberation and enlightenment, but, in spite of being caught up in an industrialized war of aeroplanes, poisonous gas, and flame throwers, he was consistently moved by the spirituality and selflessness that he encountered on the battlefield. That faith in the essential humanity of man, and in the relationship between what Ferres calls “nature and natural grace” (107), remained the core of Day’s antimodernist approach to life after he returned to Nova Scotia in 1918 and for the first time met his young son. “The war was over,” he wrote in *The Autobiography of A Fisherman* in 1927: “I came home tired and worn-out, obsessed with one idea—

I wanted rest, quiet, peace; I wanted never to speak again without necessity or to give or receive an order. I wanted to live in the woods, and be alone along my streams. A puny hand that reached up and clutched my forefinger warmed in my heart a hope, but even that faded in the memories of the war. “Poor little chap,” I thought, “he, too, may march away proudly in twenty years, to fight in a horror that some perverted madman has initiated.” What sorry hopes has poor humanity—War or Famine—to preserve a foothold on a soon overcrowded world! “Still,” I thought, “I can perhaps teach him to be a fisherman and to love brooks that brawl down from the hills.” (144-45)

Thus, when Day returned to Nova Scotia in the summer of 1926 to spend part of his holiday researching “Ironbound,” he did so in the context of being something of a late Victorian humanist who valorized personal dignity, subscribed to concepts of heroic manhood, and embraced a romantic view of the restorative powers of pristine wilderness. His story “The Epic of Marble Mountain” (1923) set in Cape Breton and the Baie de Chaleur, his sketch “The Iroquois” (1925) set in World War I France,<sup>6</sup> and his first novel *River of Strangers* (1926) situated in the Canadian north, had explored human nature in environmentally harsh settings. In such contexts, notes John Bell, Day “could strip his characters of the false accoutrement of civilization, until against a stark, primal background they displayed their humanity in its simple beauty and tragedy”(17).<sup>7</sup> His working draft of



“Ironbound,” constructed along similar lines, seemed only to be awaiting Day’s research on East Ironbound to flesh out the localisms that would enrich his fictional text. In this sense, his purpose seemed to differ little from that of subsequent Canadian writers such as Margaret Laurence or David Adams Richards who were to draw upon their knowledge of regional landscape, physical communities, economic challenge, and historical context to construct their imaginative literary worlds of Manawaka and the Miramichi respectively. As Stephen Amidon has noted in a review of Michael Millgate’s *Thomas Hardy: A Biography Revisited*, “Great writers are capable of redrawing maps. Joyce with his Dublin, Faulkner with Mississippi, Cheever and the New York suburbs—each of these authors appropriated an existing landscape for his own purposes, investing actual terrain with imaginary characters, events, and places” (D8).

Like these writers, Day appropriated an existing landscape. Physically moving onto the islands for two weeks in July-August, 1926, he clearly enjoyed a warm rapport with fishermen on Ironbound, the lighthouse keeper at Pearl Island, and at least one family on the Aspotogan Peninsula. Writing on 28 November 1926 after Day had returned to Pittsburgh, a resident from Blandford thanked Day for a box of seed that he had sent and chattily reported that they had ceased fishing for the season and were currently killing cattle.<sup>8</sup> The Pearl Island lighthouse keeper also wrote in the fall of 1926, thanking Day for a copy of H.G. Wells’ *Outline of History*, commenting on the coming of the eider ducks, and reporting that “next day after you left I had a 200 lb. hallibut.”<sup>9</sup> It is relationships such as these that clearly deepened Day’s understanding of the community, but representative Ironbounders in February 1929 nonetheless felt sufficiently incensed about his fictional selectivity in *Rockbound* to protest to the Lunenburg *Progress-Enterprise* and the *Halifax Herald*.<sup>10</sup> Day’s only response, in a letter to one of the lighthouse keepers with whom he corresponded, was that “the story refers to a time long ago not to present-day conditions and I learned of the stories when I was a little boy before I had ever heard of Ironbound.”<sup>11</sup> Although references in the novel to London suffragettes and the absence of wireless communication at sea reinforce Day’s claim to a pre-1920s setting, there is every evidence in the Frank Parker Day fonds at Dalhousie University that Day’s visit to Ironbound and its adjacent islands in July-August, 1926, enriched various levels of the story on which he had been working.

