Chapter VI

Summation

The Collective Creation has been an inextricable part of the search for a theatre that would be both indigenous and popular. The plays taken for study intended originally for audiences who had a special interest in the subject but little familiarity with the theatre. In 1969, George Ryga proclaimed that, “theatre is going through a renaissance in Canada” (Innes 56). The explosion of activity, triggered among other things by the rise of alternative theatres, had fostered performance skills as well as cultural awareness. These alternative theatres, which profoundly changed the style, substance and sheer quantity of Canadian play-making with their own uniqueness, may be ascribed to the happy convergence of many circumstances. Among all the alternative theatres, the Theatre Passe Muraille is the first to be established and its contribution to the development of a national theatre through collective creation is unique.

Collective creation is a new approach to theatrical creation, which provides the advantages of a group perspective on a topical issue. The collaborative interaction of a group of artists: the actor, the writer, the director and the designer-make up the play, which is mostly actor-centered rather than writer-centered. The plays selected for analysis in the present study are the productions of a particular theatre namely, Theatre Passe Muraille, which is the leading innovator in practicing collective creation technique. This enables one to find out development of the Theatre Passe Muraille in practicing collective creation as an indigenous dramatic form to attract the non-habitual theatre goers.
The Passe Muraille’s quest for authenticity through firsthand investigation of particular communities has been much emulated by other collective troupes because theirs was the first major step in a new kind of canvassing of native dramatic material for the stage. In performance, it discards the habitual, media-conditioned, stereotypical illusion of reality for multiple perspectives on it. Living images are projected in a series of fast-paced transformations to which the audience responds directly, both out of its own local recognitions and in the experience of performance itself as an authentic creative process based on fact.

The early history of Passe Muraille has been all but obliterated by the subsequent success of Paul Thompson, its artistic director and the series of collective creations, which he brought to life in the 1970s. In his decade at Passe Muraille, Thompson directed over thirty collective creations, and dozens of other plays. Most of the collectives drew upon a small corps of actors skilled in improvisation and committed to Thompson’s brand of populism. Thompson’s work is more varied, marked more by its eclecticism than by any consistent visual or presentational form. This is partly due to the fact that he allows his actors a free reign.

All the plays analyzed in the previous chapters have portrayed the relation of the process to the subject whether it be a community, or historic event or a work of fiction. The play The Farm Show, which is a Passe Muraille quintessential collective creation, established the theatre’s new direction under Paul Thompson and led to the dissemination of the Passe Muraille collective as the most destructive performing style of the new Canadian theatre. The basic principle of this show is to give a voice to the under-privileged. Here, a cohesive group of committed actors mingle with the residents of a small agricultural community near Clinton, which is the play’s subject, and learn as much as they could about local history and conditions. They look
affectionately at the problems and pleasures of farm life in general and at the lives of certain Clinton residents in particular.

The various objects used by the actors themselves, allow the scenes to mean and invest actuality with a socially transformative potential at the level of deep structure. The cast’s uncanny mimicry and heartfelt insights were given and taken in a spirit of honest affection between two communities, which a few weeks earlier had been completely akin to each other. The play is a drama of everyday people and normal happenings and it addresses itself to presenting a dramatic portrait of a community. The emphasis throughout is on the activities by which a community sustains itself: auctions, weddings, parades, school concerts, revival meetings, township council meetings, the community’s response to an accident, and so on. The forces against which it must contend with are present as well, growing in intensity from the snowstorm near the beginning whose power to isolate is triumphantlly flouted in a flurry of visiting hockey games and square dances, to the threat identified in the ‘Bruce Pallet’ monologue near the end: the indifference of the nation to the value of farming as a way of life and as a part of the national identity.

We are reminded of the process by which the play was created till the end of the play. One of the most memorable scenes is actor Miles Potter learning how to bale hay from a farmer, and what makes the scene work is the ironic picture of the cocky actor getting his comeuppance. Much of the charm and truth of the play comes from a quality of self-consciousness; even in the monologues we are aware of the process of research. When an actor delivers a monologue we are aware of the process of research. When an actor delivers a monologue in the play, one can see a mirror image of what the actor saw, right down to the momentary interruptions as children enter and telephones ring. In that sense, The Farm Show is a report of what the actors
saw and experienced, and it is a report made sensitive by the actors’ specialized insight. The readers are always aware that the actors are themselves characters in the play, that they are a community looking at a community.

