Chapter 3

Otherness in Rural and Urban Newfoundland: Historical Aspects

3.1 European Settlement: Second Wave, 1497-1700

Newfoundland's social and political history influences its dramatic literature in ways that are sometimes obvious and at other times less discernible. There are perhaps more depictions of past ways of life than are typically found in other North American theatre cultures. This may be because the transition from a traditional maritime culture to an increasingly urbanized society is relatively recent, a process which is still visible in more remote outport communities. As important, the patterns of events which have taken place, at least as they have been perceived and debated by scholars, have encouraged an approach to playwriting which views Newfoundland society through a prism of otherness—its own, as well as that of those affiliated forces which exist outside its micro- and macro-communities.

Types of otherness have played a fundamental role in determining the form of society in Newfoundland since the first European attempts at settlement in the early 17th century. In particular, the question of how the exploitation of available natural resources—fish in past years, oil and natural gas in the present—would be managed, and by whom, has created strata and levels of acceptance in Newfoundland society.[1] Amongst these micro-communities can be listed divisions between urban and rural communities ("townie" and "bayman"), religious tensions existing in mixed communities settled by Irish and English emigrants, merchant/fisher relations in the time of the "truck" system,

and the influence of British mercantile and political institutions which, for the most part, were based in England. All are linked by a pattern of settlement and the economic and political considerations which dictated this pattern.

A British Under-Secretary of State succinctly summarized the Empire's attitude towards Newfoundland in 1793: "The island of Newfoundland has been considered…as a great ship moored near the banks during the fishing season, for the convenience of English fishermen" (Prowse xix).This quotation indicates an extractive mentality. There is no mention of an interest in, or valuation of, settlement; the resource-rich territory is not referred to as a colony, but simply as an "island", a place where things may be taken from with little reciprocal investment. The pattern of legislation on the part of the British government, beginning with the decision to send Sir Humphrey Gilbert to stake British claims to the fishery in 1583 and extending until the early years of the 19th century, was generally suppressive of settlement, with the exception of a short period from 1610 to approximately 1626, when colonies were established on the Avalon peninsula. In anthropomorphic terms, Newfoundland was a "non-person", a Stranger functioning as a Necessary Outsider within the British community of states for over three hundred years, from Cabot's discovery of the cod stocks in 1497 to the granting of colonial status in 1824. Lord Grenville further established the vested interest of the Crown with regard to settling the resource-rich territory:

> Newfoundland is in no respect a British colony and is never so considered in our laws. On the contrary, the uniform tenor of our laws respecting the fishery there, and of the King's instructions founded upon them, goes…to restrain the subjects of Great Britain from colonizing that island. (Dropmore Hist MSS 13, 1: 548, qtd. in Prowse *History* xix)

John Reeves, the first Chief Justice of Newfoundland, summarized the emerging division in Newfoundland society. Charged with codifying and modifying the island's "very slender code of laws" (C.O. 194/38: f.316) in 1791, Justice Reeves notes four years later to the Crown that "Newfoundland has been peopled behind your back" as a result of struggles between "contending interests":

> The *planters* and *inhabitants* on the one hand, who, being settled there, needed the protection of a government and police, with the administration of justice: and the *adventurers* and *merchants* on the other; who, originally carrying on the fishery from this country, and visiting that island only for the season, needed no such protection for themselves, and had various reasons for preventing its being afforded to the others." (Reeves 1)

This comment takes on a clearer meaning when the impediments to settlement over the preceding century are considered. Newfoundland's second wave of European settlement[2] was founded upon the exclusion of the territory and its nascent settlers from the privileges and benefits of Necessary Outsider status within the British community.

The island's peculiar marine environment was a primary factor in Crown policy. Situated hundreds of miles into the Atlantic, with no resident government of its own to enforce territorial fishing rights, for hundreds of years Newfoundland represented an inviting source of fish for French, Basque, Portuguese and English fishing concerns. Save for small numbers of seasonally-contracted fishermen who elected to jump ship at the end of the fishing season to take up squatters rights on the land, crews harvested fish without a concomitant investment in the land or the social development of a resident population. Facilities for drying and curing fish on board ships were less expensive to maintain than establishments which would require maintenance, and a permanent settler

population, on the shore. Crews were easier to manage—and replace—than a population living far from Bristol which did not return seasonally.

For more a hundred years after Cabot's arrival aboard the *Matthew* in 1497, ships came and went, taking the fish and leaving little evidence of a claim to British sovereignty. The first change in colonial attitudes derived from economic considerations. Towards the end of the sixteenth century the notion of some form of settlement took hold with ideas advanced by Anthony Parkhurst, with the idea of increasing the efficiency of the fishing industry (Head 33).[3] A small number of "bye-boatkeepers" began to stay behind to maintain and guard the fishing rooms built by the fishing merchants from the West Country of England (Story 15); those who stayed were later known as planters. The first official settlement, however, was sponsored by the London and Bristol Trading Company (NAW 4: 134), a fishing concern interested in consolidating the Newfoundland trade by creating a base of operations on the Avalon Peninsula. The plantation established by John Guy at Cupids in 1610 was the first (Handcock 33), followed by later settlements in Trepassey and Ferryland in 1617 and 1621, respectively.

