

Canadian Historical Nonchalance and Newfoundland Exceptionalism

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Canadian Historical Nonchalance and Newfoundland Exceptionalism

AN AMERICAN COMMENTARY ON CANADA RISKS INCITING Great Wall of Canada ire.¹ I earned Canadian umbrage at composer R. Murray Schafer's 60th birthday symposium at Banff in 1993.² My keynote deplored music's decline from universal art – Kepler's harmony of the spheres – to national chauvinism.³ Canadian listeners were outraged. Their concert halls and airways were swamped by American media. Schafer himself had ditched cosmopolitanism for national music. He deplored Canada's enslavement to "alien cultural models."⁴ "So," he rebuked me, "you don't like our Canadian music?" An elderly Québécois came to my aid. "Who needs Canadian music? We have Berlioz." A decade later I was blindsided by ignorance of hockey, unaware it was "ontologically Canadian" and spiritually inherent to Canadianness.⁵ A Memorial University colleague lauded me as "the Wayne Gretzky of geography."⁶ Who, I witlessly wondered, was Wayne Gretzky?

My Canadian forays have been marginal or eccentric. A history thesis on the bellicose New Brunswick-Maine 1838-39 boundary dispute.⁷ Summer on a combine-crew in southern Alberta among pious Hutterites and profane Kentucky wheat ranchers. Deadly faculty do's in 1960s Toronto leavened by waterfront pub crawls among migrant loners and Inuit hawkers. Immersion in Alberta's conflicted Ukrainian legacy. An Expo 67 sortie at Moshe Safdie's uninhabitable Habitat. A 1971 sojourn at Mt. Blackstrap, Saskatchewan's Winter Games artificial alp. Celtic confabs in BC's Gulf Islands and Newfoundland outports. Parks Canada and Heritage Canada conclaves in Victoria and Ottawa and St John's. My 1999 Memorial University Henrietta Harvey lecture on global slurs against islanders (idle, inbred, insular idiots), "Newfie" and "Tassie" (Tasmanian) jibes much the same. Many Canadian locales showcase exotica – Victoria's Stratford-on-Avon replicas, PEI's *Anne of Green Gables*, Edmonton's refugee-orchestral fame as the "Athens of

1 David Martin, "U.S.-Canada Border Wall Is Starting to Sound Like a Good Idea," *Huffpost Living Canada*, 21 June 2016, http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/david-martin/trump-wall_b_10577220.html. An earlier version of this essay was written for the Coming of Age symposium at the University of British Columbia, 12 March 2016, in honour of Professor Peter Seixas. For encouragement and insights I am grateful to him and to Shane O'Dea.

2 Tim Buell, ed., *The Tuning of the World: Proceedings: The First International Conference on Acoustic Ecology*, 8-14 August 1993 (Banff Centre, Banff, AB: First International Conference on Acoustic Ecology, 1993).

3 David Lowenthal, "From Harmony of the Spheres to National Anthems: Reflections on Musical Heritage," *GeoJournal* 65, no. 1-2 (2006): 3-15.

4 R. Murray Schafer, *On Canadian Music* (Douro-Dummer, ON: Arcana Editions, 1984).

5 J. Andrew Ross, "Specifying the Canadian: Four Books on Hockey," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 49, no. 3 (2015): 270.

6 Shane O'Dea tells me this was Michael Staveley.

7 David Lowenthal, "The Maine Press and the Aroostook War," *Canadian Historical Review* 32 (1951): 315-36.

the Tundra.” They mirror Canadian education “about a history that is ‘ours’,” says Peter Seixas, “even if it is not ‘here’.”⁸

Canada strikes me in sum as a congeries of curmudgeonly diversities: Atlantic and Pacific and arctic and prairie habitats, First Nation, Anglo-French, and colonial and immigrant habitants. How could a nation meld such different memories, such distinctive heritages, such divergent histories? Is Canadianism sturdier at the sesquicentenary than at the centenary, when Ramsay Cook held the search for national identity doomed from the start and sought to abandon the futile quest? Soon afterward William Westfall declared the region “destined to rival, if not replace, the nation-state” as the main focus of Canadian studies.⁹ Local, provincial, and regional consciousness far outweighs the stereotypical coast-to-coast national inventory not just touted to tourists but burned into Canadian brains – “chestnut canoes, Emily Carr, golden wheat fields of the prairies, Blackfoot medicine wheels, Haida totem poles, Joe Batt’s Arm on Fogo Island, ice skates, Northern Lights, soapstone carvings, loons, igloos, toboggans.”¹⁰ Will Canadian culture ever sufficiently coalesce, asks philosopher Ian Angus, to provide “enough unity to become a nation . . . at all”?¹¹

Some say that Confederation’s diversities doom its survival. “Canada cannot be a national state” because of the strength of its regional and provincial identities, contended David Alexander in 1980.¹² My 1950s and 1960s lectures in Ottawa and Toronto stemmed from Canadian concern with a more fragile federal amalgam – the British Caribbean, just emerging from colonial dependency. Born in 1958, the West Indies Federation expired four years later, the victim of insular distances and disparities of size, inter-island rivalries, ethnic and racial irritants, and utopian UN promises of sovereign benefits to impecunious islets.¹³ The breakup left in its wake two Canadian-gifted ferries, a hurricane-warning weather service, a peripatetic university, and an insane asylum – the last two, some sneered, one and the same.