In extending the Canadian tradition of documentary in specifically theatrical directions, the play has radically enlarged its possibilities. The creative treatment of reality specific to it and responsible for the impact it has had and still has is the way in which its relation to reality and its intense theatricality catch fire from one another. The possibility always inherent in theatre, as theatre, of approaching the efficacy or ritual, is realized in the play that leads to the enrichment of the documentary form. What is striking about the play is the poetic valorization given to local language when it is linked to Thompson’s distinctive theatricality – which paradoxically, is rooted in documentary detail and particularized props. Although largely pastoral in character, and it proved immensely appealing to urban and rural audiences alike.

Like *The Farm Show, 1837: The Farmers’ Revolt*, was also researched and created by actors. Here the subject of the play is not a community but a historic event, 1837 Rebellion. The past is re-enacted for the purpose of alienating the present. Here the element is self-conscious theatricality. A series of vignettes based on historical documents have been constructed with Rick Salutin and Paul Thompson only by five actors who doubled all the roles. These vignettes are, in effect, historical performances that draw attention to their own theatricality, deconstructing the myth of 1837 as presented by established history and the establishment of historians. The play fairly bristles with flamboyantly theatrical gesture, which has always been the signature of the Theatre Passe Muraille. But the play does more than simply inject theatricality into its account of historical events: it reads theatricality back to them. It treats its historical figures quite legitimately as actors on the stage of history, who
invested their gestures with a larger-than-life, histrionic quality, acting both as agents and as actors in the assumption that their deeds would hope the destiny of a nation.

The play is thick with incidents possessing this histrionic quality: Mackenzie addressing the patriots; Mackenzies and Van Egmond recruiting Tiger Dunlop; Van Egmond taking command of the rebels forces just when all seems lost; Mackenzie defying Colonel McNab from Navy Island; and finally, the martyrdom of Lount and Matthews. Of course, the irony that runs through the play is that none of these histrionic gestures has in fact reverberated through history. The central figures in the rebellion make their gestures in the vacuum of what did not come to pass. Dunlop was not recruited, Van Egmond arrived too late, and Mackenzie left Navy Island for exile in the United States. As for the battle at Montgomery’s Tavern, it was the first spontaneous mutual retreat in the history of warfare, a tragic-comic anti-climax.

The play presents the deeds of the rebellious leaders as theatrical gestures played on the stage of history, and dismantles the stage. This ironic treatment is at its fullest in Lount’s speech on the scaffold. It was a brilliant idea to end the play with this execution, for by its nature the public execution of a political martyr is profoundly theatrical. National myths give the dying statements of such figures a place of honour. These flamboyantly theatrical gestures become exemplary models of a society’s most cherished values.

The irony with which the play treats these histrionic gestures is given a further dimension by another kind of theatricality in the play. Besides showing individuals taking poses on the stage of history, the company reads back into the events of 1837 the use of theatre by groups of people to grasp and change their situation. Several episodes in particular do this. In the first, a farmer acts out the defeat of his hopes to
purchase land, casting his friends in roles as he goes along. In the process, he and his friends are aware of the structure and mode of operation of the forces that oppress them and dispel the artificial fog of ideology through which the Family Compact hides its manipulations. In the Second Act, the same farmer joins in the rebellion. A piece of homemade theatre leads to critical awareness, which leads to action. This process is evident in ‘The Dummy’, in which a couple of the folks warm up a crowd waiting to hear Mackenzie with a skit featuring John Bull, the imperial ventriloquist and Peter Strump, the Canadian axeman. The skit develops the ventriloquist act as a metaphor for the imperial mentality it engenders, and the end of the skit, in which the dummy finds his own voice, leads directly into Mackenzie’s call for action. One of Mackenzie’s editorials is made into a theatrical documentation of the closed circle of power in the colony by presenting Mackenzie as a conjurer transforming a gang of thieves, rogues, and villains and fools one by one into the ruling class of this province. A proclamation by Sir Francis Bond Head, governor, is recited by the actors who form a giant head out of their bodies.