The approach to colonization was founded upon the successful models of Virginia and New England. Virginia had evolved from the "extractive" form of settlement[4] (Cell 98-9) to a mixed-use approach which would later incorporate Spanish and Portuguese experience in the Caribbean in the form of the plantation. Such an approach was clearly inappropriate in a northern colony like Newfoundland. The New England settlements, as well as those in the West Indies, offered little of value without the presence of settlers (99). Newfoundland, by contrast, offered just the opposite—a "great ship" that would be difficult to maintain but which presented a straightforward resource for extraction.

The short, and anomalous, period when fishing merchants were persuaded to allow attempts at colonization had much to do with the fact that the settlement proposals were spearheaded by John Guy, himself a Bristol merchant. In his letters Guy reveals persistent attempts to hire ships so as to expand the colony's residency advantage in the fish trade ("John Guy" DCB 1: 350). His aims were to expand the fishing enterprise beyond the traditional extractive approach of the Bristol fishing industry, while ensuring the efficacy of that aspect of the trade through the securing of more shipping "rooms" and the provision of ships from shore (NAW 4: 131-2), and to secure the plantation's existence through the establishment of a mixed economy.[5] Before his departure in 1613, Guy created the beginnings of an "Insider" community - its population peaked at 100, including 16 women brought over in 1612 (Cell, "Cupids"104)—one which attempted to adapt to local conditions and therefore became, itself, a localized community. The reasons he failed say much about the divide existing between colonizer and colonized.[6]

More small settlements, each separated from each other geographically, followed the Cupids settlement, which ultimately failed in the latter half of the 1620s. One such settlement, established at Ferryland by George Calvert, Baron Baltimore, even sought to reconcile Catholics and Protestants within the same community (Lahey 496-7). The tensions which resulted proved a forerunner of religious divisions on the island and contributed to the rapid decline of the colony by 1629.[7]

The privations faced by settlers, the diminishing return, and the escalating cost of maintaining the settlements were disincentives to West Country merchants' short-lived enthusiasm for a presence on the island, and the attitude of the British parliament and the Crown remained ambivalent. In 1634 the Privy Council passed a Western Charter which,

though it did not promote settlement in Newfoundland, implicitly recognized the fact that small numbers of settlers remained scattered around the island even after the failure of the officially sanctioned settlements on the Avalon Peninsula. The Charter proclaimed eleven laws, and enjoined the planters to allow visiting ships to make use of “available” fishing rooms. This was an implicit recognition of the right of settlers to choose a room in advance of choices made by the fishing admirals. Opposition to this tacit recognition on the part of West Country merchants led to a subsequent Royal Charter passed in 1637, effectively eliminating any priority in the choice of fishing rooms. Although the charter had the stated objective that the budding plantations be “cherished and speedilie promoted” (Privy Council 4: 1723-37), it was in fact more explicitly punitive than the previous charter. Settlers were not to maintain any form of residence within six miles of the shoreline and wood-cutting, even for subsistence, was now illegal. The effect of the charter was profound, as settlers depended upon ready access to the shore for their livelihood. A second Western Charter was approved in 1661, essentially reiterating and reaffirming the content of the 1637 revision, and West Country fishing interests were further protected with the passing of an Order-In-Council in 1671. While settlers were now implicitly allowed to fish, they were forbidden to cut wood or to set up near shore. Such restrictions made the prosecution of their fishing rights extremely challenging, and marginalized the settlers in comparison to the ready access enjoyed by the merchant-sponsored ships.

The Order-In-Council also stipulated that new settlers were barred from passage on the fishing boats and that fishermen given passage to the fishing banks from England and Ireland were prohibited from staying over the winter. This provision thus effectively

created conditions whereby further settlement would be discouraged and existing settlers would find their position untenable. Settlements were prevented from increasing population, while residents, restricted in their access to the shore, were tacitly encouraged to give up and return to their homelands. By 1675, this implicit policy of discouragement had become explicit. The Committee for Foreign Trade and Plantations, charged with advising the Crown, accused the plantation settlers of various legal and moral offences, and of contributing to the debauchery of the seafaring folk who came to fish each summer. Convoy commanders were to pronounce to the settlers that His Majesty's will was "that they come voluntarily away" (PC 4: 1768-71). The charges were investigated by convoy commander Sir John Berry in 1675, who noted his "admiration" at the number of falsehoods propagated by the merchants with regard to the Newfoundland settlers. His report to the then Secretary of State, Sir John Richardson, created confusion and tension amongst the fishing admirals, who wanted the settlers evicted, and the settlers themselves, who wanted what they regarded as fair access to the shoreline and the right to fish unimpeded. The report intensified the conflict to a degree which motivated the settler community to make its first representation in London to plead its case. In 1676 and early 1677 John Downing of St. John's appeared before the Committee on Trade and effectively rebutted the arguments of the merchants with respect to their monopoly of the Newfoundland fishery (PC 4: 1786). His appearance marks a watershed in the development of the Insider community in Newfoundland. A Newfoundlander (by choice and residence, if not by birth) was representing the interests of Newfoundlanders to what was now clearly an Outside political body. Partly as a result of the context provided by

Downing, the crisis eased. In the same year the six-mile restriction was suspended and the fishing admirals were enjoined from harming or obstructing the settler community.