8 Peter Seixas, “Are Heritage Education and Critical Historical Thinking Compatible? Reflections on Historical Consciousness from Canada,” in *Sensitive Pasts: Questioning Heritage in Education*, ed. Carla van Boxtel, Maria Grever, and Stephan Klein (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2016), 22.

9 Ramsay Cook, “Canadian Centennial Cerebrations,” *International Journal* 22, no. 4 (Autumn 1967): 663; William Westfall, “On the Concept of Region in Canadian History and Literature,” *Journal of Canadian Studies* 15, no. 2 (1980): 3.

10 Herb Wyile, *Anne of Tim Hortons: Globalization and the Reshaping of Atlantic-Canadian Literature* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2011), 7-8; 1994 Canadian brochure, in David Lowenthal, *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History* (Cambridge University Press, 1998), 4. See also “Roundtable on Re-imagining Regions,” *Acadiensis* XXXV, no. 2 (Spring 2006): 127-68.

11 Ian Angus, *The Undiscovered Country: Essays in Canadian Intellectual Culture* (Edmonton: Athabasca University Press, 2013), 92.

12 David Alexander, “New Notions of Happiness: Nationalism, Regionalism and Atlantic Canada,” *Journal of Canadian Studies* 15, no. 2 (1980): 29.

13 Gordon Merrill, “The Survival of the Past in the West Indies,” in *The West Indies Federation: Perspectives on a New Nation*, ed. David Lowenthal (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961), 18-19; John Mordecai, *The West Indies: The Federal Negotiations* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1968); Elisabeth Wallace, *The British Caribbean: From the Decline of Colonialism to the End of Federation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977).

With discrepancies little less dismaying, confederate Canada has survived – even flourished. How much this owes to political maturity, to welfare-statism, to First Nations accommodation, to immigrant rapport, and how much to abhorrence of all things your “gun-toting, bigoted, loud-mouthed, venal aggressive, tyrannical bastard of an American is” is hard to gauge.¹⁴ Yet heterogeneous Canada seems blessed with a forbearance unique in today’s fractious world. Canadians domesticate their differences rather like the Swiss, hallowing provincial particularisms while extolling national legacies of freedom, tolerance, fairness, justice, and inclusivity.

But these are legacies of recent vintage and imperfect consummation. To construct even “a quasi-national story of Canada” amid a plethora of “multicultural and regional emphases,” holds Seixas, requires “characteristics and values that can be credibly claimed as having persisted over the vicissitudes of time.”¹⁵ Canada lacks these. Pre-Cambrian geology and First Nations origin myths aside, Canadians celebrate not perdurable antiquity and traditional continuity but popular icons of scant historical merit. After five weeks in heritage-surfeited Israel, a land “choked by the clinging vines of its past,” Mordecai Richler thanked his “nearly empty” native Canada, “a small country with only a thin veneer of history,” for its freedom from suffocating memory: “I consider the watery soup of my Canadian provenance a blessing.”¹⁶

Canadians are not marinated in a Balkan broth of corrosive enmities, nor stultified by an Irish or Polish sense of perpetual victimhood. Nor do they feel compelled, like Greeks or Americans or even the Swiss, to vaunt foundational myths against the cool light of historical truth. Curators of a 1994 Swiss exhibition received death threats for demoting William Tell’s apple tale to a fruitful legend.¹⁷

Canada, like Sweden, struck the Trinidadian Nobelism V.S. Naipaul as a “secure and bypassed” country where heirlooms could be cherished because the collective past was neither painful nor dangerous.¹⁸ But lack of a capacious cultural palimpsest deprives many of temporal substance. Wallace Stegner’s history-starved boyhood on the empty Saskatchewan prairie echoes in many a Canadian memoir, such as Samuel Archibald’s backwoods Québécois Arvida, “so remote that it [seems] on the edge or outside of history.”¹⁹

Emptiness is not just a prairie dearth. Most of Canada feels thinly peopled. Even populous urban purlieus seldom seem crowded. Montreal is famously “a city of solitudes.”²⁰ Canadians tend to converse, if at all, at a semaphoric distance, bearing

14 Walter Stewart, *But Not in Canada!* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1976), 5.

15 Seixas, “Are Heritage Education and Critical Historical Thinking Compatible?” 22-3.

16 Mordecai Richler, *This Year in Jerusalem* (New York: Random House, 1994), 237-8.

17 Werner Meyer, *Nos ancêtres les Waldstaetten* (Musée Historique de Lausanne, 1994), 48; Olivier Pavillon, “Du débat à l’anathème: A propos de l’exposition ‘Nos ancêtres les Waldstaetten. La Suisse centrale au XIII^e siècle. Mythes et histoire’,” *Revue Suisse d’Histoire* 44 (1994): 311-14.