Not least of this enrichment was the visual way in which Day approached the background of his text, for, once on the islands, Day drew topographical

maps of East Ironbound, the islands of Mahone Bay, and the lighthouse on Pearl Island. Sherrill Grace has argued in *Canada and the Idea of North* that maps show “that the author has been *there*, seen that, and knows what he/she is talking about” (80). Day seemed to map in that spirit, apparently having no intention of including his sketches in the final publication that was to emanate from Doubleday Doran. However, his drawing of the Pearl Island lighthouse (to become the Barren Island light in the novel) enabled him once back in Pittsburgh to recall the shape and placement of such items as the bookcase, the stove, the kitchen, and the “Table where I wrote on the sly pretending I was preparing Shakespeare lecture.”<sup>12</sup> He experimented with names, crossing out “Lunenburg,” “Magdeburg,” and “Coppenburg” on his map of the mainland and bay before deciding on “Liscomb” as the substitution for “Lunenburg.”<sup>13</sup> And his detailed map of Ironbound<sup>14</sup>—filled with such denominators as “Cove Launch Landing Place,” “The Light,” “The Rock—North-east Shoal ? fathom—Mather’s father never left Green Island when ‘the Rock’ broke,” and “Whale Cove—whale ran ashore in the olden days”—reveals the level of oral research that gave him what Grace calls “cultural power” over his material (80). Clearly, for Day, what emerged from this visual mapping was a sense of the lighthouse and islands as sites of significance in his narrative, the places where David, his protagonist, would fulfill his quest for difference.

As well, once on Ironbound, Day realized the literary importance of the rich “Lunenburg Dutch” (*Deutsch*) vernacular of the islanders to his island mapping—what linguist Lewis Poteet has called “the aesthetics of speaking” (5). Despite Day’s youthful exposure to this dialect, he had clearly forgotten much of it by the time that he worked on the short narrative version of “Ironbound” in Pittsburgh. However, once again in the dialect-rich environment of Lunenburg County, Day became attuned to what Poteet, a student of the county’s idiom, has called “the interplay of speech communities in the culture (who hears and understands the local dialect).” “We may also see how the language works and plays in the culture,” Poteet has argued in his exploration of South Shore dialect: “for example, in bits of language that give ‘rough measure’ to a part of the world not as bound up in technology, in the metric or non-metric dilemma, as the urban world” (5). Given Day’s already articulated anti-modernist bias in fiction, and his literary depiction of the island as an escape from urbanization in the short narrative version of “Ironbound,” it is not surprising that he seized upon the distinctive vernacular of the islands as one way in which to dramatize “a part of the world not

as bound up in technology, in the metric or non-metric dilemma, as the urban world.” Thus, the confrontation scene between Uriah and Harris, originally conceived in Pittsburgh prior to 1926 in standard English, became much more heavily localized in its speech patterns in Day’s working text of *Rockbound* once he had been on the island:

“An’ what might ye be wantin?” said the old man, the king of Rockbound.

“I wants fur to be yur sharesman,” answered David.

“Us works here on Rockbound.”

“I knows how to work.”

“Knows how to work an’ brung up on de Outposts!” jeered Uriah. “Us has half a day’s work done ’fore de Outposters rub sleep out o’ dere eyes, ain’t it!”

“I knows how to work,” repeated the boy stubbornly.

“Where’s yur gear an’ clothes at?”

“I’se got all my gear an’ clothes on me,” said David, grinning down at his buttonless shirt, ragged trousers, and bare, horny feet “but I owns yon dory: I salvaged her from de sea an’ beat de man what tried to steal her from me.”

Uriah’s eyes showed a glint of interest. (4-5)

