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National Cultures and Popular Theatre

Four Collective Companies in Quebec and Newfoundland

by

(C) Patricia Margaret Anne de Gruchy, Cook, B.A.

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of
Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
Institute of Canadian Studies

Carleton University

OTTAWA, Ontario

December 15, 1986

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submitted by Patricia Margaret
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ABSTRACT

In the early seventies, Newfoundland culture experienced a "renaissance" similar to the cultural flowering which took place in Quebec in the years following the Quiet Revolution. While the arts in general in both provinces reflected the re-awakening of indigenous cultures, the re-appearance of such cultures was especially evident in the theatre, and particularly in "alternative" theatre, which had become a medium for the expression of various forms of cultural nationalism across Canada. Alternative theatre was often a vehicle for social criticism, and its mainly youthful creators sought new ways to express their concerns. The works of le Grand Cirque Ordinaire and le Théâtre Euh! in Quebec, and of the Mimmers Troupe and Codco in Newfoundland, are here compared in light of the parallels in the histories of the two provinces and the similarities in the separateness of the two cultures within the Canadian context. Particular attention is paid to the means by which the four companies approached the topics of language, class, church and family in their works, and to the popular, non-literary theatrical forms which were used to explore such topics.

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CHAPTER ONE

Nationalism, Community, and Canadian Theatre

The birth of indigenous Canadian theatre, theatre created by, for, and about Canadians, is as recent as the nineteen sixties and seventies.¹ Indigenous theatre in Quebec predates that of the other regions by several years, perhaps because it was stimulated by social events in that province to move from a "French-Canadian" identity as established by playwrights such as Gratien Gélinas and Marcel Dubé towards a québécois identity reflecting the new nationalism of Quebec society. Several years later, a similar process was to begin in Newfoundland, the result of Newfoundlanders' growing discontent with what Confederation had wrought, and of the re-affirmation of themselves as a culturally distinct people. Here, too, a rising awareness was particularly evident in the new, indigenous theatre.

There are striking similarities in the ways indigenous theatre developed in the two provinces and in the kinds of theatrical expression that occurred. Journalist Sandra Gwyn and theatre historian Renate Usmiani have both noted this fact, Gwyn in a 1976 article about the "renaissance" of Newfoundland culture,² and Usmiani in a 1983 book which traces the development of the "alternative" theatre movement in Canada.³ Janice Drodge, in a 1983 thesis in which she discusses the development of three of Newfoundland's major theatre companies, also refers to some of the historical, political, and theatrical parallels between Quebec and Newfoundland.⁴

It will be the purpose of this thesis, then, to pursue these similarities and parallels and to attempt to shed some light on the

role of indigenous theatre as an expression of regional and cultural identities by comparing four collective theatre companies: le Grand Cirque Ordinaire and le Théâtre Euh! of Quebec, and the Mummers Troupe and Codco of Newfoundland. Collective companies were chosen for two reasons: in the first place, both the ages of their members and the companies' aesthetic intentions make them, arguably, surer expressions of the social and cultural changes at work in the two provinces; in the second place, scripts of the companies' plays are either unpublished or were never actually written down at all, and it is their very ephemeral nature which makes the study of them so important. This present study was made possible by the efforts of Renate Usmiani, Janice Drodge, Gérald Sigouin,⁵ and Chris Brookes,⁶ whose works have provided histories of the four companies under discussion. It is hoped that the present study will facilitate further discussions about Canadian theatre in general and the theatre of Quebec and Newfoundland in particular.

The study of the four companies and their respective provinces will necessarily be grounded in such terms as "culture," "nationalism," "regionalism," and "cultural nationalism." These terms are, of course, "loaded," laden with the shades of meaning accorded them by various academic disciplines and all the points on the political spectrum. Thus the latter part of this introductory chapter will be devoted to defining their use within the context of this discussion. As a complete survey - or even a partial one - of the writings on nationalism and regionalism in this country would be another project altogether, I have chosen

instead to concentrate on some of those writers who have explored these concepts in terms of the importance of local communities in developing national ones. Thus the main theoretical framework of this discussion will be grounded in the writings of Robin Mathews,⁷ Susan Crean,⁸ and Howard Aster.⁹

In the second chapter, necessarily brief histories of the two provinces of Quebec and Newfoundland will be outlined, followed by theatrical histories leading up to the respective geneses of the four companies. This survey will function to place the works of the companies in their proper historical perspective. Chapter Three will begin with a discussion of the "alternative" and "popular" theatres, and how these terms relate to nationalism in Canadian theatre. The histories of the four companies themselves will then be recounted, with brief descriptions of some of their major productions. In Chapter Four these productions will be studied, particularly in terms of their themes and of the popular nature of their presentation. This recounting of productions will be a difficult task, for the nature of collective creation in Canada is such that the context of any given production is at least as important as its content, and context is not always easy to reconstruct.¹⁰ Finally, a concluding chapter will retrace the theories put forward in the first, in order to show how the work of the companies substantiates them, and an attempt will be made to consider the impact of the four companies on their respective cultural communities.

This study might best begin, then, with a definition of "culture."

The word will be used here in the sociological and anthropological sense, that being "the sum total of ways of living built up by a group of human beings and transmitted from one generation to another." ¹¹ It is a broad and simple definition, one which has been chosen for its sense of culture as a dynamic force which a society creates and transmits.

"Ways of living" can be transmitted both consciously and unconsciously. The transmitters, the senior members of society, will, in shaping and bequeathing a heritage, also pass along a valuation of that heritage. The receptors, society's youth, may accept a heritage passively and live their lives according to tradition, or they may criticize or even reject the values of their elders. This acceptance or rejection will in turn become part of "the sum total of ways of living." In societies which value questioning and criticism, culture is indeed a dynamic force, a dialectic which takes its shape somewhere between opposing values.

The colonized cultures of Quebec and Newfoundland were essentially static until a generation, responding to the effects of rapid modernization, began to resist the terms proposed by their elders for the absorption of social change. The changes in both provinces resulted in the relative democratization of the two societies, and rising middle classes felt they had a role to play in the directions those societies took. Reflecting the growing outspokenness of youth in Western culture everywhere, the youth of Newfoundland and Quebec were radically different from their elders, who had so recently

endured the patriarchal attitudes of Joey Smallwood and Maurice Duplessis.

While a people's response to rapid modernization is largely determined by culture, the nature of that response is in turn absorbed into that culture, becoming part of the evolutionary process. Perhaps out of relief at being at last faced with their own reality rather than the old rural ethos, many Quebecers welcomed the future with open arms. Newfoundlanders, on the other hand, seem to have had the future thrust upon them, and so were less inclined to regard modernization as an unmixed blessing.

In the Quebec of the early sixties, when *la survivance* (survival) finally gave way to *rattrapage* (catching up), the re-orientation of cultural values was seen as complementary to Quebec's entry into the modern industrial world. The ideals of cultural and economic independence and development ". . . were not discrete goals; they were interdependent."¹² The same could not be said for Newfoundland in the years following Confederation. As an English-speaking province, Newfoundland proved more susceptible to mainland standards of cultural expression than Quebec, and the influx of North American values during and after World War Two gave Newfoundlanders an inferiority complex about indigenous forms of expression. Sandra Gwyn's article of 1976 quotes artist Gerald Squires on the effect of the post-war years and of the growing reaction to it in the early seventies:

I think what you're seeing is an expression, really, of how strongly Newfoundlanders feel about a way of life they brought over from England and Ireland, and held onto for centuries, and then lost for a while. You see, in 1949, Newfoundlanders were made to feel the most inferior people in North America. As if there were some great monster out there telling us we were 200 years behind the times. But now we're starting to get our identity back. And our dignity.¹³

Gwyn makes several comparisons between Quebec and Newfoundland in the article, describing Newfoundland as "A society turned in upon itself and threatened from outside - by Progress rather than by les maudits Anglais," and she notes that

Just as Québec artists were at the leading edge of the Quiet Revolution, many Newfoundland artists are spiritual or practical members of the populist activist movement in the province that attempts both to celebrate the past and to build a democratic future.¹⁵

Gwyn sees a somewhat nostalgic element in the work of these artists, as the words "celebrate the past" suggest. After all, although it had long been a colony, Newfoundland had fought hard to be an independent one, causing the mother country some chagrin. It might be worth noting here that for Quebec artists at this time, nostalgia limited itself to the colony's few historical moments of rebellion.

On the other hand, Quebecers celebrated modernization in ways that Newfoundland did not. Many Quebec playwrights, for example, worked to demythologize the Catholic Church. We will see later that the tearing down of institutions took a slightly different direction in Newfoundland theatre. While Quebec artists seem to have taken pleasure in analysing the destructiveness of traditional ways of life,

Newfoundland's social heritage endured a different fate. It was not murdered symbolically under spotlights; instead, Newfoundland culture crept away shamefaced to die in quiet corners. While Quebec seemed to have taken charge of its own destiny, and the cultural outpourings of the late sixties and seventies certainly reflect this, Canada had taken charge of the destiny of Newfoundland. A return of cultural autonomy in Newfoundland could only come about when the people of Newfoundland began to re-assert their uniqueness within the Canadian federal structure.

It takes only a generation for a unique culture, a way of life, to become a thing remembered by elders rather than experienced by youth. The culture which was transmitted to the younger Newfoundlanders was a culture effectively silenced by its collision with North America. The perception of what had been lost, and was still being lost, became a major theme of artists and writers in the seventies, and that theme was nowhere more apparent than in the work of Codco and the Mummers. Janice Drodge notes that

Running through all the plays . . . is an implicit message praising that which is perceived as representing Newfoundland's "genuine" cultural heritage, while alternately denigrating and questioning that emanating from "outside" and/or modernizing influences. In this way, local theatre forms a dramatic and highly visible "counterpoint" to those forces leading . . . to the deterioration and subsequent devaluation of the original "way of life" and the identity so intimately connected with it. 16

Of course this is not to imply that traditional ways of life were always embraced uncritically. Codco's zany sketches of Father Dinn, or that

rare breed of nuns, the Sisters of the Silver Scalpel, do not hesitate to use the Catholic Church as a figure of fun. In one of the Mummers' productions, the Newfoundland anthem was used in ironic counterpoint to a fisherman's description of an unfair credit system. Whether this kind of satirizing and subverting of traditional institutions is comparable to similar methods used in Quebec theatre is central to the present argument and will be discussed in some detail in subsequent chapters.

In analysing the parallels between Newfoundland and Quebec cultures, Renate Usmiani says that "Joey Smallwood's policies for Newfoundland bore results similar to those of Duplessis in Quebec."¹⁷ It would be more to the point to note that Smallwood, whom Richard Gwyn has called "The Unlikely Revolutionary,"¹⁸ was a kind of Duplessis and Lesage combined. For while Smallwood, like Duplessis, ruled with a heavily paternalistic hand, he did so for a different reason than the Quebec Premier. Duplessis, even while selling bits and pieces of his province to outside interests, remained adamant that the future of Quebec was in the soil. Joey Smallwood, on the other hand, looked into Newfoundland's future and saw a province gleaming with the machinery of industry and commerce. While Duplessis neglected the cities which had become the centre of economic activity in Quebec, the Smallwood government's resettlement program pushed outport dwellers inevitably towards "growth centres." Significantly, the Duplessis era is widely referred to by Quebecers as *la grande noirceur* (the great gloom), while Herbert Pottle, a former colleague

of Smallwood's, gave his book about the Smallwood era the title Dawn Without Light. ¹⁹

If a case can be made, then, for the similarities between Quebec at the end of the Quiet Revolution and Newfoundland at the close of the Smallwood era, it must be made carefully. The situation in the two provinces, Quebec around 1965 and Newfoundland at least five years later, are similar, not, as Richard Gwyn said in a 1978 interview, "... exactly the same". ²⁰ Hindsight teaches a more careful history lesson. What was very similar, of course, was the cultural blossoming that followed on the heels of profound social upheaval.

In Quebec, the explosion of cultural expression had a political counterpart in the Ralliement pour l'indépendance nationale (RIN), the forerunner of the Parti québécois. Ideas of nation, always present in the French-Canadian psyche, took on renewed and altered significance, linked as they now were with the future instead of the past. Many people began to think of themselves as québécois rather than canadiens. Ideals of québécoisité were expressed by politicians, artists, and intellectuals alike, and perhaps nowhere was the new-found confidence more evident than in the labour force, where unions did not hesitate to make use of the recently granted right to strike. That some of the electorate felt free enough to criticize the modernization that had brought them out of "the great gloom," and to begin demanding a more egalitarian society, was proof positive of the profound changes Quebec had undergone.

By the time Joëy Smallwood left the Newfoundland political

scene in 1972, the first generation of Canadian-born Newfoundlanders was old enough to be critical of what his policies had wrought, and a backlash of anti-confederate feeling had begun to take effect. As in Quebec, a new form of nationalism was taking hold of some people, especially the young, a nationalism which had its roots in past pride but also a character in keeping with the province's present situation. After twenty-five years of Confederation, the tenth province retained the highest level of unemployment, the highest cost of living, and the lowest per capita income in the country. Furthermore, the ways of life which had hitherto defined Newfoundland's very existence had long since begun disappearing. Change had become the norm.

This transformation of Quebec and Newfoundland societies, and its effect on indigenous culture and cultural expression, was sudden and nothing less than profound. As was previously noted, it can be said to have taken place within a generation. Whereas in previous years Quebeckers and Newfoundlanders had been leaving home in large numbers to find better opportunities in the U.S. and on the mainland, thus transforming their lives in exile, now the transformation was happening at home. How the changes were both accepted and rejected by the people of both provinces is a central theme in the work of the four companies under study. In order to fully appreciate their work, we must now turn to a discussion of "regionalism" and "nationalism" and the relationship of theatre to the expression of such concepts.

Theatre is above all an expression of "ways of living," a communal

enactment which, being public by its very nature, is well suited to articulating the hopes and dreams of collectivities. Theatre performances are "social events," not only in the gossip columnist's sense of the expression, but also in the more important sense that we experience plays as members of a group. In reporting on and exploring our "ways of living" in this communal way, theatre reminds us that all of our activities and ambitions have a social context, that our daily existence is intimately linked to the society of which we are members. Theatre can reinforce that sense of belonging or question its value. The two functions are not mutually exclusive, as will become apparent.

Seen in this light, theatre can be a tool for the preservation or the re-shaping of a culture. Ideally, theatre should be both a product and producer of the culture in which it takes place. This has not been true in the past for Canada. In this country it has only been in the past thirty years that theatre has ceased to be an imported commodity, even when prepared, served up, and consumed by Canadians. The recent Newfoundland and Quebec theatre under discussion here, however, is a local product, distilled from local culture. The distinctive characteristic of this distillation is that it has the potential to render its consumers more articulate the more of it they imbibe. It gives them the vocabulary they need to talk about themselves and their communities. Members from at least three of the four companies under discussion here have expressed the wish that there be a useful theatre, that it play a conscious

role in shaping society. It is no accident that this wish arose at times when nationalist urges had come to the fore and people were in search of ways to control their destiny.

Of course, Newfoundland nationalism, Quebec nationalism, and any form of regionalism exist in uneasy tension with pan-Canadian nationalism. Regional nationalisms give the lie to a pan-Canadian ideal, which is, if not by definition then certainly in practice, centrist and procrustean. However, even before debate over that statement begins, one must begin by underlining the distinction between the nationalism of the nation-state, or patriotism as it were better called, and the nationalism of peoples, which is very often a different thing. The former has to do with loyalty to the institutions by which we rule ourselves, while the latter loyalty can survive even when the former has been undermined by disillusion or by the domination of another state.

It is perhaps the officially sanctioned visage we show to other nations that the art of nation-state nationalism is concerned with. (In terms of cultural expression, the Stratford Festival and international tours of classical ballet companies are examples of this.) What might be termed "folk" nationalism is more concerned with the everyday face we wear at home. The more a state reflects the beliefs and desires of its people, of course, the less distinguishable the two types of nationalism are. However, it is in those very situations where the nationalism of a people is not mirrored by state-sponsored artistic institutions, or is mirrored inadequately, that "folk" nationalism arises in opposition and is apt to become an

important cultural force. This study, then, will reserve the use of the term "cultural nationalism" to refer to the artistic expression of opposition to institutions that ignore local ways of living.

In a country where the nationalism of the people is reflected by the state, and vice-versa, nationalists are not called that. They are simply called patriots, and their dedication to the expression of national values meets with general approval, if it is not taken for granted altogether. However, the forms of cultural nationalism which exist in Canada, because they so often reject or are critical of the umbrella of Canadian statehood, are defensive in nature. Cultural nationalists find themselves defending a culture which is not officially sanctioned; they therefore pose an immediate challenge to the state and to established values, simply by existing.

This is as true for the pan-Canadian nationalist vis à vis U.S. cultural domination as it is for a Newfoundland nationalist vis à vis mainland culture. Cultural nationalists in Canada believe their culture must define itself not in spite of the fact it is dominated by outside forces, but because of it. This is equally true whether nationalists are simply trying to state a truth about their society, or are intent on revolutionizing the social and economic relations of that society. Thus the kind of cultural nationalism particular to Quebec and Newfoundland in the 1960's and 70's finds theatrical expression not only in the depiction of social realities, but also in the propagation of alternative ideals, possibilities, struggles, and mythologies, in new ways of interpreting history and of envisioning the future.

Due to the relative cultural homogeneity of the two provinces, it should be noted that regionalism, in a geographic sense, plays a secondary role in their attitudes towards the rest of the country. This is not to say that geographical nearness or distance does not have an effect, only that geography is but a part of a larger isolation which cannot be measured in miles. It must also be measured in communication, or lack thereof. That language can truly be a barrier becomes evident in conversations with members of the Mummers and le Théâtre Euh!, who, while having performed strikingly similar theatre in terms of both form and content within the same country and decade, have remained unaware of each other's work. Le Théâtre Euh! have taken their work to France and Algeria; the Mummers have crossed Canada to play in Vancouver; needless to say, they have never crossed paths. This unawareness of each other has more to do with cultural differences than with geography. Still, regionalism must remain part of the discussion, if only to remind us that although we are dealing with two solitudes, they are but two of many in this country.

A respect for regional cultures characterizes the work of Susan Crean. In her book, Who's Afraid of Canadian Culture? she rejects any form of pan-Canadian nationalism as unrealistic in its expectations and desires. Her argument is that the truest and most lasting form of nationalism in Canada is rooted in the different regional and cultural loyalties by which we define our Canadianness. Such loyalties are Canadian in that they are obliged to define themselves within the Canadian federal structure, and often against any form of cultural or

political domination applied from without. They find expression in "local," that is, regional, politics and cultural forms. As has been noted, they may be defensive in nature, responding in some wise to a perceived loss of or threat to cultural coherence (or, as the case could be made for English Canada in general, the inability to develop it).

Crean sees this kind of nationalism in a very positive light. The nationalism of state we sometimes lay claim to, she argues,

does not fit our heterogeneous and highly regionalized "national" culture. All too often, those who set out in search of the Canadian identity have been looking for something that does not exist: Canadian culture as it would be if Canada were the centre of an empire. We have, as Canadians and as a culture, a sensitivity to differences and regions that few other societies have. Far from being a constraint, this is a civilized habit and an asset that could become a great liberating force. 21

What Crean calls our "civilized habit," our "sensitivity to differences and regions," hinges on our ability to define for ourselves those very differences. The implication is that until we learn to do just that, we cannot be ourselves in our own country. This is the core of Crean's argument, and she approaches the question in socio-economic terms, showing how Canadian culture is overshadowed by the economic power that propagates American values and ideas of culture. While Crean is not alone in her analysis, hers is an important one in terms of the present argument, for she pinpoints the problem as an elitist attitude to art, an attitude which some ten years after her book was published remains firm in some quarters.

Historically, Canadians have always imported their standards of

artistic excellence. This habit dates back to an era when the word "culture" was synonymous with "refinement," and Canada could only be refined to the extent that it was peopled with members of Britain's upper classes, or at the very least, the values and standards thereof. Canadian culture has been very slow to outgrow this imported view of itself. The work of cultural nationalists in the sixties and seventies represents Canadian culture's most radical attempt to escape the colonial mentality thus far. The theatre of the time was caught between its own democratic impulse, which was to express Canadian experience, and the vestiges of a cultural elitism which refused to recognize that impulse as an important one. Critics whose standards reflected such elitist views tended to be hostile to the popular approach to theatre taken by the four companies under discussion. These companies and their contemporaries created a kind of theatre that was neither "high" art nor "low" entertainment, but instead a hybrid of the two, a hybrid which challenged such elitist terms and the assumptions behind them. The aim of this thesis is to explore how Codco, the Mummers, le Grand Cirque Ordinaire, and le Théâtre Euh! considered the lives of ordinary Canadians important enough to be put on the stage.

Susan Crean feels that cultural elitists respond to this kind of art by implying that "(My) Art transcends classes and national boundaries: (your) Canadian art is provincial."²² She blames this attitude partly on what Robin Mathews calls "the liberal ideology." In terms of cultural expression, the liberal ideology decrees that in order to create great art, Canadians must deal in universal themes. But both Crean and Mathews imply that in their eagerness to "transcend classes and national boundaries,"

liberal ideologists usually end up simply ignoring them. The final result is a kind of smoothing over of differences, a refusal to recognize various cultural differences which amounts to turning a blind eye to reality; in short, lying by omission.

The regional and "provincial" theatre we are discussing here questions, by its very existence, the value of an artist's ability to "transcend classes and national boundaries." If the four companies from Quebec and Newfoundland share any basic attitude, it is the attitude that artists play a more meaningful role in their society when they choose to be rooted in its realities, rather than continually trying to escape its intricacies for the sake of gaining universal acceptance. The urgency they felt about the necessity of reflecting their own experiences and encouraging local audiences to reach new levels of self-awareness and autonomy overrode any interest they might have had in appealing to the human race at large.

The kind of theatre these four companies created was influenced by the alternative theatre movement in Canada. It took its generally impudent character from cabaret satire, the community concert, and other non-literary, popular traditions such as mumming and clowning. The *raison d'être* of this kind of theatre is to strive for community coherence, to celebrate community, and to encourage useful criticism of the rules and standards a community maintains. The very expression of their specific cultural realities was for these companies just as important as the popularly-based aesthetic they developed in order to express them. We will see just how aptly suited these popular forms were to the task.

"Nationalist theatre," Janice Drodge has noted in her thesis, "is intrinsically parochial." Therein, she implies, lies its strength and vitality. "Parochial," "provincial," and "regional" are words that had positive connotations for the artists whose works will be discussed in subsequent chapters. This small-is-beautiful attitude to theatre, one could argue, takes its character from the much-discussed Canadian emphasis on the importance of community in the lives of individuals. In his essay "Canadian Culture and the Liberal Ideology," Robin Mathews contrasts the tendency of American writers to create protagonists in the "individual anarchist" mold to the Canadian tendency to create characters who, after rebelling against the community, come to see it as a valuable asset to human existence. The rebellious individual in American fiction (though this is admittedly a generalization) attempts to transcend or escape the community, longing to be relieved of its restrictions and its responsibilities. In much of Canadian fiction, however, as Mathews argues, protagonists eventually opt to put down roots in the community and to contribute to its existence in a meaningful way.

