Chapter I

Introduction

Theatre is the most public and the most immediate of all art forms. It is not only because what is on stage right there is palpably alive between audience and actor, but also because theatre connects immediately as it must find its audience now. To do so, it needs to be closely attuned to the world that surrounds it not necessarily by setting or by subject, but perhaps by sensibility. If it isn’t, it can vanish without a trace. A risky venture for many reasons, theatre is an ephemeral art. Never genuinely alive until produced, its afterlife may be restricted to the brief reviews of one particular production on a particular night. The chance of a play becoming available as a text to the reading public with a possibility of further productions depends on a whole network of people those who encourage or suppress its coming to life in the first place, the collective artists who then shape and interpret the work for the critical first production and then those at the publishing and who determine what gets into print.

It may well be said that a drama is the most difficult literary form to master; this certainly is not the only reason which one finds for it to be a least practiced of all the arts. Especially in Canada, the anemic state of Canadian theatre was because the audiences were lured elsewhere. They were exposed to the remarkable features of Broadway and American films they were convinced that their drama, because of its formlessness, ineffective characterization, pretentious moral attitudes and lack of stylistic distinctions is not only inferior but also amateurish.

Canada being enormous in size, could not speak with one voice. Since it is a land of ten provinces, separated by natural barriers of mountains, prairies, and water,
its drama tends to be localized with each province. Added to this is the divisive bicultural aspect of English and French Canada, always a source of anxiety. The scarcity of theatres, and the high cost of production made it next to impossible for any theatrical group to tour Canada. Canadian drama has been in its infancy for four hundred years.

The lack of production, publicity and indigenous publication that typifies the history of Canadian drama has resulted in the mistaken notion that it failed to exist before 1967, that historically significant year in which the Vancouver Playhouse commissioned George Ryga to write for the theatre. His play *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe*, and John Herbert’s *Fortune and Men’s Eyes* found their way to the Actors Playhouse in New York City. There were also Mary Humphrey Baldrige, John Coulter, Robertson Davies, Herschel Hardin, Patricia Joudry, Betty Lambert, James Reaney, Gwen Pharis Ringwood, and Beverly Simons, to name a few.

The new plays, the product of the new theatre companies, were expressive of a different tradition, one shaped by local experiment, international trends and the populist nationalism of the alternative scene. The sudden call for scripts made it possible for a number of women who were already part of the alternate theatre community. The prevailing notion that a Canadian drama was conceived in the flush of the Centennial excitement and that it was born with the completion of the Regional theatres that were, in many cases, governmental birthday gifts to Canadians.
**Canadian Drama**

Drama in Canada was in a very early stage of development. A host of reasons: historical, geographical, and economic as well as cultural reveals to us why drama has lagged behind poetry and fiction. A sparse population spread over a large area, the lack of metropolitan centers, the competition of plays from U.K. and U.S.A., the puritanical outlook of the Canadian society which looked at the stage with suspicion, the aping of foreign literary models by Canadian artists have inhibited the development of in Canadian Drama. Drama is considered the most dependent upon popular acceptance. Poetry can circulate in a minority section, in the shelves of bookstores serious fiction can find a place alongside best sellers since readers are present all over the country, but a play needs an appeal from the audience. The staging of plays normally requires a considerable number of people, lighting technicians, as well as actors, it has lagged behind from other arts.

Canadian Theatre as such date back to 1945, English-Canadian plays for performance began in 1967 which coincided with the centennial year, the year of expo and the first all Canadian Dominion Drama Festival. Canada witnessed a theatrical renaissance in the 1930s which could be compared to the New American Theatre of the 1920s and British Theatrical Renaissance of the 1950s.

Canadian artists have always felt a genuine need to establish a true Canadian theatre which would stage Canadian plays. One should make mention of Hart House Theatre established in Toronto, which remained a focal point for many years. Then came Little Theatre Movement which staged plays for small communities. The Little Theatre Movement which always believed in innovation in theatrical production, rejected commercial values. Theatres in Canada like Vancouver Little Theater, Ottawa Drama League and Montreal Repertory Theatre. The most important and...
essential development of Canadian drama was the establishment of Dominion Drama Festival in 1932, which instituted cash prizes and trophies by conducting drama competitions which encouraged many playwrights to the writing of plays.

The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, established in 1932, by broadcasting a number of plays popularized the growth of Canadian Drama. But the most noteworthy event in Canada’s cultural life was the establishment of Canada Council by its liberal grants did a lot for the development of drama in Canada, thereby enriching the quality of Canadian life. Canada also witnessed the establishment of many regional theatres in Montreal, Regina, and Toronto, based on the model of Manitoba Theater Centre.

The Canadian Theatre for the Young People had adaptations of poems and novels in the writing of the plays which have attracted large young audiences. In recent times there have been changes both in the adventure, myths and legends still attract playwrights and young audiences. The quality of Canadian Theater for Young people has been enriched by its exposure to International Children’s Festival in 1978 attracted artists and performers from all over the world.

Contemporary Canadian theatre has been further enriched by the growth of multi-cultural companies, with a number of immigrants. In Canada many ethnic groups have established their firm identities by founding their own theatres like The Yaddish Theater of Montreal, Van Couver’s German Theatre, Mennonites Theatre in Winnipeg and Black Theatre in Toronto.

Canada also witnessed the growth of Alternative Theatre Movement in 1960s. The established values and conventions, is an international phenomenon that manifested itself in various forms around the world, from street theatre to New York
repository ensembles. The development of a distinctly Canadian alternate theatre was a result of a changing political climate and increased interest in Canadian culture and institutions. This theatre represented the rejection of traditional concepts of theatre, use of non-traditional space, a new approach to audience actor relationship, collective creations and emphasis on process rather than the product. We have a number of alternative theatres in Canada like Tamahnous Theatre in Vancouver, Newfoundland’s Mummers Troup, Theatre Passe-Muraille and Factory Theatre Lab in Toronto.