18 V.S. Naipaul, *A Bend in the River* (London: Deutsch, 1979), 152-3.

19 Wallace Stegner, *Wolf Willow: A History, a Story, and a Memory of the Last Plains Frontier* (1962; New York and London: Penguin, 2000), 112; Jeanette Kelly, “Samuel Archibald’s Arvida among the books long listed for Giller Prize,” *CBC News*, 15 September 2015.

20 Hugh MacLennan, *Two Solitudes* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1945); Lianne George, “Always the Writer in Exile: The Private Battles of One of Canada’s Greatest Provocateurs,” *Maclean’s*, 12 March 2009.

out Margaret Atwood's rueful take on tolerance: "In this country you can say what you like because no one will listen to you anyway."²¹ Canadian communities bespeak a remoteness both spatial and psychic, armoured in self-protective aloofness. Newcomers are long ostracized. "Here you come," as Tove Jansson says of a Swedish island incomer, "heading into a tight little group of people who have always lived together . . . on land they know and own and understand, and every threat to what they're used to only makes them still more compact and self-assured. Everyone has his obstinate, sure, and self-sufficient place. An island can be dreadful for someone from outside,"²² especially when insiders flaunt Canadian tropes of small-town isolation, dreadful winters, madness, and monosyllabic misanthropy.²³ Yet isolation is in the beholder's eye. Adam Nicolson asked a man in the Outer Hebrides what life was like in such a remote place. "Remote from *where*?" he retorted.²⁴

Historical consciousness, contrary to continental presentism, suffuses Atlantic Canada, notably insular Newfoundland. The first footfall of European exploitation and settlement, Newfoundland is Canada's final unruly appendage, cheated of its own sovereignty, many still feel, by perfidious Albion and treacherous Joey Smallwood.²⁵

Newfoundland spurned Canadian union in 1867-77: partly because Canada would not curb invasive French fishing on its west coast, partly from fear of higher taxes for meagre benefits, largely in hope of nationhood. Foreshadowed in its 1832 constitution and 1855 self-government, Newfoundland nationalism was fuelled by Irish Catholic Home-Rule gains won against British, Ontarian, and Québécois hegemony.²⁶ "Ye brave Newfoundlanders who plough the salt sea, With hearts like the eagle so bold and so free," sang anti-Confederates, "Would you barter the right that your fathers have won? Your freedom transmitted from father to son?"²⁷

En route to autonomy, Newfoundland gained dominion status in 1905 and territorial and economic clout by annexing Labrador in 1927. Battered by Depression-era disasters, however, Newfoundland averted bankruptcy only by temporarily ceding local rule to a British Commission in 1933. But despite American-based wartime prosperity and budget surpluses, the promised self-rule was not restored. Newfoundland subservience served British and Canadian interests

21 Margaret Atwood, "Notes towards a Poem That Can Never Be Written," *Selected Poems II 1976-1986* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), 74.

22 Tove Jansson, *The Summer Book*, trans. Thomas Teal (London: Sort of Books/Penguin [1972], 2003), 43.

23 J.C. Sutcliffe, review of *Arvida* by Samuel Archibald, *Times Literary Supplement*, 5 February 2016, 21.

24 Adam Nicolson, "The Islands," *Geographical Review* 97 (2007): 156.

25 Greg Malone, *Don't Tell the Newfoundlanders: The True Story of Newfoundland's Confederation with Canada* (Toronto: Knopf, 2012).

26 John Edward FitzGerald, "Conflict and Culture in Irish-Newfoundland Roman Catholicism, 1829-1850" (PhD diss., history, University of Ottawa, 1997); James K. Hiller, "Confederation Defeated: The Election of 1869," in *Newfoundland in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, ed. Hiller and Peter Neary (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980), 67-94.