Though Mathews himself is not a defender of regionalism, his argument in defense of community values is a defense against the imposition of values from outside the community. He seems to see all of Canada as the community in question, and the main thrust of his argument is that Canadians are confused by the "liberal ideology." Since Canadians like to think of themselves as "liberal-minded," he argues, with all the openness and tolerance the term implies, they are afraid to defend their own cultural turf. Thus they are "open" indeed,

open to exploitation by other cultures.

If there are only three Canadian magazines on a magazine rack in the nearby drug store carrying three hundred magazines, we are invited by the liberal ideologists to think that we are witnessing the free flow of ideas.²⁴

Thus the liberal ideology helps to perpetuate a colonial mentality regarding indigenous Canadian culture, a mentality which favours the official, the officially subsidized, culture with its imported standards of excellence. Hence the funding of Shakespeare and Molière over the Mummers and le Théâtre Euh!.

The liberal ideology, Mathews argues, is at odds with Canada's conservative foundations and as such is something of an imported consciousness. He believes that Canadians, particularly "liberal-minded" Canadians, are embarrassed by their conservative and loyalist roots. We might do well to remind ourselves that Mathews' essay dealt with the political trends relevant to 1976. While his, Crean's, and Aster's arguments may seem dated, that is precisely why they reflect the quality of thought relevant to the Canadian theatre movement of the 1970's. Conservative community values, Mathews argues, are our true heritage and as such may be the salvation of Canadian culture, for it is only by working together to define ourselves that we can hope to avoid being defined by more powerful outside forces. Whether or not one believes with Mathews that socialism is the route to self-definition, his analysis of the liberal ideology and its effect on Canadian culture remains pertinent.

Also pertinent to this discussion are Howard Aster's views on

nationalism in Canada. In his essay "Nationalism and Communitarianism," Aster begins by making the distinction between nation-state and nation-people. As he describes it, the nationalism of the state is the nationalism of the instrument of government power, while the nationalism of the people, which he begins by labelling "organic" nationalism, incorporates "the elements of feeling, belonging, and emotional identification."²⁵ To "organic" nationalism he eventually gives the rather more complicated name "communitarianism," because its characteristics "relate to people and community, rather than people and nation-state."²⁶ Like Mathews, Aster pinpoints the conservative temper of this form of nationalism, and makes the connection between state nationalism and liberalism:

The paradoxical quality of Canadian nationalism emerges from the fact that nationalism understood in the communitarian sense has been identified with conservatism . . . whereas nationalism understood in ideational terms has been associated, overwhelmingly, with liberalism in Canada.²⁷

He was of course writing when a Liberal government was in power and plagued with questions of national unity. Aster's argument implies that "ideational" nationalism is by nature a structural and imposed form of nationalism, not "organic" at all, not arising naturally, but a manufactured political response to our confusion. When nationalism is organic, he seems to imply, it forms the backbone of a nation. If it is imposed, however, nationalism functions more like a carapace, effective enough protection in stressful times, but rather unwieldy baggage otherwise. And when we step out from under the carapace, it is easy

to see that it is after all an external containment and not really a supportive internal structure.

Thus Aster sees communitarianism as the truly Canadian "way of living." The nationalism of the state, while carrying its own emotional appeal, appears to him a theory rather than a verity. The paradox for Aster is that organic nationalism is associated with "old-fashioned" community values, while the "new" Canadian nationalism of his era, apparently progressive in its ideals, is actually repressive in that it is artificially imposed from outside the community. To put it more bluntly, he worries that the "new" nationalism comes not from the people as a whole but by those whose interests it may serve, namely those politicians who have nothing to lose in playing at patriotism. While his attitude may seem slightly alarmist in retrospect, it is useful in that it reminds us of an often overlooked idea about democracy.

Aster's populist approach to democracy reminds us that the democratic urge has as much to do with our having something to say as it has to do with electing others to say it for us.

In the end, Aster's essay is an argument for cultural nationalism whose conclusion is much the same as Crean's. Canadians have to do more than recognize their true nature, he concludes. They have to build on that recognition.

Canada's unique nationality resides exactly in its heterogeneous communitarian bases. In more specific terms, the problem confronting Canadian policy-makers is devising human relatedness within the framework of community so as to strengthen community, and seeking substantive bases for the relatedness of diverse communities throughout the country.²⁸

The kind of emphasis on community values which Aster, Mathews, and Crean see as the true nature of Canadian citizenship is very much in keeping with the kind of theatre that developed across Canada in the sixties and seventies. Let us return to Mathews' argument for a moment and remember his comparison of American and Canadian protagonists, the American individual who rebels against the community and the Canadian who rebels initially but eventually returns to the fold. Consider the following scenario. An American escapes Smalltown U.S.A. by running away to New York City to become an actor. This actor goes to acting school, freed from Smalltown drudgery, and graduates. Being lucky, the actor becomes famous for playing roles as the individualist character in various Broadway productions. The actor's fame puts Smalltown on the map, but this artist never goes back home.

Now consider the fate of another actor, this time from Colonial City, Canada. This actor goes to theatre school and does well there, but much to his/her surprise suffers from homesickness. Eventually this Canadian returns to Colonial City full of ambition to start up a theatre company there. Enduring the doubt and ridicule of some of the neighbours, and with the help of like-minded friends, the Canadian actor becomes part of a movement to create an atmosphere in which indigenous theatre becomes the norm in Colonial City. In spite of the fact that the neighbours think the company is a scruffy band of bohemians, many of them go to see the plays. Since the plays are often about local issues, they stimulate discussion in all quarters.

Colonial City, Canada will never be the same.

The real-life scenario, of course, is never that simple. This is merely a bare-bones description of how much of Canada's indigenous theatre began. For the four specific companies under discussion, theatre was a tool whereby they could give their communities a self-image and, they hoped, a sense of self-worth not provided by television or Hollywood or Ottawa. That these four companies worked more or less collectively is significant, for the link between the collective mode of creation and cultural nationalism is a strong and significant one. In collective creation, the traditional hierarchy of theatre production is overturned in favour of more egalitarian methods. Each actor creates his own roles, and is thereby able to express his own concerns regarding the issues at hand, rather than submitting to the artistic vision of a single writer and/or director.

This is a democratic form of theatre creation and the product of a group rather than an individual writer. An actor is not the mouthpiece or puppet of a director or playwright: more likely the actors speak lines they themselves have written and thus the views they express are their own. And collective companies often create "epic" plays, in Brecht's and Piscator's terms, without concerning themselves with Aristotelian unity, or evenness of plot. Rather, they are interested in depicting a multiplicity of viewpoints and events, in order to create "a picture of a complex and living community."²⁹ As theatre historian and former member of the Mymmers Troupe Alan Filewod has observed:

A fundamental difference between the individual and collective playwrights is that the individual synthesizes the objective world into a private vision, whereas the collective synthesizes it into a public vision.³⁰

Perhaps the urge to create theatre collectively is never stronger than when a people is struggling to define a collective vision of itself.

The nationalist movements in Quebec and Newfoundland captured the attention of many individuals. Both cultures were experiencing a re-definition of the very terms of their existence. The young people of Quebec and Newfoundland had grown up in an atmosphere of change, when old standards of living were breaking down and new values were being discussed. The general democratization and secularization of both provinces brought them very suddenly into twentieth century North America, with different and yet not unrelated results.

The young companies of Quebec under discussion responded to the process of democratization by insisting that it had not gone far enough, that the old oppressors still lurked in the background. The Newfoundland companies, speaking out of a culture which had been force-fed Progress, reacted slightly differently. They were caught between two basic mandates: to celebrate the province's past while condemning that which had impoverished it, and to articulate the present to the mainland and to Newfoundlanders themselves.

The next chapter will attempt to put the social movements in Quebec and Newfoundland into historical context. We will see how theatre, that most social of art forms, takes its character from the social realities which surround it.

NOTES

¹ This is not to imply that no Canadian theatre existed prior to the sixties. On the contrary, as we will see in the second chapter, amateur theatre flourished and amateur productions of Canadian scripts were not unknown. Various efforts were made to establish professional companies which would produce Canadian works, such as Hart House, The New Play Society, and Toronto Workshop Productions. And a number of playwrights established reputations for themselves in English and French Canada. Gratien Gélinas, Gwen Pharis Ringwood, Merrill Denison, and Robertson Davies, among others, wrote plays before Canadian productions became the norm. However, these writers and companies were not yet part of a broad national network of professional, indigenous theatre. That would happen later.

² Sandra Gwyn, "The Newfoundland Renaissance," Saturday Night, April 1976, pp. 38-45.

³ Renate Usmani, Second Stage: The Alternative Theatre Movement in Canada (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1983).

⁴ Janice Ann Drodge, "A Heritage Portrayed: Nationalist Theatre in Newfoundland, 1972-1982 (M.A. thesis, Memorial University, 1983).

⁵ Gérald Sigouin, Théâtre en lutte: le Théâtre Euh! (Montreal: VLB Editeur, 1982).

⁶ Chris Brookes, None of That Artsy-Fartsy Stuff (St. John's: Institute for Social and Economic Studies, Memorial University, forthcoming).

⁷ Robin Mathews, "Canadian Culture and the Liberal Ideology," Canadian Literature: Surrender or Revolution, ed. Gail Dexter (Toronto: Steel Rail Educational Publishing, 1978).

⁸ Susan Crean, Who's Afraid of Canadian Culture? (Don Mills: General Publishing, 1976).

⁹ Howard Aster, "Nationalism and Communitarianism," Nationalism, Technology, and the Future of Canada ed. Wallace Gagne (Toronto: MacMillan of Canada Ltd., 1976).

¹⁰ It has been reconstructed from those available scripts, videos, archives, articles and reviews by and about the four companies.

¹¹ Random House College Dictionary, revised edition, s.v. "culture".

¹² François-Pierre Gingras and Neil Nevitte, "The Evolution of Quebec Nationalism," Quebec: State and Society, ed. Alain G. Gagnon (Toronto: Methuen, 1984), p. 8.

¹³ Gerald Squires in Gwyn, p. 40.

¹⁴ Gwyn, p. 40.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Drodge, p. 108.

¹⁷ Usmani, p. 91.

¹⁸ Richard Gwyn, Smallwood: The Unlikely Revolutionary (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1968).

¹⁹ Herbert L. Pottle, Dawn Without Light: People and Politics in the Smallwood Era (St. John's: Breakwater Press, 1979).

²⁰ Richard Gwyn, in interview with Peter Gzowski, 90 Minutes Live (St. John's: CBC television, Feb. 17, 1978).

²¹ Crean, p. 278.

²² Ibid., p. 12.

²³ Drodge, p. 98.

²⁴ Mathews, p. 203.

²⁵ Aster, p. 60.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 61.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 62.

²⁸ Ibid., pp. 60-61.

²⁹ Paul Thompson, in prefatory note to The Farm Show: A Collective Creation by Theatre Passe Muraille (Toronto: Coach House Press, 1976).

³⁰ Alan Filewod, "Collective Creation: Process, Politics, and Poetics," Canadian Theatre Review 34, Spring 1982, p.47

CHAPTER TWO

Québec and Newfoundland: Colonization to Cultural Awakening

The following abbreviated discussion of the social and theatrical histories of Newfoundland and Québec will not explore questions of scale. The population of Newfoundland, after all, is approximately one-tenth that of Québec. In every quantitative sense, Newfoundland's is the smaller society. We would do well to keep in mind, then, that the present comparison is not a quantitative but a qualitative one, and that what we are attempting to establish is that there is a direct correlation between social movements in Québec and Newfoundland, and the kinds of theatrical expression that were used by four companies responding to those social movements.

The first part of this chapter will outline a brief history of Newfoundland, which will provide the context for a subsequent history of theatre in the province. The same method will be followed to outline a history and theatre history of Québec. There are two reasons to turn our attention to such a study at this point. First, it will serve as a reminder of the important events and persons in the histories of the two provinces, which will in turn provide the background necessary to an understanding of the themes and subjects of the companies' performances. Second, a look back at such events and personalities will help to contextualize the cultural development of the two provinces, and may begin to explain the relatively slow development of indigenous theatre in Québec and Newfoundland.

In her discussion of Newfoundland theatre, Usmiani notes that

Like Quebec, Newfoundland suffers from the impact of a double colonialism: a sense of dependence on England which did not end when the province joined Confederation in 1949; and a sense of inferiority towards the mainland after that date.¹

In fact Newfoundland's dependence long predates its official colonial status of 1825. Though settlement was not entirely legal until that year, this had not prevented an almost equal number of English and Irish immigrants, and a smaller number of Scots, from making their homes on the Island. From the very beginning, life in Newfoundland revolved around the fishery, and from 1729 the settlers were ruled by a series of naval governors not noted for their clemency. F.W. Rowe notes the early development of a servant class, mostly Irish, of fishermen and domestics.²

The fishery worked on "truck," a credit system whereby the wealthy merchants leased their boats and supplies to the fishermen and then felt themselves free to set the price of fish as low as they liked, often leaving the fisherman with little reward for his labours. Many fishermen lived in a constant state of indebtedness to the merchants; Irish or English, the fisherman was on the bottom of the social structure. Except for a few skilled tradesmen, there was no bourgeoisie to speak of. Whole communities depended on the fishery and whole families were involved in the process of catching, cutting and drying the fish for European markets. The tiny outport communities developed mostly along the south and east coasts of the Island, isolated from larger towns such as St. John's.

Religion has played an important role in the history of

Newfoundland. Most of the English settlers were Protestants, while the Irish were almost exclusively Roman Catholic. And although the number of English and Irish was roughly the same, they were distributed unevenly geographically. The majority of the our ports were Protestant, while in St. John's the Irish were the poor majority. After colonial status was granted in 1825, the agitation for representative government was carried out mostly by the merchants, who were eager to exercise their rights and privileges as British subjects. Catholics were not permitted to run for office. S.J.R. Noel comments on the basic differences between the Irish settlers and the English:

The Irish brought with them a national heritage of poverty, Roman Catholicism, and hatred of their English oppressors; while the English brought with them from the West Country a heritage of puritanical Protestantism, social deference, and semi-feudal economic relationships.³

It should not surprise us, then, to learn that much of Newfoundland's political history is marred by sectarian clashes. Add to this picture a harsh climate, inhospitable soil, the dangers of life at sea and on the ice floes, not to mention the vagaries of the fishery itself, and it is not difficult to see where the popular stereotypes of Newfoundland originated. They were first promulgated by various Gulliver-like adventurers centuries ago,⁴ and continue, much modified, in the travelogues of today. As we might expect, many Newfoundland writers and artists have worked to separate the myths from the realities of past and present Newfoundland. Still, Noel seems to think that

certain aspects of what might be called the Newfoundland psyche are deeply ingrained:

It is not surprising . . . that the politics which developed in this nascent colony reflected not only the traditional cleavages of ethnicity and religion but also the underlying potential of the people to realign their loyalties on the basis of economic class. Indeed, the subsequent history of Newfoundland may be viewed as a struggle between those who sought to preserve the existing economic system by maintaining and exploiting existing social cleavages, and those who sought to bring about social and economic changes by persuading the majority of the people of the paramouncy of their common class interests.⁵

Noel's hypothesis may help to explain why the campaign for representative government was led by Patrick Morris, an Irish merchant, and William Carson, a Scottish doctor. Thanks to their efforts, Britain granted the Island of Newfoundland the right to representative government in 1832. (The Mummers Troupe would later portray Patrick Morris as a ventriloquist's dummy, rebelling against Mother England's forcing him to tell Newfie jokes.) Predictably, the newly founded political parties were divided along class and religious lines. Generally speaking, the merchants formed the Conservative (Protestant) party, while the reformists, who were mostly Catholic, became the Liberal party. According to Noel, "The former was a party of patronage and influence, the latter a channel of popular agitation."⁶

By 1855, Newfoundland was virtually self-governed. However, the new constitution of that year did nothing to diminish the problem of the French Shore. This was the name given to the West Coast of

Newfoundland, which had been ceded to France in the Treaties of Utrecht and Versailles. Thus a fair portion of the Island was not the colony's to colonize, and this may have aggravated Newfoundland's sense of isolation from the rest of North America, while simultaneously strengthening existing bonds with the mother country and the U.S. The French Shore and its excellent fishing grounds would remain a thorn in Newfoundland's side until 1904, when France finally ceded it to England in exchange for territory in West Africa.

Newfoundland's sense of physical closeness to the U.S. led to various efforts between 1890 and 1910 at a reciprocity treaty concerning the sale of fish and minerals, but all efforts failed, serving only to cause England to consider Newfoundland overly independent. Not for the first time, the mother country considered suggesting that the troublesome colony become part of the Dominion of Canada. Ottawa had never lacked interest in such a possibility, especially since the railways had been built and the Island's resources had begun to be exploited at the turn of the century. Then, too, there were fears that Newfoundland might become the Alaska of the East, and Canada was not interested in having American neighbours across the Gulf of St. Lawrence. However, Newfoundland Prime Minister Sir Robert Bond was not interested in union with Canada. When then Governor General Lord Grey visited the Island in 1906, he found as Noel says, that

Among the forces in favour of union . . . were the governor, the Roman Catholic archbishop, the Bank of

Montreal, the Canadian iron ore companies, and the Reid railway monopoly. The opposition, he believed, came from 'the few two penny ha'penny industries at St. John's'.⁷

The first decade of the 20th century was a boom time for the economy of Newfoundland. The price of fish was hitting unprecedented heights in Europe, and the building of a railroad on the Island meant that timber and ore in the interior could be exploited for the first time. The people whose forefathers had clung to 'the Rock' so fiercely were not interested in giving up their hard-won security. However, this sense of security was apparently not felt in all sectors of the population. Newfoundland, like any country in the early stages of industrialization, was about to experience a labour movement.

The movement was led by William Coaker, a farmer who had worked in a fishing village and knew that Newfoundland's fishermen were the backbone of the nation. By 1910 he had organized the Fishermen's Protective Union. Membership called for dues payment, and the union provided a newspaper and co-operative outlets for fishing supplies and foodstuffs. Coaker's ultimate goal was to form a political party which would reflect the needs of the fishermen. He succeeded partially in this, but his party's eventual coalition with the Liberals, and the coming of the war, ensured that the FPU would not last. There was money to be made in the war, and fewer people had time for the politics of protest. While in the House, Coaker made two grave errors. First, he allied himself with the Prohibition Movement (what better way to prove, as Noel points out,

that even the union was in the hands of the Orangemen?).⁸ Then, when the war broke out, the unions experienced a further loss of faith in a representative who refused to oppose conscription. (Coaker, like Patrick Morris, would later become grist for the Mummer's mill.)

Newfoundlanders, conscription or not, came out of the war with a sense of having done their patriotic duty for England. Losses were heavy; the Newfoundland Regiment lost one-fifth of its men. Meanwhile on the home front, Noel argues, the war was wreaking other lasting changes:

To most Newfoundlanders the wartime boom brought a first taste of material prosperity, North American style - and naturally they liked it. Habits developed in this free-spending era, and expectations were aroused that lingered long after the means of satisfying them had vanished After the war few politicians dared promise, and none dared implement, a return to pre-war standards, which left only one alternative: to live hopefully on borrowed money - and borrowed time.⁹

Newfoundland was not prepared for the post-war slump in the economy and suffered terribly the effects of the Depression. By 1934 the country was so deeply in debt that Britain repealed responsible government, supposedly on a temporary and conditional basis.

A Commission of Government was sent in, and for the next fifteen years Newfoundland would be run by bureaucrats from abroad rather than by its own politicians. Several Newfoundland representatives had the unpopular task of advising the Commission. Relations were strained and the Commission kept clear of public life, especially after an unemployed protest in 1935 turned into a riot. (By 1938, over a

third of the population was on relief.)

Newfoundland prospered again with the arrival of the Second World War, thanks to a sudden influx of American soldiers. Britain had decreed that the Americans would be allowed to build three military bases on the Island. Newfoundland became a strategically important place for the Allied Forces. St. John's watched as war-ships squeezed through the harbour, carrying armaments to be used in battles across the sea, and to the north Gander became a fuelling stop for Allied planes. Whereas in the first war Newfoundlanders had gone out to the world, in this war the world came to them. The presence of thousands of American soldiers on the Island amounted to a friendly occupation and bolstered the local economy. The Mummers' Makin' Time With the Yanks would later provide a light-hearted look at this hectic period in Newfoundland's history.

After the war Britain looked at Newfoundland and realized that the Island was once again self-supporting. The mother country was loathe to return the colony to its former independent status, for fear that the temporary prosperity would not last. The solution was simple: convince Newfoundland of the necessity of joining with Canada. It was decided that a national referendum would be held in order that Newfoundlanders could decide their fate. The choices facing them were: return to responsible government, maintenance of commission government, or Confederation. Characteristically, a scandal broke out along sectarian lines, thanks to the anti-union

language strikingly similar to that of traditional French-Canadian nationalists in Quebec . . . [they] argued against material blandishments and in favour of the preservation, in isolation, of simple spiritual values.¹⁰

Many who voted for Confederation did so with regret, and only because they could see no realistic economic alternative. The Confederate case was strong; it was ably and at times brilliantly presented. The case for responsible government was by contrast weak and presented with almost pathetic ineptitude. That it so very nearly succeeded is an indication of the powerful hold which the idea of a separate national life had upon the minds and hearts of Newfoundlanders.¹¹

The subsequent modernization and resettlement of Newfoundland changed the character of the nation-province drastically. Federal funds poured into social services and industry while Joey Smallwood advised Newfoundlanders to burn their boats. The Smallwood government was not looking back. There was little talk in those days of

salvaging old ways of living, and only some talk of culture, for as Noel points out, however unique and valuable a subsequent generation would find Newfoundland culture, it was generally seen, and had in the main been experienced as,

a culture of poverty, a product of ignorance or necessity, and a means of making unendurable hardship slightly less unendurable. It is hardly surprising therefore that those who were part of it, as distinct from those who romanticize it, are able to view its disappearance with unconcern or even pleasure.¹²

Newfoundland had now become preoccupied with providing its citizens with roads and schools and social services. The resettlement programme, the purpose of which was to centralize the population in order to provide such services more cheaply and efficiently than would otherwise have been possible, also ensured that approximately 200 communities would be no more. In the meantime, the Liberal government turned towards industrial expansion, confident that "Not local manufacturing but large-scale exploitation of forest, mineral, and hydro-electric resources would be the path of economic progress."¹³

Predictably, Newfoundland's entry into union with Canada, and subsequent modernization, North Americanized the province to a great extent, bringing it closer to the mainland in terms of transportation, communication, and education. The fundamental changes this caused to Newfoundland society should not be underestimated. Now not only the capital but also the smaller communities could enjoy the fruits of modern technology and the democratizing effect

of family allowances. Another change was also taking place relative to what it had been before, Newfoundland was becoming a secularized society, reflecting the questioning of old values common to communities undergoing rapid social change. For the most part, schools continued to be organized along denominational lines, but as in Quebec, citizens began to feel that perhaps schools were less a place to learn one's catechism and more a place to learn to live in the modern world. Like baby bonuses and widow's pensions, education would have a role to play in democratizing Newfoundland society and bringing it into the North American mainstream.