Canadian writers encouraged theatre. A glance at the history of theatre in Canada is highly revealing. The first theatricals in New France at the beginning of the seventeenth century to the more sophisticated productions of the present time, there has been a steady growth of theatres throughout this vast nation. After three hundred and fifty years of foreign importations, the Canadians at last began consistently to dramatize their own unique characters, cultures and backgrounds in plays that were provincial rather than national in character, and experimental as well as traditional.

The roots of Canadian drama lies in its French garrison theatre as early as 1606 when Marc Lescarbot, a Parisian lawyer, encouraged theatricals in order to boost the morale of the people. He himself wrote an original Maine masque verse, *Le Theater de Neptune*, which was performed on the beach and in a barge and canoes by Indians and voyageurs. Published in 1609, it was, indeed, the first Canadian play which was followed by pageants and charades in the garrison at Port Royal and Quebec. Classical French plays like Corneille’s *Le Cid* in 1646, *Heraclitus* in 1651 were performed in Quebec. Drama was encouraged in the military messes by the Governor Louis de Baude and Comte de Frontenac from 1672 to 1698.
It is interesting to note that the change from French to British rule in Canada resulted in a powerful revival of the theatre, because the British officers sent to Montreal and Quebec City supported the revival of French plays, even those that the Catholic Church had banned because of its popularity in the eighteenth century. English-Canada was beginning to introduce theatre in its garrisons. The first English Canadian play *Acadius or Love in a Calm* was produced in Halifax in 1774. Around the same time Professional English and American actors and stock companies were presenting plays in Montreal and Halifax. A group calling itself the American company of Comedians performed in Halifax in 1768 and established the second Grand Theatre in 1789. A century later, this small city could boast of three theatres and an opera house. Quebec’s permanent playhouse, Theatre du Marche au Foin, opened in 1790 and the Theatre Royal in Montreal in 1825 attracted famous actors to Montreal. The Military theatricals were frequently presented in the mid 1800s in Quebec City and Montreal. In the 1830s Pierre Petitclair, a Quebec-born dramatist, wrote comedies in the style of Moliere known as anti-establishment satires of the Quebec society. French Canadian Dramatists’ play succeeded by the stimulation of professional touring companies from other countries. Touring companies from France and the US began to dominate the Canadian theatre by presenting European and American classics as well as the romantic and melodramatic plays. The poetic dramas of the nineteenth century lacked vitality and originality. Charles Mair’s *Tecumseh* (1886), Sarah Curzon’s *Laura Second: The Heroine of 1812* (1876) and *The Sweet Girl Graduate* (1882) were some of the major poetic plays.

The first play to depict the small-town-life was *The Female consistency of Brockville* (1865) written under the pseudonym ‘Caroli Canadidus’. The play is a virulent attack on hypocrisy in the Presbyterian Church. *Dolar Solatio* (1865) by the
anonymous ‘Sam Scribble’, satirized attitudes towards confederation. Nicholas Flood Davin’s *The Fair Grit* (1876) is a comic treatment of Party Politics. Several Political and social satires became very popular, for example, *The King of the Beavers* (1865) written by Sam Scribble. The most popular playwright of this period was William A. Treymane whose *Lost 24 Hours* (1895) was produced at New York. John Hunter Duvar, John Harpor, Bliss Carman and W.W. Campbell wrote plays during the turn of the century.

Dramatic troupes from Britain and Europe toured English and French Canada, bringing to Canadians a taste for great plays, there was no interest at that time in promoting an indigenous drama for Canada. Theatre for Canadians was simply a form of entertainment, not an original expression of one’s own identity and culture. Canadian equated their identity with their European forebears. Hence they empathized with the dramatis personae in British and European plays.

The early years of the twentieth century saw a little progress. Canadians did not seem unaware of the revolutionary changes taking place in the various fields of drama in Europe, nor did they perceive with very comparable foresight the sudden growth of an indigenous American drama beginning with Eugene O’Neill and the Provincetown players in 1917. One important event that occurred and had far-reaching effects in the development of the theatre in Canada was the annual competition in music and drama introduced by Governor General Lord Albert Henry George Grey in 1906 is an incentive for Canadian talent because professional theatre in Canada was being directed and performed almost entirely by outsiders.

The Little Theatre Movement of the early twentieth century was an attempt of reclaim the theatre in Canada from foreign domination, which paved the way for the
emergence of genuine national expression. As a result there arose a Vancouver Little Theatre (1921), Ottawa Dramatic League (1913), and Montreal Repertory Theatre (1930) and Frank Massey’s Hart House Theatre in Toronto (1919-1921), which included Canadian plays among their productions. The latter presented one-acts like Duncan Campbell Scott’s Pierre (1921), Isabel Mackey’s The Second Lie and Merill Denison’s Brothers in Arms (1921). These three plays, along with eight others were published by Vincent Massey in Canadian Plays from Hart Home Theatre (1926-1927).

The establishment of Dominion Drama festival (1932-1971) succeeded to a great extent in giving shape to amateur theatre establishing the overall standard and providing opportunities for the development of amateur artists, until it was replaced by the non-competitive theatre in Canada in 1971. The Challenge Trophy (1934) and the Bessborough Trophy established also encouraged Canadian Playwrights. The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) also nurtured the growth of Canadian drama. Established in 1936, it provided the motivation, necessary for scriptwriters to create original Canadian plays. Lister Sinclair, W.O. Mitchell, Earl Birney, John Coulter, Merrill Denison, Timothy Findley and Michael Cook were some of the prominent radio dramatists who also made the impact on the stage. Under the dynamic leadership of Andrew Allan, the CBC Radio began a long and successful career in the production of original Canadian plays reaching such heights of masterful, original performances in the mid twentieth century.