27 "The Anti-Confederation Song," c. 1869; Glenn Colton, "Imagining Nation: Music and Identity in Pre-Confederation Newfoundland," *Newfoundland and Labrador Studies* 22, no. 1 (2007): 21.

against the United States, forfending an east-coast Alaska in Labrador and securing imperial control over fisheries, aviation, naval bases, and iron-ore reserves.²⁸ Silencing the local electorate allowed Canada “to strip the rings from the fingers and the gold from the teeth of the corpse of the Newfoundland state.”²⁹ Confirmed an Ottawa arbiter, “Canada got Newfoundland cheap, and we knew we’d never get her as cheap again.”³⁰

Newfoundlanders felt coerced into Confederation not only by overt British interests and Canadian lust for its resources, but, many suspected, by covert manipulation of the narrowly decisive 1948 referendum. The conspiratorial view that “Newfoundlanders are not free citizens of a province in Canada but rather captives in a nation occupied by a foreign power” was the leitmotif of the 1992 film *Secret Nation*, its British villain vilifying Confederation’s opponents as “Papists and crackpots.”³¹ Conspiracy rancour is still rife.³² “Within six months of Canada taking us over, we won’t have a pot to piss in or a window to throw it through,” growls Ernest in Jean Dohaney’s novel *The Flannigans*. “And in five years there won’t be a mineral left in the ground or anything with a fin in it left in the ocean.”³³ Newfoundland’s own Joey Smallwood was the Antichrist:

Confederation had entered the world with Joey, he had led Newfoundlanders to it and tempted them to partake of it as surely as the serpent had led Eve to the apple. And we had thereby . . . been banished forever from the paradise of independence.³⁴

In D.W. Prowse’s classic account of sturdy settlers hapless against colonial rapacity, “stupid, cruel, and barbarous” oppression by West-Country merchants and Whitehall autocrats had made Newfoundland an economic basket case.³⁵ And “five centuries of the plundering of Newfoundland’s resources left a legacy of political

28 Raymond B. Blake, *Canadians at Last: Canada Integrates Newfoundland as a Province* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), 127, 137-8, 178.

29 John Edward FitzGerald, “The Orthodoxy Unchallenged” [review of Blake, *Canadians at Last*], *Newfoundland and Labrador Studies* 11 (1995): 141.

30 A.W. Pickersgill to J.E. FitzGerald, 11 August 1992, quoted in John Edward FitzGerald, “‘The Difficult Little Island’ That ‘Must Be Taken in’: Canadian Interests in Newfoundland during World War Two,” *Newfoundland Quarterly* 35, no. 3 (Spring 2001): 26.

31 Jerry Bannister, “Whigs and Nationalists: The Legacy of Judge Prowse’s *History of Newfoundland*,” *Acadiensis* XXXII, no. 1 (Winter/Spring 2002): 105; Edward Riche, *Secret Nation* (film script), in John Edward FitzGerald, “Newfoundland Politics and Confederation Revisited: Three New Works,” *Newfoundland Studies* 9, no. 1 (1993): 112.

32 Raymond B. Blake, “Confederation and Conspiracy: An Extended Essay on Greg Malone’s *Don’t Tell the Newfoundlanders*,” *Newfoundland and Labrador Studies* 29, no. 2 (2014): 303-17.

33 M.T. Dohaney, *The Flannigans: A Novel* (St. John’s: Flanker Press, 2007), 21, quoted in Adam Lawrence, “Riots, Referendums, and Raging Fires: Revising History in Recent Newfoundland Fiction,” *Newfoundland and Labrador Studies* 25, no. 1 (2010): 134.

34 Wayne Johnston, *Baltimore’s Mansion: A Memoir* (London: Anchor, 2000), 183. See also Kirsten Sandrock, “Regional (Be)Longing in Canada – Newfoundland’s Unrequited Dream? Identity Politics in the Writing of Wayne Johnston,” *Zeitschrift für Kanada-Studien* 27, no. 2 (2007): 58-72.

35 D.W. Prowse, *A History of Newfoundland from the English, Colonial, and Foreign Records* (London: Macmillan, 1895), xix.

impotence, a chronically retrograde economy and a cultural life thwarted by the unrelieved rigours of bare subsistence, isolation and alienation.”³⁶ Yet not even these miseries made Newfoundlanders give up hope.

What destroyed hope was the thwarting of self-rule and the debacle of Confederation. Many “draped their homes in black flags. They cried,” recounts outport theatre founder Donna Butt, “for they knew they were giving up the dream of a Newfoundland nation.”³⁷ Confederation was followed by disastrous deals like the Churchill Falls dam that enriched Hydro-Québec at Newfoundland’s expense.³⁸ Because Ottawa feared inflaming Québécois secessionism, “Newfoundland paid a high price for helping to keep Canada united.” This reflected a recurrent pattern. “All too frequently simple majoritarianism in the national parliament has [ignored] the interests of smaller and weaker provinces,” notes Raymond Blake. And while chafing at the 1957 equalization policy, Ontario and Quebec sought “to create the illusion that they were governing in the national interest.”³⁹ The equalization problem, charged Toronto columnist Margaret Wente, had been especially exacerbated by Newfoundlanders:

Siphoning money from the haves to the have-nots . . . turned Canada into a permanently aggrieved nation, [with] every region . . . convinced that it’s being brutally ripped off by every other region. No one is better at this blame game than the Newfs . . . and the only way to get elected there is to pledge to stop the terrible atrocities of Ottawa.⁴⁰

But while Newfoundland’s griefs extinguished Prowse’s promise of a progressive industrial future, they also unleashed a cultural reawakening that sanctified the outport past – a Newfoundland Renaissance of stunning creativity in literature, theatre, the arts, and folklore that mourned loss yet revitalized outport life. Newfoundland’s future was now felt to lie in its past, whose communal virtues must be shielded against industrial modernity.⁴¹ “The old order that produced all of us,” warned a leading activist, “is being smashed, homogenized, and trivialized out of existence.”⁴² And the weakening of traditional communal ties engendered a drive to

36 F.L. Jackson, *Newfoundland in Canada: A People in Search of a Polity* (St. John’s: H. Cuff Publications, 1986), 78.

37 Donna Butt, Address to Convocation, Sir William Grenfell College, 9 May 2003, *Memorial University of Newfoundland Gazette* 35, no. 19 (12 June 2003): 6.

38 Jerry Bannister, “A River Runs Through It: Churchill Falls and the End of Newfoundland History,” *Acadiensis* XLI, no. 1 (Winter/Spring 2012): 211–25.

39 Raymond B. Blake, *Lion or Jellyfish? Newfoundland-Ottawa Relations Since 1957* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015), 15, 9.

40 Margaret Wente, “Oh Danny boy, pipe down,” *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), 6 January 2005.

41 Bannister, “Whigs and Nationalists,” 100–2, and Jerry Bannister, “Making History in Twentieth-Century Newfoundland,” *Newfoundland Studies* 18, no. 2 (2002): 175–94; this is expanded in Jerry Bannister, *The Politics of Cultural Memory: Themes in the History of Newfoundland and Labrador*, research paper for *Royal Commission on Renewing and Strengthening Our Place in Canada* (St. John’s: Queen’s Printer, 2003), 125–55.

42 Sandra Gwyn, “The Newfoundland Renaissance,” *Saturday Night* 91 (April 1976): 45.

retain (or reinvent) local heritage.⁴³ Pride in ancestral “simplicity and lowliness [and] quiet, moral tone,” urged oral historian Nimshi Crewe, was all the more needed “now we are part of a larger and harsher people.”⁴⁴

At the heart of lament for a lost heritage was “the belief that the island’s golden age lay not in a modern future of material wealth but in an idyllic” outpost past.⁴⁵ “The simple fisher-folk,” as heritage maven Edythe Goodridge mocked the common stereotypes, then “the rowdy Irishman and now . . . the northern Appalachian hillbilly” became the polymath curator of cherished customs.⁴⁶ Wayne Johnston’s paragon in *Custodian of Paradise* was born equally adept, in Lisa Moore’s trope, at “knowing how to build a boat, or fillet a fish with a few economical flicks of the wrist, dance the goat, play the fiddle, or produce a recitation.”⁴⁷ Romantic archaism, diaspora nostalgia, academic chic, and tourist hype created useful fictions of an admirable if often unendurable past, with an odyssey for every outpost. Fabricated tradition in Newfoundland, as in Brendan Bradshaw’s Ireland, is vital to community well-being, “a beneficent legacy, its wrongness notwithstanding.”⁴⁸

Nostalgia for a past that never existed sustained a historical fable that contrasted the unspoiled past with the corrupted present, equated change with degeneration and deviance, and condemned economic development. In F.L. Jackson’s withering conclusion, “enthusiasm for cultural heritage [is] a *rebellion against the present*. . . . Heritage-worshippers [cherish] the most outrageous caricatures” in adulating “not the past itself, but . . . some idealized picture of it [to] compensate for the . . . authenticity and connectedness . . . missing in the life of the present.”⁴⁹ Yet this fabricated past so reanimated Newfoundland spirit that “our artists and preservationists became permanent inhabitants,” notes Shane O’Dea. “Many who had emigrated came home and drew in new people in their path. . . . They came because of a past and a place, they stayed because the present promised a future.”⁵⁰

In a 2003 royal commission on provincial identity, Newfoundlanders claimed a sense of history “felt and expressed more strongly” than anywhere else in English-speaking Canada.⁵¹ A 2007-2008 survey confirmed that view: 75 per cent of

43 Gerald L. Pocius, *A Place to Belong: Community Order and Everyday Space in Calvert, Newfoundland* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1991), 21-4, 272-90.

44 Nimshi Crewe to J. R. Smallwood, 24 April 1951, quoted in Jeff Webb, *Observing the Outposts: Describing Newfoundland Culture, 1950-1980* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016), chap. 2.