The effect of Newfoundland's introduction to mainland values was profound, especially in terms of local culture, which, even as "a culture of poverty", had after all survived several centuries. Now it was effectively silenced, as Usmani argues:

So strong was the colonial complex that even by the late 1960's, local music such as fiddling or playing the accordion was simply "not done" in "cultured" circles. In the field of drama, the problem of the vernacular presented a serious obstacle. Newfoundland dialect, like joual in Quebec, was a lingua non grata in polite society and its use as a stage idiom unthinkable. 14

The "great monster" that artist Gerald Squires refers to in Gwyn's article, the imaginary monster that convinced Newfoundlanders that they were an inferior people, had truly taken hold. The loosening of the monster's grip - the realization that Newfoundland culture was unique and valuable - encouraged a "cultural renaissance," in Gwyn's term. The renaissance found its voice in a variety of places, from

the rejuvenated fishermen's union to the work of the Folklore Department at Memorial University to the work of Memorial's Extension Services. The Extension Services were started because

It was argued, with some logic, that in a society such as Newfoundland's, consisting essentially of fishermen, loggers, miners and general labourers, the one university should be reaching out to enfold the whole community . . . in short, not waiting for the people to come to it, but, rather, going to the people.¹⁵

One of the Extension Service's projects was the Fogo Island project, which brought filmmaker Colin Low of the National Film Board to Newfoundland. Low made the Fogo films as an experiment in "mediated intervention."¹⁶ The film crew shot interviews with members of local communities, discussing lifestyle changes, impending plans for resettlement, and so on. The project was unique in that the subjects themselves took part in the editing process. The films were screened in various communities and are credited with encouraging contact between formerly isolated groups, and citizens were able to share their concerns, to the point where they felt confident enough to lobby the government about resettlement plans and start a co-operative movement. Mummers Troupe founder Chris Brookes credits this project with inspiring him to start a theatre company with the same goals.¹⁷ Before considering such events, however, let us turn back to look at Newfoundland's theatre history.

Cultural patterns on the Island followed the course of socio-economic development. Thus early Newfoundland theatre reflects the

colonial pattern; the social elites imported their cultural values from the mother country, while the lesser-endowed groups clung to "folk" culture. St. John's society people busied themselves with productions of Gilbert and Sullivan musicals, as a glance through the first two tomes of the Book of Newfoundland will attest. Outport communities, on the other hand, celebrated local talent with community concerts. Chesley Skinner has written a dissertation on the latter form of cultural expression, describing it as

a theatrical production utilizing the variety and revue style of presentation with programmes consisting of dialogues, songs, recitations, and readings, and produced by the various communities as a primary means of raising money to support church, school, and other essential services. It was the one dramatic event common to all parts of this province . . . and until the 1950's was a major form of entertainment which contributed positively to the self-sufficiency and the cohesiveness of each community. 18

Of course, such popular forms of community entertainments were hardly considered Art, even by participants, and yet they may be the true forerunners of groups like Codco and the Mimmers Troupe. The first group of people to dedicate themselves solely to developing theatre for its own sake was the St. John's Players, founded in 1937 by a librarian and former teacher, Grace Butt. This amateur company was formed in the 'little theatre' tradition, and members devoted themselves to high quality productions of American and British dramas. Eventually the Players began to produce the occasional local script by Grace Butt and others. In the following passages

from P. Lloyd Soper's history of the company, published in 1949, we find evidence not only of the company's interest in building a national theatre, but also a hint of why such a thing was impossible at the time.

True, we have not yet developed a national theatre but that can come only after there has been observation of the work of other lands, after the development of dramatic technique and with the awakening in Newfoundlanders of a desire for a Newfoundland theatre

.... At this point, it is a pleasure to be able to record success in the production of local plays. The first one was a one-act play, Proud Kate Sullivan, written by Mr. Fred R. Emerson, K.C. This play depicts the simple life of several ordinary Newfoundlanders, marked by peculiarities of Newfoundland speech and mental attitudes. It has a delightful local atmosphere about it and its production by the St. John's Players was indeed a thrill for all who hope to see the development of a Newfoundland theatre. 19

The first paragraph describes a company involved in "art for arts sake," an attitude that, in a country which has not yet developed its own theatrical tradition, condemns indigenous expression to the background in virtual perpetuity. After all, one cannot write a local Macbeth if one is forever busy producing someone else's. The second paragraph implies that one cannot create Great Art about a place where the people are "marked by peculiarities" in their "speech and mental attitudes." The players, like their contemporaries on the mainland, were locked in the colonial attitude of "us equals inferior," and the depiction of local atmosphere and ordinary people, however delightful, was not something that merited serious artistic consideration.

However, whatever difficulties the Players had in building a

national theatre, they did provide a venue for the indisputable talents of Grace Butt. The Road Through Melton, her first full-length play, was also "the first [full-length] play by a local playwright about a local subject."²⁰ As the story of a community torn between developing or retaining its original character, the play remains a significant exploration of a Newfoundland theme, even if otherwise dated. Although she wrote several plays after this, any plans Butt or the Players had of building a truly "national" theatre were effectively eclipsed by the events of 1949. A subsequent play by Butt, which won first prize at the Dublin Theatre Festival in 1969, is aptly titled Part of the Main. This play is a post-Confederation portrait of a St. John's family and as such paints a harsh picture of late Sixties Newfoundland values. St. John's writer Roberta Buchanan describes the main character, Irene, who

has deserted her outport roots for the high life in St. John's she is shown giving a fashionable dinner party at which the guests are St. John's trendies Irene's husband, Norman, who double-crossed his old outport friend to get a government contract discovers that his friend has been killed in a brawl. Norman, drunk and upset, is ushered off to bed and given a tranquilizer so that the dinner party can continue undisturbed.²¹

Buchanan also notes that Grace Butt has been "rather neglected by her younger contemporaries. Perhaps this is because her plays have been performed by amateurs such as the St. John's Players, rather than by professionals." ²²

In a 1967 article, theatre enthusiast Sylvia Wigh describes

the state of amateur theatre in Newfoundland. She notes that the founding of the St. John's Players encouraged similar groups to spring up in other centres such as Corner Brook and Grand Falls. She also traces Newfoundland's entry into the Dominion Drama Festival in 1951 after several years of competition within the province. It may be a comment on the amateurs' faith in scripts from elsewhere that the 1951 adjudicator is remembered as saying that the Newfoundland performance was better than the play they had chosen to do. In retrospect, Wigh's article reflects the general optimism of 1967:

The arrival of the Dominion Drama festival to this province for centennial year was a major step forward for local drama. That the Festival is an all Canadian one, and for this province in particular a showcase of at least three Newfoundland plays, is a good omen. Playwrights Grace Butt, Fred Emerson, Ted Russell, Harold Horwood and Cassie Brown have seen their plays in production. Thus, working together, it is not impossible that the great Newfoundland play may be written and produced right here in Newfoundland, by a Newfoundland company.²³

It seems that Newfoundland was creeping towards an indigenous theatre, and yet the province still did not have a professional company (much less a theatre school) of its own. When professional theatre did begin to develop in Newfoundland, it was because of the efforts of young people who wished to develop their own theatre of protest and satire. Like many young professionals in Quebec, they were caught up in imparting their own collective vision of Newfoundland, a vision that scripted plays were not providing. Many of these young people gained amateur experience with the Memorial University Drama

Society, with Michael Cook's Open Group (also at the university) and with the Newfoundland Travelling Theatre Company, which toured a variety of plays to small communities and which was run by Dudley Cox who, like Michael Cook, taught at the university.

The year 1972 would be a banner year for Newfoundland theatre. It saw the first production of a full-length play by Michael Cook, the founding of Dudley Cox's company, and the first collective production by the Mummers Troupe of Newfoundland. The young people who would profoundly affect the development of Newfoundland theatre were just beginning to find a voice, and it was very different from the voices that had been heard in Newfoundland thus far.

There are definite similarities between historical and cultural developments in Newfoundland and Quebec. New France was controlled and, until 1663, directly governed by the fur-trading monopolies. Here, too, settlement was not encouraged; what France really wanted was expansion into the fur-rich interiors, and settlement militated against that. However, when settlement finally was undertaken it was in a very deliberate fashion on a semi-feudal model, unlike the early, illegal, and haphazard settlement of Newfoundland. According to Finlay and Sprague (1984), in the hundred years before the Conquest, the settlers lived under "benevolent as well as authoritarian"²⁴ government.

From 1663 to 1760, the very stability of the colony's absolutism tended to confirm outsiders in their opinion that the government was despotic. There were no newspapers, and therefore no effective focus for public opinion. There was no parliament, and therefore no politics

or even a belief that government should be based on the consent of the governed.²⁵

The colony was ruled by a Governor and an Intendant, the former having the status of the king's representative, the latter being the real administrator. Aside from the fur-trade, France's mercantilist policy prevented other commerce from developing.

After the English Conquest of 1759, when some of the community leaders returned to France (there is still debate about how many and how much effect their departure had), the Church advised loyalty to the new regime. The government responded by banning Catholics from holding office, a proclamation that was not repealed until the Quebec Act of 1774. The French-Canadian people, though in a majority in Lower Canada, were to remain the "hewers of wood and drawers of water," while the English minority looked after business and commerce. In Montreal particularly, whatever commerce existed began to be taken over by the English merchant class, and a pattern was set that would endure for several centuries. In fact Findlay and Sprague argue that the real Conquest began to take place only when the Loyalists started arriving:

After 1783, the Canadiens continued to be the numerically superior group but with the establishment of parallel British institutions the majority of the population began to be treated as exceptional and of lesser importance.²⁶

Though French and English would join forces in the war against the Americans in 1812, by 1837 the Patriotes of Lower Canada were on the verge of rebellion. Led by Louis-Joseph Papineau, the Patriotes

gave voice to Canadian concerns about government favoritism to those of English origin and they demanded constitutional changes that would put an end to such practices. The affair boiled down to a potential civil war between French and English. Then the Church intervened and, while sympathetic with the rebels' cause, denounced their actions. The British moved in and arrested the conspirators, Papineau fled, and the Rebellion was over before it had begun.

The French-Canadian nation was to take another psychic beating with the arrival of Lord Durham in the Canadas. Not only did Durham judge the Canadiens to be an inferior race, he was also one of the earliest proponents of federalism. He was convinced that the Union of the two Canadas would be beneficial to both. Upper Canada at this point was near bankruptcy, and federalism

seemed an attractive enough solution since it would create a structure too large for the petty oligarchy of any one colony to dominate. Equally important, a federal unit would have a revenue large enough to handle internal improvement schemes on a much greater scale than any one province could undertake by itself.²⁷

The Union took place in 1840, without the installation of responsible government that Durham had recommended. That would not be in place until 1848.

The French-Canadians of Canada East looked forward to Confederation, feeling that their numbers would be better represented in Parliament. They then assured themselves that they continued to control the moral aspects of French-Canadian life which were important to their society. The years following Confederation were

years of consolidation, of out-spokenness in the House, and of the continued ethic of "la survivance." This was the tactic taught by the church: maintaining the old ways of life under the guidance of the clergy would ensure the survival of the French Canadian way of life. This rural mythology had, since the Conquest, allowed French Canada to further distinguish itself from industrializing societies. By the end of the nineteenth century, however, the myth was already distinct from the reality, for growing industries and crowded farms had started the movement to the cities. In the main, people moved to Montreal to look for work, while Quebec was the centre for educational purposes. With the coming of World War One, conscription caused a crisis, for nothing could underline more clearly Quebec's subordinate position in Confederation.

Postwar French Canadian nationalists such as Lionel Groulx reiterated the theme that survival was in the land, and this theme continued to be heard during the Depression. In fact, Catholic groups, blaming the evils of the Depression on the evils of modernization, initiated a "back-to-the-land" movement in hopes of offsetting urban unemployment. In 1936 Maurice Duplessis and the Union Nationale, an amalgamation of discontented Liberals and Conservatives, came to power on a populist platform. Duplessis is remembered most for selling Quebec's resources to outside interests while ignoring the problems of the populace he had been elected to serve, insisting that French Canadians belonged on the land, close to God. His response

to the presence of radical protesters was the infamous "Padlock Law," which gave police the right to arrest and detain anyone they considered guilty of propagating communistic ideals.

World War Two brought Quebec out of the Depression. Demands for pulp and paper, minerals and munitions increased and hydroelectric capabilities were exploited. So much had changed that, "by 1956, almost 90% of all French-origin Quebecers were neither farmers nor country dwellers."²⁸ In the meantime, conscription reared its ugly head once again and 1944 saw the return of Duplessis as premier. In 1949, when the Asbestos Strike gave evidence of the growing discontent among Quebecers, the strikers were supported by the Church in the person of Joseph Charbonneau, Archbishop of Montreal. Though the strike in and of itself was not successful - many strikers were not rehired, and Charbonneau was transferred to B.C. - in the view of historians Finlay and Sprague, the event

proved to be a major turning point because it accelerated the tendency of the secular intelligentsia and the reform-minded clergy to think along the lines of a new ideology, one that would preclude a government from preaching agrarian nationalism to an industrial society, or from posing as a major defender of Quebec's autonomy while leaving the initiative in social and economic development to the traditionalist or foreign-dominated corporations.²⁹

Duplessis died in office in 1959. The Liberal Party under Jean Lesage swept into power in 1960 on a platform of change and étatism. Rattrapage (catching up), was the order of the day, and the state was to be the "moteur principale," or the main vehicle

of the new order. The new Quebec would be born from a series of reforms in social services, such as health and welfare, and of course education. This meant a secularization of Quebec society and an expansion of the government bureaucracy. Private companies such as Hydro-Québec were taken over by the government and industry was to bring Quebec up to date. The modernization of industries and the rédefinition of cultural values may sound like discrete ideals, but at this stage in Quebec's history they were seen as "complementary."³⁰ In addition, the world of labour was liberalized. In sharp contrast to the Duplessis government, which had repressed union activity, the Lesage government granted public sector unions the right to strike. That right was not ignored in the years to come.

Many Quebecers began to think of themselves as Québécois, rather than French-Canadians: for many the provincial border became a national one. This was nowhere more apparent than in the birth of the *Rassemblement pour l'indépendance nationale*. Founded in 1960 by intellectual Pierre Bourgault, the RIN began its political life with a neutral stance. Eventually reflecting the disillusion of Québécois with progress that seemed only to reward a developing middle class, it moved in a social-democratic direction. When the RIN fell apart in 1968, torn by dissension and disagreements, and conflicting marxist and socialist views, many members turned to the *Parti québécois*. In the years that followed Quebec would begin to find a new voice within Canada, and the bickering between the now-confident Quebec and

Ottawa culminated in the famous visit of Charles de Gaulle in 1967.

The Parti québécois was founded in 1968 by René Lévesque, a man whose career in some ways parallels that of Joëly Smallwood. Like Smallwood, Lévesque was already familiar to the public, thanks to the modern media; also like Smallwood, he was in a position to reconsider the sovereignty of a people; and arguably, both men eventually bowed to economic realities which overrode nationalist feelings.

Two years after the founding of the Parti québécois, the October Crisis rocked the country. Many Quebec artists were detained under the War Measures Act, and Quebec film, literature and drama would reflect that experience for years to come. By 1970, the two Quebec theatre companies under discussion had already been formed, and that year saw both companies performing productions which used the FLQ crisis as a major theme. The Grand Cirque Ordinaire toured the play Alice dans le pays de sommeil (Alice in Slumberland), and le Théâtre Euh! performed Cré Antigone! (That Damned Antigone!), a Brechtian drama which explored the theme of political oppression.

In tracing the history of theatre in French Canada, Suzanne Aubry goes all the way back to the Jesuits of New France.³¹ The Jesuits, she tells us, encouraged plays of a religious nature. The soldiers of Frontenac performed non-religious plays of a very genteel nature, with men playing the women's roles. According to Aubry, the audience for this "théâtre de société" was as genteel as the productions. Such performances were rare in any case, and any

number of years might go by between shows. When in 1699 the Church banned theatre altogether, New France had not much to lose.

A hundred years later, after the Conquest, theatre came alive again, and classical pieces became popular. As the clergy still disapproved, performers had to choose their material carefully. However, in spite of the disapproval of the Church,

many amateur French-Canadian groups were founded in Montreal and in small towns. . . They mounted historical dramas, folkloric sketches, and melodramas by French-Canadian authors and others, as well as vaudevilles; Louis Fréchette would popularize patriotic dramas exalting the heroes of the rebellions of 1837-1838.³²

Apparently French Canada had its "golden age" of theatre between 1895 and 1910. However, as Aubry notes, no significant French-Canadian theatre was written in that time, and she believes that this was at least partly because of the moral climate. "Our authors, confined by the righteous moralizers to very conventional topics, had to develop melodrama or dramas about the past."³³ In any case, the war would soon occupy everyone's minds, and then motion pictures became a potent distraction. In the late twenties and through the Depression, burlesque was a favorite entertainment of Quebec audiences. The troupe of Olivier Guimond began to perform in French when it was realized how large a segment of the audience was francophone.³⁴ As material was often "racy," burlesque was seen as low comedy and avoided by the social elites. Aubry explains:

The rise in popularity of the burlesque can be accredited to the use of the vernacular language

of the Montreal districts, and the comedic talent of its interpreters. Based on improvisations around a simple outline, the burlesque demanded ingenuity and a constant adaptability on the part of the actors, who learned as they worked.³⁵

The decline of this popular form, like the decline of Newfoundland's community concerts, is blamed on the arrival of television in the 1950's.

Also to arrive on the scene during the Depression was le Théâtre Stella, the first theatre owned and operated by French Canadians.

Unfortunately this Montreal company, like many others, did not survive the Depression. In 1937, an important company was formed by Père Emile Legault. Les Compagnons de St. Laurent planned to use theatre as a tool for Christ, with the moral edification of the audience as the prime goal. The group's repertoire consisted of classical and religious plays. Slowly the raison d'être of the company evolved into an attitude of "art for art's sake," and they turned out professional-quality productions. In 1947 Les Compagnons won honours at the Dominion Drama Festival, and in 1948 they bought an old church and remodelled it into a theatre. As Aubry sees it, this troupe more than any other legitimized theatre in Quebec, but

on the other hand, perpetuated, thanks to its mythic perception of Culture, the dichotomy, still with us today, between theatre as a means of education for the uncultured masses, and the theatre that, reflecting the multiplicity of views of a people, becomes their true expression.³⁶

In the meantime, in a more popular vein, University of Montreal students mounted a yearly review called Bleu et or. Gratien Gélinas introduced his Fridolin to the province in 1938, and 1948 marked the

first production of Ti-cog. Fridolin and Les Fridolinades captured the attention of Quebecers from the start. Fridolin, Gélinas' monologue persona, was a man of the people who spoke in everyday language about everyday events, and while critics pointed to the character as proof positive that Quebec had yet to be "cultured," his audience adored him. Ti-cog was a play about a young soldier who resents his illegitimate birth in a world of respectable families. Aubry describes Ti-cog as "an expression at once individual and collective, of a people faced with revolt and with submission."³⁷

Gélinas went on to found his own company, La Comédie canadienne, in 1957. It was dedicated to building a theatre of French-Canadian character. In the meantime, other companies were springing up: le Théâtre de l'Équipe (1942), le Théâtre du Rideau Vert (1948), and le Théâtre du Nouveau Monde (1951). These companies sought to awaken public interest in theatre past and present. A number of avant-garde companies were also formed, such as l'Egrégore and les Saltimbanques. These were instrumental in bringing the work of the Absurdist and others to Quebec audiences. In 1952, Marcel Dubé, a young playwright, won first prize for his De l'autre côté du mur at the Dominion Drama Festival. It was perhaps at this point that Canada began to realize that indigenous theatre was possible.

In 1958 the Association canadienne du théâtre amateur (ACTA) was formed. The Association put out a bulletin, started a resource centre, and provided "ateliers," workshops on various aspects of the theatre. Other playwrights began to make themselves known over the

next few years, including Françoise Loranger, Jacques Ferron, and Jacques Languirand. The early sixties saw both Dubé and Gélinas exploring the idea of separatism in their plays, Dubé in Les Beaux Dimanches (The Beautiful Sundays), and Gélinas in Hier les enfants dansaient (Yesterday the Children Were Dancing). In 1965 the Centre d'essai des auteurs dramatiques (CEAD) was founded by playwright Robert Gurik and five other theatre artists, all of whom were determined that the CEAD be devoted to the development of a Quebec dramaturgy. The centre held public readings of new plays, published a magazine, and held roundtable discussions and workshops.

Le Théâtre Populaire du Québec was founded in 1966. It began as a government-funded organization which would tour the province in order to make "the classics" available to even the smallest communities. In 1967, the Festival de l'ACTA coincided with Expo '67, and a series of exclusively québécois plays was presented. Soon after, the Quebec government quadrupled cultural funding, a move that had great influence on the development of the "jeune théâtre" (young theatre).

In 1968, Michel Tremblay's Les Belles-Sœurs had an immeasurable impact on the developing Quebec theatre. For the first time a play depicted poor Quebecers speaking their own language and living in a slum. The critics were torn. Some insisted that the use of jargon was what made the play real; others argued that depicting Quebecers in such a negative light did nothing to further the province's cultural development. Whatever one believed, Les Belles-Sœurs spelled

the virtual end of French-Canadian drama in Quebec (in the old sense of the term, at least), and pointed the way irrevocably towards a truly québécois theatre. The Canadian stage character virtually disappeared, displaced by an urban Québécois in search of a new identity.

The following year, 1969, saw the founding of two new professional theatre companies devoted to collective creation. Le Grand Cirque Ordinaire and le Théâtre du Même Nom would be followed by other "jeune théâtre" companies characterized by the optimism of the sixties and the wish to democratize the processes of theatre creation. Every actor, no longer enslaved by playwrights and directors, was to have an equal opportunity to express his or her creativity.

Collective creation, responding to the democratizing objectives of these troupes, opens up new perspectives to actors who, as interpreters in the service of a work, become the active agents of creativity and assume, individually and collectively, a desire for social transformation through and with theatre.³⁸

Accordingly, 1973 saw the re-orientation of ACTA to AQJT, or Association québécois du jeune théâtre. As time went on, the politicization of the young people of Quebec would be reflected in the AQJT, which would become more and more radicalized. Its members did indeed see themselves as producers of "alternative" theatre and truly popular theatre. The new theatre continued to grow up alongside what was by now becoming an established mainstream. Workshops given by the AQJT helped the young companies to share their theatrical techniques, and these included explorations of mime, masks, and puppetry. Yearly festivals celebrated the works of the young companies.