In 1678 the prohibition on carriage of new settlers was also removed (Matthews 185, 193). The tide had turned against West Country control of the Newfoundland market. The fishing merchants began to concentrate on the off-shore fishery, traveling only as far as the Banks. The settlers began to assert their right to prosecute an in-shore fishery[8], and contact (and therefore tension) between the visiting fishermen and the settlers diminished. Communities began to spread further north along the east coast of the island and westward along its north coast as well. The legal restrictions added throughout the seventeenth century by the British Parliament had underlined the fact that the Newfoundland settlers were considered displaced, legally as well as geographically, from their home community; the response of the settlers, in their determination to remain, was to create a new home.

3.2 Third Wave Growth: 1700 - 1824

Threats to the settlements did not all originate from across the ocean. French raids had killed 95 English residents by 1696 (O'Flaherty 53), and in the face of a continuing French claim to parts of the island[9] and occasional alliances forged between the French and the M'iq ma'ak, the British decided to create the basis of a military and governance structure. Fortifications were built at key points along the shoreline, and a Governor and Justices of the Peace were appointed in 1729 (PC 4: 1838-40; CSP 1728-29: 377-9). The commitment to the establishment of a governing structure could not be said to be whole-

hearted; the island's Governor was in residence only during the fair weather months. This lack of institutional presence contributed to a growing sense of independence on the part of outport settlers. Localized institutions, formal and informal, had begun to take over the maintenance and establishment of criteria for Insider identity and the definition and treatment of Strangers.

There remained, however, a demonstrated need to protect the port of St. John's, and the presence of the garrison and the addition of fortifications at various points across the island indicates continuing British commitment to the island.[10] The fact that the British government's interest was focused on the island's resources rather than its settlers is evident in the words of the Prime Minister of the period, Lord North: "Whenever [the settlers] wished to have roasted, the Governor was to give them raw, and whenever they wished to have the raw he was to give it to them roasted" (Dropmore Hist MSS 548, quoted in Prowse, *History*, xix). The British government soon recognized the need to create a more visible institutional presence in St. John's, if not in the outports themselves. The island's Governor was empowered to administer a Criminal Court in 1750. In 1764 a Customs Collector was employed to make certain the Crown received its fair share of the burgeoning New England trade, and in 1765 the New World's first Methodist Mission was established at Harbour Grace (Story 18-19). Meanwhile religious tension was exacerbated by a vigorous competition amongst Anglican, Catholic and Methodist clerics, who, in their pursuit of new adherents (and the funding from Britain which accompanied increased numbers), enflamed sectarian rivalries brought over from Stuart England and post-Cromwell Ireland. In places like the Codroy Valley, rife with hostilities between Mi'k ma'aq, English, Scots, French, and newly-arriving Irish, the cleric in each

parish served to unite his flock under one large, sectarian tent (Szwed 20, 30-32). Newfoundland society was evolving into a more complex macro-community made up of micro-communities divided into ethnically homogeneous and monolithically religious sub-groups. These divisions persisted, with manifestations which were occasionally violent, well into the 20th century.[11]

The economy of the outports was becoming more diverse, with a mixture of hunting, husbandry, and small-scale farming adding to the traditional prosecution of the in-shore fishery. These communities were not self-sufficient; each required manufactured goods that could only be acquired in trade. For this an intermediary was necessary. The figure of the local merchant, employed in some measure by the fishing houses but based in the community, now became a mainstay of outport existence. The practice of trade between merchant and fisherman—the so-called “truck system”—created significant dyadic imbalances in communities for, with the exception of the yearly seal hunt, the local economy was not cash-based, and the merchant set the prices both for the fish he bought and the equipment and food he traded for the fish. Unsurprisingly in such a system weighted to one end of the transactional dynamic, there was seldom surplus credit and often a sizeable deficit accrued over years of good fish harvests and bad.

The truck system is an example of history that is not distant in the minds of Newfoundlanders. The non-cash economy persisted until the 1930s in rural Newfoundland (Story, “Newfoundland” 22) perhaps, as John Szwed notes, because fishermen appeared averse to risk, and so were loathe to agitate for change to the system (49). It is equally likely that the relative independence offered to each

fisherman contrasted favourably with the experience of his forebears. In such plays as *From Toxic Rock It Grows*, produced by Theatre Newfoundland Labrador in 1997, the local merchant is presented as an Insider who, through force of circumstance, has shifted Outward in local eyes to assume the status level of a Necessary Outsider.

The truck system, while contributing to the creation of a hierarchy of Insiders within each outport based largely on economic status, also served to inhibit geographical mobility on the part of local residents. By the 1830s it can be said that an Inside had developed in Newfoundland outport life in response to the array of hostile forces marshalled against its existence, despite all the factional tensions which existed within or between communities.

With the fact of Newfoundland settlement now an unalterable reality, the British government made further concessions to its proper administration. A full-time Governor was appointed in 1817, resident on the island year-round (O'Flaherty 129).[12] A Chief Justice was appointed in 1819, who ruled that Newfoundlanders could legally own property and their own homes. Full colonial status became inevitable. The British retained full control over the administrative affairs of the island until 1832, although for Newfoundlanders not resident in St. John's, these changes were likely perceived as abstract in any case. The outport had been essentially self-sufficient for generations, and neither the Chief Justice nor the Governor was known to venture off the Avalon Peninsula.