45 Bannister, “Making History,” 180.

46 Ethyle Goodridge interview, 11 November 2007, quoted in Roger Bill, “Culture vs. Policy vs. Culture: The Evolution of Cultural Policy in Newfoundland and Labrador, 1967-2007,” *Newfoundland and Labrador Studies* 24, no. 1 (2009), 91-109.

47 Wayne Johnston, *The Custodians of Paradise* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2007); Lisa Moore, “Notes from Newfoundland,” *The Walrus*, May 2011, 24.

48 Brendan Bradshaw, “Nationalism and Historical Scholarship in Modern Ireland,” *Irish Historical Studies* 26 (1989): 348-9.

49 F.L. Jackson, *Surviving Confederation: A Revised and Extended Version of “Newfoundland in Canada* (St. John’s: H. Cuff, 1986), 21 (emphasis in original).

50 Shane O’Dea, “Culture and Country: The Role of the Arts and Heritage in the Nationalist Revival in Newfoundland,” *Newfoundland Studies* 19, no. 2 (2003): 385.

51 Alexander, “New Notions of Happiness,” 4.

Newfoundlanders held their provincial past very important, compared with fewer than half elsewhere, even in Quebec.⁵²

[Our] sense of place . . . links the past with the present – a deep sense of belonging. . . . We have a passionate appreciation of our cultural and artistic heritage, and enjoy a strong sense of connection to the land and the sea. Our provincial emblems – Atlantic puffin, pitcher plant, labradorite, black spruce, Newfoundland pony – reflect our ancestors' humour and resilience. . . . The spirit [they] brought here . . . lives on in each one of us. We know our culture is special and even unique. . . and other Canadians know it, too.⁵³

But to other Canadians Newfoundland exceptionalism has not been laudable but laughable, the butt of jibes against a bumpkin pilloried to stress their own sophistication (at least until the musical hit *Come From Away* hyped islanders for "opening up their hearts and homes" to thousands stranded at Gander by 9/11).⁵⁴ "We're slobbering idiots, slack-jawed simpletons, rustic fish billies living in Dogpatch-on-the-Rocks, . . . the laughing stock and 'white trash' of Canada," wrote Ray Guy in 1968. He warned that "the fad for ridiculing all things Newfoundland . . . could leave a scar that will take a long time to heal."⁵⁵ Newfoundlanders similarly traduced a generation later feared that "a future of prosperity and self-reliance is not achievable within the Canada of today."⁵⁶

Their alienation stemmed from the humiliating terms of union with Canada in 1949. As a formerly independent dominion with a wealth of natural resources, Newfoundland felt entitled to special status and treatment. Scorning this exceptionalism, Ottawa saw the islanders as poor and feckless folk incapable of managing their own affairs and recklessly dependent on federal handouts. Lumped with the depressed Maritimes, Newfoundland was demoted to their meagre level of financial support.⁵⁷ Confederation and denial of promised aid in 1959 led to the abandonment of 400 outport communities and to calls for secession.⁵⁸

Relations were exacerbated as unemployed islanders emigrated en masse, their numbers redoubled by the 1992 cod moratorium, to Ontario and later to Alberta oil-

52 Margaret Conrad et al., *Canadians and Their Pasts* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013), 107-11, Table 6.1.

53 Preface – "What Is This Place That Holds Fast Our Hearts?," *Royal Commission on Renewing and Strengthening Our Place in Canada*, v.

54 Peter Marks, "'Come From Away' Comes in for an Exuberant Broadway Landing," *Washington Post*, 12 March 2017.

55 Ray Guy, "Newfie, Nigger, Frog or Wop," *Evening Telegram* (St. John's), 1 February 1968.

56 *Royal Commission on Renewing and Strengthening Our Place in Canada*, 2.

57 Corey Slumkowski, *Inventing Atlantic Canada: Regionalism and the Maritime Reaction to Newfoundland's Entry into Confederation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011). More a distant cousin than a sibling to the Maritimes, Newfoundland's accession recast the whole region as "Atlantic"; see Margaret Conrad, "The 'Atlantic Revolution' of the 1950s," in *Beyond Anger and Longing: Community and Development in Atlantic Canada*, ed. Berkeley Fleming (Fredericton: Acadiensis Press, 1988), 55-96.

