Chapter-I

Introduction

Sharon Pollock is a well- acclaimed name in the theatre of Canada, her identity as an internationally noted playwright, well proven actor, artistic director and courageous producer, has a prominent mark in the world of Canadian drama and theatre. The astounding range of her works ranges between the documentaries to political, cultural and artistic plays showcasing the challenging roles played by her well-crafted characters. The psychological panoramic view of the struggle of identity, prejudices, suffocation, passion and affections can be experienced through her characters, in her works.

The dramatic and theatrical history of Canada goes back to a good deal further than the less than two hundred years in which English-language plays have been performed in the area which now constitutes the country. American ritual forms provide a theatre history that extends back into antiquity, and some, notably the elaborate masked dance dramas of the Pacific coast, continue to contribute to the Canadian public’s theatre going experience. French-language drama in Canada began in 1606 with a production of Marc Lescarbot’s Theatre of Neptune.

English-language drama came to Canada after American Revolution with the thousands of United Loyalists who field to Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and
Upper Canada (Ontario), separate colonies until Confederation in 1967. The first-recorded English-language production took place in 1787, when an amateur company in Halifax, Nova Scotia presented Richard Cumberland’s *The West Indian*. After a number of productions, then a lapse of several years with no activity, and American professional company arrived in the town, in 1816. Some critics maintain that this sequence of events established the pattern for the early development of theater in English-speaking Canada: amateur efforts, American professionals would arrive and dominate the local entertainment, while the indigenous efforts, as far as records reveal, would subsequently disappear. A similar series of events occurred in St. John, New Brunswick: there the first performance – of *The Busy Body and Who’s the Dupe?* – was staged in Mallard’s Long Room in 1789. The American professional company moved in 1816.

Early theatre in Montreal was, of course, in French. Among the earliest English-language productions to be seen in the city were plays presented by John B. Rickett’s Circus, which made the perilous journey overland from upstate New York in 1797; the trip frequently required the services of a guide. Montreal’s first theatre was built in 1803; a makeshift affair superseded by the Theatre Royal, built in 1825, in the time for Edmund Kean’s visiting productions of *Richard III*, *the Merchant of Venice*, *King Lear*, and *Othello* in 1826. Toronto, then Little York, saw its first production, *The School for Scandal*, in 1809. Its first regular theatre, a
room in Frank’s Hotel, was renovated for the purpose in 1820. The first production in British Columbia, the *Rivals*, was presented by an-all male cast aboard a warship anchored in Victoria harbor in 1857, and Winnipeg’s first theatre, the Red River Hall, was opened in 1871. Despite short-lived attempts to establish stock companies in some of the larger cities, touring companies dominated theatrical activity in Canada for most of the nineteenth century. Few Canadian distinguished themselves in any of the theatrical arts. Most conspicuously absent were the playwrights: Few Canadian plays of note emerged during the nineteenth century, and even fewer found their way onto Canadian Stages.

The first play published in book form by a Canadian, *The Female Consistory of Brockville*, appeared in 1856. It depicts an uprising of female parishioners who expel their minister for activities they consider oppressive of their sex; it is generally thought that the pseudonymous author, Carole Candid, was a clergyman removed from his post in an incident similar to the one depicted: the ladies are mercilessly pilloried.

Versa drama was the form taken by many nineteenth-century Canadian play’s most was are unplayable, and indeed several of the authors took care to disavow anything as vulgar as theatrical ambition. The form is a curious mixture of pseudo-Elizabethan blank verse and sensational melodramatic events, probably the consequence of the author’s loyalty to a literary tradition that esteems Shakespeare
above all others and of their theatergoing experience, in which melodrama predominated; a similar hybrid form developed in Australia. Charles Heavysege (1816-1876) was the first to the Canadian verse dramatists. His Saul was highly praised when it was published in 1857, and indeed British critic Coventry Patmore praised passages as ‘scarcely short of Shakespeare’. It is now difficult to understand the excitement generated by the dramatization of the Biblical story, although some of its demons are lively enough. Court Filippo (1860), a convoluted exploration of doomed love, is even less successful. Other Canadian attempts at verse drama include Thomas D’Arcy McGee’s Sebastian or the Roman Martyr (1861), Samuel Watson’s Ravlan (1876), John Hunter Duvar’s The Enamorade (1879) and De Roberval (1888), and Wilfred Campbell’s Mordred and Hildbrand (1895), reprinted with Daulac and Morning as poetical Tragedies in 1908. Even Campbell, whose reputation as one of Canada’s Confederation poets in quite secure, failed to overcome the stultifying effects of a form whose theatrical day had long passed.