It was in this atmosphere of collective creativity and democratization that le Grand Cirque Ordinaire and le Théâtre Éuh! made their unique contributions to Quebec theatre. These companies came to life at a time when Quebec society was very conscious of its own inner workings; ideas of nation were being explored and articulated, and thus were part of the day-to-day discourse of artists and intellectuals. In fact such people were often on the front line of whatever debate was currently raging. Within Canada, Quebec had become the hub around which discussions of national unity turned, even while many Québécois remained "at the same time, passionately committed to Quebec independence and massively indifferent to the rest of Canada."³⁹

Despite the differences in scale alluded to at the beginning of this chapter, the social and cultural histories of Quebec and Newfoundland provide interesting parallels. Similar histories of cultural domination reflect the economic and political realities in the two provinces. At first, European mercantilism retarded settlement in the two colonies, and the subsequent development of staple economies dependent on European markets continued the pattern. Both colonies maintained something of a peasant class with little or no bourgeoisie. Religion played an important role in keeping French Canada a coherent entity; in Newfoundland, the powerhold of two Churches had a lasting effect on politics and education.

Though Newfoundland and Quebec both entered the 20th Century

late, they did so for different reasons. Quebec had already modernized in terms of industry; it remained for a government to admit that fact and to formulate social policy in keeping with modern realities.

Thus duplessisme gave way to the Quiet Revolution. For Newfoundland, modernization was even more necessary and therefore more of a jolt.

During the Quiet Revolution, Quebecers had come to realize that the future had been kept from them; in Newfoundland, the same realization was complicated by the fact that now the past was being sacrificed for the sake of the future. In the early seventies, as subsequent chapters will show, *le Théâtre Euh!* and *le Grand Cirque Ordinaire* would express disillusion with a modern world where social equality did not exist, reflecting the attitude that social reforms were too little and too late. For the Mummerys and Codco, however, "too little, too late" was inextricably linked to "too much, too soon," as modernization and federal funds paved the way for Newfoundlanders to become just like other Canadians. Whereas the Quebec companies spent little time being nostalgic and strove instead to become socially critical, for the Newfoundland companies nostalgia was to become an implicit part of the criticism.

NOTES

¹Usmiani, p. 91.

²F.W. Rowe, A History of Newfoundland and Labrador (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson Limited, 1980), p. 19.

³S.J.R. Noel, Politics in Newfoundland (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971), p. 4.

⁴For examples of early "Gullivers," see Patrick O'Flaherty's The Rock Observed: Studies in the Literature of Newfoundland (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979).

⁵Noel, p. 5.

⁶Ibid., p. 9.

⁷Ibid., p. 41.

⁸Ibid., p. 132.

⁹Ibid., p. 131.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 257.

¹¹Ibid., p. 260.

¹²Ibid., p. 274.

¹³Ibid., p. 277.

¹⁴Usmiani, p. 91.

¹⁵F.W. Rowe, Education and Culture in Newfoundland (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson Limited, 1976), p. 98.

¹⁶Marie Kurchak, "What Challenge? What Change?" Canadian Film Reader eds. Seth Feldman and Joyce Nelson. (Toronto: Peter Martin Associates Limited, 1977), p. 122.

¹⁷Sandra Gwyn, p. 44.

¹⁸Chesley Skinner, "Drama in Newfoundland Society: The Community Concert" (Ph.D. dissertation, Michigan State University, 1984). Quoted from abstract.

¹⁹P. Lloyd Soper, The St. John's Players: The Little Theatre in Newfoundland (St. John's, 1949), p. 44.

²⁰Roberta Buchanan, "Outport Reminders" Canadian Theatre Review 43, Summer 1985.

²¹Ibid.

²²Ibid.

²³Sylvia Wigh, "Recent Development in the Theatre," The Book of Newfoundland Vol. IV, ed. Joseph R. Smallwood. (St. John's: Newfoundland Book Publishers Ltd., 1967), p. 386.

²⁴John L. Finlay and Douglas N. Sprague, The Structure of Canadian History (Scarborough: Prentice-Hall Canada Inc., 1984). p. 43.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Ibid., p. 77.

²⁷Ibid., p. 131.

²⁸Ibid., p. 422.

²⁹Ibid., p. 423.

³⁰Pierre-François Gingras and Neil Nevitte, "The Evolution of Quebec Nationalism," p. 8.

³¹Suzanne Aubry, Le Théâtre au Québec: l'émergence d'une dramaturgie nationale (Montreal: Centre québécois de l'Institut internationale du théâtre, 1983), p. 5. All quotations from Aubry are translated.

³²Ibid., p. 7.

³³Ibid., p. 9.

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 12.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 13.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 25.

³⁹ Kenneth McRoberts and Dale Posgate, Quebec: Social Change and Political Crisis revised edition, (Toronto; McClelland and Stewart, 1980), p. 270.

CHAPTER THREE

Popular Theatre and Alternative Ideals: The Development of Four Collectives

The Mummers Troupe, Codco, le Grand Cirque Ordinaire, and le Théâtre Euh! can all be described as "alternative" theatre companies. The meaning of this term needs to be explored, particularly in the rather unique context of Canadian theatre. Usmiani provides a succinct definition at the outset of her book, by placing the development of Canadian theatre in a world context. Unquestionably, such a context is a useful beginning, for even Canadian cultural nationalists must admit that theatre artists in this country have taken many lessons from international social and theatrical movements. The important aspect of Usmiani's definition is the idea that an alternative movement

defines itself as a consciously posited parallel to the mainstream, which it does not seek to replace Alternative movements set themselves up in opposition to institutions and social patterns, as well as artistic conventions.

In other words, alternative theatre is theatre responding to "counter-culture" patterns. These patterns have in common the rejection of certain traditions, the rescue or revitalisation of others, the questioning of widely-held values, and any other attempts to demythify dominant ideologies. I will here paraphrase the six characteristics which according to Usmiani identify alternative theatre companies: They are unsubsidized, or minimally so; they are revolutionary and experimental in their aesthetics and/or social and political ideologies; they aim at being widely accessible, both financially, in

terms of admission prices, and physically, in the sense that many alternative companies make touring to small communities part of their mandate; they often use collective techniques and improvisation to create productions; and, finally, in Canada alternative theatre companies tend to be nationalistic, in that they are concerned with contributing to a national theatre. On this last note, Usmiani points to the Canadian theatre movement's

emphasis on original works and the need to support Canadian playwrights [which] constitutes a strong protest against cultural colonialism. The goal of alternative theatre in this country, then, would seem to be the implementation, at last, of the demand made already in the 40's by Gratien Gélinas, when he called for a "national and popular" theatre - with a considerably more radical interpretation of those terms than the one given them thirty years earlier.²

How one interprets the terms "revolutionary," "national," and "popular" is the linchpin of the present discussion. Often what is seen as revolutionary in Canadian culture is simply that it is "national" and "popular." In a society where culture is weighed down by a colonial mentality, any attempt at indigenous expression is a challenge to cultural and artistic standards. For example, the Mummers' I.W.A. and le Grand Cirque Ordinaire's T'en rappelles-tu, Pibrac?, both community portraits, are revolutionary in that they attempted to instill in their audiences a sense of dignity and pride, and thereby encouraged those people to gain a measure of control over their lives. As Grand Cirque Ordinaire member Paule

Baillargeon has said of the people of Pibrac, "in seeing themselves represented in this way, they suddenly began to think of themselves as important. That's political."³ Sandra Gwyn says something quite similar in describing a Mummers production she attended as "an intense psychological experience that moved me profoundly and gave [members of the local audience] a sense, possibly for the first time in their lives, of having been important."⁴

In addition to this kind of testimony, members of le Grand Cirque and Codco have referred to the emotionally cathartic effect that some of their productions have had on audiences.⁵ This catharsis seems to have been experienced not because audiences transcended their own realities, but rather because they enjoyed being presented with those realities, probably, as Gwyn makes quite clear, for the first time in their lives. This experience would not be cathartic in the usual sense, because it implies more than identification with a fictional character; it implies identification with a character similar to one's own self. Whereas catharsis is thought of as emotional purgation, perhaps we would do well to think of this mirroring of one's reality as a kind of psychic nourishment. Playwright and social critic Rick Salutin has argued that it is perhaps this very mirror of themselves that Canadian audiences need, rather than Brechtian or other alienation effects:

Brecht was operating in a German culture with a tradition of stormy romanticism, of Sturm und Drang, huge emotional demands for involvement and an

audience accustomed to being swept into a scene with the thrill of it all. They had to be alienated a little so they could bring their minds into play as part of the aesthetic experience. In Canada today, however, we are already detached from our own experience. Far from being over-involved and over-identified, we hardly see enough of our own experience to recognize it. And what we do get is often done the detached, documentary way. In this - our - situation, not more but less detachment may be called for. A kind of anti-alienation effect may be on the agenda for Canadian culture at this point.

Canadian alternative theatre often functioned, as has already been noted, as the alternative to a void left unfilled by other forms of Canadian expression, Hollywood films, or any other imported and/or officially sanctioned cultural products. Of course, the plays of the four companies under discussion were often revolutionary in the directly political sense that they encouraged audiences not simply to recognize themselves as oppressed people, but to do something about it. It is this sense of the term "alternative" that Alan Filewod invokes in his review of Usmiani's book when he asks, "if 'alternative' is a volitional stand, why was it institutionalized by the Canada Council and maintained by grant ceilings?"⁷ What he implies is that, if alternative theatre ever caused a revolution in Canada it was in the minds and hearts of people, and not in the streets of the nation. Still, even a revolution in ways of looking at Canada's people was enough of a threat that three of the four companies under discussion experienced closures of their shows by the authorities and/or had difficulty in getting funding for shows in the first place.

Canada, Susan Crean argued ten years ago, does not have an official culture of its own. State-recognized culture is imported, and "underground"

cultural expression is the only true expression of our experiences:

In most cultures, the artistic underground is the refuge of what is (as yet) unacceptable and unaccountable to the mainstream. . . . But in Canada, the underground does not work that way. It is not the avant-garde, or the counter-culture, or Bohemia, it is a "minority" culture all on its own, living in the shadow of Official Culture . . . In Canada the essential differences between official and underground culture are not formal (i.e. stylistic or technical) They are philosophical and political, involving opposite approaches to the questions of aesthetic excellence and economic control in the arts. Ultimately both rebound on nationalist issues.

Crean concludes that the counter-culture movement in Canada was actually a counter-colonial-culture movement, a struggle against imported cultural standards about what is important in terms of art, expression, and artistic merit. We noted earlier that the conflict between state nationalism and folk nationalism is really about is the difference in views regarding the function and purpose of democracies. If the liberal ideologists are concerned with making elitist, official, and universal art accessible to the many, alternative ideologists are more concerned that a people be allowed to enjoy an art that reflects its own realities. To some extent Codco, and to a greater extent the Mummens, le Grand Cirque Ordinaire, and le Théâtre Euh! devoted much of their time touring to communities where the people were seeing theatre for the first time, and where the companies performed in non-theatrical venues closely linked to the everyday lives of their audiences. The church basements, meeting halls, and hockey arenas the four companies performed in are the antithesis of the plush interiors of subsidized arts centres.

It is worth noting at this point that the members of le Grand

Cirque Ordinaire, Codco, the Mummerys Troupe and le Théâtre Euh! either had little theatre training to begin with or else rejected much of what they had been taught because theatre schools did not provide them with the opportunity to express themselves. It seems that once inside the bastions of cultural learning, actors were not expected to think.⁹ Alternative theatres were, for the most part, their own schools, developing their own aesthetics as they went along, following the popular traditions they felt their audiences related to and could learn from.

The kind of popular theatre these companies created deserves a specific definition at this point in the discussion. By "popular theatre," I mean a theatre which takes as its subject the lives of ordinary (read, lower to middle class) people and which considers the articulation of the hopes, fears, and realities of such people to be its main goal. This is the drama which Salutin hints at. The definition, for present purposes, was drawn from David Mayer's "Towards a Definition of Popular Theatre,"¹⁰ and Bertolt Brecht's On Theatre. Mayer's essay is curious in that it does not mention Brecht, but his idea of what constitutes popular theatre explains why. Mayer sees popular theatre as being the antithesis of "aesthetic theatre," or theatre as an art form. As Mayer sees it, the drama of the aesthetic culture is characterized by

single authorship, by playwrights who would be known for their skills, by structural and aesthetic relevance, by willingness to face complex moral issues without blinking and to lead audiences

to newer or different attitudes. It is intended for audiences sufficiently educated to insist upon artistic and intellectual coherence.¹²

Popular drama, on the other hand, is

determined by function, utility and amusement being the chiefest of these. It has utility in that it serves social needs through public rites or through plays that reinforce desirable social and moral conclusions. . . . It beguiles and amuses, rests and relaxes the mind, encourages conviviality and satisfaction with things as they are.¹³

In Mayer's definition, popular theatre exists only for enjoyment and the maintenance of the status quo, while social criticism and intellectual stimulation are the domain of the aesthetic drama.

Yet he also feels that the best drama incorporates both forms.

Without mentioning any particular theatre artists by name, Mayer concedes that

the realization that there are nevertheless points of tension and friction between the popular and the aesthetic has led in recent years to work of considerable benefit and effectiveness in the drama . . . which because of its very effectiveness further blurs the distinction between the popular and the aesthetic cultures. This work arises out of authors, directors, and artists deliberately exploring Western popular cultures and using extensively the techniques of communication and the mythologies that have emerged within those cultures. Those who work these veins and their audiences can testify to the currency and power of the mythologies, especially at such times as the myths are magnified, re-examined and turned against the societies that produced them. Myths thus treated can reveal the aggression, fears, banalities and devious foundations of a society. Setting them in distorted versions of popular dramatic forms raises further questions about the values and methods of that society. We know what that dramatic form was devised to tell us, and an ironic use of that form brings an ironic awareness of its habitual traditional content.¹⁴

Mayer's use of the term 'popular drama' implies a kind of theatre which is unselfconscious, while Brecht's implies a self-conscious form of theatre, one which, like those Mayer describes immediately above, possesses a critical attitude towards the status quo. Brecht appropriated the forms of popular theatre and used them for his own intent, which was to move people to think critically about what they were seeing, rather than simply to move them emotionally. As Mayer might express it, Brecht brought the forms of popular drama into the aesthetic drama in order both to entertain the popular audience and to encourage that audience to think about its situation. This conception is very different from Mayer's idea of pure popular theatre, which, in his terms, would tend to encourage complacency. To Brecht, popular theatre involved more than the use of popular forms, it involved their transformation:

Popular means intelligible to the broad masses, taking over their forms of expression and enriching them, adopting them and consolidating their standpoint, representing the most progressive section of the people in such a way that it can take over the leadership.¹⁵

What was known as 'agit-prop' art, which a number of second-rate noses were turned up at, was a mine of novel artistic techniques and ways of expression. Magnificent and long-forgotten elements from periods of truly popular art cropped up there, boldly adapted to the new social ends.¹⁶

We will see how the work of the four companies under discussion moved back and forth between Mayer's definition of popular theatre and Brecht's use of popular forms, sometimes for the sheer joy of it

and sometimes to achieve Brechtian alienation effects.

The popular forms that the four troupes used, which Usmiani refers to as "non-mainstream forms,"¹⁷ include mime, masks, mummering, puppetry and clowning. Many of these techniques, in their modern forms at least, came to Canada via the United States and Europe already "Brechtianized." Raymond Cloutier of le Grand Cirque Ordinaire and Clément Cazels and Marc Doré of le Théâtre Euh learned clowning techniques at the Lecoq school in Paris. Chris Brookes of the Mimmers and Raymond Cloutier have noted the influence of American avant-garde companies such as Bread and Puppet Theatre, The Living Theatre, and the San Francisco Mime Troupe.

In spite of this, Usmiani, like Mayer, seems to insist upon separating such popular forms from the aesthetic theatre:

non-mainstream theatrical forms of the past, such as puppet shows, folk theatre, clown and mime shows differ from modern alternative theatre in the sense that they were not specifically set up as a counter-culture or alternative; they were simply minor genres within the general context of theatre.¹⁸

But perhaps Mayer and Usmiani are missing a point about popular forms which Brecht seems to have understood. To Brecht, the point about the "non-mainstream" forms and "minor genres" of theatre such as the mime and the circus is that they are at least as old as, in fact much older than, mainstream forms such as the well-made play. We have seen that Brecht referred to them as "magnificent

and long-forgotten elements from periods of truly popular art." If modern alternative theatre companies adopted popular forms, it was because such forms traditionally served a non-elite audience. As such, they are durable vehicles for social protest. This is an aspect of folk culture that neither Usmiani nor Mayer deals with properly, but which seems to have been an important inspiration to some alternative companies. Chris Brookes, founder of the Mummers Troupe, identified strongly with the element of mummering which had in the past led to mischief and to expressions of class conflict. Clément Cazalais and Marie-Renée Charest, former members of le Théâtre Euh!, recently served as director and dramaturge of a production of Dario Fo's Mistero Buffo. Fo's play is about the life of Christ as recounted by a troupe of "jongleurs," medieval clowns who were apt at exposing the painful truths about society - not unlike the clowns of le Théâtre Euh!. Le Grand Cirque Ordinaire, in addition to employing deliberately Brechtian techniques, also excelled at creating, with parades, music, and movement, an atmosphere of the "fête populaire," a term which suggests a joyous, spontaneous celebration with something of the carnival and the harvest thrown in, and for which there is no one adequate English translation, since the term "folk festival" has come to imply a celebration of music alone. In any case, the term does imply an event which militates against the dignity and formality of elitist art - something which Codco also specializes

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in. Codco does what comedy troupes have always done, and with a vengeance. Sandra Gwyn called Codco's style "commedia dell'outport,"¹⁹ probably recognizing in the company's "off-the-wall" humour and local themes a quality of theatre which has its roots deep in the past. In conclusion, perhaps one could argue that popular forms have always been capable of satire and protest, simply by not being Art.

To sum up the preceding discussion, we have noted that alternative theatre tends to be a theatre of the "counter-culture." Susan Crean notes that in the colonized culture that is Canada's, nationalism becomes part of the counter-culture ideology. As the kind of nationalism she refers to challenges elitist systems, it should not surprise us that nationalist theatre is often "popular" theatre in both Mayer's and Brecht's senses of the term. It is only fitting, after all, that a nationalist movement, which presumes the existence of "a people," should find its theatrical voice addressing itself to this people. Hence my own definition of popular theatre, which incorporates the joyous and celebratory aspect of Mayer's definition with the critical thinking implied by Brecht's. The ideal result for Canadian audiences would be a kind of popular theatre which incorporates the joy (and often discomfort) of self-recognition with some kind of spur to critical thinking. This seems to be the kind of cultural expression which Salutin recommends.

It is time now to turn to the histories of the four companies

themselves so that we may begin to compare their work. The geneses of the companies will be recounted and several productions from each will be outlined briefly. Some attention will be paid to their organizational structures, questions of funding, and both formal and informal statements of artistic goals and practices. This chapter will conclude with a consideration of why the four companies chose to stop performing.

Le Théâtre Euh!

As Usmiani notes, le Théâtre Euh! originated in 1970, the same year as Quebec City's "official, subsidized" Grand Théâtre. The group was started by several theatre school graduates living in the city. Marc Doré had studied with Jacques Lecoq²⁰ in Paris several years earlier, and Clément Cazalais had recently returned from the Lecoq school. All of the others, Marie-Renée Charest, Marie-France Desrochers, Yves-Erick Marier, and eventually Lise Bolduc, had participated in workshops given by Doré. Charest and Desrochers had attended the Conservatoire d'art dramatique in Quebec City, Cazalais the Conservatoire in Montreal. (Jean Bauer and Cathérine Catel-Bauer would spend nearly all of 1971 with the troupe.)

Most of the founding members worked as "animateurs" or in other educational capacities throughout the life of the troupe (1970-1978). It was decided from the beginning that the troupe would

function without funding in order to maintain total freedom of expression. Still, they insisted on charging a nominal fee for performances in order that their work be seen as work, and some performances were paid for by the various groups for whom the company performed "on command." These included community groups, schools, union locals, and so on. Gérald Sigouin sums up le Théâtre Euh!'s approach to theatre in this way:

Le Théâtre Euh! is here to tell us that the theatre of "Culture," the theatre of consumption and illusion, is dead. Make way for a theatre of intervention! Make way for a socially critical theatre that seeks to open the spectator's mind to his own alienation and slavery! This theatre of open struggle, which devotes itself to the condition of man, works in line with an ideology which believes that art can and must change reality, that art can and must intervene in History, that theatre is more than an art of expression and may also become an art of explanation.²¹

Euh! implies a hesitation, a loss for words (like 'um' in English), which epitomized the troupe members' unwillingness to categorize themselves. In the seven-odd years of its existence the company moved from the anarchist fringes of Quebec's avant-garde to children's theatre and community and union-sponsored productions. They eventually wound up under the aegis of a Marxist-Leninist group. They performed in all sorts of facilities, part of their credo being that theatre could happen anywhere a group of actors chose to make it happen.

They became adept at outdoor performances as the clowns Sam, Pic, Poc, and Ket (and later Plum). Such performances would

begin with a parade to attract the attention of people in the vicinity. The group developed repetitive verbal techniques suited not only to their clown characters but also to the problematic acoustics of outdoor performances. Like most clowns, Sam, Pic, Poc, and Ket wore masks or red noses, funny hats, and patched clothing, but they were also clowns with a message. In fact they were highly politicized clowns acting out skits about local and national issues. For example, La Place Royale was about the closing of a community centre in a poor section of Quebec City, l'Histoire du Québec was about the colonization of Quebec, and A bas le vieux kit! (Down With The Old System!) was about worker solidarity.

Le Théâtre Euh! functioned as a true collective. Each play was a series of epic-style sketches improvised on a single theme. The company did not perform exclusively as clowns; several early shows, namely Quand le Matriarcat fait des Petits (When the Matriarchate Has a Litter) and Cré Antigone! (That Damned Antigone!) did not use the clown characters. In any case, most of the plays used masks, dolls, and simple, childlike musical instruments such as tambourines and kazoos. Sigouin describes le Théâtre Euh!'s style as "a style of theatre which is very physical, imaginative, and effective."²²

The Euh! plays which will be referred to in Chapter Four include l'Histoire du Québec, Quand le matriarcat fait des petits, and a specific performance of Un, deux, trois . . . vendu! (Going, Going,

. . . Gone!). L'Histoire du Québec was partly inspired by Léandre Bergeron's polemical book of the same name, and told the story of the province as a series of oppressions. Quand le matriarcat fait des petits was essentially a study of the twin ideologies of motherhood and family, which were something of an obsession with Quebec artists at the time. Un, deux, trois . . . vendu!, like the Mummens' Gros Mourn, was an attempt to give voice to the frustrations of a community whose farms and homes were in danger of being expropriated (in this case, for Mirabel Airport) and to encourage inhabitants to protest. Cré Antigone!, one of the company's earliest productions, was an allegorical exploration of repression modelled on Brecht's Antigone, with Antigone as a factory worker and Creon as the capitalist owner and dictator.