Newfoundlanders in 1824 maintained, especially in St. John's, a strong attachment to the British Crown, but as a people they were evolving, in spite of these sentiments, into a singular and distinct society.

3.3 Colony: The Illusion of Inclusion, 1824 – 1900

Class-based differences remained a source of tension within Newfoundland society, even as increased local mercantile activity provided growth and stability. The population grew in spurts: from approximately10000 in 1750 to nearly fifty thousand by 1830 (GN 2/1/A 22: 24, 297, qtd. in O'Flaherty 122, Story 27). A census of 1753 indicates that about 70% of Newfoundland's summer population comprised servants (Wells 50), and that of these, a majority were Irish (CO 194/15: ff.192, 197-8, qtd. in O'Flaherty 77). Irish servants were the most likely to remain in Newfoundland, given the economic conditions and dearth of opportunities in Ireland.

The development of class-based Insider-Stranger demarcations was thus largely based on ethnic and sectarian differences, heightened by the shift in demographics as Irish settlers began to outnumber the English in outports and towns. As a group, the Irish constituted a tangible Stranger presence in the towns. Many were unilingual Gaelic speakers and all were Roman Catholics. Roman Catholicism, alone amongst faith-based systems in Newfoundland, was proscribed (CSP 1728-9: 378). In class terms, the Irish were largely poor and uneducated, effectively prevented from holding office (Coughlin 9), and their efforts at husbandry, pursued within the emerging conventional practices of the outports but in many cases in contravention of the law, were closely watched and often stifled (CO 194/12, f.2, qtd. in O'Flaherty 125). Their superior numbers and poverty presented the threat of discord, a threat which was manifested in repeated incidents of criminality and violence in the first part of the 19th century.[13] Efforts at this time towards the establishment of a constitutional system administered in Newfoundland,

culminating in the first Representative Government in 1832 (followed by Responsible Government in 1855), were the products of these tensions. Patrick Morris and William Carson, two prominent citizens of Irish Catholic and Scottish Protestant stock, respectively, recognized the social benefits in enfranchising a growing Catholic citizenry. In promoting voting rights for the Catholic minority, their objective was to provide a measure of social responsibility for each citizen. The elevation of the Irish from an unequal minority to stakeholders in the social good, coupled with increasing levels of education, would in theory end religious strife and ensure the well-being of the island's residents.

The status of the region's burgeoning Irish population had become a significant issue. In the first years of the new century the problem of discrimination had quickly become more acute. Twenty-four thousand Irish emigrated to Newfoundland between 1811 and 1830, a significant increase in the island's population (GN2/1A, 22: 24, 297; 25: 99-100; 26: 84; 27: 1-4). Spurred by two years of declining fish prices and other economic factors, impoverished Irish took to the streets in St. John's, looting, burning, and fighting (CO 196/60: f.211).

This tradition of sectarian violence, and the insertion of the word "ral" into Newfoundland life, carries significance for this discussion of depictions of the "other" in Newfoundland's dramatic literature and performance history, for the practice of Christmas *mummering*, although itself derived from West Country tradition, soon came to be associated with "ral" or "Irish" (i.e., violent, anti-social) behaviour. The men who attacked the anti-papist editor Henry Winton in 1835, severing his ears, were disguised as mummers, and further incidents between 1835 and 1861 involving

mummers using their cloaked identity to exact rough justice upon citizens of wealth or status led to the banning of the practice across the island in 1861 (Ryan 102). It should be noted here that mummering in St. John's, in contrast to the outports, involved individuals who might not be identifiable even when unmasked, as they might come from other parts of town. Nor could all mummers be identified with certainty as Irish. The bestowal of Stranger status in such cases is based on a broad perception of group activity rather than on specific facts and information. The identity of *Stranger* had been affixed to mummering. The next chapter will detail the distinctive approaches to performance which resulted from the deepening cultural split between rural and urban communities in Newfoundland.

As a result of sectarian divisions the educational system was split, like the towns, along denominational lines.[14] The system persisted in Newfoundland until 1998. A system established to keep the peace had as its most lasting result the separation of outport residents who had everything to gain by living and working together and coalescing against the Outside forces which served to retard their development. Despite, or perhaps because of, this dividing of rivalries into camps, sectarian violence continued to flare from time to time.

By the 1860s some progress had been made in bringing together the main sectarian rivals under the roof of the Legislature. Newfoundland had been granted Responsible Government in 1855, but with this evolution as a macro-community came a new form of Stranger, as the issue of confederation with the new Canadian nation emerged. In 1869 Prime Minister Frederick Carter decided to put the question of confederation with Canada to a vote in the house. Canada appeared to offer little to

Newfoundland voters in economic terms, as it did not represent a new market for its goods. Rumours abounded of direct taxation and the undue influence of the French. The colony was adjudged, at least by its legislators, to be in better shape, at this point, than the federation. The decision of the Newfoundland legislature to resist confederation stands as another marker in the development of a distinct identity. Anti-confederate politicians had been able to capitalize, for the first time, on an emerging nationalist sentiment (Hiller 84-5). By a vote of twenty-one to nine in the Legislature, confederation was rejected.