Workers Experimental Theatre is an amateur company, which made plays of the stage for bringing about social, economic and political reforms. The most important outcome of this theatre is the collectively written Eight Men Speak, which staged the protest against the imprisoning of a few members of the communist party.
of Canada’s political bureau. Other companies committed to staging new Canadian plays were playwright’s Studio Group founded by the Canadian Women Press Club in 1932 and Herman Voaden’s play workshop, founded in 1934.

The Canadian Government established a council in 1957, which gave financial support to several groups, one of the first being Manitoba Theatre Centre. The government subsidy helped to establish a string of professionally managed theatre companies across the country. The emergence of an indigenous professional theatre coincided with the golden age of radio drama and the birth of television drama. Several plays were broadcast, telecast and staged. The regional theatre movement, combined with the wave of a nationalism emerging in the Centennial year led to an unprecedented increase in the quality of plays written and produced in the late sixties and in the early seventies. The fortunate confluence of a number of factors resulted in the emergence of theatrical activity nostalgically referred to as the golden age of Canadian theatre. A small group of committed and idealistic artists, directors, actors, writers and designers contributed a great deal over a short period of time towards this. According to Martin Kinch, one of the founders of Toronto Free Theatre:

The Truth of the matter is that we were tearing our hair out. But, in another way, the truth is that immense amounts of theatre were being created, some of it is good, some of it terrible. I think the thing we now lose track of is that we made contact with an audience that for various reasons had no means of cultural expression… There was a genuine need for this kind of cultural mirror… (Wallace 345)
Mainstream Theatre and Alternative Theatre came into existence in close proximity in Canada. Alternative Theatre was born as reaction to mainstream programming in 1960, which deserves special highlight and which began as the experimental avant-garde in the early seventies, much influenced by the then prevailing anti-establishment, counter culture ethos, the main thrust in them being nationalistic. The nationalists’ enthusiasm besides creating a demand for indigenous Canadian plays generated opportunities for playwrights. Notable among the regional dramatists are Sharon Pollock, David French, Michael Cook, Ken Mitchells, George Ryga, and Paul Thompson.

In the latter half of the twentieth century, Canada witnessed a remarkable flowering of literature of all genres, especially drama. This theatrical revolution kept pace with recent developments. Theatres increased and actors became professionals. In the beginning, many plays were written in the realistic mode which was qualified as magic realism. In a memory play set up what is basically a realistic account of the play is depicted in a non-linear form wherein scenes from the past are re-enacted as they are recollected in the present. David French’s *Of the Fields Lately* and George Ryga’s *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe* employ this technique.

**Birth of Native Drama**

The 1970s also saw the birth of native drama, an art form both ancient and modern became traditional Indian practices were basically dramatic, a fusion of music, dance and ceremony. Only three writers first attempted this literary form. They are Duke Redbird, Nona Benedict, and George Kenney. *Wasavkachak* is a play produced by Duke Redbird in 1974, which illustrates the power of love. A demi-god
chooses to sacrifice immortality to become mortal in order to marry the blind girl he loves. The Great Spirit is so moved by his sacrifice that he restores the girl’s sight. In the same way Nona Benedict wrote a one act-play *The Dress* which explores the conflicts of native young people caught between tradition and mainstream culture.

George Kenney’s play *October Stranger* was written in collaboration with the director Dennis Lacroix. So Native Drama was in its infancy in the seventies.

The field of drama developed rapidly in the eighties. According to Tomson Highway, “In this decade, there has been the first emergence on a national scale of a native literary movement, particularly within the realm of theatre. Native voices are being heard on a scale similar to that of the native visual artists of the sixties”. (Petrone 170). The numbers of playwrights and the plays produced have grown remarkably high since the tentative attempts by Duke Redbird, Nona Benedict and George Kenney in the 1970s. Native performing groups, full and part-time have sprung up across the country.

One of the most important activities of the various theatre companies is their work with children and young adults in drama courses, summer theatre camps, and workshops organized by them. Studies include music, dance, and mime, since Indian culture music, drama and ceremony were meshed into aesthetic unit. Touring various reserves is yet another function. Many of the plays were collective works that were performed in the manner of the actors and ancestors, as a sharing of each others’ idea and a blending of each other’s rhythm, with many voices speaking louder than one.

The native theatre groups have tried to develop a new form of theatre that restored and recreated their native cultures with non-native theatre to articulate and express theatrical mode that both informs and entertains. Using theatre as the vehicle
for instruction and entertainment, they emphasized on community-theatre techniques
for native social development, which was called ‘Prevention through Drama’.

A few playwrights notably Tomson Highway in Toronto and Sadic Worn Staff
and Margo Kare on the West Coast have established names for themselves. Tomson
Highway is Canada’s most celebrated playwright and his plays were inspired by
contemporary social problems faced by native Canadians alcohol and drug abuse,
suicide, wife battering, domestic violence, the racism of the justice system, loneliness,
rejection, youth awareness as well as current environmental issues. The politics of the
streets and the sub-culture are a recurring theme.

Alternative Theatre Movement

The Alternative Theatre Movement in the 1960s and 1970s is another ripple in
an ever changing pattern which constitutes a major phenomenon of cultural history.
The genuine Canadian theatre is so new that the existence of such a theatre has been
questioned. The Canadian Alternate Theatre Movement shared with its American and
European counterparts a strong political orientation; rejection of the traditional
author-actor-director triangle; the use of non-traditional and collective creation.