Kirsten Stevens has noted that the contrast between this scene and its earlier version represents a stylization of dialect, revealing what H. Rex Wilson has called “Lunenburg Dutch” as not so much “a dialect of German but a peculiar way of speaking English in an area where the original colonization was by German-speaking settlers”(35).<sup>15</sup> Thus, as Stevens has illustrated, characters in the final version of the novel will say “let him go wid as a favour” instead of “let him go with you as a favour,” will substitute “d” and “t” for the “th” sound, will pronounce “v” as a “w,” and will often add “Ain’t it” to the end of a sentence for confirmation (not unlike the German *nicht* or *nicht wahr* requesting confirmation) (35-37). Already beginning to de-emphasize the urban artist theme that had been a focus of his original “Ironbound” text, Day began in the summer of 1926 to make lists of birds, songs, expressions (for example, “to rutch up” against), and books (for old Gershom’s library in the lighthouse on Barren Island).<sup>16</sup> He visited the cemetery at Smith’s Cove on the mainland to get a sense of regional names, and recorded folktales, superstitions, expressions, seasonal occurrences, and the rhythm of work. His descriptive notes, interspersed with parts of his novel in progress, form a running commentary almost novelistic in their vividness. Beginning on 30 July 1926 with the dramatic statement, “Charles is dead,” the memoir-like text builds around dialogue, authorial questions, and factual detail that he is collecting as background (for example, members of the Jung family have sold potatoes, strawberries, vegetables, butter, eggs, and

herring on the mainland on 30 July 1926, and Day records the amounts sold and the income generated). Ghost stories that Day hears while traveling by boat or visiting the lighthouse on Pearl Island will get reworked into the novel, while his visit to a “great red-faced giant” of a local lighthouse keeper (“What a Viking!”) leads to a vivid thumbnail sketch in his working notes: “I’m an agnostic, an atheist, a free thinker,” he announced, “and I read all the time, Byron, Shakespeare, Wordsworth and history.” Appended to this is Day’s observation: “a great drinker and lover of women.”<sup>17</sup> It is not difficult for readers of the final version of *Rockbound* to see in this encounter the genesis of the old and young Gershoms, both of whom appear in the evolving novel only after Day’s visit to Mahone Bay in 1926.

More significantly, once on Ironbound, and once committed to the process of physically mapping the islands, Day seemed to become much more conscious of the importance of “islandness” to his narrative. He sailed to the more remote Pearl Island (Barren Island in the novel) and wrote in his working draft of looking back at Ironbound from the second floor of the Pearl Island lighthouse tower. As Janice Kulyk Keefer has pointed out, in the fictional world that *Rockbound* creates “it is not the shore which stands as antithesis to the ‘wearisome argument of the sea,’ but the lighthouse, on whose steady, faithful guidance the fisherman’s very life depends” (73). Thus, as he reworked “Ironbound” into a romance of quest, ordeal, and triumph for his protagonist David Jung (his reworking of the Harris Mader figure in the earlier versions), he dropped altogether the trope of the island as a regenerative force for world-weary urbanites. Instead, his fictional Ironbound/Rockbound becomes a site of the same twentieth century malaise that confounds the urban East Coast cities from which Antriquet is escaping in the original draft story. Women are victims of patriarchy. Greed motivates bad behaviour. Religion fails to regenerate. Education struggles against tradition. Change is unsettling.

As Day worked through different versions of the text, from the short story of “Ironbound” to a changing novel variously entitled *His World—The Islanders*, *The Devil’s in the Sea*, *The Islanders*, and, finally, *Rockbound*,<sup>18</sup> the island and its outer islands become liminal spaces. Each physical move—from Big Outpost to Rockbound to Barren Island—takes Day’s protagonist, David, further out to sea away from “civilization” to eventually find his happiness in turning Barren Island into what David Creelman calls an “edenic state” (32). Destroying the soil-polluting carey-birds (“cursed birds of night”), David Jung of the final version of *Rockbound* restores the farming

capability of the island, becomes a symbol of trust by running the government lighthouse, and eventually raises his son with Mary (his Eve figure). His journey has archetypal overtones reminiscent of Huckleberry Finn's decision to reject "sivilization" and instead "light out for the Territory ahead of the rest." But whereas Mark Twain leaves Huck Finn suspended between "sivilization" and the unknown, Day turns David's journey into a revelation of self discovery.<sup>19</sup> By moving David into the government-appointed role of lighthouse keeper, a role that ironically centres this antimodernist hero in the modernist world of contemporary travel and trade, Day challenges Ian McKay's claim that "man" in *Rockbound* "is essentially an animal dependent on the rhythms of nature" (244). Rather, as J.D. Robins argued in a 1928 review of the novel in *The Canadian Forum*, "Hardy's characters war with Destiny, but it is a losing fight: they are creatures of Destiny, playthings for the 'President of the Immortals.'" However, "back of *Rockbound*," Robins argues, "by no means explicit in it, but rolling in distant thunder behind it, is the sense of the supremacy of man again, working with Destiny if you will, but achieving by means of an indomitable will which can bend even Destiny to its purpose" (245). Moreover, by rejecting the elemental greed, lust, and revenge that unfold on *Rockbound*, mirrors of what David Creelman calls "the disruptive forces of the modern world" (32), Day posits an ideal of service based on "the nobility lying latent in every breast" articulated in his 1920s lecture on contemporary fiction. It is an "individualist liberalism," notes David Creelman, that emerges "naturally" from David's personality, "not as the product of an external religious or educational system" (32). In this sense, it is consistent with the same essence of "tenderness, international & timeless" that artist and writer Robert P. Tristram Coffin had identified elsewhere in Day's work.<sup>20</sup>