By the end of the 19th century Newfoundland had evolved, despite various impediments, into a distinct colonial entity. Its culture remained, in most respects, firmly rooted in its British origins, with many of the same demarcations of otherness: class, religion, and the insularity of smaller outlying communities. Its population had progressively increased and micro-communities now included a large Irish minority, an urban *haute bourgeoisie* centred in the capital and towns, and a large working class, resident in both town and bay. Newfoundlanders had achieved colony status, followed by Representative Government, leading to the advent of Responsible Government. A railway across the island, built at a ruinous cost on narrow-gauge rail,[15] connected communities for the first time by land. Linguistic divisions had receded as the Irish were assimilated into local culture and the French influence on the west coast was diminished by the Anglo-French Convention between England and France in 1904 (Hiller 23). By 1900 Newfoundlanders had evolved, through the establishment of institutions and progressive settlement, into a people. Over a period of four hundred years a disparate group of migrants—among them entrepreneurs, missionaries, and the desperately poor—had

forged a common home and had traded their otherness for the sometimes transitory cloak of the Insider.

3.4 Newfoundland in the North Atlantic Sphere, 1900 - 1945

The beginning of the 20th century marked Newfoundland's entry into the league of nations, if not officially, then at least in terms of increased recognition and contact with the world. From the turn of the century until the end of the Second World War, the British, Americans, and Canadians, engaged with their own geopolitical agendas, found Newfoundland a convenient north Atlantic outpost in which to fly the flag. The colony, now self-administering under "Responsible Government", expended millions of dollars and thousands of lives contributing to the British war effort (Major 322-338). The identity of the Dominion (as it was now called) may have been buttressed by these expenditures, but the economy, while beginning to diversify beyond narrow fish-based concerns, could not effectively replenish these losses. The mushrooming public debt—63% of gross revenues by 1934—led directly to the loss of Newfoundland's independence. Where the private fortune of Sir Robert Bond had saved the island's people from a similar fate at the turn of the century, in 1933 there was no recourse. A rash of political scandals in the 1920s had marred the two governments of Sir Richard Squires, further inhibiting the government's ability to redress the fiscal imbalance. Social and political unrest had arisen as workers in the fishing industry, dissatisfied with inconsistent prices and substandard working conditions, coalesced around the charismatic Richard Coaker.[16]

Coaker's Fishermen's Protective Union was a force in island politics for nearly twenty years, even participating in a "national government" from 1917-19 (McDonald 166-7). This was the first time outport voices had truly been represented in St. John's. The achievement was short-lived and in some ways ruinous for those who had supported the FPU alliance. Squires' numerous failures in promoting the FPU agenda—his inability to persuade the Exportation Board to reform export regulations, to prevent the collapse of the fish market in 1921, or to forestall increased competition from countries such as Norway and Iceland which had already modernized their fishing practices—produced an immediate and deleterious effect. In 1919 Newfoundland boasted a balanced budget. By 1920-21 the annual deficit had ballooned to over 4 million dollars—50% of the Dominion's revenue (Noel 151). The accumulated debt in 1920 stood at an insupportable 43 million dollars. Loans taken out by the government to provide relief to its poorer constituents soon raised this figure to over 60 million dollars (Cmd 4480, Newfoundland Royal Commission 1933 Report). In 1925, humiliated by what S.J.R. Noel terms "the reckless rapacity" of Squires' administration (153), Coaker predicted the demise of independent government. He was soon proved right.

In 1933 the British government, previously the grateful recipient of Newfoundland's patriotic tithing, suspended its legislature and appointed a Commission of Government. No native Newfoundlanders were among the three politicians appointed to examine political remedies for the tangled affairs of the island.[17] While there was no effort made to take Newfoundland back into a tighter colonial embrace, the economic failure of one of its satellites did not reflect well upon the Crown. Therefore a solution was to be sought through a form of external mediation rather than appropriation. The

political identity of Newfoundland was effectively placed in limbo. Lord Alderdice, one of the six representatives of the Commission of Government, noted that Newfoundland now lay "betwixt and between a Crown Colony and a Dominion" (qtd. in Major 365). Political administration and the maintenance of an institutional presence in the outlying communities by the government in St. John's remained inconsistent and detached.

Economic prosperity remained elusive until the advent of the Second World War, when the Allied Forces took an interest in Newfoundland as a staging base. As the point of North America most accessible to attack by sea, possible Axis targets across the island and in Labrador were identified and fortified. Canadian Forces established operations in Gander and Torbay, and in Goose Bay the Canadians built a facility used largely by the Americans. The Americans, for their part, negotiated sovereign rights on three parcels of land leased for ninety-nine years at rock-bottom rates from a desperate British government (Neary, *North* 46-7). The world had arrived in Newfoundland, but in large measure Newfoundlanders remained at its fringes, participating, but not driving, the changes in their economy and social lives.