In the eight years that they worked together, members performed for audiences in and around Quebec City, becoming more and more oriented to labour politics and socialism, and all the while exploring "le dynamique du clown." Production style was as simple as possible, "la scène dépouillée" (the bare stage) being part of the company's aesthetic. This simplicity often resulted in a crudeness which became part of the company's style. (In fact this was true for the other troupes as well.) For example, in a sketch from L'Histoire du Québec, a clown carries on a one-sided conversation with a doll dressed as a native Indian. The conversation ended, the clown puts the doll away in a box which he claims will keep

it safe - like a reservation. In other skits, an actor in a pig mask portrays a capitalist character. By adopting the image of the clown (which modern audiences identify with childlike and harmless entertainment), and infusing it with political meaning, le Théâtre Euh! did indeed develop its own "dynamique du clown," a dynamic which questioned authority.

Le Grand Cirque Ordinaire

Le Grand Cirque Ordinaire evolved out of two major factors: the disillusion of several young québécois theatre students with what they saw as outmoded teachings, and Raymond Cloutier's studies with Jacques Lecoq in Paris. In 1968 a group of third-year students at the National Theatre School in Montreal presented the director with a manifesto demanding permission to perform Quebec plays. They were rebuffed, and in response a number of students quit the school. A group of them proceeded to put together the kind of show they wanted to do. Pot T.V. (implying both "pas de T.V." and "pot" T.V.) was a series of sketches about young people in Quebec society, drawn from the actors' own experiences of everyday life. When Raymond Cloutier approached Albert Millaire, the new head of the Théâtre Populaire du Québec, with an outline for a subsequent production, Millaire was enthusiastic. It was agreed that the company would work under the aegis of the TPQ and so

the organization which had previously toured the classics would now pay a weekly salary to a group of actors to produce original material.

The original members of the company were Cloutier, Pierre Curzi, Paule Baillargeon, Suzanne Garceau, Jocelyn Bérubé, Gilbert Sicotte, Guy Thauvette, and Claude Larocque. As Usmani notes, the name the actors chose for their company

reflects their basic philosophy: "Circus" indicates a popular, light-hearted, non-verbal approach to theatre; "grand" modifies this and indicates a seriousness of intent which transcends the usual context of circus performance; and "ordinaire" refers to the ordinary everyday life, which is a base of reference for the productions. The group called its production "spectacles socio-poétiques," clearly indicating a desire to combine Brechtian fable and Artaudian communion.²³

The first production by le Grand Cirque Ordinaire was loosely based on Brecht's radio play Joan of Arc. T'es pas tannée, Jeanne d'Arc? (Aren't You Fed Up, Joan of Arc?) toured the province in 1969 and 1970. Jeanne d'Arc encapsulated all the important themes of subsequent Grand Cirque productions, questioning the family, the authority of the church and other institutions, and North American consumer society. Joan of Arc was chosen as an archetypal nationalist figure, and a series of sketches was improvised around both her life and the everyday lives of modern Quebecers.

Like le Théâtre Euh!, le Grand Cirque Ordinaire often preceded shows with small but jubilantly noisy and colourful parades into the playing area, whether it was a community hall, a hockey arena, or

an actual theatre. Also like le Théâtre Euh!, le Grand Cirque Ordinaire tended to use minimal sets and simple props that would serve a multitude of purposes. Costumes, too, were minimal: over a pair of overalls and a t-shirt, a hat would do to represent the father of a family, while a vest of crocheted "chain mail" identified St. Joan. At the back of the stage, three silent puppets watched the proceedings - the Church, the Conqueror, and Justice. Masks were also used: in a sketch about the sale of Quebec, five potential buyers wearing masks ogle the "300-year-old virgin", and discuss how best to plunder her resources. In this scene Quebec does not wear a mask; instead she is gagged and her hands are tied. She wears a tinsel crown and her long blue robe is resplendent with fleurs-de-lys.²⁴ In a sense this skit is typical of all the four companies at their best, incorporating the visual naiveté of a child's game of dress-up with biting satire that proves how dangerous such naiveté can be. The children playing this game are neither innocent nor ignorant.

The second production of la Grand Cirque Ordinaire continued in the same vein. La Famille Transparente was a satiric look at the family and the way the family underpins the structure of all of society. Father Honoré and Mother Desirée are the parents of Dommage, Pacifique, Prospère and Bébé-Buick. For this production each member of the company developed his or her own character and wrote a theme song for it. Then the cast improvised collectively and the scenes about the family's life evolved.

Le Grand Cirque's third production, T'en rappelles-tu, Pibrac, ou le québécois? (Do You Remember, Pibrac, or the Quebec - what?) was to prove a difficult one. The company was touring La Famille Transparente when they arrived in the small town of Pibrac, where unemployment was high and 150 families were on welfare. The play that evolved out of the company's view of the town was meant to foster community solidarity and to encourage a nascent lumber co-op. In Usmiani's words, the play "attempted to encourage the co-op movement by presenting the community a picture of themselves and their relationship with the government."²⁵

This was the group's first foray into the "useful" theatre, meaning political in the sense that it encourages an audience to take a stand. It also forced the actors to confront their own beliefs vis à vis art and the political sphere. The dissenting views which resulted in disagreements between members would have a lasting effect on the company. In any case the show was closed down by the authorities, presumably because it depicted Jean Drapeau, Robert Bourassa, and Pierre Trudeau as not only heartless but also homosexual. The troupe disbanded, frustrated and exhausted. When they eventually regrouped it was as an independent co-operative, but the TPQ would eventually ask them to return to the fold.

A show we will discuss in some detail is La Tragédie américaine de l'enfant prodigue, the group's foray into the world of the rock opera. A biblical allegory, the play explores the adventures of the

prodigal child in search of a treasure chest. The play concludes that the world is a wicked place and that "peace and love," that optimistic credo of the 60's generation, is an illusion. It is interesting to note that Codco started to write a rock opera as well, though "Bernie Snelgrove: Superstar" ended up as a lengthy sketch, which reached similar conclusions about the same generation, but for very different reasons. Why this is so will be explored in the next chapter; for now, suffice it to say that La Tragédie américaine was described by one critic as a cross between Aristophanes and Frank Zappa,²⁶ while "Bernie" might best be described as a cross between Frank Zappa and Peer Gynt.

Two other Grand Cirque productions should be mentioned here. L'Opéra des Pauvres (The Poor People's Opera) dealt with a group of friends growing up and finding themselves dissatisfied with their middle-class lives. Un Prince, mon jour viendra (Some Prince, My Day Will Come) was created by Paule Baillargeon, Suzanne Garceau, and Luce Ghibault, an actress from outside the company. Un Prince was a satirical play about the likelihood of women becoming liberated while men remain violent aggressors. It is generally regarded as the first real feminist play of Quebec theatre. Though it would be unfair to say that the four companies did not deal with women's issues on some level, this play, with the Mummers' Stars in the Sky Morning, a portrait of outport women by Jane Dingle and Rhonda Payne, and Ouvrez les portes des maisons (Open the Doors of the Houses) by le Théâtre Euh!, which was a play about the role of women in social

reform, are the only full-length plays specifically about women.

The Mummers Troupe

The Mummers Troupe of Newfoundland was founded in 1972, when Chris Brookes and Lynn Lunde, who had been touring the province with a Punch and Judy show, decided to revive the folk tradition of mummering in Newfoundland.

Mummering, or mumming, dates at least as far back as the Middle Ages, and had come to Newfoundland from Britain. The English tradition was to tour the homes in one's village during the twelve nights of Christmas, performing a play about St. George and the Turkish Knight. After each performance, the householders would try to guess the identity of the disguised players. In Newfoundland, mumming had survived as an oral tradition passed down through the generations.²⁷ As a "popular," rather than artistic form, mumming in the class-divided St. John's had taken on a character of mischievousness in the nineteenth century. Respectable citizens complained of pranks and rowdiness, with the result that mumming was outlawed in the city in the 1860's.

Chris Brookes sees mumming as related to other folk traditions whereby the lower classes are allowed a temporary and ritualistic control, and all classes are allowed a temporary relaxation of societal mores. Hence the traditions of the Rule of Misrule, the Boy King, and the footloose behaviour of revellers at Christmas and other

festive occasions.²⁸ It was the class-based, mischievous aspect of mummering that Brookes adopted and developed into a tool for social criticism.

Brookes had studied theatre at Dalhousie, Michigan State, and Yale universities. He worked with several important Canadian alternative companies, including Savage God and Passe Muraille, before lecturing at Simon Fraser for a short time. He returned to Newfoundland and was inspired by the Fogo Island Project to set up a theatre company that would play a meaningful role in community life. The other early members of the troupe came from a variety of backgrounds, some trained for the theatre, some enthusiastic amateurs, and some interested in the political stance of the company.

The Mummers Troupe, like the other three companies under study, became its own school. The sheer volume of people who moved through the company on their way to something else is one of the major differences between the Mummers and the other three companies. (For a list of their names, see Appendix.) While it is difficult to assess the effect this may have had on the life of the company, it could suggest any number of things. The difficulty of procuring adequate and stable funding, so that members could stay with the company indefinitely rather than on a show-to-show basis, was an everyday reality for the Mummers. In addition, the democratic structure of the company, in which any aspect of the troupe's functioning was open to discussion, must have made

consensus difficult. And it was perhaps inevitable that some Mummers, like some members of le Grand Cirque Ordinaire and le Théâtre Euh!, would have difficulty reconciling art to politics and vice-versa.

While touring the province with Lynn Lunde, Brookes had become determined to restore a sense of cultural dignity to the people of Newfoundland. He felt that in order to do so it was essential that Newfoundlanders develop a consciousness of the political and economic forces that controlled their lives. Mummering was just the beginning, for like the Quebec companies the Mummers Troupe would make use of the popular theatrical forms of clowning, masks, puppetry and mime to expose the dynamics of modern society.

The productions by the Mummers which we will be looking at are: The Mummers History of Newfoundland (also called Newfoundland Night), a view of Newfoundland's history which, like Euh!'s history of Quebec, views the past as a series of oppressions; Gros Mourn, an agit-prop production about the proposed resettlement of an entire community for the sake of a national park and as such very similar to le Théâtre Euh!'s Un, deux, trois . . . vendu!; and Buchans: A Mining Town,² a portrait of a one-industry town owned by an American company.

The Mummers Troupe began with its members pooling their resources, and throughout the life of the company, funding would remain a problem. The troupe depended to a great extent on

Canada Council grants, as the provincial government was not forthcoming with funds. Generally, shows were also funded by the various organizations apt to take an interest in the project at hand.

For example, Weather Permitting, a play about life in Labrador, was funded by the Labrador Resources Advisory Council. The Price of Fish, which explored the idea of Newfoundland being a Third World Community, was funded by Oxfam. It was not until 1977, when the Mummer created a show which counteracted negative views of the seal hunt, that the government of Newfoundland showed any interest in supporting the troupe's work.

Codco

Codco got its start in 1973, when a group of Newfoundlanders living in Toronto joined forces to create a show about Newfoundland. Some of them had auditioned for a production of Them Donnellys at Theatre Passe Muraille. Director Paul Thompson was impressed with their abilities but felt he could not have Newfoundland accents in a play about Southern Ontario. Instead, he gave them a grant of three hundred dollars to do a show reflecting their own culture.

The result was Cod On A Stick, a depiction of Newfoundland people and a send-up of the strange ideas mainlanders seemed to have about Canada's tenth province. Sketches in the production include sardonic scenes of outport life, Newfoundlanders in the unemployment office, Mother England as a ventriloquist (putting

words into the mouth of her Newfie Puppet before throwing him on the mercies of Captain Canada), and a Newfoundland delegate whose pithy comments on federal stupidity are simultaneously translated into government bureaucratese for the benefit of the House. Described by one critic as "The Newfie Joke That Bites Back,"²⁹ Cod On A Stick set the stage for further Codco material which, while often less oriented to strictly Newfoundland experience, continued to take shots at hypocrisy and pretension everywhere, whether in family life, the church, politics, or the arts.

Unlike the other companies under discussion, Codco (the name combines a sideways glance at other newspeak words like Canlit or Candu with an obvious reference to "cod" as both Newfoundland's staple export and a word which describes a jokester) never purported to have any other mandate than to make people laugh. It is the manner in which the company went about doing just that which places it within the framework of this discussion. Comparisons have been made between Codco and Second City, Monty Python, and Saturday Night Live, yet this company has been and remains so rooted in the realities and banalities of Newfoundland life that at times no comparisons can be made.

The original structure of Codco included seven actors and a business manager. Of the four companies, Codco is alone in that it retains some of its former shape. Five of the original seven members are, at the moment of writing, touring a retrospective

show, while several solo acts have developed and a new television series is planned. That Codco retains some of its former shape and cohesiveness (not to mention audience) is testament not only to the individual talents of its members but also to the enduring popularity (and here I use the word in its most general sense) of humour as entertainment.

The original seven members of Codco were Tommy Sexton, Greg Malone, Cathy Jones, Mary Walsh, Andy Jones, Dyan Olsen, and Bob Joy, with Maisie Rillie as business manager. None of them had "official" theatre training, but all had plenty of amateur experience and several had worked with professional companies such as Theatre Passe Muraille.

Most of the discussion of Codco material will centre on Cod On A Stick. Sickness, Death, and Beyond the Grave, which combines skits on those hair-raising topics with satire sharp enough to take the pomp out of anyone's circumstance, will also be discussed. Das Capital, Codco's third production, was commissioned by a group concerned with development in St. John's, and became something of a portrait of the city. Would You Like To Smell My Pocket Crumbs? satirizes everything from hospitals to television evangelism, and while this show was less "about" Newfoundland than the first three, many of its targets remain central to this discussion in terms of themes, especially as regards the family, religion, and North American values (or lack of them).

To conclude this chapter, a few words must be said about the fact that three of these companies are no more. Le Théâtre Euh!, according to Marie-Renée Charest, did not so much collapse as get "swallowed up by politics."³⁰ Some members eventually objected to the political direction the troupe was taking, and the company disbanded in early 1977. Charest and Cazelaïs went on to found Théâtre à L'Ouvrage (Theatre at Work) and aligned themselves to a Marxist-Leninist group. They now perceive that as a serious error, feeling that an artist in such a position is robbed of autonomy:

The role of the artist is always to remain an independent thinker. . . . The artist should never be politically aligned. We were always obliged to defend certain ideas regardless of our own opinions.³¹

Both the Mummers Troupe and le Grand Cirque Ordinaire fell apart due to the combined effects of personal disagreements and financial difficulties (both Chris Brookes and Raymond Cloutier blamed the latter on chronic underfunding). What might be called artistic fatigue also played a role, not to mention the general sense of disillusion the entire generation seemed to be experiencing at the close of the seventies, due in part to a chilly economic climate. In retrospect, the collective theatre of this era must be seen, as much as anything else, as the outpouring of a young, energetic sector of society clamouring for change. This is in no way to imply that collective theatre is no longer interesting or important - on the contrary. But the idea of collective work lacks the urgency it

once had, and nationalist urges have somewhat abated. In the next chapter we will see an indication of what it was that the four companies were so eager to communicate at the time.

NOTES

¹Usmiani, p. 1.

²Ibid., p. 2.

³Paule Baillargeon, in interview with Pierrette Chevrier, Stratégie 9, Summer 1974, p. 39.

⁴Sandra Gwyn, p. 44.

⁵Codco in interview, St. John's, May 28, 1986, and see also Grand Cirque Ordinaire interview in Jeu 5, Spring 1977, p. 24. It should be noted that the kind of catharsis referred to in these two interviews has more to do with humorous self-recognition than it has to do with Aristotle's tragic view of catharsis involving "pity and fear" - even though the humour of these two companies often touched on the tragic.

⁶Rick Salutin, "Documentary Style: The Curse of Canadian Culture," Marginal Notes: Challenges to the Mainstream (Toronto: Lester and Orpen Dennys Ltd., 1984, p. 97.

⁷Alan Filewod, review of Second Stage: The Alternative Theatre Movement in Canada, by Renate Usmiani, in Theatre History in Canada, Vol. 5 no. 4, Fall 1984.

⁸Crean, p. 166.

⁹See le Grand Cirque Ordinaire in Stratégie 9, Summer 1974, p. 36, and le Théâtre Euh! in Nord 5, Winter 1973, p. 57.

¹⁰David Mayer, "Towards a Definition of Popular Theatre," Western Popular Theatre, eds. David Mayer and Keith Richards (London: Methuen, 1977).

¹¹Bertolt Brecht, Brecht On Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic, ed. and trans. John Willett (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964).

¹²Mayer, p. 265.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 268.

¹⁵Brecht, p. 108.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 111.

¹⁷Usmiani, p. 1.

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Sandra Gwyn, p. 38.

²⁰Jacques Lecoq is a mime teacher whose ideas, particularly about clowning, seem to have had a profound effect on the members of le Théâtre Euh! and le Grand Cirque Ordinaire.

²¹Sigouin, p. 17.

²²Ibid., p. 24.

²³Usmiani, p. 119.

²⁴This scene, and any others from T'es pas tannée, Jeanne d'Arc? described here, are recorded in Le Grand Film Ordinaire, ou Jeanne d'Arc n'est pas morte, se porte bien et vit au Québec, directed by Roger Frappier and distributed by Faroun Films (1970).

²⁵Usmiani, p. 119.

²⁶Michel Beaulieu, "Le nouveau spectacle du Grand Cirque Ordinaire, un mélodrame pour vieux hippies," Perspectives-Dimanches: Dimanche Matin, April 13, 1975. Quoted in Jean-Cléo Godin and Laurent Mailhot, Le Théâtre Québécois II (Montreal: Hurtubise HMH, 1980), p. 84.

²⁷Gerald Sider, Mumming in Outport Newfoundland (Toronto: New Hogtown Press, 1977).

²⁸Allardyce Nicoll, Mimes, Masks and Miracles: Studies in the Popular Theatre (New York: Cooper Square Publishers, Inc., 1963). Nicoll argues that such festivities were necessary outlets for the people of the Middle Ages, whose lives were closely regulated by the Church. "All through the Middle Ages," he writes, "the Feast of Fools, the Feast of the Ass, the

Feast of the Boy Bishop, as well as those more ancient saturnalia against which the Councils²⁹ fulminated, testified to the power [of theatre], providing a kind of safety valve for those repressed sentiments which otherwise might have broken their bonds more violently and destroyed thereby the material fabric (the Church Catholic) of the idea spiritual." (p. 19) Gerald Sider, above, describes urban mumming in nineteenth-century Newfoundland as "a display of ritualized disorder that hovered on the edge of melee and violence between Catholic and Protestant, workers and upper³⁰ class." (p. 19)

²⁹ John Fraser, "The Newfie Joke That Bites Back," Globe and Mail, January 26, 1976.

³⁰ Marie-Renée Charest, Le Théâtre Euh! interview, Montreal, Feb. 21, 1986. All quotations from this interview are translated.

³¹ Ibid.

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CHAPTER FOUR

National Themes and Popular Forms

We have seen that the alternative theatre movement in Canada was responding to the colonialized situation of Canadian culture in general. The companies under discussion reacted to this situation by rejecting the forms and conventions of establishment theatre and turning to the use of popular forms to build a new, critically conscious theatre. As the term "popular" suggests, this new form of Canadian theatre was concerned with articulating those audiences to themselves. This "mirroring" of an audience's experiences often had a profound effect on people who had rarely enjoyed such a privilege. Yet this primary function of art - to explain ourselves to ourselves - was only the beginning for many Canadian alternative companies. The political ideologies and the cultural rootedness of the companies under discussion, however, set them apart from the companies which sprang up in other regions of Canada.

It was remarked earlier in the discussion that very often the context of collective creation is as important as its content. How, why, where, for whom, and with how much money such a play is produced all have an effect on its eventual form. In terms of collective creation in Canada, the terms of production must be considered simply because they are unusual. The plays under discussion are culturally and often temporally specific, and one could easily argue that they found their true significance only with their original audiences. As Alan Filewod has noted,

Collective creation is essentially non-literary. Because it is a public expression, it is rhetorical. But it is an analytic rhetoric, a public vision of reality, and derives its power and usefulness from the fact that it is public, a community addressing a community. When that public dimension is removed, then the work is changed into something it was not meant to be.¹

There are two ways to build a collective creation. The first is to document real-life facts, events, interviews, and informal conversations. The second is to decide on the subject of a play and to improvise sketches around it. Most collective creations are hybrids of these two methods, combining documentary material with what might be called fictional or invented scenes which explore the significance of the material. The result of these two methods is invariably a plurality of facts, opinions, and experiences which must somehow be synthesized. This is very different from a single-author script, as Filewod observes:

Because collective creation synthesizes the artistic responses of a number of individuals, it must proceed from a shared analysis, which differs from the private vision of the individual because it needs some kind of critical perspective to account for the differences within the collective.²

In other words, it would be a good idea for a group to know what it wants to say before it tries to say it. Yet as Filewod also notes, the very nature of collective creation often ensures that the "shared analysis" can only evolve as the work itself evolves. In fact it is usually "discovered through the process of research and rehearsal."³ While this generalization is true for many Canadian companies, we will see how it must be modified to suit others.

Le Théâtre Euh!, for example, tended to approach productions with an already-articulated political standpoint. And because Codco's mandate was to be humorous, the company never sought deliberate meanings or conclusions in its work. Thus any shared analysis in Codco material would have arisen spontaneously and would not necessarily have been pursued as an end in itself.

The first major productions of le Grand Cirque Ordinaire, le Théâtre Euh!, the Mummers Troupe and Codco all centre on the twin themes of culture and nation. Their depictions of Newfoundland and Quebec explore many of the preoccupations which these twinned themes entail. In general, these preoccupations can be outlined as language, class, church, and family. By keeping these related themes constantly in mind, we will arrive at an analysis of the work of the four companies which will reveal how closely related the companies' approaches were.

Comparisons between the companies will begin with a discussion of early productions: the Mummers' Newfoundland Night, le Théâtre Euh!'s l'Histoire du Québec, le Grand Cirque Ordinaire's T'es pas tannée, Jeanne d'Arc? and Codco's Cod On A Stick. The themes and preoccupations broached in the early major productions resonate in the later plays, even when they do not provide the major thrust of a play's subject. Once these resonances have been established, we will be ready to discuss how popular forms provided a medium for their expression. These forms include the use of the methods of mime, masks, puppetry, and clowning to express certain

ideas to particular audiences. Several examples of their use were touched on in previous chapters. This chapter will explore how their use by the four companies relates to the expression of popular movements within cultures.

There are obvious grounds for comparison between le Théâtre Euh!'s I'Histoire du Québec and the Mummers' Newfoundland Night. Both shows are class-conscious histories of their respective provinces, related by a group of clowns in one case, and within a circus-and-puppet-show motif in the other. Both borrow, and in fact physically illustrate, the "social pyramid" metaphor from Léandre Bergeron's polemical work, I'Histoire de Québec.