The contrast between these two modes of theatricality, the histrionic gestures of the leaders on the one hand and the use of theatre by groups of ordinary people to grasp their situation on the other, reinforces one of the major themes of the play: the contrast between the revolutionary energy of the working people and what Salutin terms “the unreliability and timidity of bourgeois leadership in a struggle for Canadian independence,” (107) which the play presents as a betrayal of that strength. More than this, the people’s theatre that the company reads back into the past is not offered as a reflection of what might have been done then but as a model of what needs to be done now, and in fact is being done in every moment of the performance of 1837: The Farmers’ Revolt.
In the above mentioned play, the principal side of the relation between the documented reality and the reality of the theatrical event is the latter. The source material effects an imaginative penetration of the here-and-now. It is a political act in the mode of theatre. The events of 1837 are presented as a means of alienating the contemporary state of affairs. The play’s status as a political event is enhanced by an underlying analogy between the larger political situation and the internal politics of the acting company. The very process of creating the show contradicts the internal structure of directorial authority and actors’ submission: Paul Thompson places the emphasis on the collective process, playing a role much like Mackenzie the company discovered: his function was not to impose his authority but to release the actors’ own energy and will and resources. Salutin himself insists that his role was similarly non-authoritarian he was “the writer on – but not of – 1837” (113). The collective creation of the show is foregrounded in the show.

Certain elements of the performance of 1837: The Farmers’ Revolt is vehicles by which the non-authoritarian process of creating the play is conveyed to the audience. One is the clear emphasis on a collective protagonist, matched by the absence of any distribution of leading and secondary roles among the performers. The actor who plays Mackenzie, a part which may appear to make both the actor and the historical figure dominate the show plays a large number of minor roles in other scenes, thus effectively pulling both his performance and the character back into the context of the ensemble performance in the present and of the popular movement in the past. This absence of fixed roles in a hierarchical order characterizes all the performances, to the extent that women play male roles in several scenes, while a man plays the ineffable colonist, Lady Backwash. The loose, episodic structure of the show likewise conveys the sense of a collective at work. Although the placing of
individual scenes produces frequent ironic effects through montage, the whole still appears to be oddly and sometimes surprisingly pull together.

These elements permit the collective creation of the play to be visible in the theatre, where it functions as an effective contrast to the failed collective effort of the past and as a theatrical analogy of the collective creation of an independent nation which the play calls for in the present. Paul Thompson who was no longer expected to create a viable text in six weeks as he did with *The Farm Show* and *1837: The Farmers’ Revolt,* also learned to use playwrights more effectively during the second decade of his directorship. Rather than undergoing the collaborative process, *Les Canadiens* was written by Rich Salutin with an assist by Canadian goalie Ken Dryden. Rick Salutin, who was continuously fascinated by the 1837 Rebellion saw one group – the French-Canadians – attacking their problems successfully, and he addressed their past and present in his play.

The shift from theatre, myth, and history to direct political action is the central structural principle of *Les Canadiens,* which exploits the theatricality of hockey, the popular ritual of *Hockey Night in Canada,* and the myth of the Montreal Canadiens to examine the nature and role of national myths of identity. The Montreal hockey team becomes what it was in life – a symbol for the French people of the province. Their victories and defeats become the victories and defeats of the Quebecois; in fact, the Quebecois are able to bear their team, with its Drydens, Moores and Morenzes. Salutin has ingeniously divided act one of the play according to the time clock of a hockey game. This first half sets the history of Quebec told as a series of defeats in the theatre of war and in the arena of politics, against the story of Les Canadiens, represented as a series of triumphant victories in popular theatre of the hockey arena, complete with announcer, score board, and organist. It begins with the action at 17:59
of the first period and proceeds through other crucial dates in Quebec history up to recent events, including the War Measures Act at 19:70.