In three years (1939-42) the entire economy of the region was transformed. By 1942 20,000 Newfoundlanders were engaged in base-building (Neary, "Mortgaged" 182). Men and women were migrating from impoverished outport communities (and the truck system) to the new hives of activity seeking wage-based work. By agreement with the British Crown, the government set wages for Newfoundlanders working on American bases at half those of the foreign workers (184-5). In spite of this inequity, the shift to a wage-based economy offered rural Newfoundlanders a new kind of independence: cash in their pockets, the chance to save, to acquire education, to benefit from increased health

services and contributions to infrastructure. Service industries sprang up to meet the expectations of these relatively affluent newcomers, who had come in prolonged contact with their continental neighbours. The commitment to the war proved to have significant implications for Newfoundland's future affiliation. Most Newfoundlanders serving in the military had been assigned to train in Canada. This effectively demystified the "Canadian Wolf," introducing, in many cases, Newfoundlanders and Canadians to each other for the first time.

As the Second World War ended, Newfoundland's economy was back in surplus, and those who had come to the emerging towns such as Corner Brook, Grand Falls, Gander and Stephenville to earn wages at the bases or in the forestry industry could feel that the suspended Dominion was regaining its place in the world. The sense of independence manifested in outport life was divorced from these economic-based criteria. Outports remained resolutely traditional in their way of life. Most were still not accessible by paved roads and did not have hydro-electric power; as Noel notes:

> The outports were still tightly knit communities, bound together by the homogeneity of their economic life, by extended patterns of kinship, by inherited customs and folkways, and, in Catholic and Protestant outports alike, by the acceptance of stern religious authority. (262)

This was soon to change irreversibly.

3.5 Confederation and Modern Newfoundland

The idea of Confederation with Canada was a product of the British political agenda. The Crown's Commission of Government had done little to prepare Newfoundlanders for a return of their democratic rights, and a return to full colonial status was not considered.

Confederation with Canada, then, seemed a likely solution. Neither of the suitors, however, saw any pressing reason to conjoin. Though their peoples had gained some familiarity with each other through the experience of the war, many Newfoundlanders (and more than a few knowledgeable people in the Dominions office of the Crown) felt that Canadians generally viewed Newfoundlanders with "condescension, and even contempt" (Clutterbuck, qtd. in Major 387). The matter was not assisted by the fact that Canada had sided with the province of Québec in challenging Newfoundland's rights to Labrador in 1927. The option of Confederation had to be nudged along by the British, surreptitiously, to avoid offending local sensibilities

It was clear that for Confederation to succeed local support required a champion. Regulations enacted for the National Convention of 1946 to prevent "carpet-bagging" by St. John's commercial interests obliged outport candidates to have a documented local affiliation. This provided an opportunity for Joseph R. Smallwood, a former union organizer and journalist well-versed in the roughhouse ways of St. John's politics. His pig farm was located in Gander and he could boast of having been born in Gambo. From the beginning of his energetic promotion of Confederation at the National Convention debates to his retirement from active politics in 1971, Smallwood would become yet

another source of division between Newfoundlanders as he shepherded the province through the most rapid period of economic and social change in its history.

The roots of Smallwood's divisive impact lie in the mixed affiliations of his early years. Though he presented himself as a champion of the outports, he had left Gambo at a young age and had attended prestigious Bishop Feild school with "the scions of merchants" (Smallwood 72). In his autobiography *I Chose Canada* Smallwood describes his grandfather as a "Water Street merchant" (18). Nevertheless, with his colloquial dialect, prodigious memory for names and encounters, and a genuine talent for promoting Newfoundland on radio and in books, "Joey" Smallwood could persuasively market himself as a successor to Coaker, the champion of the outports. An opportunity was presented to these communities through the prospect of Confederation to redress the perceived imbalance which existed between town and bay.

Opposition to this emergent point of view could be found in St. John's. The wealthy merchant families of the capital would have preferred that the issue of Confederation to never have been raised at all.[18] Their numbers dominated the legislature, including many outport seats. They had little incentive to invest in the educational development of outport residents or to provide them with more political independence.

The initial ballot, which took place in June 1948, offered three choices: continued Commission of Government for a period of five years, Responsible Government, or Confederation. The first option, though initially attractive to many people both in St. John's and the outports, was clearly a non-starter. The British had given no indication that Commission would extend longer than five years. The second option, a return to Responsible government, appealed to "pink, green and white" Newfoundlanders (i.e.

those of a nationalist bent), and was the choice of the merchant class, who would retain control over the economic levers of society. Memories remained fresh, however, amongst the general population, of what so-called “responsible government” had wrought in the 1920s and the early 1930s—corruption, mismanagement, and penury in the outports. The third option, Confederation, would reduce St. John’s to a provincial player in a national economy, where the Water Street merchants possessed few friends and no influence, but where outport citizens would benefit from the Canadian innovations of old-age pensions, the baby bonus and unemployment insurance. The elements existed for a fractious and divisive battle over the future identity of Newfoundland and its territory of Labrador.

Tensions between the Avalon communities, the outports of the west and south coasts, and Catholics and Protestants increased to a fever pitch. Anti-Confederates nailed outrageous claims, Luther-like, on the doors of Protestant churches. Politicians mailed provocative newspaper reports of Orange Order activity to Catholic clerics. Both sides published private newspapers full of rants and roars.[19] When the results were in, the Confederates had won a narrow victory, achieving a slender majority of 52.3%.