Alternate companies set themselves up in protest against the colonial attitudes
on the directors of regional theatres; it was felt that regionals offered no scope for
growth or development to Canadian playwrights. Another target of the alternate
companies’ attacks was traditional theatre training in the universities. Finally, the
young theatre enthusiasts who created the movement rebelled against the fact that the
nation’s showcase theatre should be located in Stratford and feature Shakespearian
productions rather than Canadian plays. The movement began in Toronto, with the
First Underground Theatre Festival of 1970, when the term alternative theatre
appeared. The next ten years saw the rise of literally innumerable small, alternate companies across the country; most of them followed Toronto models, especially Toronto Workshop Productions and Theatre Passe Muraille.

Toronto Workshop Productions came into existence from the amalgamation of two groups, the Arts Theatre Club, founded by Basya Hunter, 1959 and Luscombe’s Workshop’s productions. The first show of Toronto workshop productions’, *Hey, Rube!*, a collective creation, proved a great success. Since 1963, Toronto Workshop productions have been working as a professional company, working in three genres; collective creation, fee adaptation of classics and scripted plays. A disciple of Brecht who has worked with Joan Littlewood in England, Luscombe feels the theatre’s main function is to make a social statement. He defines his work as popular theater.

Toronto Workshop Productions pioneered the use of collective creation in English Canada and these productions were usually built around a contemporary social or political problem. Toronto Workshop Productions set the pattern for such subsequent development, Theatre Passe Muraille evolved into the most successful and influential alternative theatre operation in Canada. Within a decade of its emergence in 1969, Passe Muraille had produced twenty two collective creations, a large number of scripted plays by new Canadian authors, and had also developed a distinctive style of its own.

Jim Garrard and Paul Thompson were the two men who created Passe Muraille. Thompson’s work was oriented towards two major goals; actor development and the invention of new, more effective methods of collective creation. He frequently called the services of writers; his shows were always conceived with the actor foremost in mind. He was stern in his view that collective creation provides
the best instrument to bring out an actor’s potential. The original contribution to the technique of collective creation was that he put the onus for research and documentation entirely on the actors themselves. Critics often point out the strong sense of authenticity of Passe-Muraille shows; it is a result of the actor’s direct involvement with their material.

Passe Muraille pursued two major lines of investigation, Sociological and Historical. These two will be explained in story of Passe Muraille. After Toronto Workshop Productions and Theatre Passe Muraille, Factory Theatre Lab was probably the third most influential institution on the Toronto alternate theatre scene of the seventies. It was founded in 1970 by Ken Gas and Factory Theatre Lab provided training ground for young actors, directors, and especially writers. Factory Theatre Lab had premiered fifty new Canadian plays and other small theaters followed its lead. Three more companies should be mentioned in order to illustrate the full range of alternative theatre: Toronto Free Theatre, Black Theatre Canada, an example of ethnic theatre, and the defunct Redlight Theatre, dedicated to the feminist cause.

The new alternates have shifted their interest from political theatre and the promotion of new Canadian plays to experimentation with style and technique and return to the classics as a base. Owing to the emergence of hundred of new troupes, new playwrights came into existence to legitimize Canadian drama and thus Canadian theatre experienced an unprecedented revolution. A complex intersection of historical forces, especially the revival of nationalism, resulted in the vast growth of professional theatres in English Canada and also in Quebec. The large scale government funding, the maturing of post-war generation and the rejection of traditional artistic convention and the world wide revival of experimental theatre contributed to the birth of the alternative theatre movement. It opposed the system of
publicly subsidized civic theatres established across Canada. This created an awareness of the theatrical tradition existed in Canada. This movement shared with its American and European counterparts a strong socio-political orientation, giving rise to collective creation.

This movement is also a protest against the colonial attitudes of the directors of regional theatres because it offered little scope for the growth or development in dramatic art of Canadian Playwrights. The existing network of Canadian regional theatres was not responsive to needs of the hour, dramatists created an alternative system, which fulfils their needs:

Whatever their initial impulses, the alternative theatres found themselves in the forefront of a popular nationalist movement. In the theatre the issues of post-colonial cultural independence were particularly visible and deliberately not, theatres forced into a nationalist posture by the lack of good Canadian plays and the apparent preference for British plays and directors in the regional theatres found themselves typed as radical. The alternative theatres provided a market place for aspiring playwrights who felt themselves locked out of the larger theatres; this situation in turn contributed to the nationalist debate that was emerging in all sectors of Canadian society. (Filewood 20)

Alternative theatre formed as an alternative to the elitist mainstream establishment. This thrust manifests itself at many levels, from admission price and theatre space to aesthetics. Canadian alternative companies have also experimented with five admissions in The Toronto Free Theatre, Julian’s PACET experiment, and Quebec’s Street Theatre. Such a radical policy proving impossible, the basic principle of maintaining low cost had been retained. Popular theatre also means doing away with
the conventional theatre space. When Jim Garrard called his new theatre ‘Passe Muraille’ it meant a going beyond the walls, which enclosed conventional theatre spaces. George Luscombe emphasized the need to bring theatres into areas, which they had never seen before, thus creating new awareness of and new audiences among the people. Both Passe Muraille and The Mummers Troupe implemented this principle in their sociological shows by moving into communities and producing their creations among people. Likewise companies like the Savage God and June Theatre performed among the people in street corners, city squares, parks, cafes, shopping malls, and other public areas.