The pyramid metaphor tells the whole story. On a poster for Newfoundland Night, the pyramid is illustrated with human figures. A Beothuck Indian sprawls on the bottom of the human heap. On his back stands a fisherman, while on the fisherman's back perches a cleric. A diminutive Joey Smallwood stands on the shoulders of the cleric, waving his arms as if in mid-oration. The drawing vividly illustrates the play's depiction of Newfoundland history as a series of oppressions.⁴

A photograph taken during a performance of le Théâtre Euh!'s production provides a similar view of Quebec history. On the bottom of the heap sprawls a native person, flattened by a coureur de bois, a priest, and the Governor of New France. Following this tableau, the Conquest is depicted: the Governor-clown is replaced by a clown speaking only English.

L'Histoire du Québec became one of le Théâtre Euh!'s most requested shows. Quebec audiences enjoyed the production and seemed to relate well to its explicit social criticism, but a performance at a theatre festival in France met with derision from an audience not well versed in Quebec history and politics.⁷ Yet at the same time, the production caught the attention of theatre artists from Mexico and Algeria who saw themselves as similarly colonized. Also revealing in this context are Usmiani's comments on the script of the Mummers' first production. According to Usmiani, Newfoundland audiences enjoyed the production of Newfoundland Night, but she herself claims the script is "too long, uneven, and often irritatingly obvious in its propaganda, [and it] taxes the reader's patience."⁸ Clearly, productions of this nature are less likely to engage the sympathies of those who do not feel themselves to be implicated in the situations depicted. Nor can a written script of a production billed as "a living pageant . . . with songs, music, flags, puppets, actors and acrobats"⁹ be expected to convey the energy and colour of the live performance. One wonders if a written script of le Théâtre Euh!'s history of Quebec would not have been just as "irritating".

From these early performances we receive a strong impression of the similarities between these two politically-conscious theatre companies. In Chapter Three we learned that le Théâtre Euh! worked from the premise that art can and must change reality.

Mummers founder Chris Brookes, as quoted in Sandra Gwyn's article, adopted a similar position:

Someone who didn't like us once called us "an anarchist, agitprop, political-warfare-type theatre." Personally, I thought it was a perfect description.¹⁰

Just as le Théâtre Euh! took much of its inspiration from the political possibilities inherent in the clown,¹¹ the Mummers found their expression in a very old popular tradition which in Newfoundland had a history of class identification. Yet while le Théâtre Euh! had a specific and well-articulated mandate which was expressed in several manifestoes, the Mummers' goals were not always so clearly and unanimously defined. Le Théâtre Euh! was a small, tightly knit collective whose members knew exactly what to expect from each other. The Quebec company followed a pattern close to that which, according to Filewod, describes the functioning of collectives in Latin America:

The Latin American tradition takes a relatively stable and long-term collective through a series of projects which are decided by the membership, one way or another, in response to perceived needs. Out of this comes a shared analysis which is applied to, and often challenged by, the subject of the play.¹²

Although the Mummers also worked hard to respond to perceived needs, their company was an open-ended, ever-changing entity, rarely retaining the same members from one production to the next. Thus although the Mummers Troupe was similar to le Théâtre Euh! in its political outlook and aesthetic tactics, it was considerably different in its organizational character. The Mummers were always involved in a struggle for money. There were not enough

theatre jobs in Newfoundland to employ Mummers in the way that the members of le Théâtre Euh! were able to find employment. Nor was the provincial government willing to support them, as le Grand Cirque Ordinaire was originally supported by Quebec.

Another crucial characteristic of the Mummers Troupe which sets it apart from the other three companies under discussion is that some of its members came from outside the community it addressed itself to. Members came not only from Newfoundland but from the mainland as well, which likely made group consensus on some topics difficult to arrive at. That this may have been the case is evident in the troupe's use of dramaturges, often as not from outside the company. A writer in such a position would be expected to organize the collected and/or improvised material into a coherent shape. It is worth noting that neither le Grand Cirque Ordinaire nor le Théâtre Euh! ever invited artists from outside their companies to oversee a production in this fashion. Perhaps it would not be unfair to assume from this that the Quebec companies had more confidence in their individual members' abilities as "creators". Clearly the members of the Quebec companies felt quite capable of expressing themselves and their societies within the context of collective work.

While the first productions of the Mummers and Euh! were histories with present-day application, le Grand Cirque's T'es pas tannée, Jeanne d'Arc? and Codco's Cod On A Stick were present-day portraits with historical references. And while l'Histoire du Québec

and Newfoundland Night served a mainly didactic purpose, Cod On A Stick and Jeanne d'Arc were mainly satirical (though we should keep in mind that satire by definition serves a didactic purpose). Jeanne d'Arc uses the saint as a nationalist figure from history to talk about contemporary Quebec nationalism. Codco's first show is built around contemporary images which manage to convey Newfoundland's historical position as a beleaguered colony and province.

Cod On A Stick and Jeanne d'Arc are very like the history plays of the other two companies in terms of form. All four shows are composed of separate but thematically linked sketches. What is most important for present purposes, of course, is the number of similarities among the sketches.

I have said that all four plays discuss nation and culture, and treat those subjects either directly or indirectly through the themes of language, class, church, and family. That the Quebec companies would be keenly interested in exploring the relationship between language and cultural sovereignty should come as no surprise; that the Newfoundland companies would be just as keenly interested in such an approach probably will. Like francophone Quebecers, Newfoundlanders are different from other Canadians in their language. As Usmani has noted, Newfoundland English is to Newfoundland what jòial is to Quebec: a language maintained in isolation and mostly associated with ordinary people rather than elites. Thus the language-as-culture question is tied in with questions of class

distinction and regionalism. Such questions are often hard to separate, especially if we are to consider accent as part of the language of a distinct cultural group.

In the Codco skit, "Newfoundland Delegate," described in Chapter Three, the delegate's complaints are literally translated from angry Newfoundland English to calm, well-modulated Upper Canadian English. When Gene, the delegate, opines that the Ottawa ministers "doesn't know a jeezly thing about the fisheries" the translator renders it as "... the honourable ministers in Ottawa ... seem to be a little out of touch with their constituents in Newfoundland."¹³ In the Grand Cirque Ordinaire sketch about the selling of Quebec, which was also described in Chapter Three, the potential buyers speak English in various accents (including an American one) and the one buyer who speaks French speaks a very proper, international-sounding French. Québec, being gagged, cannot speak at all.

The topic of language is also central in the work of the Mummers and le Théâtre Euh!. In a scene from l'Histoire du Québec, the clowns get their first lesson in English, after the Conquest:

-Now, stop your game, petit leçon d'anglais.

(a little English lesson)

-Comment dit-on Anglais en anglais?

(How do you say "Englishman" in English)

-Hi! boss.

-Good.

-Comment dit-on en anglais, Canadien français vendu?

(How do you say "French-Canadian sellout" in English?)

-Hi! foreman.

-Good.¹⁴

In Newfoundland Night, we see another "Newfie Puppet" being manipulated by Mother England. This time he is Patrick Morris, the nineteenth century reformer, complaining that he doesn't want to tell England's old Newfie jokes anymore.¹⁵ Clearly, a lesson in "English" is a lesson in cultural and economic domination. That is precisely why it is difficult to discuss language in this context without discussing class. Of course, the very fact that these four companies use ordinary language on stage speaks volumes. This fact, along with the fact that the shows deal with and are directed at ordinary people, suggests that the work of these companies is shaped by some form of class consciousness. A programme note for Buchans: A Mining Town explained how the company had lived with the people of Buchans and that "the words of this play are theirs."¹⁶ While in the case of Buchans this statement was literally true (cast members collected taped conversations and interviews to use in the show), it is also true in the more general sense that the four companies used everyday language, rather than "correct" or "theatrical" language, in every production.

It is in part due to their use of everyday language that many characters in these plays can be identified as "white niggers", to use Pierre Vallières's term.¹⁷ This theme is important enough to resonate in other art forms of the period under discussion. We have only to think of Michèle Lalonde's famous poem, "Speak White,"¹⁸ to understand the significance of language in these plays. An Atlantic-Canadian example of this theme can be found

in folksinger David Essig's song "High Ground," in which the narrator speaks of leaving Prince Edward Island to end up in Toronto, "on the wrong side of the street, with that accent in my pocket and the red clay on my feet."¹⁹ That the language theme is particularly evident in Cod On A Stick is partly a result of Codco's verbal genius, but it also stems from the troupe members' experiences as Newfoundlanders living in Toronto:

We were really making a statement [in Cod On A Stick]. We were in Toronto and we felt like ninth-class citizens. We were reacting against the whole vision that they had of Newfoundland, and the way that we were treated. . . . That was a very political show.²⁰

A 1976 article written collectively by le Théâtre Euh! reveals that company's uncompromising stand on the use of joul. At the time the company felt it was necessary to explain that they used everyday language not for artistic reasons, not because they wanted to make poetry of it, but simply because it reflected the true language of their audience. Le Théâtre Euh! was interested in analyzing the world, not mythologizing it, and their use of joul reflected this aspect of their mandate. "If le Théâtre Euh! uses the language people use," they wrote, "it is not for the sake of aesthetics or fashion, it is simply to make ourselves understood."²¹ The need to explain this aspect of their performances arose from the fact that at the time many writers and playwrights in Quebec were exploring the use of joul as a poetic medium. Michel Tremblay's portraits of working-class Quebecers were in part an attempt to legitimize and dignify the spoken language of an

oppressed people. If one can make poetry of the language, the argument seems to have gone, that proves it to be as effective a language as that of the oppressor. An effective language capable of producing poetry signifies a viable expression of a lively, meaningful culture. However, le Théâtre Euh!'s approach to joul was simply a practical one. As a former member said in interview,

Tremblay always needed to prove his joul, within his dramatic structure. We didn't. We simply spoke it.²²

This attitude is very different from the one Chris Brookes took in the early days of the Mummers. In the midst of collecting material for Gros Mourn, he wrote:

Most of our lives we don't really listen to the words around us. Working like this, hanging on every word of a conversation, memorizing or taping, one begins to notice the poetry in the speech of ordinary people The whole myth of Art is autocratic nonsense - everyone, not just the artist, speaks with poetry, breathes with music. It is simply a matter of listening.²³

Brookes argued democratically that everyone is capable of poetic speech, while le Théâtre Euh! argued that poetry was not the point. In spite of these different approaches to language, the result in the productions of the two companies is similar - the oppressive characters usually speak British, American, or Canadian English, while the people speak their everyday language. There are exceptions, however, such as the medical student in l'Histoire du Québec, who speaks joul but looks forward to the good life:

So, I've just recently graduated from Cegep.
And now the second most important thing, I've
got my bank account book (. . .) Now I can
cure any invalid.²⁴

A similar character appears in T'es pas tannée Jeanne d'Arc?.

Three men are depicted working on an assembly line. The boss's son approaches from behind, slaps them all heartily on the back, and proceeds to extol the virtues of the new Quebec. At the same time he exerts enough pressure on two of the workers' shoulders that they are forced into a kneeling position. Oblivious to their discomfort, the boss's son continues his speech, climbing enthusiastically onto the two men as if they were a soapbox. His last few sentences, including the two Quiet Revolution slogans, "On est capable" (we can do it), and "Quebec sait faire" (Quebec knows how to do it), are delivered while he stands, quite literally, on the backs of the workers. The Quebecers of the new "social pyramid," ironically, have become upwardly mobile enough to oppress each other. Scenes like these reflect the jeune théâtre's disenchantment with the capitalism of the Quiet Revolution, which supported a rising Quebec bourgeoisie but disappointed many social democrats. The characters speak the language of their nation but their goals do nothing to destroy the pyramidal structure of the old order. Of course, the context of popular theatre specified that this kind of theatre was not created in the interest of ruling classes. However, the four companies took varying approaches to this particular question.

Le Théâtre Euh!, as we have seen, was similar to the Mummers

Troupe in terms of mandate, and the similarities between the plays of these two companies arise out of similar world views. The two companies both performed shows about strikes, about expropriations for federal projects, and about local issues. The protagonists of their plays were the members of their audiences: they were miners, loggers, mill workers; they worked on farms or in factories, in the bush or on boats. They spoke an "uncultured" language. Their problems and their lives were presented in both factual and imaginative ways, often in satiric or otherwise humorous ways, but humour was never the main goal of their creators. The picture of workers that emerged was almost invariably sympathetic, while the picture of bosses was almost invariably a fiercely drawn caricature. The oppressor often spoke a different language, came from a different cultural background, and imposed his will and his greed without thinking twice.

For Codco and le Grand Cirque, questions of class, though usually in the background, were so often and continuously in the background that they were actually a large part of the overall picture presented by these two companies. Both groups used ordinary language, as was mentioned, and both satirized elites very effectively. Le Grand Cirque was determined to develop a popular form of theatre, and declared their intentions; Codco developed their form of theatre less self-consciously, more by implicit inclination than explicit declaration. How these ideas and images were communicated to the audiences, and how popular forms became the

medium for such messages, will become clearer in the latter half of this chapter.

If the themes of language and class are often intertwined in the works of the four companies, the themes of the family and the clergy are no less so. This is especially true in the case of the Quebec groups, where the one institution is frequently depicted as propping up the other. The relationship between these two themes is slightly more complex in Newfoundland material, for a variety of reasons which need to be explored. The first of these reasons is that Newfoundland is not, as we saw in Chapter Two, a one-denominational society in the way that Quebec has been historically. Since the early days of its settlement, Newfoundland has been divided on religious lines, and the work of the two Newfoundland companies, when compared to that of the Quebec companies, does not show the same evidence of a unanimous effort to demythologize the church.

While the church looms large in Codco productions, the Mummets were less preoccupied with the subject. Nevertheless, Newfoundland Night depicts the Church as being in league with political power. The Everyman character of Henry is shown as being virtually hypnotized by his clergyman into doing what is expected of him.²⁵ This example from the 'Mummets' first show, however, is not common to later productions. That the community portraits barely mention the church, or mention it only in passing, may reflect the partial secularization of Newfoundland. Certainly it reflects the Mummets' desire to aim for clearer targets, such as multinational corporations and federal and provincial governments.

Still, Chris Brookes has indicated that he would have loved to do a production about the Church in Newfoundland; the Mummers were simply so busy with specific local issues that they just never got around to it.²⁶

Codco, on the other hand, seems to have been obsessed with the Church. Codco productions are liberally laced with numerous examples of crazed priests, bearded nuns, and pontificating pontiffs whose collective insanities amount to a hilarious and often crude condemnation of religion in general and Roman Catholicism in particular. The dramatic effect of these characters, however humorous, is often powerful enough to shock even the most staunchly fallen Catholic. Church members are depicted as sexually repressed, hypocritical, and frequently sadistic. Father Dinn harangues a very young congregation on the horrors of burning in hell;²⁷ Reverend Fréep is exposed as a transvestite;²⁸ the Sisters of the Silver Scalpel run amok.²⁹ The work of Codco, while not self-consciously political, indicts the Church with a seriousness which is only partly masked by humour. While the Mummers seem to have treated religion as simply part of an overall system in need of a shakedown, Codco's religion skits seem designed to expose religion as a system unto itself. If we are to take Codco's humorous vision of religion seriously, we will likely see religion as a system which oppresses people first and foremost on the psychological level. It warps libidos, victimizes children and generally inflicts its inbred hypocrisies on the human beings it comes into contact with.

Much of Codco's satire on religion derives from personal experiences; most of the members are Irish Catholic, and all grew up in an era when the Church was only beginning to lose its grip on Newfoundland (in fact, many Newfoundlanders would argue that it has yet to do so entirely). By contrast, the Mummers membership was never unanimously Catholic, which may explain why, as Chris Brookes expressed it in interview, "we didn't have the same fire under our ass about taking the mickey out of the Church."³⁰

That Quebec's attack on the Church through cultural expression is equally evident in the two Quebec companies bespeaks the homogeneity of Quebec culture in comparison to that of Newfoundland. In spite of their differences, *Le Grand Cirque* and *Euh!*, and other Quebec artists, all took up this theme. Two scenes stand out from *T'es pas tannée, Jeanne d'Arc?* and *l'Histoire du Québec*: In the former, a drunken father who has forgotten the family's Christmas presents tries to atone for his neglect by giving his children a blessing in the manner of a parish priest,³¹ while in the latter, the father of a rural family begs the curé not to bless him because he is already "blessed" with fourteen children.³² Such scenes take aim not only at the Church but also at the family, which in supporting the Church allows itself to be victimized unto eternity.

For Quebec artists of this era, the exploration of the family-as-system was at the core of an overall analysis of society. The family, after all, is the basic societal unit; from it we learn to be social animals. A close look at the family reveals the innermost

workings of society in general, as the title of le Grand Cirque's La Famille Transparente suggests. At the same time, the family may be used as an allegorical symbol of that society.

As Quebec society was changing, so was the attitude of Quebecers to the family as institution. In the Quebec drama and literature of this period, the family is seen as both victim and perpetrator of its own mythology. In falling for the rural myths of the past, and the urban myths of the present, the family has left itself little room for growth or liberation or identity. Le Théâtre Euhl's Quand le matriarcat fait des petits³³ depicts family members enslaved by credit cards, by television, by sexual repression, and by the roles they are expected to play: mother, father, husband, wife. When a child asks his mother if she loves him, she responds by giving him money; he uses it to buy a tape recorder so he can carry her voice with him wherever he goes. A young man returns from his honeymoon to confess to a friend that the experience of sex was a disappointment. A group of orphans leaf through a sex magazine, looking for a mother. A young woman returns from a "sexology" class and asks her mother if there is anything she would like to know. A married couple's television set breaks down and they find they can only relate to each other in the terms the set has provided for them. The Oedipus myth is retold in modern terms, with the ironic closing comment, "Another one of our beautiful French-Canadian families."³⁴ This montage of sketches adds up to a serious critique of modern life in Québec, but the

closing sketch adds a note of hope: the actors band together to move a huge boulder out of their path. The implication is that things can change, and will, if people can learn to work collectively.

Le Grand Cirque Ordinaire's La Famille Transparente, which was inspired by the family sketches in the company's first production, provides a similar critique of Quebec society.³⁵ The first names of the family members tell part of the tale: Honoré and Desirée (Honoured and Desired) are the father and mother, and their children are named Dommage (Pitiful), Pacifique (Peace-loving), Prospère (Prosperous), and Bébé-Buick (Baby Buick). The two eldest sons, one a drunk and the other a slightly crazed artist, are depicted as mother-fixated. Prospère and Bébé-Buick are, as their names suggest, the consumers in the family; the former is shown living the high life in capitalist heaven, while the latter's self-image is dependent on brand-name beauty products. Usmiani describes Bébé-Buick as ". . . a nightmare figure. Young, pretty, and exploited, [she] eventually drowns in a basin filled with her own tears."³⁶ In La Famille Transparente we see how intimately connected the family and its problems are with the functioning of a consumer society.

The exploration of the family by the two Quebec groups and so many of their contemporaries provides important insights into Quebec society during and after the Quiet Revolution. Like the rural mythology of which it was part, the large happy family image

of French-Canadian life no longer applied to the new reality of an industrialized Quebec. As this image was so deeply imbedded in the French-Canadian consciousness, however, drastic measures were needed to exorcise it. The mother had to be taken off her sanctified pedestal, stripped of her madonna image and exposed as a human being, one who was as capable of evil as any other human being. Le Théâtre Euh!'s Le Matriarcat had a huge mother-marionette dominating the stage, and men played female roles in exaggerated costumes which ridiculed ideals of femininity.³⁶ Le Grand Cirque's La Famille Transparente depicted a mother who was meek and mild, but who nevertheless managed to dominate the thoughts of two of her sons. That both companies would deal with the topic of family life and its importance to Quebeckers so similarly, and so early in their repertoires, is indicative of how the changing family occupied the thoughts of many Quebeckers during this period of social upheaval. Usmiani quotes Grand Cirque member Paule Baillargeon as saying, "Whatever the form, it is "no" to the family It is the family which is the foundation of the system. If the family is destroyed, that's the end of it."³⁷

If the disease was modern consumer society, or more precisely, capitalism, then for Quebec artists the family was a symptom of the disease as well as its victim. In the Newfoundland plays the focus was slightly different. For the Mummers, too, the family was a victim of the capitalist system, but was never the perpetrator of its own problems. Since the rural and working class families

of the Mummers' productions tended to be at odds with notions of progress imposed by Upper Canadians, they were depicted much more sympathetically. This phenomenon can be traced back to the lack of control which so many Newfoundlanders felt as the new province galloped off into a mainland-style future which threatened Newfoundland's very identity, even while providing all the modern amenities. The Mummers' mandate, we should remember, was to instil a combination of pride and social awareness in their audiences. The resulting characterizations of people and communities are essentially positive reflections which sometimes border on sentimentality. Michael Cook took note of this tendency to idealize ordinary Newfoundlanders and complained that it led to "caricatures" of Newfoundlanders and their realities:

Once a certain level had been reached [in the depiction of Newfoundlanders to themselves], both audience and company seemed frozen in a time warp. The characters in all of the collectives rarely, if ever, changed. Newfoundlanders were perennial victims, were always cast in a heroic suffering mold. There was the strong-willed, often angry or grieving, Newfoundland woman. There were the boys in the bar, witty, sardonic, knocking everything and everybody. There was the exploited fisherman, the wicked merchant, the ignorant and snobbish mainlander, the indifferent and corrupt politicians.³⁸

Here Cook puts a finger on the difficulty with social-revolutionary forms of theatre which rely on instantly recognizable character types and a depiction of situations which frequently call for action as well as contemplation. As far as family depictions go, for example, there is little room for psychology, and images are usually simple, direct, and appealing, for the purpose of this type of theatre is not

to send the audience away to ponder the vagaries of human nature, but rather to convince the spectators that they have a right, even a moral obligation, to find a way to better their own situation.

In the Mummers' Buchans: A Mining Town, for example, a young woman writes a letter to her husband who is away working in Buchans. She is pregnant, presumably with their first child. She misses her husband and wishes that he could be home for the birth, or that she could come to live in Buchans. The problem is that the company that owns the town has not built enough housing for the miners' families.³⁹ Obviously, a scene depicting people thus robbed of a normal family existence will tug at the heart-strings of any audience; at the same time, it underlines the irresponsibility of the mining company doing the robbing. Thus an appeal to a sentiment can serve as an appeal to reason, in this case an appeal to the people of Buchans (the original audience) to face the fact that an American corporation controls their lives, and the lives of the people they are closest to - their families. This and other scenes from the play caused Alan Filewod to write that

It is significant that the most effective moments in Buchans are those which . . . appeal to heightened sentimentality, rather than critical analysis.⁴⁰

In another scene, a miner tells the audience that "People used to say that Buchans was nothing but muckin' and . . . no, I can't say it!"⁴¹ His abashed refusal to supply the rhyming expletive shows the interviewed miner to have been sensitive to his listener's response; it is also a convenient out for an actor who presumably

does not wish to offend. However, that it could also be a rather coy method of avoiding a bit of unpleasant realism is born out by a videotape of the performance which caught the sound of a very young member of the audience obligingly providing the offending rhyme.⁴² (While it may be unfair to belabour such an extra-theatrical detail, the rhyming child anecdote does help to underline the fact that although Buchans was essentially a documentary play, it was a selective one, the main goal of which was not realism.)