That Confederation remains as a vividly recalled and evoked presence in the work of Newfoundland dramatists of the 1970s to the present day is testimony to the impact of the referendum campaign on the consciousness of Newfoundlanders, as a series of events which forever altered their notion of identity.

3.6 Post-Confederation Issues of Identity

Two issues are of particular relevance to this examination of Newfoundland drama and the historical basis for its orientation within a narrative of alienation. The first is the programme of resettlement undertaken by the Smallwood administration, and the second is the moratorium on the cod fishery enacted by the federal government.

It is important to note that out-migration had afflicted many outport communities in the years prior to the enactment of an official resettlement programme. Copes notes that "the people of Newfoundland outports have long been dissatisfied with the inferior public services available to them and with the low income levels they have experienced in their native environment" (qtd. in Neary *Political* 226). Forty-six communities disappeared entirely between 1945 and 1953, as regional economies were shattered by the departure of American and Canadian troops.

The idea of resettlement can be viewed as having originated with the people of the outports themselves. Following requests from outport residents in 1953, the provincial government created a programme of financial assistance to aid families who wished to relocate. From 1954 to 1964, a further 115 outport communities were vacated as a result of this "Centralization Program" (Neary 227). The need, in the government's view, to consolidate the fishing industry in order to create more efficient means of production resulted in a new, more aggressive form of the programme in 1965. The "Newfoundland Fisheries Household Resettlement Program" was incorporated with a five year mandate. Assistance rose to almost $3000 per household, on average (230). Copes notes, perhaps

disingenuously, that the “program was more flexible also in that it no longer required unanimous agreement in a community before support for resettlement was given” (230).

This aspect proved to be the most controversial element of the Smallwood resettlement programme. Communities divided along the lines of support or non-support for resettlement. Each confronted the prospect of reaching a “tipping point” where the out-migration of its people reached sufficient proportions that, regardless of the wishes of its remaining citizens, the outport was no longer viable as an entity. Plays such as Al Pittman’s *A Rope Against the Sun* and *West Moon* are examinations of the repercussions of this accelerated programme and the lingering bitterness and regret which was its legacy in many outport communities.

The issue of resettlement, as with that of the cod fishery, is neither exclusively economic nor emotional. That political and economic reasons existed to promote resettlement is indisputable. The manner and timing in which the programme was enacted can be challenged, but sufficient documentation exists to support the idea of the programme’s validity in political terms. In social terms, however, the resettlement programme proved to be an unmitigated disaster, leaving a psychic scar in the minds of the rural residents who were, in their eyes, its unwilling victims.

The demise of the cod fishery may be viewed in a similar light. In the new millennium there remains no solid evidence that cod stocks will ever be replenished in the North Atlantic. The ecological reasons behind the moratorium enacted in 1992 are clear. In contrast to the seal hunt, an ecologically sustainable undertaking which remains politically controversial, the decision to suspend cod-fishing was the result of ecological catastrophe: there were simply no more cod to be fished. In a documentary produced for

radio in 1993 by Chris Brookes entitled “What Happened Was…”, fisherman Sam Lee reveals his initial frustration at being prevented from fishing, the centuries-old occupation he loves. After spending a week aboard a Department of Fisheries and Oceans vessel, his hope that he can resume fishing is destroyed. “Sweep upon sweep over the Grand Banks with windowless nets brings up twenty small cod…there are no fish” (Peters “Baskets” 128).

In fishing communities women were forced to take jobs while their men festered, unwilling to retrain or to admit the loss of their traditional livelihood. A sense of victimization was indeed difficult to dismiss. Newfoundlanders were not guilty of over-fishing the waters off their vast coastline. The absence of the sophisticated technology Smallwood had wished to incorporate into the industry prevented them from taking in the massive hauls of richer countries such as Spain. As playwright Berni Stapleton puts it in *A Tidy Package*, “We are already as mysterious and remote as the pyramids … Displaced. Canada in 1994 and we have a new *displaced* people” (qtd. in Peters, “Baskets” 128). The intervening years have proven Stapleton correct. Little concrete action has been taken to correct the economic imbalance which resulted with the moratorium and the out-migration and despair that it triggered in outport communities. Fishing is an all-encompassing way of life within coastal settlements, an aspect of outport society that extends far beyond its economic utility. In the global economy, traditional ways of life are even less subject to protection as cultural heritage than previously.

Newfoundland society is, by most conventional measures, more prosperous and better governed than in the period prior to Confederation. Issues of cultural identity remain in play, however. The province remains subject to a dangerous level of out-

migration and, with the exception of the period in the early 19th century when Irish emigration peaked, the region has fared poorly in attracting new immigrants. The provincial government struggles to create sustainable local industry from the interests of multinational petroleum and gas concerns, with limited success. Polling companies report a consistent level of pro-independence support at about 20%. While this could be construed as evidence of Newfoundlanders' nostalgic relationship with their past, it can also be viewed as a further indication of a disconnection from other political entities, a feeling that Newfoundland remains Outside other established polities in a tangible and consequential way, and that the codes and demarcations related to otherness established over four hundred years of contested settlement remain valid.