The aesthetics adopted by alternative theatre reflects its popular orientation. The contemporary idiom and the production style adopted are simple and stylized as it is anti-literary in character and is chiefly based on collective creation. In their choice of a name also, the alternative theatres stressed their popular approach: The Mummers Troupe consciously links up with popular form; Passe Muraille emphasizes its rebellion against convention. Alternative theatre companies tend to have strong roots in their communities; they also consider themselves an important part of the culture building process within the nation. The double orientation can be seen in their production of political, sociological shows on the one hand and of historical plays on the other. Mainstream theatre stresses the importance of universality, and the alternative theatre affirms the need to be strongly rooted in the here and now.

Alternative theatres acted as stimulating agents in creating a show-place for new writers and bringing to the fore their talents since they were unwilling to accept the conventional, rigid differentiation between the writer, actor and director. Artists who had been most obviously excluded from the nation’s stages were given a chance to participate. This radical change is apparent in the contrasting comments of Michael
Tait’s glum observation for years 1920-1960, Tait wrote of “the lack of any vital and continuing relation between theatrical activity and the work of the Canadian Playwright” (167). Rubin wrote that, “In both the 1971-72 and 1972-73 seasons in Canada, more than 200 new Canadian plays received full-scale productions” (20). In this way alternative theatre companies have made a very serious effort in contributing to the growth of a truly national drama in Canada.

Theatres were largely successful in creating the popular theatre though public relation to the alternative theatre differed widely from Passe Muraille’s founder Garrad’s Brechtian dream of making theatre as popular as bowling. Certain groups had made a mark in this respect. As Passe Muraille’s sociological shows proved to be immensely popular both in and outside the communities where they were conceived and several of the Mummer’s productions, especially, Gros Mourn and Company Town appealed greatly to the popular audiences. PACET productions in Vancouver attracted participants from all walks of life. Alternative theatres faced the problem of contending with the usual difficulties of committed or political theatres because of their concern with local, regional and national issues, which at times have proven beyond their capacities. For instance, many of the Quebecois productions gave importance to propaganda even at the expense of aesthetic consideration; certain other companies had to sacrifice their professional standards because of their companies strive to create a strong link between theatrical activity and contemporary social issues.

It successfully achieved its objective of advancing Canadian dramatic literature by providing the broad base for experimentation, the much-needed spawning ground for new playwrights. In each region playwrights like George Walker, Rick Salutin, Herschel Hardin, Ken Gass, Hrant Alianak, and Andre Simaard
tried out their ideas by staying within the confines of the alternative theatre movement. They led the Canadian audiences of a whole new concept of theatre for the plays exhibited solid craftsmanship, a clear understanding of the requirement of the stage, and through contemporary approach which provoked national consciousness and national pride. Renate Usmiani remarks, "Within the evolution of Canadian theatre, the alternative movement has meant a gigantic step forward into a new area of experimentation, a new concept of theatre in keeping with lines of development internationally” (153).

**Toronto Alternative Theatre Movement**

In English Canada, the movement began in Toronto with the first Underground Theatre Festival of 1970. Within a short period, the alternative theatres dominated the theatrical landscape of Canada’s largest theatre market, and strove to attain national influence. The rise of Toronto’s alternative theatre was led by four major alternative theatres: Theatre Passe Muraille founded by Gim Garrard, in 1968 which was followed by Ken Gass’ The Factory Theatre Lab in 1970, Bill Glassco’s Tarrogan Theatre in 1971 and Toronto Free Theatre founded by Tom Hendry, Martin Kinch and John Palmer in 1972. Alternative theatres renewed people’s excitement in Toronto, creating new patterns by their series of influential productions.

Toronto’s alternative theatres had to go through three stages before attaining the stature of new mainstream. The first stage was radical (1968 to 1970) as new alternative theatre companies, influenced by American alternative theatres especially by the aesthetics imported from New York coffee houses, presented new experimental styles in performance stage was nationalistic (1970 to1972) as playwrights store to create indigenous plays, discarding American models more or less though trial and
error, whereas, the established theatres did not. This new venture invited enormous
critical attention in Toronto, inspiring widespread re-evaluation of Toronto’s local
professional theatre amidst critics, arts councils and theatre people themselves. The
third stage was a mainstream one (1972 to 1975) targeted towards finding a broader
audience. Each alternative company passed through these stages, adopting themselves
to the changing trends. John Palmer described the alternative theatres as ‘flickers of
light in a dark country’ (7).

The direct links between European and Canadian companies were established
by George Luscombe, of Toronto Workshop Productions, and Paul Thompson, of
Theatre Passe-Muraille. Luscombe worked with John Littlewood in England;
Thompson, with Roger Planchon in France. Both of these directors were actively
engaged in experimentation on the basis of Brechtian techniques. Thompson also
familiarized himself with the work of Peter Cheeseman, director of the Victoria
Theatre at Stoke-on-Trent. Finally, exchange programmes and guest appearances at
some of the international avant-garde festivals brought at least a small number of
Canadian alternative theatre companies into direct contact with their European
counterparts in 1970s. All the major American groups left their mark on the Canadian
theatre scene: The Living Theatre; The Performance Group; The Open Theatre; The
San Francisco Mime Company; The Bread and Puppet Theatre; and Teatro
Campesino. However, the two single most important factors in the evolution of the
Canadian movement were The Living Theatre and the concept of ‘environmental
drama’ as developed by Richard Schechner, founder of the Performance Group.