Thomas Bush’s Santiago (1866) surpasses most works of the genre in its presentation of a nightmare world doomed to destruction, but the most nearly stage worthy of the verse plays is Charles Mair’s Techumesh (1886). Indeed, this dramatization of the life of the Indian chieftain who fought on the British side in the war of 1812 was finally produced, in 1972, by the Factory Theatre Lab in
Toronto, rather inexplicably under the title *The Red Revolutionary*. While production revealed surprising, if sporadic, theatrical strengths, it also emphasized structural weaknesses already obvious from a reading of the play and demonstrated the dramatic weaknesses of some passages which critics had admired for their literary merit.

The period also produced some short, light plays and operas. Most are political satires; the Canadian theatergoing public’s indifference to Canadian material did not apparently extend to Canadian politics. A number of these pieces—Sam Scribble’s *Dolorsolatio* (1865), Nicholas Flood Davin’s *The Fair Grit* (1876), and Jean Newton McIlwraith’s *Ptarmigan* (1895) – were recently republished, with Carole Candid’s *The Female Consistory of Brockville* (1856), Thomas Bush’s *Santiago* (1866), and William Henry Fuller’s *H.M.S. Parliament* (1880), in the first volume of the Canadian Theatre Review’s Canada’s Lost plays series.

The only Canadian playwright to enjoy popular and extended success during the period was W.A. Tremayne, a melodramatic who wrote approximately twenty-five plays in the decades preceding and following the turn of the century. Tremayne turned to playwriting after acting with James O’Neill’s touring company. His first play, *Lost 24 Hours*, a farce in the French manner, opened in New York in 1898; *The Dagger and the Cross* (1900), *A Free Lance* (1902) were written as vehicles for the American romantic actor Robert Bruce Mantel. Many of
Tremayne’s scripts have lost; the one still readily available, The Black Feather 1916; published 1918 as *The Man who Went*, is a conventional but neatly constructed melodrama of World War I espionage and intrigue. Research is currently underway (Canadian theatre history is still a relatively young field of study) to determine whether other Canadian writers made their way to New York to seek fame and fortune at a time when opportunities for Canadian playwrights were rare. The only other Canadian commercial success of the period was a stage adaption of Gilbert Parker’s novel *The Seats of the Mighty*, produced in England by Beerbohm Tree to considerable acclaim.

The hay day of the touring companies in Canada occurred between the early 1880s and outbreak of World War I. During the period, over two hundred companies toured the region of the country, and even comparatively small towns constructed theatre’s to accommodate the theatrical visitors. The majority of the touring companies were American and offered popular melodramatic fate, but there were the tour visits from more distinguished theatre artists of the time: Thomas Keene’s company toured Canadian cities ten times between 1883 and 1898, and indeed Keene fell mortally ill while playing in Hamilton, Ontario; Sarah Bernhardt’s company toured in 1880, 1896, and 1910; Henry Irving in 1884, 1894, 1895, 1900, and 1904; Lily Langty in 1883, 1886 and 1887; Dion Boucicault in 1884; Ellen terry in 1907; Madame Nazimova in 1908 and 1909; and Marie
Dressler (who was born in Coburg, Ontario) in 1912. Sir John Martin Harvey was a perennial visitor: he appeared as a junior member of the Lyceum Company in three of Irving’s tours and brought his own company to Canada eight times between 1903 and 1932. A good many of Canada’s older generation of theatre artists remember with pleasure their introduction to a wider range of theatre through his tours (the portrait of the actor-manager in Robertson Davies’s novel World of Wonders is based on this figure from Canadian theatre history). The tours served to keep Canadian audiences in touch with the Western theatrical tradition, with the latest popular fare, and in the late-nineteenth century, with the new drama of Galsworthy, Pinero, and Ibsen. Canada itself produced three touring companies of its own: the E.H. McDowell Company, the Tavernier Company, and the Marks Brothers Company. After serving as the first manager of the Academy of Music in Montreal, McDowell left in 1877 to form a company to tour western Canada and the United States. Although few records of the group now survive, the company apparently did mount a tour of a Canadian play, H.M.S. Parliament in the late 1870s and early 1880s; the piece, by W.H. Fuller, combines the burlesque of the Gilbert and Sullivan Operetta, H.M.S. Pimfore and satirical comment on contemporaneous Canadian politics. It is one of the few examples of an indigenous work achieving popular success in nineteenth-century Canada. The Tavernier Company, billing itself as the New York Comedy Company and featuring Albert
Tavernier and his wife, Ida Van Cortland, specialized in more refined melodramas, touring Atlantic Canada and the eastern seaboard of the United States in the 1880s. Moving on to the Ontario circuit before its disbanding in 1896, the Mark Brothers were most successful financially, sending out three road companies’ consecutively at the height of their popularity and surviving until 1922. The company played safe, popular, melodramatic pieces to smaller communities.