Codco's depiction of Newfoundlanders and their families is distinctly different from that of the Mummers. Here the emphasis is on the satirical, on turning the clichés about Newfoundland inside out, both for the sake of pleasure and for the sake of enlightenment. And just as Codco's mandate was different from the Mummers', so too was its audience. Whereas the Mummers addressed themselves most often to small rural and/or working-class audiences who presumably valued family life, Codco's audience has traditionally been urban, and includes devotees on the mainland as well as at home. In fact Cod On A Stick had its genesis and premiere in Toronto. That the company has not hesitated to satirize even its "mother" company, Theatre Passe Muraille,⁴³ should provide an indication of how little is sacred to Codco members.

If for the Mummers the problems of modern living lie with the capitalist system, for Codco that is only partly true. For the most part, many human problems as depicted by this rudely philosophical troupe are the result of human inadequacies which cannot

be overcome. While praising Codco's satiric edge, theatre critic John Fraser also noted that "The satire of Codco reflects a vision of life seen as a basic tragedy that you really can't do anything but laugh at."⁴⁴ Still, if one believes that laughter can be a powerful and liberating force in the theatre, then making a mockery of life's "basic tragedy" may be a good place to start. If we refer back to Michael Cook's article about the caricature of Newfoundland images, we will see that Cook actually perceives Codco's satire as a kind of alternative:

Some years ago, a group called CODCO took every one of the proliferating stock types stalking the stage and turned them inside out in a series of biting social satires. Scatological, often deliberately obscene, they took up the medium of black humor, which has always been a part of Newfoundland's basic survival kit, and parlayed it into an attack upon all that was sacred. The Church and State, unscrupulous landlords and ladies, sexual mores, even basic soul food like fish and brewis was all grist to their mill.⁴⁵

Primarily parodists and satirists, Codco members present a vision of the world and human beings as complex. It is a vision which frequently borders on the Absurd, but which is so biting and so hilarious that it appears all is not lost: if something is rotten, it will be exposed. Codco member Andy Jones describes their humour as "oblique".⁴⁶ While obliquity can imply obscurity, such is not the case with Codco. Here "oblique" connotes the unexpected angles from which the company takes aim at deserving targets.

We have already seen examples of how Codco has satirized the Church and the mainland, and the Newfoundland family does not escape their aim either. In Cod On A Stick, a mother and

daughter bicker offstage, while the father smiles beatifically and declares that "They're more like sisters than mother and daughter."⁴⁷ In the same skit, each of the members of this outport family enters the scene screeching or complaining. When the father points to the guests from the mainland (the audience), each character subsides into more decorous behaviour and then berates the mother for not getting the "guests" a cup of tea (even though she already has). The same mother appears in a subsequent skit, taking a taxi into St. John's for her shock treatment appointment.⁴⁸ Such skits work on two levels: they demythologize the Happy Family in general, and they knock the stuffing out of the stereotype of the Happy Newfoundland Family in particular. The significance of this theme becomes even clearer in subsequent skits, when The Happy Province itself is satirized. "The Happy Province" skit savages the stereotype of Newfoundlanders as simple, quaint rustics incapable of evil thoughts. Though Codco's depiction of Newfoundland families ~~did not~~ always sit well with home audiences, the reverse caricatures served a definite end:

We were trying to show what Newfoundlanders were really like. We weren't just painting a picture of being victims, we were showing that even if we were victims, we could use that: Newfoundlanders were slimy enough or clever enough or whatever, that they could turn that around and use it to their advantage.⁴⁹

Consequently, much of Cod On A Stick was performed with a tongue-in-cheek air which is difficult to convey in print. "The Happy Province," for example, is about a group of neighbors discussing an article they have read in Maclean's. The article maintains

that theirs is Canada's happiest province, and they concur. They themselves, they insist, are wonderfully happy. The conversation seems perfectly serious, but the language the characters use undercuts the surface message. One character, Elizabeth, describes herself as "dreadfully 'appy," even "wretchedly 'appy," and concludes that "they got sweet nothing up in Labrador, they must be fanatically 'appy."⁵⁰ Cecil has his own ideas about Newfoundland happiness:

Of course now, maybe we don't have some of the advantages that some of your richer provinces got, Alberta and Ontario and the like, boy, but our 'appiness is a more intangible sort, you can't really touch it like the food and the clothing.⁵¹

Though all four companies made liberal use of the satirical mode, on this level of satire Codco is most similar to *le Grand Cirque Ordinaire*. *Le Grand Cirque's* Christmas scene in *T'es pas tannée, Jeanne d'Arc?* is almost unnervingly similar to Codco's Christmas scene in *Sickness, Death, and Beyond the Grave*. Father is drunk, the children bicker; the Newfoundland father knocks down the tree, the Quebec father has forgotten the presents, and both mothers despair of ever having a nice cozy Christmas like families are supposed to.⁵² In both skits, the Christmas idyll and all it represents succumb to the reality of family life, a reality which is depicted as problematic at best.

In this vein, I have previously alluded to Codco's and *le Grand Cirque's* treatments of the theme of youth culture. Of *le Grand Cirque's*, Usmiani writes:

La Tragédie Américaine de l'enfant Prodigue used biblical fable as the basis for a self-analysis of the collective and its history. A rock opera obviously patterned on Hair, l'Enfant Prodigue reflects the inner crisis of the company as they ponder the past and wonder about the future.⁵³

While l'Enfant Prodigue reflects the spiritual quest of the prodigal child, and ends, Usmani claims, on a note of defeat,⁵⁴ Codco's "Bernie Snelgrove, Superstar," parodies the Hair generation, among other things, and it ends on a note of absurdity. Bernie, we have previously noted, is a Newfoundland Peer Gynt, a young anti-hero on a rather confused quest. Bernie's story is related to us by one Reverend Percival Freep, who describes it as a "Newfoundland folk tale."⁵⁵ Bernie escapes the tiny outport of Pouch Cove and goes to Toronto in search of personal freedom. With a little help from his guitar, he becomes, if not free, then at least rich, famous, and "cosmically unconscious."⁵⁶ Upon hearing that his old Pouch Cove girlfriend is pregnant, Bernie has an attack of guilt feelings. He decides he wants to go back to "the shining waters of [his] island home."⁵⁷ He rushes back to Newfoundland as quickly and unthinkingly as he left it, this time deserting a new girlfriend in Toronto. Bernie and his Pouch Cove friends are last seen disrobing to a very Hair-esque tune with a Newfoundland setting:

Take off your oilskins and be free
Like a fish in the sea.
Take off your oilskins and be free
Free free free free⁵⁸

The Reverend Freep, who has already "freaked out" once while reading us Bernie's story, tells us that Bernie has learned an important

lesson, that "Newfoundland is where it's at,"⁵⁹ but we have seen enough of Freep to realize that he is no more to be taken seriously than the script he reads from. That Bernie's lesson has been a cynical, profit-oriented one is obvious to us (though not necessarily to Bernie), especially when the Reverend ends with some advice to his audience:

Haul your nets out of the ocean. Rise up from your ethnic squalor. Lash your dory to the ceiling of a cocktail lounge, and rake in every tourist dollar.⁶⁰

The value of Freep's advice is even further thrown into question when in righteous indignation he tries to stop the disrobing song. One of Bernie's friends rips open the Reverend's shirt to reveal a black brassiere.

All in all, "Bernie" has a very different tone from le Grand Cirque's La Tragédie Américaine de l'Enfant Prodigue. L'Enfant Prodigue is also a quest story, and it is not without parodic elements. However, the Child's quest is essentially religious in nature, and the treasure chest s/he seeks (for it is a prodigal child, not a prodigal son) has an almost mystical significance. The Child, like the company, is frustrated in its quest for a better world. Of this production, theatre historian and critic Jean-Cléo Godin writes:

The second part of the show, which was almost entirely improvised, illustrated not only the conflicts between the "grey empire" of North America and the new world inspired by "peace and love", but also - with a sometimes brutal and vulgar frankness - the difficulty of realizing an ideal of fraternity and love, the disillusion of those who,

thinking they were about to realize their dream,
fell back into disfavor and solitude.⁶¹

For le Grand Cirque Ordinaire, the failure of the Child's quest represented the failure of the peace and love generation, as well as the failure of the troupe to achieve their own demanding ideals. Whereas Bernie Snelgrove had failed to find solutions for himself and Newfoundland, the Prodigal Child had failed to find solutions for the human race in general and perhaps Quebec in particular. The implications of the Quebec play are thus much broader; the Child is searching for the keys to a treasure chest which have been stolen, indicating that the child's search is for something lost; Bernie, unknowingly and unwittingly, rejects whatever heritage that remains to him. Even his reasons for returning to Newfoundland are questionable. Bernie is an anti-hero, and his story is a satire of a generation which, like any other, was as much wrapped up in its own preoccupations as in any preoccupation with the future of the Cosmos.

Le Grand Cirque's look at youth culture, like that of Codco, is also a self-reflexive look at the company's work, its goals, and its disillusionment. Le Grand Cirque seems, more than the other three companies, to have reflected counter-culture ideals in their depiction of the Quebec psyche. Usmiani has noted that their method lay somewhere between Brechtian fable and Artaudian communion. Furthermore, the oft-expressed wish of the Grand Cirque actors to define themselves as artists, rather than comedians or political activists, gives le Grand Cirque Ordinaire a

special status within this discussion and underlines the essentially poetic nature of their work.

Whereas Codco members seem sometimes to have had trouble taking themselves seriously, Grand Cirque members seem to have had trouble not taking themselves seriously. No doubt there is a direct correlation between le Grand Cirque's essentially tragic view of the world and the degree to which Quebeckers had articulated their condition in almost every aspect of their existence, and Codco's essentially Absurdist view and the degree to which Newfoundland's position in North America had yet to be fully articulated. Hence Bernie Snelgrove can run away to Toronto, become rich and famous, and come home without ever asking himself why he left in the first place. We the audience can see that Bernie gets caught up in the "hippy thing," but Bernie's quest is essentially a personal one, and the darkly ironic message he brings home to Newfoundland is: sell yourselves, take part in North American life. That no character in this sketch escapes parody is a strong hint that Bernie and his friends have yet to arrive at a satisfactory solution to a problematic goal: that of establishing a modern Newfoundland identity which will not fall victim to its own clichés.

Both troupes started out to write a rock opera; le Grand Cirque ended up with a sort of poetic lament about the loss of innocence, while Codco depicted a character who short-circuits his own unarticulated goals. Apparently the Quebec troupe was able to treat the topic with some degree of seriousness, while the

Newfoundland troupe refuses to grant "ol' Bern boy" even a touch of dignity. Here again, the difference between a Quebec troupe and a Newfoundland one can probably be traced back to Newfoundlanders' mixed feelings about Progress. Progress in this case means leaving home to find out what the rest of the world is like, and in Bernie's case means returning home with an even more confused set of values, counter-culture values which somehow don't fit in with the Newfoundland reality. Andy Jones has noted that:

A lot of [Bernie] was people laughing at how the hippie thing didn't sort of work here. . . . Analytically, a lot of our stuff is about how a lot of things don't work in Newfoundland.⁶²

Ultimately, Bernie's Hair-like antics, being out of sync with the world he returns to, are material fit only for parody. They are material imports from another culture, and his blithe efforts to import mainland values, however appreciated by his young friends, evoke only laughter in his audience. Bernie tells his guardian uncle Cecil that, as a young man, Cecil was "trapped like a tile in the mosaic of [his] past",⁶³ but Bernie has yet to learn that the present and the future are also a mosaic, puzzling agglomerations of Newfoundland, mainland, American, and counter-culture values. Bernie has not even begun to sort them out yet.

To conclude this part of the discussion, we may note that the productions of the four companies contain many similarities and parallels in terms of subject matter, themes, and ideas of culture and nation. While some themes, such as that of language, are

ever-present in the works of all four companies, others receive a different treatment. Often the differences can be traced back to the two provinces' different experiences of progress and to the different degrees of politicization which their populations experienced prior to and during their respective "cultural renaissances". As both Chris Brookes and Andy Jones have pointed out, Quebec audiences had a background of self-awareness with them when they went to a performance; Newfoundlanders were just beginning to develop (and react to) images of themselves at the point in their history when indigenous theatre was beginning on the Island.⁶⁴

For many people in both provinces, theatre would play a part in shaping their images of themselves and their cultures. The remainder of this chapter will be devoted to a brief exploration of how popular forms of theatre were used to shape such images.

The most obvious parallels and similarities of form are to be found in the Mummers' Gros Mourn and le Théâtre Euh!'s Un, deux, trois . . . vendu!. In addition to sharing a similar subject - communities threatened by expropriations for federal projects - the two plays also share many theatrical methods and metaphors. The Mummers production used the names, opinions, experiences, and sometimes the actual words, of people in Sally's Cove to put their play together in less than two weeks. Le Théâtre Euh!'s play, on the other hand, was a "rural version,"⁶⁵ in Sigouin's term, of a play which had already been performed by the company in several urban settings. Hence the Euh! play distilled the experiences of the

people of Ste.-Scholastique into representational characters.

The two plays use techniques designed to capture and keep the attention of an audience. Both plays were partly narrated; both offered, if not solutions to the problems at hand, then suggestions as to how action might be taken. While the Mummers' play talked about the actual people of Sally's Cove, the Euh! play involved the audience on a different level, by using familiar music that audiences could sing along to, and by incorporating the audience's response into the performances. Characters were basically good or bad, and here again the Euh! play used anonymous caricatures while the Mummers' play named names, implicating the government officials involved in the Gros Morne situation. But the Mummers show was not short on imagination; scenes included a lobster in a trap warning the people of Sally's Cove to guard their freedom, and the use of a sort of "living newspaper" (a sheet with holes; through which actors stuck their heads in parodies of local officials' photos and quotations in the Gros Morne News).

The two plays, however, are most similar in their endings. At the end of both plays, small cardboard houses representing the homes of inhabitants are symbolically demolished. The Sally's Cove homes are destroyed by the bottle which christens the new park, and then what remains of the houses is set on fire. Meanwhile, O Canada plays in the background and the cast sings a well-known hymn. The houses in Un, deux, trois . . . vendu! are also demolished, and here too the cast sings O Canada - to the tune

of the American anthem. That the two plays could have such similar endings, even when the two companies had never heard of each other, is not a startling coincidence; rather, it is proof that such techniques are alive and well and part of the largely unrecorded practice of popular theatre in North America.

In more general terms, the plays of the four companies contain many of what Usmani calls "felicitous stage metaphors."⁶⁶ Many of these add to what I have previously described as the "childlike" element of these productions, an element which, when combined with political and social commentary, signals that we are witnessing a very serious form of "play" indeed. In La Famille Transparente, the alcoholic son Dommage encloses himself in an eight-foot beer bottle; in the Mummers' They Club Seals, Don't They? a man-sized "baby" seal vies for our sentiments; in a Codco sketch about a bargain basement, a man-sized budgie escapes from the pet department, flutters and twitters nervously around the stage, and is eventually recaptured and dragged mercilessly back to captivity. These giant props and "characters" accentuate, often humorously, whatever message is implicit in their presence onstage. Interestingly, miniature props can have the same kind of effect, as is the case with the little representative houses in Gros Mourn and Un, deux, trois, . . . vendu! and the dolls frequently used by le Théâtre Euh!.

Puppets, and the idea of puppetry, are important in the work of these companies. From Cod On A Stick's Newfie Puppet, to

the mother-marionette of Le Matriarcat, we see puppets used not just as dramatic toys but also as metaphors. The Newfie Puppet is played by a human being in the Codco sketch, which accentuates the sense of servitude. The Matriarcat and the three marionettes that watch the proceedings of T'es pas tannée, Jeanne d'Arc? are notable for their silence; the mask-puppet police force in Buchans is anonymous, voiceless, and seemingly as ruled by the company as the miners themselves. Puppets illustrate the inhumane qualities of institutions because they allow the living breathing actor to be removed from the stage: what is left is generally purely representational. Masks generally serve the same purpose with the added eerie effect of removing an actor's identity or persona and transforming him or her into a different character.

Music was an important aspect of many of the plays which have been discussed here. Anthems, as we have seen, were often used ironically, as were familiar folk tunes and musical forms. The tunes of several songs familiar to Quebec audiences feature in Un, deux, trois . . . vendu!, with the words rewritten to suit the situation at hand. "The Buchans Reel" is just one example of the Mummies' use of square dance tunes. In this instance, the "caller" quickly sketches a picture of life in Buchans:

Now you go to work with a do-si-do,
Another man comes when the whistle blows.
Do-si-do 'till you're sixty-five,
Get a pension from the company to keep you alive.
Promenade! 67

Examples of the satiric use of musical forms by Codco include the

"Joey Smallwood Song," sung to the tune of the Halleluiah Chorus, and the achingly funny "Ballad of the Wild Cod," which spoofs every folkloric cliché ever invented and still manages to convey a dire warning about the environment:

The wild cod lie dead in the ocean
The wild cod lie dead in the sea
They all died of water pollution
Caused by the oil companies.⁶⁸

Le Grand Cirque Ordinaire also made ample use of music. In fact the company turned more and more towards music in their later plays. Eébé-Buick, the beautiful daughter of the Transparente family, describes in her "Lament" what a good consumer she has been:

I took off all my clothes
I showed my beautiful tanned body
my beautiful Tropic Tan body
my Wonder-Bra breasts
my flat stomach
my Philishave legs
my Colgate smile
my Miss Clairol hair
my doll face⁶⁹

There are many other examples, too numerous to relate, of how the four companies used music as an ironic medium in their productions. Where the musical form was a tried and true one, such as the familiar folk song or ballad, the inversions were not meant to spoof the forms themselves but the clichés inherent in them. Then again, spoofing often took elitist forms of art as targets. Codco continues to perform a skit called "El Basketto," a satire on the operatic form. The Mummers performed a show called The Bard of Prescott Street, which told the true story of Johnny Burke, a St. John's poet who

satirized Newfoundland life (and particularly St. John's "society") in the nineteenth century. Le Grand Cirque Ordinaire did their own adaptation of Brecht's Threepenny Opera, called l'Opéra des Pauvres (The Poor People's Opera).

Finally, no survey of the work of these four companies would be complete without a discussion of titles. The names the four troupes gave their productions aptly express the different but not unrelated approaches to theatre that each of them took. Puns often appear in the titles, as do questions. The informal address which in French denotes familiarity shaped the titles of several Grand Cirque productions. T'es pas tannée, Jeanne d'Arc? and T'en rappelles-tu, Pibrac? are examples of titles which seek answers while choosing to deal with the topics on a "familiar" (read, popular) level. Codco's question-titles are of a more impudent nature, as What Do You Want to See the Harbour For? and Would You Like to Smell My Pocket Crumbs? suggest. The Mummers' titles are often puns, like Some Slick (a play about offshore oil) and Gros Mourn, while exclamation marks accentuated several Théâtre Euh! show names. Like the names of the companies, most of the play titles tend to suggest the ability to provide amusement while simultaneously challenging the audience to take their fun seriously.

The popular, non-elitist forms of theatre and entertainment I have explored here include the circus, clowning, mime, mummering, puppetry, and music. These are all forms of entertainment and art which people indulge in because they are enjoyable.

They are also sociable activities, in that they often bring people together and stimulate a ~~sense~~ of celebration. As is the case with any art form, when such activities are skillfully performed, they instill in their audiences a sense of joyous wonder, even of awe; the circus astorishes us; the clown delights us; the mime tells a story in silence; the puppeteer makes inanimate objects come alive; the mummer invades our homes, transforming our living rooms into theatres and peeling back our veneer of social decorum. Brecht recognized the power of these forms of art and their ability to make us see the world in unaccustomed ways; his life's work seems to have centred on using such forms to carry that sense of "anything is possible for human beings" into the sphere of proletarian politics. The work of the four companies under discussion, whether consciously or unconsciously, reflects an attitude to theatre which is Brechtian. But it is also pre-Brechtian. The joyous, anarchistic theatrical effects the four companies used, in short, the fun they created, reflected that aspect of the theatre which is its prime purpose and which Brecht himself was well aware of:

It is a peculiarity of the theatrical medium that it communicates awareness and impulses in the form of pleasure: the depth of the awareness and the impulse will correspond to the depth of the pleasure.⁷⁰

The specific examples of the use of popular forms described here represent, in my opinion, some of those happy moments in theatre when image, form, and idea (or the medium and the message) achieve harmony and balance. They are examples of irony and satire, of exaggeration and minimalization, of a poverty of means

combined with a wealth of ideas. Often, they create images which are childlike and playful, and yet the "play" is always serious, for theatre of this nature is concerned, in a very adult fashion, with developing a more meaningful life for a specific cultural community.

A final glance at the two cultural communities of Quebec and Newfoundland, and the significance of indigenous theatre to their expression, will be the topics of the Conclusion.

NOTES

- ¹ Alan Filewod, "Collective Creation," p. 58.
- ² Ibid., p. 48.
- ³ Ibid.
- ⁴ Poster advertising Newfoundland Night, provided by Alan Filewod.
- ⁵ Performance detail captured in a photograph, shown to me in interview with le Théâtre Euh!.
- ⁶ Sigouin, p. 88.
- ⁷ Ibid., p. 80.
- ⁸ Usmiani, p. 100.
- ⁹ Poster description, see 4 above.
- ¹⁰ Chris Brookes, quoted in Sandra Gwyn, p. 44.
- ¹¹ Euh! members were influenced by Lecoq in this regard.
- ¹² Alan Filewod, "Collective Creation," p. 48.
- ¹³ Codco, "Newfoundland Delegate," Cod On A Stick, typescript, Codco Archives, St. John's. Newfoundlanders stress the last syllable in "Newfoundland"; that the translator does not marks him as an outsider.
- ¹⁴ Sigouin, p. 88.
- ¹⁵ Mummers Troupe, Newfoundland Night, typescript, Centre for Newfoundland Studies, St. John's, p. 12.
- ¹⁶ Programme note for Buchans: A Mining Town, Centre for Newfoundland Studies, St John's.
- ¹⁷ Pierre Vallières, Les Negres Blancs d'Amérique (Ottawa: Les Editions Parti Pris, 1967).

¹⁸ Michèle Lalonde, "Speak White," Speak White, (Montreal: Editions de l'Hexagone, 1974).

¹⁹ David Essig, "High Ground," High Ground, copyright Peregrin Songs-Woodshed Records Limited, 1975.

²⁰ Mary Walsh, Codco interview, St. John's, May 29, 1986.

²¹ Le Théâtre Euh!, "Euh!," Nord 4, Fall 1972, p. 51. Translated.

²² Marie-Renée Charest, Théâtre Euh! interview, Montreal, Feb. 21, 1986.

²³ Chris Brookes, "Useful Theatre in Sally's Cove," This Magazine, June 1974, p. 6. Also quoted in Usmani, p. 96.