Factory Theatre Lab
The alternative theatres in Toronto may be roughly divided into two categories: namely the category that concentrated on the development of new playwrights like, Factory Theatre Lab, and one that worked on collective creation such as Theatre Passe Muraille. Theatres working on collective creation come in the second category. Collective creation in the annals of English Canadian theatre history has become one of the most notable phenomena of contemporary theatre, establishing thereby the liveliest period on record. Collectives are companies that live and function together sharing socio-political ideologies as they seek to inform and entertain the public, with the aim of politicizing and eventually reforming them radically. Bound by common beliefs and goals that transcend commercialism, the collective creators are socially conscious artists who considered the suffering of the community as their own. This could also be called artist priests as they trained to practice self-denial and physical hardships.

**Collective Creation**

Collective creation refers both to a particular historical practice that defined a crucial stage in the development of Canadian drama in the 1960s and 1970s, and to a collaborative method of playwriting that is still widely practiced. In its most common application, collective creation refers to the technique of devising a play as a group, with or without the aid of playwright or dramaturge. Advocates of this process claim that it makes the actor a creative artist, and leads to a performance style that expresses the authentic experience of the actor-creator.

Theatre has always been a collective creation, drawing on the collaborative energies of a team of artists who share the vision of the work they create. The movement of collective creation that developed in Europe and North America in the
1960s drew on many theatrical antecedents, but it was propelled by a desire
democratize the creative process, which in the twentieth century placed increasing
emphasis on the genius of the director as the interpreter of the text. The Canadian
movement of collective creation was influenced by the work of such groups as the
Living Theatre and the Open Theatre in New York, and the collaborative techniques
of directors such as Peter Brook and Peter Cheeseman in Britain and Roger Planchon
in France.

The social impetus behind collective creation in Canada was the generational
surge of young artists whose passion for Canadian cultural nationalism in the 1960s
led to a demand for plays that probed the experience of Canadian life and history.
Most of the Canadian theatres that had emerged since the introduction of public
subsidies to the arts in the 1950s had shown little interest in Canadian playwriting.
Coinciding with the remarkable surge of new playwriting in the 1970s, a number of
newly formed companies turned to collective creation implied left-wing populism, a
critique of artistic hierarchy and a commitment to local culture. Theatres repudiated
the established model of regional theatre as the product of a colonized mentality, and
sought to define indigenous culture by returning to historical and local subjects.

There were many such companies in the years between 1968 and 1975, but the
landmark event that showed the artistic possibilities of collective creation in English
Canada was Theatre Passé Muraille’s celebrated documentary play, *The Farm Show*,
in 1972. This production became a template for hundreds of similar projects across
English-speaking Canada. The process of *The Farm Show* has become famous
because it was the prototype of a style that has come to characterize Canadian theatre
in the early 1970s, and because it was the subject of a celebrated film by Michael
Ondaatje, *The Clinton Special*. In the summer of 1972 director Paul Thompson and a
group of actors stayed in a borrowed farmhouse near Clinton, Ontario. Out of their conversations with local farmers, the cast improvised a documentary play that combined spoken actuality and exuberant story-telling theatricality.

Playwriting developed in Canada to the point where dramatists could make a living from their art, collective creation appeared less necessary. Even so, some of the most important and popular plays of the 1970s were collectively devised, including twenty-fifth Street Theatre’s *Paper Wheat*, Toronto Workshop Production’s *Ten Lost Years*, and the politically radical collectives of the Mummers Troupe in Newfoundland. The equation of collective creation with specific genres and populist ideological principles of culture and theatrical organization began to fade through the 1980s. As a process, collective creation remained popular as one set of specific dramaturgical tools that enabled theatres to write a play on a desired topic efficiently and quickly. Some companies, such as Headlines Theatre in Vancouver and Resource Centre for the Arts in St. John’s, remain committed to collective creation as a process appropriate to community-based culture.

In the 1990s collective creation has been widely supplanted by collaboration in order to move beyond the anti-hierarchical political connotations that were so important in the 1970s. Despite this shift in language, the techniques of collective work are commonly practiced, particularly in physical theatre and imagistic groups, feminist companies and grassroots political theatres. No longer is an expression of alternative cultural practice, collective creation now one of the repertoire of methods utilized by small theatres, because they either pay very little or rely on volunteer commitment from their casts, can keep a team of actors together long enough to develop a play. That is a luxury which the larger, more institutionalized theatres can rarely afford.
The process of Collective Creation starts a consultation between the director and the writer, following which certain broad lines of theme, character, theme and situation are discussed with the actors and technicians. The improvisations then begin. Through constant analysis of what seems right, characterizations deepen, relationships develop meanings, and a pattern of scenes and narrative lines begin to emerge. The dialogue is written keeping in mind the actor’s improvisations, then freer and wider until the script begins to suggest scenes and characters, which have not been introduced on the stage. Co-operation and division of labour are the fundamental principles of collective creation in the case of Toronto Workshop Productions. Collective creation rejects the concept of scripted dialogue altogether as it is based on the work of actors themselves, who research the material and characters, and then develop a play, again by a process of trial and error through improvisation.

The collective creations turned out to be purely actor improvised plays in the beginning, since improvisation was the key element in their creative process. This became indispensable for dramatizing abstractions. The actors toured to perform in various places like women’s shelters, prisons, town halls, gyms, churches, auction barns that include also theatres in its various incarnations. They did not want for an audience but got onto their feet to perform their creations impromptu almost anywhere and everywhere, addressing the local public directly on subjects of interests that centre on their lives and tradition. They very often took into account the local context in some of its key moments and gradually extended their range through continuous contact with the target audience and the other, though it involved high risk performance. Through this new technique, the actors and directors forged new forms, expanded the actors’ range and capacity and by their collaboration gave a new and fresh vision to the problems.
Story of Passe Muraille

The first appearance of Theatre Passe Muraille was on the Toronto underground theatre scene in 1969. Its premiere production, Futz, dealt with the story of the relationship between a man and his sow, aroused a public scandal and the morality was shattered. Futz not only dealt with an unacceptable theme, but also certain words of displeasure. Passe Muraille was the only one of all the groups participating in the Underground Theatre Festival of 1970 to survive commercially. Theatre Passe Muraille is well established in a spacious permanent house on Ryerson Avenue; it has a faithful following in Toronto and its impact has been felt nationwide over the years.