The touring system in Canada went into sharp decline after World War I; professional theatre was evidently less able to withstand the competition of cinema that it was in countries with a more firmly entrenched theatrical tradition. The theatrical vacuum was filled by a rapid proliferation of amateur companies, encouraged by the spectacular development of the little theatre movement in the United States. This change in theatrical direction favored the development of Canadian drama, as many of the amateur performers were more willing to produce Canadian material than their professional predecessors had been. One of the most significant amateur companies worked I Hart House Theatre, established one the campus of the University of Toronto in 1999. The company’s policy specially encouraged the writing of Canadian plays, and its first artistic director, Roy Mitchell, was responsible for persuading Merrill Denison (1893-1975) to turn his hand to playwriting. Denison’s short plays satirizing Canada’s romantic vision of its heroic north made him the country’s first English-Language dramatist of note.
Hart House also produced *Duncan* Campbell Scott’s Pierre (1921), Britton Cooke’s The Translation of John Snaith (1923), Carrol Aikin’s *The God of Gods* (1922). L.A. Mackay’s *The Freedom of Jean Guicheet* (1925), and many other new works.

In 1932, the formation of the Dominion Drama Festival gave the amateur theatre a focal point, and for many years its annual nationwide competition was the highlight of the Canadian theatrical season. Performance standards were improved by the establishment of the Banff School of the Arts in 1933. While the encouragement of the amateur companies substantially increased playwriting activity in Canada, the quality remained disappointing: few plays of the period between the wars are of caliber of Denison’s work. Most are short, insubstantial, and highly derivative; the majority of the writers avoided Canadian settings, choosing instead remote and romantic settings, Biblical parables, or the ubiquitous English drawing room: Pierrot, Jesus, and Lord X are favorite protagonists. Herman Voaden (1903) is an interesting exception; his Theatre Studio Group in Toronto encouraged theatrical experiment, and he himself borrowed from the European expressionists in his attempts to depict the spirit than the external appearance of the Canadian wilderness. He attempts to render in dramatic terms the vision of the painters of the Group of Seven in Rock (1931), Earth song (1932),
Hill Land (1935), Murder Pattern (1936), Maria Chapdelaine (1938), and Ascend as the Sun (1942).

One of the best playwrights to emerge from the amateur theatre movement is Gwen Pharis Ringwood (1910). She worked with the Carolina Playmakers at the University of North Carolina in the late thirties, and applied the concept of the fold play emphasized there to her own country in Still Stands the House (1938), Dark Harvest (1939), and Pasque Flower (1936), all somber vision of Canadian farm life, and in a lighter play. The courting of Marie Jenvrin (1942). Still active in the theater, Ringwood continues to write for the Banff School and for an amateur company in Williams Lake, British Columbia.