That Day struggled to articulate these idealized antimodernist themes in his novel is evident from the five surviving manuscript versions and their aborted endings. While the visit to East Ironbound in the summer of 1926 was critical to the evolution of *Rockbound*, his New York artist friend, Charles Amiguet, had noted in a letter from the Aspotagan Peninsula that "your visit to Ironbound was a helter skelter affair that cannot have been very satisfactory to you."<sup>21</sup> Nonetheless, Day seems to have accumulated enough background to enable him to complete a typescript of a novel entitled *His World—The Islanders* for Doubleday Page & Co. by the beginning of 1927. Although this early version of the novel contained characters and episodes later found in *Rockbound*, Day still retained allusions to the artist

theme that had informed the story “Ironbound.” This impelled reader and lawyer, Allan Davis of Pittsburgh, to criticize the novel intensely in January 1927, arguing that “the artist people, one and all, do not belong in the story. . . . The yarn is about Iron Bound people, and these others have no real place in it.” “Make this *your book*,” he added as he concluded his letter: “It’s about your own country, your own people. You may not get a second or a third chance at anything so big again.”<sup>22</sup>

Editorial notes on the surviving typescript of the novel reinforce Davis’ analysis, urging the elimination of the artist theme and the retention of the Ironbound motifs: “Your sea & fishing material has the look & sound of the real. So has old Uriah. Harris [later renamed David in *Rockbound*] has faded as the story has progressed.”<sup>23</sup> By 1 June 1927, a revised novel entitled *The Devil’s in the Sea* was closer to what was eventually to be published by Doubleday, Doran and Company in 1928 as *Rockbound*. Throughout the revision process, Day struggled with various endings for David Jung, projecting him to age 40, surrounding him with children, and contemplating, “as upon a map,” his peaceable kingdom encompassed by a sea that, he notes philosophically, both “feeds us an’ drowns us.”<sup>24</sup> The conclusion chosen for the 1928 version of the novel ultimately confirms the universal values central to Day’s work. David’s kingdom at the end of the novel is no outpost of civilization but its symbolic centre. By focusing on the birth of the family, it resonates with hope, a sense of the future, and a commitment to a wider social good. Read as romance and universalized by Chaucerian headnotes and allusions to Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, *Rockbound* therefore conveys in its resolution Day’s tribute to the triumph of the human spirit. But it also stands as a powerful if selective extension of Day’s imaginative reading of an island fishing culture just prior to World War I and the way in which that microcosm echoed the wider macrocosm.

## NOTES

- 1 See: Brady, Colonel J.E. Letter to Maude Guthrie. 26 April 1926. Frank Parker Day fonds, Ms.2.288. Correspondence, Folder 16.4. Killam Lib., Dalhousie University Archives, Halifax.  
Day, Frank Parker. Letter to Colonel J.E. Brady. 10 May 1926. Frank Parker Day fonds, Ms.2.288. Correspondence, Folder 16.4. Killam Lib., Dalhousie University Archives, Halifax.  
Note: All future manuscript/typescript references will be to this collection. Unless otherwise indicated, references are to the 2005 finding aid and re-cataloguing of the papers.
- 2 Davis, Allan. Letter to Frank Parker Day. 31 Jan. 1927. Folder 16.5.
- 3 Day, Frank Parker. Letter to Nella Broddy Henney. 28 Jan. 1926. Folder 16.6.