The Passe Muraille house style was characterized by a combination of dialect realism, improvisation, and presentational story-telling. Thompson’s emphasis on the actor’s creative encounter with reality and his delight in pure theatricality were shaped in large part by the two years he spent as a stagiaire, an apprentice director, with Roger Planchon during 1960s in France. Thompson’s belief was that theatre can locate and define motifs and images which identify a culture. The motifs and images point to the formative myths of a society for Thompson. The idea of myth recurs throughout Thompson’s work and it lies at the heart of The Farm Show. This also explains why in his subsequent shows Thompson moved beyond documentary actuality to a new form of actor-created dramatic literature.

Thompson’s basic element of his theatre was a direct relationship between actor and material, an appeal to a collective sense of community, an emphasis on truth which is formulated in terms of stories, and an implied reference to the process by which the play was made. The act of showing the image or fact to the audience is
manifested in the process. The passage bears a similar comparison with a piece from the rehearsal process of *1837: The Farmers’ Revolt*, as described in Rick Salutin’s diary of the play:

1st day rehearsal

Before splitting up, we asked each of the actors to present an 1837 object. The best was Clare (Coulter).

She set herself before us and said:

I’m William Lyon Meckanzie’s house.

My feet are spread wide and my feet are firmly planted.

My hands are on my hips and I look straight ahead.

I have bits of windows and any question

You ask me I’m not afraid to answer. (Salutin 11)

Thompson is rare among Canadian directors in his reliance on the actors to discover not just the form and the structure of the play but its conduct and scope as well. Thompson begins the rehearsal of a play without any preconception of the final product. Thompson hardly recaptures the brilliance of *The Farm Show* in his later works, in part because of the unique conditions that made that play possible, and in part because of his commitment to expand the collective form.

Passe Muraille owed its existence and philosophy to the energy and vision of two men, James Garrard and Paul Thompson. Garrard founded the company and gave it its initial direction; Thompson developed it further the Passe- Muraille style. Both of them came to the theatre from academic backgrounds. Garrard, graduated
from Queens University, had become disillusioned with education and decided to take up theatre study in England. Returning to Canada, he became part of the growing cultural and nationalistic protest movement of the period. Part of the protest movement was Rochdale College, an experimental school set up in antithesis to traditional educational institutions. Garrard joined this project. He founded an independent company, in 1969, which he called Passe Muraille. The name carried implication of his visions of a truly popular theatre: theatre without walls.

Paul Thompson felt that it was his duty to open up his theatre to new, unknown dramatists, since the regional theatres were obviously not taking up the challenge of creating Canadian drama. Passe Muraille started humbly from the underground of Rochdale College, it moved to a variety of locations in the city, playing wherever cheap space was available. Often, the lack of a permanent space led to imaginative, environmental experiments The Immigrant Show was performed in a street car hired for the purpose which travelled through the city. The car stopped at relevant locations to create a sense of authenticity as the show was in progression. After acquiring a permanent home, the company has produced an astounding number of shows for the Canadian audience.

The audience of the Passe Muraille collective creation responds to the theatrical moment rather than the development of a governing idea the meaning of the play is a result rather than the cause of the arrangement of material. An exception to this rule is those plays that take their structure from an event. The 1837 is a fine example, with its chronological arrangement of didactic scenes. The emphasis on episode rather than fable encouraged the development of an acting style, at appearance informal and highly mannered in fact. Garrard had set the ideological pattern for Passe Muraille, it remained for his successor, Paul Thompson, to develop
the specific Passe Muraille style of collective creation. This style reached full
maturity with *The Farm Show* of 1974. The production of the play, revealed Passe
Muraille’s artistic identity, due to the vision and labour of its director.

Thompson never hesitated to create characters and scenes whenever history
plays demanded them. Some of Thompson’s best effects came from his free
improvisational sessions with actors. Shortly after staging *1837: The Farmers’
Revolt*, Thompson stated that, “in the end, you create the character and what he says.
And you can make your own statement through what you create”. He called this
“mythologizing history” (Wallace 58)

Certain years later, Thompson spoke of the theatre obligation to write history
in current language for which the information had to be fashioned according to the
target audience. Since, history plays by their very nature, could not effect direct
interaction with the audience as community plays, the suggestion was to use the
current language for their re-creation in order to restore their effect. In Passe
Muraille’s plays the perspective of the past and its stylistic explorations were rooted
very much in the physical actuality of stage imagery.

**Literature Survey**

The new play making method of the Theatre Passe Muraille has been given a
special place in histories and anthologies of Canadian drama. The theatrical career of
Paul Thompson as Director of the Theatre Passe Muraille and his collective plays
have been traced and critically viewed by critics like Diane Bessai, Alan Filewood,
Denis W.Johnston. Diane Bessai, a leading Canadian Scholar-critic, wrote many
articles on Canadian drama in general and on Theatre Passe Muraille’s collective
creation plays in particular. She, in her book, entitled *Playwrights of Collective*
Creation critically analysed the background of the development of collective creation and evaluated the famous works of playwrights who wrote collective creation plays and participated in them as well. In the article, “Discovering Popular Audience” she analysed John Gray’s collective creation plays.