58 Raymond B. Blake, "Canada, Newfoundland, and Term 29: the Failure of Intergovernmentalism," *Acadiensis* XLI, no. 1 (Winter/Spring 2012): 49-74.

field jobs. Ontarians reviled the Newfoundland diaspora as “stupid lazy uneducated” foreigners, Albertans as “Mexicans with sweaters.”⁵⁹ Two generations on they remain mainland aliens, more attached to their homeland than other provincial migrants who are said to “bring a broader Canadian perspective.”⁶⁰

With permanent settlement of fishermen and fur trappers long discouraged, tension between the “need to leave” and the “desire to stay” has been a defining characteristic of Newfoundland for centuries.⁶¹ Many who leave stay at home in spirit. “You let him turn your heart into a Newfoundland heart, not a Canadian heart, and your soul into an Newfoundland soul not a Canadian soul,” says a diaspora daughter of another’s émigré upbringing. “You understood the world [in] a Newfoundland context, not a Canadian context and there’s nothing you can do about it now, not a damn thing.”⁶²

Mainland antipathy redoubles for islanders who do not emigrate, traduced as greedy deadbeats sustained by cod-embargo compensation. Mainlanders tout Raymond Blake’s disparaging view: that before Confederation dragged them kicking and screaming into the 20th century, poor Newfoundlanders had been content to live in “primitive and wretched conditions.”⁶³ Poor “compared to *what?*” riposted John Edward FitzGerald, noting that 1930s Newfoundland “had enough dried saltfish to send some to the primitive, wretched, starving huddled masses of Alberta”; no matter that some said the saltfish were used as snowshoes.⁶⁴ Bailing out Newfoundland was held a drag on Canadian prosperity. “We send more money so that people can stay in the scenic villages where they were born, even though the fish are gone and there’s no more work and never will be,” charged a popular Toronto columnist, terming rural Newfoundland the world’s “most vast and scenic welfare ghetto.”⁶⁵

Historical consciousness was early feared as a barrier to Canadian unity. In 1839 Governor-General Lord Durham derided French Canadians as “a people with no history, and no literature . . . destitute of all that can invigorate and elevate . . . owing to . . . their peculiar language and manners”⁶⁶ – an aspersion that so fuelled Québécois militancy that Prime Minister Wilfrid Laurier 60 years later at Fort Louisbourg unavailingly pleaded “that the memory [of Anglo-French] conflicts be forever forgotten.”⁶⁷ So likewise were Newfoundlanders, reduced along with the

59 Jennifer Bowering Delisle, *The Newfoundland Diaspora: Imagining the Literature of Out-Migration* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2013), 24–6, 31–2, 38. See also Harry H. Hiller, *Second Promised Land: Migration to Alberta and the Transformation of Canadian Society* (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2009).

60 Conrad et al., *Canadians and Their Pasts*, 115–17, Table 6.3. Of Newfoundland migrants, 68 per cent held their provincial past “very important,” compared with 21 per cent of all Canadian migrants.

61 Moore, “Notes from Newfoundland,” 24.

62 Kay Anonsen, “Confederation,” *TickleAce: A Journal of Literary and Visual Art* 37 (2000): 51.

63 Blake, *Canadians at Last*, 146–7.

64 FitzGerald, “Orthodoxy Unchallenged,” 137.

65 Wente, “Oh Danny boy, pipe down.”

66 Earl of Durham, “Report on the Affairs of British North America,” *Journal of the House of Assembly of Upper Canada*, 4th sess., 13th parl. (1839), 96. See Richard Handler, *Nationalism and the Politics of Culture in Quebec* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988), 20.

67 Wilfrid Laurier (1900), quoted in “Historic Town Captured by Sir Wilfred’s Eloquence,” Louisbourg Heritage Society, *Heritage Notes*, no. 4 (February 1994): 1.

Maritimes to “quaint, patronage-ridden, backward obstacles,”⁶⁸ pressed to embrace modernity by ditching their crippling and regressive past.

In this mainland mindset, historical “attachment to place is [a] disadvantageous, inconvenient, even retrograde” hindrance to progress.⁶⁹ Canada “tends to jettison its history – especially when it is inconvenient,” as John Fraser put it in 2008, when oil riches briefly reversed Newfoundland’s have-not status. “You poor buggers,” quipped Newfoundland Lieutenant-Governor John Crosbie in distressed Toronto. “You’ve got potholes in your streets and leaks in your bank buildings, . . . beggars on Bloor Street. . . . But Newfoundland is going to stick with you, come hell or high water. Even if you all end up on the welfare rolls, we’ll tide you over.”⁷⁰

To be sure, much in the Newfoundland past is locally savaged as sordid or shameful, from Harold Horwood’s fish flake (“the only culture . . . we have”)⁷¹ to the scandals of Annie Proulx to the miseries of Bernice Morgan.⁷² But Newfoundlanders accused of being mired in the past are more truly its savvy, if self-mocking, devotees like Wayne Johnston’s Sheilaigh Fielding, who lampoons “the pagan practices to which people in this country have for so long clung and which some seek to preserve in the name of ‘culture,’ ‘folklore,’ ‘custom,’ or ‘tradition’.”⁷³ And mania for memory inspires Memorial University’s inclusive curriculum, where marine biologists routinely chat with folklorists, physicians with historians, linguists with geologists. Economics is earthy and nautical, English ecological and cartographic.⁷⁴ Newfoundland scholars share the historical awareness of Robertson Davies’ protagonist:

I must be modern; I live now. But like everybody else, . . . I live in a muddle of eras, and some of my ideas belong to today, and some to an ancient past, and some to periods of time that seem more relevant to my parents than to me. . . . When I most want to be contemporary the Past keeps pushing in, and when I long for the Past . . . the Present cannot be pushed away.⁷⁵

The challenge is to inhabit this “muddle of eras” in tandem rather than in opposition, as Newfoundlanders have tended to do. “The unspoken assumption has always been that Newfoundland and Labrador is not just a place but a time: it is forever on the cusp of going somewhere, becoming something, fighting someone,” observes Jerry Bannister. “To be a Newfoundlander is to know in your bones that the

68 Ian McKay, “A Note on ‘Region’ in Writing the History of Atlantic Canada,” *Acadiensis* XXIX, no. 2 (Spring 2000): 99.

69 Wyle, *Anne of Tim Hortons*, 244.

70 Leacock Debate, University of Toronto, February 2008, quoted in John Fraser, “When the Rock Gets Rich,” *Maclean’s*, 25 September 2008.

71 Harold Horwood, “Political Notebook,” *Evening Telegram* (St. John’s), 11 September 1952.

72 Annie Proulx, *The Shipping News* (New York: Scribner’s, 1993); Bernice Morgan, *Cloud of Bone* (Toronto: Knopf, 2007).

73 Wayne Johnston, *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams* (New York: Anchor, 1999), 375.

74 Webb, in *Observing the Outports*, charts the growth of Newfoundland studies at Memorial University as an inter-disciplinary collaborative enterprise from the 1950s on.

75 Robertson Davies, *Rebel Angels* (New York: Penguin, 1983), 124.

next big resource deal is just around the corner, because one day the sun will surely shine and ‘have not’ will be no more.” Hence, during the brief oil-based prosperity of the new millennium, provincial rhetoric focused on breaking free from history by power-fuelled deliverance from the economic injustices of the past.⁷⁶ The subsequent collapse of oil revenue that again plunged Newfoundland into the have-nots is a cautionary reminder of the perils of promised futures.⁷⁷

Whether crutch or curse, the past is Newfoundlanders’ unshakeable intimate companion. As with Allan Rankin’s Prince Edward Islanders, they “breathe their past like morning air – exhaling family genealogies, community histories, folklore, local museums, and historical societies.”⁷⁸ But that past remains nostalgically parochial, entrenched in suspicion of Canada and of Confederation. A century after Newfoundland’s brief autonomy, the activist actor Greg Malone dreams that “one day soon the diaspora will return . . . and Newfoundland and Labrador will be an independent country once again, unfettered and free.”⁷⁹

“The curse of provincial exceptionalism,” charges a reviewer, “too often influences both popular and academic views of Newfoundland and Labrador.”⁸⁰ Given the impassioned devotion Newfoundland inspires and requires, exceptionalism shows few signs of abating. “There is something precious about Newfoundland and Labrador that you cannot fully appreciate until you have lived here,” declared Premier Danny Williams in launching his 2006 cultural manifesto, “until you come to care for this place so deeply that the thought of losing it is more than you can bear.”⁸¹ Given the contrivances that cost Newfoundland its sovereignty, it is not unjustly said that “confederation created Newfoundland’s ‘Canadian question’.” The sesquicentennial leaves unanswered FitzGerald’s ensuing query: “Is confederation, in the long run, sustainable for Newfoundland?”⁸² Once the “Cinderella of the Empire,”⁸³ Newfoundland became her unloved stepsister, toes cut off to squeeze crippled feet into the merciless slipper of Confederation.

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76 Bannister “A River Runs Through It,” 213-17.

77 Charlie Gillis, “Bust Times Are Back in Newfoundland and Labrador,” *Maclean’s*, 8 April 2016.

78 Allan Rankin, “Museum Interpretation of Island History,” in *The History of Atlantic-Canada: Museum Interpretations*, ed. Peter E. Rider (Ottawa: National Museums of Canada, 1981), 124-5.

79 Malone, *Don’t Tell the Newfoundlanders*, 240.

80 Edward Hollett, [review of Alex Marland and Matthew Kerby, eds., *First among Unequals: The Premier, Politics, and Policy in Newfoundland and Labrador*], *Newfoundland and Labrador Studies* 29, no. 2 (2014): 327.

81 Danny Williams, in *Creative Newfoundland and Labrador: The Blueprint for Development and Investment in Culture* (St. John’s: Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 2006), 2.

82 FitzGerald, “Orthodoxy Unchallenged,” 142.

83 Thomas Thorner and Thor Frohn-Nilsen, *A Country Nourished on Self-Doubt: Documents in Post-Confederation Canadian History*, 3rd ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press 2010), 234-56.