Notes

[1] For the purposes of concision this paper will focus on the second European settlement after 1497. Appendices are available to provide context for the historical periods prior to this era.
[2] The first wave comprised the Vikings who briefly attempted a settlement in the area now known as L'Anse aux Meadows around the turn of the first millennium.
[3] The reasons of the British government for advancing settlement policies—such as they were—were exclusively mercantile in nature. The government wished to protect its claim to sovereignty over a resource. Reasons for settlement more aligned with a typical immigration profile—economic betterment, protection from persecution—can be found in the generations of poorer settlers who worked on the boats and who fought for the right to stay.
[4] Basically, resource exploitation and the utilisation of found resources, without regard for continued long-term use or the development of new resources and infrastructure.
[5] Aspects of this mixed economy were to include management of a "triangular" trade between England, Newfoundland, and continental Europe, as well as farming activity. (Cell, *Newfoundland Discovered*: 61).
[6] Amongst these, the harsh winter of 1612, an outbreak of scurvy, and tensions with the Beothuk are several of the most prominent, underlined by the inability or unwillingness of the West Country trade to support the plantation (Cell, *English Enterprise* 71)
[7] Other contributing factors including raids by the French, and the extremity of the winters (Cell, *Newfoundland Discovered* 292-3).
[8] "Off-shore" denotes that part of the fishery involving large boats which put out to sea on voyages of various duration. "In-shore" denotes the fishing practice of going out to sea only as far as that which allows a daily return to land, and thus involves much smaller boats.
[9] Although the French had agreed to fish only as far up the western coast as Point Riche, the actual location of this geographical boundary remained a source of dispute until the early twentieth century. The French

fishing presence on the west coast served to slow English settlement on that part of the island, and, coupled with the orientation of the French settlers to their counterparts in New France on the Canadian mainland, delayed a logical growth in activity between Anglo-Irish Newfoundlanders and their closest neighbours. This lack of contact played a factor in the suspicion and heightened tensions which greeted Canada's confederative overtures to Newfoundland in 1869.

[10] Michael Cook's *Colour the Flesh the Colour of Dust* (1971) puts forth the premise that the deployment of a regiment of soldiers to St. John's, who were given few duties while waiting for the infrequent incursions from the French, can be presumed to have done little for either the morale of the regiment or the social development of the town.

[11] As Story points out, this glacially-paced settlement took place entirely along the Newfoundland shoreline (21). This left the interior to occasional bands of nomadic aboriginal tribes from Labrador and Nova Scotia, and was the redoubt of the Beothuk, who had removed themselves further from the coasts as the English and French expansion occurred.

[12] The cost to the Crown accrued by early Governors for this indignity was impressive—the Governor's Residence in St. John's, built of stone and marble, expanded with each new appointment (see Major 197-8).

[13] One example which indicated the need for expeditious social reform was "the Winter of the Rals" in 1817 (Devine 1937, 39). A rowdy or rioter, "Rals" was the name given to rioters who gathered in several outports and St. John's in the hard winter of 1817, using battering rams to break into provision stores to get food.

[14] The first formal schooling had been attempted only in 1723 (Rowe 22). The Newfoundland School Society was founded one hundred years later, with many outports still lacking a school (40). The first movement towards denominational schooling took place in 1836 with the initial Education Act. This was furthered in the succeeding Act of 1843, and denominational splitting was officially enshrined in the Education Act of 1874, although by then the actual practice had been going on for years.

[15] The story of the concessions demanded—and received—by R.G. Reid would be the stuff of legend if they were not a matter of factual record. The railway left the government $9 million in debt and in danger of insolvency, with no money to run or maintain the railway. Reid offered to continue his involvement at the cost of five thousand acres of land for every mile of track. After 50 years, and an outright payment by the government of $1 million, the railway would revert to Reid's heirs. After predictable outrage over the contract (signed in 1898) had brought down a government, the new government of Robert Bond were forced to negotiate a termination of the contract. This alone cost $1 million for renunciation of the reversionary rights; $850,000 for the additional lands acquired by the Reids; and another $1.5 million to reacquire control of the telegraph system. See Major, *As Near To Heaven By Sea – A History of Newfoundland and Labrador*.

[16] After several significant political misjudgments Coaker would renounce his followers and retire to Jamaica just as they were poised to wield real power in the legislature, retiring to a government pension and relative affluence (and political inactivity). See Major, *As Near To Heaven By Sea*.

[17] The so-called "Newfoundland" representative on the Commission was a Canadian, William Stavert. Stavert, an agent of the Bank of Montreal, was a Confederate (Major 363). The stacking of the deck in favour of eventual Confederation with Canada thus began with the resumption of Imperial power by the British authorities and the naming of the three Commission members.

[18] A mark of their influence, and the determination of the British Government, is that a motion to include Confederation as an option in the coming referendum was soundly defeated at the national Convention, 29 votes to 16. In spite of this seemingly democratic expression of the people's wishes, the British Government included Confederation with Canada as an option.

[19] Tom Cahill's plays *As Loved Our Fathers* (1974) and *The Only Living Father* (1991) bring the Confederation debates memorably to life.