Salutin here disposes quickly of the histrionics of the leading actors in traditional Canadian histories: General Wolfe, for example, is represented as self-consciously composing, to the accompaniment of a recitation of Grey’s Elegy, a tableau of his own death in battle; however the bulk of the first act concern itself with what the playwright has come to view as a more dangerous use of popular theatre and popular mythology. Acknowledging and even celebrating the need for myths and heroes in the construction of a national sense of identity, Salutin ultimately exposes the cathartic capacity of myth, art, history, and sport to sap the popular will to effect political action.

The self-conscious theatricality of the play’s stage metaphors: the gun with which Wolfe is shot at the play’s opening, for example, is represented onstage by a hockey stick that is passed down the years through the play’s first act as the torch of Quebecois’ resistance insist on the audience’s recognition of theatre and history as representations, effective as models but debilitating as substitutes for action within the political arena itself.

The point of the play is that the Quebecois reached a stage of political maturity when they voted into power a separatist party. They were able to assert their identity politically and thus had no need to assert themselves vicariously through a group of hockey players. Salutin’s populist views are evident here, as he sees the Quebecois standing up to their masters in 1976 in a way they never had before. He sums up his point in the introduction to the play, “It was as though, on that night in the Forum, the
people of Quebec finally transferred their need of victory from the shoulders of the hockey team onto their own backs” (LC 20).

Since the play is set entirely in the Forum, the hockey focus is sharpened by the unity of the place. Although the Plains of Abraham are superimposed by stage business on the Forum, which shrinks to become a skating rink, then expands to become a hockey arena, the stage space retains the identity of the Forum. As needed, scenes shift from dressing rooms to ticket lineup, from the cheap seats to the boxes. This cathedral of hockey is also a gallery of heroes, a classroom, a place to meet old pros or the media, or chat to the doorkeepers, Jake and Jacques. It is a place where men seek a holy grail. But above all, it is an arena in the Roman sense, providing circuses when there is no bread, action for those without political power. It is both theatre and spectacle. At times it becomes a haven enclosing adoring fans, who in a thrust theatre are also the audience themselves. Finally it is also a true forum, a place for debate.

The decision to concentrate all of the action in one place strengthens the throughline of the play’s narrative and makes the scene doubly moving when Kirk, after a last meeting with the female figure who personifies Quebec, finally leaves the Forum still trying to sort out the implications of her penultimate line, “Now we do it ourselves” (173). Outside the Forum, whose symbolic function has been changed irrevocably by events portrayed in act two, he comes upon a group of little kids under a street light, still acting out the old dream in a game of street hockey.

The woman’s relationship to hockey and to Les Canadiens is the play’s chief metaphor for the growth of political awareness in Quebec. In the first act she begins with survival as her basic value, and a gut hatred for war in all its forms, hockey
included. Eventually she comes around. Even as she admits that she has become a fan, she tells her son, “You still want to play hockey for le club de hockey Canadien, you’d better learn English, my son” (89). Yet, just like the English worker, she cannot afford a ticket to the game. In the first act she has become the bright, French language instructor to the English players, hostile as a separatist, but star-struck as a fan. She is a bridge, which divides. As a woman, she is also, perforce, a spectator of this game, rather than a player, who at long last participates in a vote, which changes the rules of the game. She has anger but no hatred, and great self-confidence. It is also worth noting that in the last scene, where the myth of les Canadiens is reduced from a symbol of Quebecois aspirations merely to a game, Quebec has moved on and so has she. She has no part to play. Throughout the play the woman is the pivot: observer, sceptic, survivor, powerless in a sexist Quebec. Eventually she becomes a supporter, then an instructor and finally a separatist. She is the antagonist of the dram, the protagonist of the political metaphor, adding coherence and excitement to both.