Alan Filewood in his book Collective Encounters: Documentary Theatre in English Canada examined the documentary theatre both in historical and analytical contexts. The plays discussed in this book have been selected for their representative value, providing a cross-section of the range of Canadian documentary, and as individual models of specific aspects of the form. The analysis of these plays rests on the critical assumption that the documentary theatre must be considered a genre of performance rather than a form of literary drama.

Denis W. Johnston’s article, “Playwrights and collectives at Theatre Passe Muraille: An Historical Review” gives a survey of the development of Theatre Passe Muraille, the features of collective creation and playwrights who engaged in producing collective creation plays as full time career. In his book Up The Mainstream: The Rise of Toronto’s Alternative Theatres, 1968 -75, he concentrated on the four leading alternative theatre companies of Toronto and the personalities which created these theatres, the forces which shaped them and the events which brought them to prominence.

A close reading of this type of plays reveals the uniqueness of collective playmaking method and this uniqueness is derived from the synthesis of several different perspectives and experiences. It also reveals the role of the theatre directors like Paul Thompson along with other playwrights in raising the consciousness of theatre as a national bonding experience through collective creation. Their goal was
to attract audiences who were not habitual theatre-goers. They were fully confident that their collectives can reach out to new audiences throughout their non-linear structure and their presentational style. They never failed in achieving their goals. Non-theatre going Canadians seemed more comfortable with this structure, and with a more direct form of address than theatre’s conventional fourth wall. This dualistic role envisaged by the theatre directors capotes the attention of the present researcher and leads to unravel the distinctive features of collection creation plays produced from various perspectives.

The present study aims at analyzing a relatively new theatrical genre called collective creation that has a special theatrical presence in Canada. It brings out the unique features of Canadian collective creation in all its thematic and theatrical aspect. Besides bringing out the historical development of collective creation as an interesting genre in Canadian theatrical scene, the study focuses on the treatment of various historical, social, native and political issues that are depicted artistically in many collective creations. The rich experience of actors and the directors and the script writers of the plays are brought together in the form of collective creation, which is very rich in terms of theatrical form and dramatic content. An examination of these plays shows the unique presentational styles adopted by these writers whole giving expression to the social, historical, political and native issues confronting the Canadian Society.

The introductory chapter makes a general survey of Canadian drama, the various reasons for the anaemic state in the drama field and also traces the various sources that contributed to the development of drama in Canada. It gives a detailed account of alternative theatre movement, which was started as an opposing movement against regions theatres. The alternative theatres are divided into two
categories, the first one being theaters concentrating on the development of new playwrights and the second one being theatres practicing collective creation. The principal focus of the present study is on collective creation. This chapter introduces the concept of collective creation both in Britain and in the U.S., which formed the background for the development of this new theatre in the Canadian theatrical context.

The second chapter discusses Rick Salutin’s play *1837: The Farmers’ Revolt* from a historical perspective. Historical plays in general go considerably beyond the scope of the sociological shows. In addition to the need to portray individuals and communities at certain points in time, the historical shows require the structuring of action into plotline and the interpretation of historical events pointing to their relevance and significance. This chapter takes into account how these aspects have been successfully achieved by the collective method employed in this play, which is based on the Upper Canadian Rebellion of 1837. It also discusses the Theatre Passe Muraille’s effort to identify its production with the main struggles and passions of the time through a collective creation. The fact that the play is based on a historical event enables it to discuss Canadian history making use of the stage as a metaphor involving the audience participation for the development of the theme as well as for the discussion of issues related to the country.

The third chapter analyses how the collective creations’ rich potential is fully exploited in *The Farm Show* by the Theatre Passe Muriale. As an in-depth study of farming community near Clinton, Ontario the encounter of farmers and actors and the encounter of documentary and theatrical conventions together form the structure of the play. *The Farm Show* in its original performance was more than an entertainment; it indeed effects a transformation in the relationship between the
company of actors, who created the show, and the farming community, which was
the subject of the show. This chapter illustrates how this transformation has been
embodied in the substance and structures of the play, along with the play’s relation to
fact, and how the actors demonstrate the day to day life of the farm people and their
work in the field.

The fourth chapter investigates the play *The Book of Jessica* from the native
perspective. Being produced by the native writer Maria Campbell and non-native
writer Linda Griffiths, the play, by using the collective method, portrays the life of
Campbell and relates her struggle as a Métis woman in Canadian society. This
chapter examines how the use of multiple characterizations establishes a thematic
relationship between some of the characters performed by the same actors, how the
actors, who transformed into spirits function as interveners for Jessica’s dream vision
recollection and how their links with the human characters they play have been
established. It also analyses how this multiple characterization is integrated to its full
presentational capacity in the play.

The fifth chapter examines *Les Canadiens* produced by the Theatre Passe
Muraille along with Rick Salutin from a political perspective. The history of Quebec
reflects the sense of being conquered and ruled by a foreign power that has remained
in Quebec. In Quebec ice hockey as a cultural fact differs from what it means to
outsiders. The play *Les Canadiens* shows how the Quebecers find their cultural
symbolism in a professional sport. This chapter analyses how Salutin relates the
implications of the Separatist election victory to the contemporary uncertainties and
confusions of English-Canadian political and cultural identity, how the chronology of
scenes has been established in keeping with the hockey setting and how each scene
has been shaped to make its own specific point by combining the history of Quebec.
with that of its hockey team. It also examines how the political scenes about the hockey club are slightly fictionalized to conform to the pattern of struggle between conquered and conquerors, which counterpoints the Quebecois myth of hockey with English-Canadian myths of conquest.

The sixth and final chapter sums up the arguments. The chapter closes with the note on the present status of the collective creation along with possibilities such as new ventures and directions likely to be pursued in the present Canadian theatrical genre.