- 4 Wallace MacAskill: *Seascapes and Sailing Ships*, 31. See: <http://www.Macaskill.com/Wallace/wallace.html>. A second MacAskill site is <http://www.gov.ns.ca/nsarm/virtual/macaskill/essay.asp?Language=English>.
- 5 Amiguet, Charles. Letter to Frank Parker Day. no date. Correspondence, A-Z. Folders 17.3-17.5. Like Day's protagonist, Charles Antriquet in the story "Ironbound," Charles Amiguet worked at odd jobs (shingling, house painting) in order to fund his artistic life. Part of an Arts and Crafts artistic colony in Woodstock, Ulster County, New York, in the 1920s (originally formed around 1902), Amiguet indicates in a letter to Day that he knows that Day is drawing on him as a basis for the story "Ironbound." He subsequently visited the Days at Lake Annis in Nova Scotia, and may have been part of Day's Ironbound visit in the summer of 1926. I wish to thank Nancy Edgar, a doctoral candidate in English at the University of New Brunswick, for assisting me in finding information on Amiguet.
- 6 "The 'Iroquois'" was published in *Forum*, 31 (1925): 752-764.
- 7 David Creelman notes "*Rockbound* creates a fascinating tension as the dominant romance blends a conservative chronicle of a fading way of life with a thoroughly liberal celebration of the potential of the human spirit" (29).
- 8 Young, Harris. Letter to Frank Parker Day. 28 Nov. 1926. Folder 16.12.
- 9 Pearl, M.B. Letter to Frank Parker Day. 22 Sept. 1926. Folder 16.10.
- 10 "Letter to The Editor." *Progress-Enterprise* [Lunenburg] 20 February 1929: vol. 52.14.1; "New Book is 'Ridiculous,' Citizens Say." *Halifax Herald* 26 February 1929: 3. See also: Davies, Gwendolyn. Afterword. *Rockbound*. By Frank Parker Day. 1989. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2005. 305-310, and Bevan, A.R. "Rockbound Revisited: A Reappraisal of Frank Parker Day's Novel." *Dalhousie Review*, 38(1958): 37.
- 11 Day, Frank Parker. Letter to Allan M. Langille. 18 May 1929. Ms. 2.288. C240, Old Finding Aid.
- 12 Day, Frank Parker. "Day Papers." Folder 20.3.96.
- 13 Day, Frank Parker, "Day Papers." Ms.2.288.9.9. I wish to thank Karen Smith, Head of Special Collections, Killam Library, Dalhousie University, for her assistance in providing this reference.
- 14 Day, Frank Parker. "Day Papers." Ms.2.288.9.9. Folder 20.7.
- 15 Stevens quotes H. Rex Wilson (40). See also M.B. Emeneau, 34-44.
- 16 Day, Frank Parker, "Day Papers." Ms.2.288.9.9. Folder 20.6, 210-213; Folder 9.8, 210, 214-226, 236.
- 17 Day, Frank Parker. "Day Papers." Folder 9.8.13. Old Finding Aid: E4c (i), 24-26
- 18 "Day Papers," *His World, The Islanders*, Folders 9.10-9.11; *The Devil's in the Sea*, Folders 9.3,9.5; *The Islanders*, Folders 8.11-8.13,9.1-9.2. In 1928, Doubleday Page & Co. became Doubleday, Doran And Company. In June, before publication, Day and Doubleday Doran agreed to change the title to *Rockbound* even though the dies for *The Islanders* had been cast and the book was in galleys. See Stowe, Beecher. Letter to Frank Parker Day. 26 June 1928. Folder 16.5.
- 19 In *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America*, Leo Marx comments on the elusiveness of the refuge that Clemens (Twain) seeks for Huck in the "territory" (340). Day suggests no such fragility in David's future.
- 20 Coffin, Robert P.T. Letter to Frank Parker Day. 11 October 1926. Folder 16.5.
- 21 Amiguet, Charles. Letter to Frank Parker Day. no date. Aspotogan Sunday, Correspondence, A-Z. Folders 17.13-17.15.
- 22 Davis, Allan. Letter to Frank Parker Day. 31 January 1927. Folder 16.5.

- 23 Day, Frank Parker. *His World – The Islanders*. Ts., Folder 9.10-9.11, 138.  
 24 Day, Frank Parker. *The Islanders*. Ts., Folder 9.2.

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