The suggestion given by Salutin is that political maturity depends on a nation’s capacity to outgrow its need for heroes and myths. However, the introduction is much more polemic than the play itself. Les Canadiens traces the development of a game, a team and a national ideal, which, as the play demonstrates, is the focus of a vital phase in the growth of political awareness and of self-confidence. Only when mindless riot and political violence were replaced by the collective and conscious act of voting to change the order of things, did Les Canadiens become just another team, but still the world’s best. The play also implies that when the rest of Canada reaches that point, Les Canadiens will cease to be one of Canada’s chief focuses of national pride.
Jessica was written by a non-native writer Linda Griffiths and native writer Maria Campbell. The play is collaboration. Maria Campbell researched the play, and a group of four actors under the direction of Paul Thompson, created the characters and situations and Maria, Linda and Paul gave the play its current form. The complete work The Book of Jessica: A Theatrical Transformation, divided into four parts, of which, the second and third recorded how Maria and Linda have succeeded in their joint venture of expressing the sorry state of minority people and they also show the social disharmony of Canada by bringing out the sufferings of natives, especially of women, who were humiliated and exploited in so many ways. At the same time, a host of problems like authorial voice, appropriation, cross-culturalism, linguistic constraint, emotional compatibility and post-colonial predicament crop up. This is aptly observed by Agnes Grant who says: “Appropriation and a minority group’s sensitivities are serious dramatic issues; The Book of Jessica is invaluable reading in this area” (108).

The final part of the book is the play Jessica which recovers the crucial highlights of its heroine Jessica’s story from broken childhood and marital desertion to the traumas of prostitution, drug addiction, and later to native activism and concurrent spiritual discontents, through flashbacks. So, the play goes back, scene by scene, through Jessica’s life. These flashbacks, which are actually Jessica’s dream vision of her past, are based on a mixed blood ceremony, in which the play is structured. On her journey to self-discovery, she is helped by her spiritual mentor, Vitaline, as well as by the guiding spirits of Bear, Coyote, Crow, Unicorn, and Wolverine, who represent desperate aspects of Jessica and the people in her life. The spirits’ function was to guide Jessica through each phase of her life.
Each character in this play demonstrates a distinctive role. Jessica, as the eponymous heroine, represents the ‘ins and outs’ of Maria. Through her, Maria’s experiences, sufferings, exploitations, weariness, agony and misery are expressed directly and those of the Métis race indirectly. Vitaline, who is Jessica’s spiritual guide, symbolizes the female power. Her love for Jessica, respect for native tradition, guidance given to Métis community women, her faith in prayer to grandmothers and grandfathers, advice given to Sam and above all, her transformation to the role of Coyote woman and vice versa make her an immortal character. Besides Jessica and Vitaline, all others are animal spirits, which have to be taken seriously as characters.

The play employs certain dramatic techniques that provide the base for the success of the play. The varieties of music, sounds of creatures, light, mask and the way in which the characters transform themselves to other roles are the theatrical techniques employed by the dramatists. Even at the very beginning of the play, the stage direction reveals the technique, “In the darkness we hear night noises. The sound of the wind, wings; something scuttles, almost laughs, an owl calls” (J 117). The deliberate picture of darkness, shadows and noises suggests that the lives of the Métis minorities are kept in the dark and other people hear only the alarming sounds. The sitting Vitaline is revealed by the growing light in her cabin. She gathers power as the sound builds around her and then screams. There is a flash of light and Vitaline transforms to Coyote. A rare new technique of this sort brings credit to the dramatists.

The use of mask is a very powerful technique. The masked spirits appear in the play and they are humorous, sensual and at times deadly. On one occasion, Unicorn lifts her mask and raises it high in the air. Coyote takes and, cradles it like a child. This spectacle of lifting the mask up reveals the urge for the social upliftment
of the natives. During the ceremony, the characters of this play come together for a change of role, in which music is played by them. In fact, the role of spirits, the ceremony, and the heroine Jessica’s struggle towards self-discovery add a new dimension to highlighting the dramatic techniques.

The language in *The Book of Jessica* reveals both the sufferings of Natives and the significant features of their culture and tradition. The dialogues between Linda and Maria in the prefatory discussions of the text show their cross-cultural consequences and the difficulties of creating the text. In one of her conversations, Maria says, “I hate working with the English language and … I have a hard time working with white people, because everything means something else” (J 17). As a non-native personality, Linda comes to know about spirits during the rehearsals. Linda says, “All I could think was Jessica. I’m just seeing it. I’m seeing that it begins with the spirits… that they’re the centre of it” (59).