²⁴ Sigouin, p. 89f.

²⁵ Mummers Troupe, Newfoundland Night typescript, Script Bank, Centre for Newfoundland Studies, Memorial University, St. John's.

²⁶ Chris Brookes in interview, Toronto, July 26, 1986. Brookes himself performed a one-man adaptation of Australian playwright Ren Blair's The Christian Brothers. The play follows a day in the life of a member of that religious organization, which, to quote a Codco character, has "done a lot of good in Newfoundland."

²⁷ Codco, "Father Dinn On Sin," What Do You Want to See the Harbour For Anyway? typescript, Codco Archives, St. John's.

²⁸ Codco, "Bernie Snelgrove, Superstar," Sickness, Death, and Beyond the Grave typescript, Codco Archives, St. John's.

²⁹ Codco, The Sisters of the Silver Scalpel film, Memorial University Folklore and Language Archives, Memorial University.

³⁰ Chris Brookes in interview.

³¹ Performance detail from Le Grand Film Ordinaire.

³² Sigouin, p. 86.

³³ Described in detail by Sigouin, pp. 27-34.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 33.

³⁵See Usmiani, pp. 121-23, and Jean-Cléo Godin, "Un Grand Cirque (peu) Ordinaire," Théâtre Québécois Vol. II, eds. J.-C. Godin and Laurent Mailhot (Montreal: Hurtubise HMH, 1970), pp. 77-86.

³⁶Sigouin, p. 27.

³⁷Paule Baillargeon quoted in interview, Stratégie 9, Summer 1974. Cited by Usmiani, p. 121.

³⁸Michael Cook, "Culture As Caricature: Reflections on a Continuing Obsession," Canadian Literature 100, Spring 1984, p. 76.

³⁹Mummers Troupe, Buchans: A Mining Town video recording, August 28, 1976. Supplied by Alan Filewod.

⁴⁰Alan Filewod, "The Development and Performance of Documentary Theatre in English-speaking Canada" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Toronto, 1985), p. 308.

⁴¹Mummers Troupe, Buchans: A Mining Town video.

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³Codco, "Theatre Passe Muraille," Sickness, Death, and Beyond the Grave typescript, Codco Archives, St. John's.

⁴⁴John Fraser, "The Newfoundland Plight Becomes Newfie Joke," Globe and Mail, November 16, 1974.

⁴⁵Michael Cook, "Culture As Caricature," p. 77.

⁴⁶Codco in interview.

⁴⁷Codco, "Family," Cod On A Stick typescript, Codco Archives, St. John's.

⁴⁸Codco, "Taxi," Cod On A Stick.

⁴⁹Greg Malone, Codco interview.

⁵⁰Codco, "The Happy Province," Cod On A Stick.

⁵¹Ibid.

⁵²Codco, "Christmas Scene," Sickness, Death, and Beyond the Grave typescript, GCO Christmas scene recorded in Le Grand Film Ordinaire.

⁵³Usmiani, p. 125.

⁵⁴Ibid.

⁵⁵Codco, "Bernie Snelgrove: Superstar," Sickness, Death, and Beyond the Grave typescript.

⁵⁶Ibid.

⁵⁷Ibid.

⁵⁸Ibid.

⁵⁹Ibid.

⁶⁰Ibid.

⁶¹Jean-Cléo Godin, "Un Grand Cirque (peu) Ordinaire", p. 83, translated.

⁶²Andy Jones, Codco interview.

⁶³Codco, "Bernie Snelgrove: Superstar."

⁶⁴Both Chris Brookes and Codco members stressed this in interviews.

⁶⁵Sigouin, p. 118.

⁶⁶Usmiani, p. 98.

⁶⁷Mummers Troupe, Buchans: A Mining Town video.

⁶⁸Codco, "Ballad of the Wild Cod," Cod On A Stick typescript.

⁶⁹Paule Baillargeon, "Baby Buick's Lament," from La Famille Transparente, quoted and translated by Usmiani, p. 123.

⁷⁰Bertolt Brecht, Brecht On Theatre, ed. and trans. John Willett (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964), p. 230.

CONCLUSION

The historical and cultural parallels between Quebec and Newfoundland, as explored in this discussion, are given further resonance in the works of le Théâtre Euh!, le Grand Cirque Ordinaire, the Mummers Troupe, and Codco. Although Newfoundland theatre was the product of a smaller society and lacked a detailed intellectual framework for the discussion and expression of ideas of nation, the work of Codco and the Mummers is similar to that of the Quebec companies on many levels. While many of the themes and methods of the four companies reflect what was taking place on the world stage in the sixties and seventies, and particularly in the North American and Canadian contexts, the collective theatre companies of Quebec and Newfoundland share special features which are the result of certain historical, political, and cultural realities.

Le Théâtre Euh! and the Mummers Troupe sought to create a new kind of theatre for their audiences, a theatre which would explore the underlying structures of their societies and propose political solutions for oppressed classes and cultures. Le Grand Cirque Ordinaire, while less militant in its stance, also worked within an ideology of social engagement. Codco, while ostensibly a comedy troupe, came to life at a time when Newfoundland culture was undergoing a renaissance and beginning to take itself seriously. Both Codco and the Mummers Troupe should be looked at in the context of this renaissance, which in turn should be seen, at least in part, as the expression of a younger generation's new-found

pride in its distinctive cultural identity.

Since Codco material is predominantly satiric, aiming its outrageous arrows at hypocritical societal institutions and mores, it is difficult not to see the company's work as socially critical, and thus on a par with much of the work of *le Grand Cirque Ordinaire*. Although Codco members insisted that their main goal was to make people laugh, and *le Grand Cirque Ordinaire* described their own work as "socio-poétique," even a brief study of these two companies is sufficient to show how often they treaded, as it were, each other's stages. In reaching for laughter, Codco members often touched the tragic. *Le Grand Cirque*, while dramatizing "l'expression euphorique de notre vie tragique" (the euphoric expression of our tragic life)¹ often used humour as their medium.

The collective creations which have been discussed here were perhaps most effective on the level of local and regional culture, addressing themselves to the cultural groups from which they took their character. In the case of the Mummies and *le Théâtre Euhl*, the cultural cohesiveness of a nation-people was expressed in terms of class struggle. These are terms which challenge economic and political elites and monoliths. More generally, the "organic" nationalism expressed by the four companies tends to be positive and affirmative of the cultural communities in question, while holding outside and oppressive elements up to ridicule. We have seen that cultural nationalism is particularly well communicated on the level of language, with the non-elitist and everyday language particular

to cultural communities held up as expressive of their unique situations within the Canadian context.

The four companies all took to task those social institutions which were seen as inhibiting social progress. The church was a favorite target, due to the importance of its role in shaping the histories of both provinces. For the Quebec companies, the family was both victim and perpetrator of an undemocratic, consumer-oriented society. In the Newfoundland context, family hypocrisies were a favorite target for Codco, but the Mummings took a different direction, using the sanctity of the family to expose the injustices of larger powers.

Robin Mathews, Susan Crean, and Howard Aster would likely argue that in their conscious and unconscious efforts to foster cultural cohesiveness, the four companies under discussion here were performing a quintessentially Canadian task. The members of the four companies, however, would probably prefer to look at their work in a different light. For these four groups, the urge to articulate a cultural community stemmed from the fact that for them, the label "Canadian" did not go very far in defining their hopes, dreams, and economic and cultural realities. Indeed, it was often the Canadian state itself (personified by the Newfoundland companies as Upper Canadian characters, and by the Quebec companies as "sellouts" virtually indistinguishable from Americans) which became the target for ridicule and scorn. This is hardly surprising, for in the Canadian context it is usually the state

which is the interlocutor between local communities and the workings of modern industrial capitalism, about which all four companies expressed such deep ambivalence.

It has been argued throughout this discussion that le Théâtre Euh!, le Grand Cirque Ordinaire, Codco, and the Mummies all worked within a framework of "popular theatre." The term has been used both in the Brechtian sense and in what has here been referred to as the pre-Brechtian sense. This was done in order to stress the idea that non-literary theatrical forms have always lent themselves to non-elitist expression, and that so-called "folk" expression has often been aware of its ability to speak for those not in positions of power. In this vein, we have seen Usmani's explanation of how le Grand Cirque Ordinaire chose its name:

"Circus" indicates a popular, light-hearted, non-verbal approach to theatre; "grand" modifies this and indicates a seriousness of intent which transcends the usual context of circus performance, and "ordinaire" refers to the ordinary, everyday life which is a base of reference for the productions.²

This is a somewhat misguided view, perhaps, of why le Grand Cirque chose to work within the circus format. First of all, any self-respecting circus thinks of itself as "grand" or "great". Secondly, the circus is not necessarily "light-hearted". Part of the thrill and fun of the circus lies in its inherent dangers, just as part of its charm lies in its inherent tawdriness, vulgarity, and trickery. As former Grand Cirque member Claude Laroche said in an interview, "Le cirque c'est l'élément mensonge" (the circus tells lies), but the lies often lead to the truth.³ In any case, all of the four

companies chose to emulate the more mischievous and unsettling aspects of the popular forms which they adapted in their own approaches to theatre.

As was noted from the beginning, the work of these four companies, as well as that of many of their contemporaries, cannot be truly understood outside the context of the social upheaval of the sixties and early seventies. While this is particularly true in the specific cultural contexts of Newfoundland and Quebec in those years, it is also important in a more general sense. Theatre worldwide was very much a product of the times, and it was a time of outspokenness for a generation of young adults, many of whom were determined to build a better world than that which had been bequeathed them. Cynicism about the future of the planet went hand in hand with a euphoria concerning the potential of human beings and a seemingly endless scope for liberation on all fronts. Though the roots of indigenous theatre in Canada's regions run deeper than those years, here perhaps was its first real flowering, and the works of the four companies reflect the hopes, dreams, and disappointments of young people searching for realistic self-definition within their own unique cultural communities.

Although the plays discussed here represent only a fraction of the out-put of each of the four companies, there are enough interesting parallels to be looked at, on so many levels, that further research in this area could not fail to reveal many fascinating and important insights. If the comparisons made here are plausible, the

literature and "legitimate drama" of Quebec and Newfoundland would also provide fertile ground for such an exploration.

In concluding this discussion, I must make reference to a recent Newfoundland film. The Adventures of Faustus Bidgood was written by Codco's Andy Jones and directed by his brother, filmmaker Michael Jones. Described as "a fascinating and complex exploration of the Newfoundland psyche,"⁴ Faustus tells the story of a minor civil servant who fantasizes that he has become the first president of the independent Republic of Newfoundland.

Faustus took ten years to complete, thanks to a chronic lack of funds. Before the final editing, the film contained a scene in which Faustus, thinking over recent political events in Newfoundland, concludes that (and I am paraphrasing), "When a people rises up, they gets confused."⁵ While nationalist movements in Canada and its regions have lost much of their momentum since the filming of Faustus began ten years ago, the average Canadian's confusion about the significance of indigenous culture persists. Recognizing, exploring, and commenting on that confusion remains a crucial aspect of our self-definition.

NOTES

¹ Claude des Landes, "Les feux de la fête," Jeu 5, Spring 1977, p. 5. Also quoted in Godin and Mailhot, vol. II, p. 86.

² Usmani, p. 119.

³ Claude Laroche, in Jeu 5, p. 24. Also quoted in Godin and Mailhot, vol. II, p. 86.

⁴ Matthew Fraser and Joan Sullivan, "Keeping up With the Joneses," Globe and Mail, Feb. 8, 1986.

⁵ While this line from the film seems to have ended up on the cutting room floor, some Newfoundlanders seem to treasure it. Chris Brookes quoted it in interview with me, and Edythe Goodridge, former head of the Newfoundland Arts Council, quoted it in interview with Peter Gzowski, on CBC Television's Gzowski and Co.

APPENDIX

A. Mummers Troupe Members

Chris Brookes lists the many people who worked in the company "in order of appearance":

Lynn Lynde, John Doyle, Kevin Pittman, Diane Olsen, Tommy Sexton, Sam Hedge, Sandy Cantwell, Jane Dingle, Paul Sametz, Mary Walsh, Chris Knight, Andy Thompson, Donna Butt, Jan Henderson, Bob Pot, Bembo Davies, Paul Collins, Don Wherry, Judy Marshak, Marsha Coffey, Michael Fahey, Heather Earle, Rick Boland, Rhonda Payne, Lee Campbell, Howie Cooper, Allan Booth, Connie Kaldor, Alan Filewod, Michael Smith, Derek Butt, Connie Brissenden, Maddy Williams, Ron Hynes, Steven Bush, Jane Foster, Wayne McNiven, Ray Landry, Pam Morgan, Jeff Pitcher, Frank Lapointe, Bob Banfield, Judy Parsons, Ron MacEachern, Ann Narvaez, Susan Perly, Bill Maloney, Don Walsh, David Ross, Jeannie Becker, Brenda Devine, Mavis Penney, Terry Reilly, Geoff Butler, Jules Drake, Joan Brownridge, Bob Joy, Brian Hennessey, Janet Michaels, Michael Kearney, William Roberts, Sheila Zisman, Kelly Russell, Jim Payne, Pierre Beaupre, Glen Tilley, Ann Budgell, Gay Hauser, Steven Osler, Kent Barrett, Charles Tomlinson, Mark Manson, Charlotte Jewzyk, Juanita Crocker, Mac Furlong, Denis Parker, Brian Downey, Paul Steffler, Warren Brownridge, Laine Lunde, Christine Lewes, Henry Chaulk, Betsey Erving, Colin Quigley, Benny Malone, Glen Rockwood, Greg Thomey, Caroline Ford, Jim Maynard, Stephanie Squires, Michelle Fleiger, Jacquely Ryan, Pat Byrne, Janis Spence, Kevin Noble, Ed Keilly, Sheila Guy, Sherry Smith, Gerry Squires, Clyde Rose, Kay Anonsen, Jan Wallace, Mary-Lynn Bernard, Merle Matheson, Michael Wade.

While not all of these people worked with the company long enough to have considered themselves "members" of the company, the list gives an indication of how many people in the Newfoundland arts community have been involved with the Mummers on some level.

B. Lists of Major Productions

The following lists are in no way meant to be exhaustive. They are provided mainly for the sake of chronological clarity and to give the reader an idea of the variety of themes undertaken by the four companies. The list does not include all the minor but nonetheless important public appearances of the troupes. These would include lunchtime theatre, workshops, sketches, benefits, evenings of improvisation, and appearances at protests and strike sites, in parades, on television, or in festivals.

1. The Mummers Troupe

The Mummers Play was first performed in traditional style by the group in 1972, and would become an annual Yuletide event in St. John's in the years that followed.

Newfoundland Night (1973) This sardonic, working man's view of Newfoundland's history incorporated mime, puppets, music and dance.

Gròs Mourn (1973) This was an agit-prop, carnivalesque production which dramatized the situation of Sally's Cove, a community whose homes, land, and other properties were in the process of being expropriated so that a provincial park could be built.

Buchans: A Mining Town (1974) A community portrait of Buchans, Newfoundland, a town owned by an American company whose residents had recently taken part in a bitter strike.

I.W.A., the Newfoundland Logger's Strike (1974) A dramatization of the strike that rocked the province in 1959, the reasons behind it, and the way it affected the men and women involved.

Dying Hard (1975) Based on Elliot Leyton's book of the same name, this play presented the thoughts of miners dying from silicosis and other diseases.

East End Story (1975) A portrait of East End St. John's which stressed the changes the community had undergone and the importance of fostering community solidarity.

The Price of Fish (1976) Sponsored by Oxfam, this play explored the notion of Newfoundland's being a Third-World community.

Irregular Entertainment (1976) A light-hearted look at bingo, with emphasis on its role as a social event rather than a gambling opportunity.

Silakepat Kissiane (Weather Permitting) 1977 A portrait of life on the coast of Labrador.

The Bard of Prescott Street (1977) An affectionate portrait of Johnny Burke, a nineteenth century poet and satirist of St. John's.

They Club Seals, Don't They? (1978) A highly-publicized, circus-motif production which sought to counteract negative views of the seal hunt.

Stars in the Sky Morning 1978) Created by Jane Dingle and Rhonda Payne, this production dramatized the lives of outport women.

Some Slick (1979) A rock musical which considered the possible effects of oil wealth on Newfoundland communities and culture. - -

Makin' Time With the Yanks (1981) This production took a look back at the war years, when the influx of American servicemen had an enormous effect on St. John's.

II. Codco

Cod On A Stick (1973) A satire on the mainland view of Newfoundland, full of inverted stereotypes and tongue-in-cheek humour.

Sickness, Death, and Beyond the Grave (1974) These supposedly taboo subjects were treated with little respect. So were the 60's youth and the arts and entertainment world.

What Do You Want To See The Harbour For?, also known as Das Capital (1975) Commissioned by a community group, this production satirized the over-development of St. John's, some local characters, and many politicians.

Would You Like To Smell My Pocket Crumbs? (1975) Christmas, death, and religion were the main targets in this production, with federalism thrown in for good measure.

The Tale Ends (1976) Intended as a farewell show, this one took on Canadian documentary theatre, and presented "The Codco School of Acting," which had Andy Jones teaching vomiting lessons and Sir Laurence Olivier trying to learn the Newfoundland accent.

Laugh Your Guts Out With Total Strangers (1976) was a compilation of old material along with new skits, including several on aging.

Who Said Anything About Tea? (1978) Included skits about hospitals, rebellious grannies, and funny feminists.

The Waning Moon Café (1979) This production combined old and new material in a decidedly cabaret-style atmosphere.

Barely Dead and Hardly Missed (1981) Targets and subjects included psychiatry, feminism, Nazis, and a lounge lizard entertainer, Ricardo.

The Best of Codco (1986) Codco's recent retrospective is proof of the enduring nature of irreverent comedy.

III. Le Grand Cirque Ordinaire

T'es pas tannée, Jeanne d'Arc? (Aren't You Fed Up, Joan of Arc?) 1969. The company's first production featured Joan of Arc as a symbol of nationalism, and included many skits which dramatized and satirized modern life in Quebec.

Alice au pays de Sommeil (Alice in Sleepyland) 1970. This play for children was given a new slant following the FLQ crisis.

T'en rappelles-tu, Pibrac, ou le québécois? (Do You Remember, Pibrac, or the Quebec - What?) 1971. This was the group's most overtly political show, in that it put forward suggestions as to how the people of unemployment-ridden Pibrac could take charge of their fate.

L'Opéra des Pauvres (The Poor People's Opera) 1973. This was the company's first production outside the aegis of the TPQ, and used Brecht's Threepenny Opera as the basis for its improvisations.

Un Prince, Mon Jour Viendra (Some Prince, My Day Will Come) 1973. Created by Paule Baillargeon, Suzanne Garceau, and Luce Ghibault, an actress from outside the company. The play inverted the innocence of fairy tales and showed how the true liberation of women remains impossible in a world where men insist on playing the role of violent aggressors.

La Tragédie Américaine de l'Enfant prodigue (The American Tragedy of the Prodigal Child) 1975. This production was both a self-reflexive look at the company and a tale of disillusionment in the search for peace and love.

La Stépette Impossible (Impossible Highstepping) 1975. This play, which relied heavily on improvisation, was meant to explain how the company worked.

Les Fiancés de Rose Latulippe (Rose Latulippe's Fiancés) 1976. An exploration of relations between the sexes.

iv. Le Théâtre Euh!

Quand le Matriarcat fait des petits (When the Matriarchate Has a Litter) 1970. This exploration of motherhood and the family was the company's response to the demythologizing impulse of the era.

Cré Antigone! (That Damned Antigone!) 1971. A québécois reworking of Brecht's Antigone, with Antigone as a munitions factory worker who rallies the other workers to protest, and Creon as the factory's capitalist owner.

Sam, Pic, Poc, et Ket s'en vont (Sam, Pic, Poc, and Ket on the Move) 1971. This was the first title of what would later become L'Histoire du Québec, in which Quebec's past is presented as a series of oppressions.

A bas le vieux kit! (Down With the Old System!) 1972. A dramatization of a "white book" of the Centrale des Enseignants du Québec, the teacher's union, and its proposals for reforms.

Les Sept Péchés capitaux (The Seven Capital Sins) 1972. A working-class couple becomes aware that their impoverishment is the result of the greed, sloth, envy, etc., of their oppressors. They protest and take over their workplace.

La Vie Heureuse de Méo Tremblay (The Happy Life of Méo Tremblay) 1974. A play which was often adapted to suit different audiences, Méo dramatized the life of a worker (in a factory, a mine, on a farm, etc.) who protests his living and working conditions and plans to go on strike.

Un, deux, trois, . . . vendu! (Going, Going, . . . Gone!) 1975. As was mentioned in the discussion, this depiction of "profitable federalism" and its social costs had both a rural and an urban version.

Ouvrez les portes des maisons (Open the doors of the Houses) 1977. An example of the company's work in their most militant phase, this play underscored the role of women in the fight for social justice.

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F. Scripts, Videos, and Other Records of Productions

Le Théâtre Euh!

Le Théâtre Euh! did not record their productions in written form. I have relied on Gérard Sigouin's detailed descriptions of the plays.

Several videos and films of le Théâtre Euh! have been made, and are scattered in private collections. For more details, see Sigouin's "Filmography".

Le Grand Cirque Ordinaire

Le Grand Cirque did not make written scripts.

Le Grand Film Ordinaire, ou Jeanne d'Arc n'est pas morte, se porte bien et vit au Québec is a 1970 film of the troupe, directed by Roger Frappier and distributed by Faroun Films. It documents performances of Jeanne d'Arc, providing not only an excellent record of their performance style but also, with footage of real-life events in Quebec, a socio-political context for the play.

In addition, several films and videotapes were made by the company itself. For a complete list, see Jeu 5 (Summer 1977).

The Mummers Troupe

The Mummers scripts all exist in print form. I relied mainly on the following:

Newfoundland Night

Buchans: A Mining Town

I.W.A., the Newfoundland Logger's Strike

Some Slick

Kilakepat Kissiane (Weather Permitting)

Videotapes of Buchans, Newfoundland Night, and Gros Mourn were made available to me by Alan Filewod.

Codco

A Codco collection is presently being compiled at the Memorial University Folklore and Language Archives. Transcripts of most of the company's material are available. In addition, there are numerous rehearsal and performance videotapes and audio tapes. I relied chiefly on transcripts and videotapes (labelled 85-045 CODCO SERIES, numbered VC 23 through 37) of the following:

Cod On A Stick

Sickness, Death, and Beyond the Grave

What Do You Want to See the Harbour For? (Das Capital)

Would You Like to Smell my Pockets Crumbs?

Finally, the Centre for Newfoundland Studies at Memorial University has a Script Bank of Newfoundland plays, and various clipping files and collections which were very useful.

G. Interviews

Chris Brookes (Mummers Troupe), Toronto, July 28, 1986.

Andy Jones, Mary Walsh, Tommy Sexton, and Greg Malone (Codco), St. John's, May 29, 1986.

Clément Cazelaïs and Marie-Renée Charest, Montreal, February 21, 1986.

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