These words reveal not only the significance of the spirits in native culture but also the language of the text. Through the use of language, the dramatists also unlock their hearts. Maria says:

I could feel the conqueror, the oppressor, making me sue his language… They stole everything a now we can’t just speak any more, the old language is almost gone and we don’t know the new language well enough to help each other, heal each other… we’re just hanging there in the middle. (73)

When Sam says, “We’re drinking the tears of a thousand years” (153), the language reflects the pathetic condition of natives in Canada. Jessica is ‘drowning’ and ‘cracking’ as a halfbreed woman with “waves and waves of fear” (121) in a confused White world. This situation highlights the fear and fate of the native
women. They want to establish their identity through genuine voices and not by mere echoes. Jessica’s words “we’ve always done everything according to tradition” (122) show her concern for native values. Jessica gives the reader an authentic look at women’s role in delineating their existential dilemma.

The language of the animal spirits, which assume human forms in the play, suggests the animal behavior of men and women which spoils the human relation in daily life. Maria satirizes the white society in her own language, “it’s bloody hard to live…. In a society that takes and takes, a society that changes re-arranges, interprets…. Until there’s nothing left but confusion” (91). Sam’s words, “if we don’t fight…. There isn’t going to be any praying to any spirits, dark side, light side any side” (169) bring out the yearnings of natives for a common fight for retaining their rights. Almost all the native characters in the play speak a language, which makes the reader take side with them. The polished language of Vitaline, the language of the spirits, the language used in the mixed blood ceremony, the words used for explaining the symbolic significance of the Red Cloth in the play all these go to prove that the dramatists have highlighted the various problems of the natives through their successful use of language. Though the movements back and forth between the spiritual and ordinary world in this play had to follow, and the lessons and discoveries of the stages in Jessica’s life didn’t clearly come across, its ambitiousness and complexity were recognized.

Findings

The concept of collective creation in the modern theatre has an ideological source. This does not mean that collectively created plays are about ideology. It means that one must be aware of the difference between a concept and a convention.
Theatre is a collective art, and in one sense, all plays are created collectively, just as an automobile is created collectively; the result of a number of talents working jointly to create a single thing.

The modern experiment in collective creation differs radically in that it places the responsibility for the play on the shoulders of the collective; instead of a governing mind providing an artistic vision which others work to express, the collectively created play is the vision of a supra-individualist mind. There are more evidences to suggest that of all forms of dramatic creation, collective creation is best equipped to embody and reflect actively the objectivity of social life; consequently there is an affinity between collective creation and documentary drama, especially in Canada. Collective creation derives its uniqueness from the synthesis of several different perspectives and experiences. This is especially true when the actors work as scenarists and playwrights, and it suggests a fundamental difference between the imagination of the collective and the individual playwright. It is quality of imagination that differs, for the skills that go into the construction of a play do not differ radically. In fact, playwrights frequently work within collectives. It may be suggested as a basic principle that collectives as a rule are no better or worse than individual playwrights when it comes to making a play. But there is a fundamental qualitative difference in the kind of imitation that underlies the play.

In Canada, collective creation is looked upon as an alternative method of play creation whereas in Latin America, collective creation is often systematized as a way of producing meaning. It is a dialectical method which confronts and expresses the contradictions between virtuosity and alternative. It differs from the traditional bourgeois theatre, in which the actor is suppressed, as an interpreter of someone else’s meaning. In this sense, collective creation is seen as a natural development.
Discipline and hierarchal order acquire their highest expression in the collective method where the work is distributed in terms of the ability and personal experience of the individual, under the supervision of the collective. This of course accords with the Marxist theory that the individual can only achieve true fulfillment and productive creativity in the collective, which frees him from the artificial constraints of social oppression.

To take this a step further, a fundamental difference between the individual and the collective playwrights is that the individual synthesizes the objective world into a private vision, whereas the collective synthesizes it into a public vision. This is not to say that only the collective is capable of creating objectivist drama; that is obviously not so, and some collectives are so subjective in their artistic vision as to be virtually incomprehensible to the outsider. Once more, it is the quality of imitation that differs. Because collective creation synthesizes the artistic responses of a number of individuals, it must proceed from some kind of 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. In this sense, art is very different from the making of a material commodity. One man may build a car in his shed, while in the next shed, a collective may build a car, and they may build similar cars, because the only real experience is the distribution of the work. But in the theatre, that distribution affects the very nature of the play.

The process of collective creation and its relation to the final text is concerned with the ways in which a concept of working is embodied in performance. A question may arise in one’s mind as to whether it is possible to ascertain from the viewing of a play whether it has been created collectively. The question is deceptive, because the signals which might lead one to answer yes are not restricted to collective creation.
Improvisation is a tool of collective creation, but it is not the substance. Yet it is by recognizing improvisation that one can recognize collective creation.

Theoretically it is possible to adduce whether a play has been collectively created by watching the development of the montage, listening closely to the language, and by following the actors as they develop their characters. But theory is not always sufficient, because the collective itself is a variable, a gestalt, which finds its specific talent in the range of talents it joins together. By its nature, the collective is an organism in a constant state of change, as it grows and reacts, as its membership changes, and as it re-defines itself in new projects. Generally, the Canadian tradition has been the one-shot collective; very rarely it has happened that the same group of people work on more than one or two shows, although naturally. Some theatres, like the Passe Muraille have used a basic corps on a series of projects. The plays selected for the present study can be put into this category.

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 challenged by, the subject of the play. In Canada, both for financial and ideological reasons, theatres tend to audition and hire a group of actors to work on a particular project, and usually the analysis is discovered through the process of research and rehearsal. The major exceptions to this are those plays in which a writer is brought into the collective as a specialist. In such cases the writer often provides a basic analysis, by the very act of shaping the actors’ discoveries into a structure. Frequently, actors are cautious of writers in this situation, unless a comfortable independence of roles is developed early. It is connected with the issue of honesty.
In documentary theatre, which has been a major tendency in collective creation in Canada, the issue of honesty is never far away. When working with the lives of actual people, or with one’s own deeper emotions, ethical questions become important. Only in collective creation the ethical considerations of the process of making the play becomes central to the final play in performance. Every actor must at some point confront his or her real feelings and attitudes as they relate to both the subject of the play, and those of the other members of the collective. What in other forms of theatre today is an ideal is in collective creation a necessary part of the process.

The four plays, *1837: The Farmer’ Revolt* (1985), *The Farm Show* (1976), *The Book of Jessica* (1989), and *Les Canadiens* (1977), selected for the present study infuse all such qualities of collective creation that provides them with remarkable success. They are unique for their fusion of the most serious concern for what really happened and the most profound attention to the reality of the moment in the theatre when actors and audience encounter each other. The distinction between these two realities, maintained by the overtly presentational mode of performance, is like the potential difference in an electric field. If the energy is sufficient, a spark leaps across the gap, and an audience apprehends that not only is something important being said but that something important is happening, here and now, in their presence. It is this accomplishment that makes these instances of documentary theatre a significant contribution to the critical understanding of the genre.

**Present Status of Collective Creation**

All art requires at some level some kind of external recognition; if one cannot recognize a work of art as art, it has no meaning. In this respect, collective creation is
no different from any other form of art. It is not the opposite of a script; rather, the
collective and the script are the two reconcilable ways of arriving at a performable
text. The assimilation of collective methods and styles in Canadian playwriting is
now so familiar that we scarcely notice it. In recent years, there has been a trend
away from the improvised text and toward more scripted plays. In this trend,
however, collective methods developed in the 1970s are still prominent. The
collective has made possible the strong interaction between the playwright, the actor
and the director in the play development process, a relationship which was considered
revolutionary thirty years ago. Beginning as a localized phenomenon, it has evolved
into a particular form of theatre and it has changed the definition of theatre in Canada.