During the thirties, the Depression inspired a protest drama in sharp contrast to the more genteel offerings of the bulk of Canadian little Theatres; foremost in the field was the Theatre of Action, in Toronto, and the workers Theatre movement, with active companies in six cities. Most of the plays were short and to the point, such as Harmony (1936) by W. Eric Harris warns against an authoritarian reaction to the growth of socialism in Canada. The same playwright’s Twenty-Five Cents (1936) demonstrates the effect of the Depression on a working-class family. The prairie farmer in W.E. Bicknell’s Relief (1936) faces economic difficult as well as the old enemy, drought. Looking Forward by H. Francis shows the development of a political activist. One of the most starting plays of the period
is *Eight Men Speak* (1934), written while its authors were serving prison sentences. The manuscript was smuggled out, and it was published by the cultural arm of the Canadian Communist party. The play dramatizes the party’s claim that an attempt was made on the life of the party’s leader while he was imprisoned in a federal penitentiary, and is also the occasion for some trenchant criticism of the structure of Canadian society. The play has had a stormy production history. The worker’s theatre movement was also responsible for a great deal of agitprop, for the most party very short pieces designed to be performed in labor halls or on the streets, and bearing such evocative titles as *Solidarity Not Charity, Eviction, Farmers’ Fight, and Labour’s Love Lost*. Vigor is the hallmark of all the protest plays, and this is the quality which does much to compensate for their technical crudity. The only Canadian commercial success of note between the wars was Mazo de La Roche’s *Whiteoaks* (1885-1961), a dramatization of part of the Jalna story which enjoyed an extremely long run in West End London theatre, beginning in 1936. The prolific popular novelist turned to playwriting on three other occasions, producing the one-act plays *Low Life* (1925), *Come True* (1926), and *The Return of the Immigrant* (1928).

The establishment of the publicly owned Canadian Broadcasting Corporation in 1932 had a profound influence on the subsequent development of Canadian drama in both languages. Extensive radio programming in drama made it
possible once again for actors to make a living in Canada; the subsequent establishment of a pool of experienced actors made possible the later revival of professional theatre in Canada and provided would-be Canadian playwrights with performers capable of putting their work to the test. Canadian actors who developed their art through radio drama include Frank Perty, Lloyd Bochner, John Drainie, Budd Knapp, Lorne Greene, and Barry Morse. The playwrights, too, were provided with a ready market for their art, and with an opportunity to develop through productions of many plays. Excellent producers, among them Andrew Allan, Esse Ljungh, and Rupert Caplan, encouraged vigorous attention to craft, and their discipline gave to Canadian drama a shapeliness too often lacking in the past. The radio dramatists of the forties and fifties – Len Petersen, Tommy Tweed, Lister Sinclair, John Bethune, Alan King, Joseph Schull, Hugh Kemp, Harry J. Boyle, W.O. Mitchell, and others- helped to build the closest thing Canada has had to a national theatre, the only drama available in many parts of the country at the time, and certainly the only “theatre” attended regularly by compatriots separated by thousands of miles in all other ways. The C.B.C. continues to play a significant role in the creation of Canadian drama: there are few significant playwrights who have not written for the corporation at some point in their career. C.B.C. television, from its inception in 1952, has also provided a venue for Canadian playwriting, but one which has been much more limited than that provided by radio, as the
television network quite quickly succumbed to the pressures to American programming comparatively little time is devoted to Canadian drama, and the standards achieved do not, on the whole, match those established by the radio in its ‘golden years’.

Theatrical activity in Canada was much reduced during World War II, but the hiatus proved to be a pause preceding a period of great renewal. The decade following the war saw a number of attempts to revive professional theatre in Canada. Initial attempts frequently took the form of summer-stock companies. The international players in Kingston and the Peterborough Summer Theatre served the cause of Canadian drama by mounting some of the earliest productions of the plays of Robertson Davis, the most distinguished Canadian playwright of the period. Davis, wit and style helped alleviate some Canadian suspicion of indigenous drama, and his dramatic statements expressing both the difficulty and necessity of making art in Canada were apropos. Another summer-stock company, *The Straw Hat Players*, evolved into Toronto’s Crest Theatre in 1954. Built around a nucleus of young actors who had worked with Robert Gill Hart House and led by brothers Murray and Donald Davis, the repertory company produced as many as financial difficulties, in 1966. In its earlier years, the Crest produced a substantial number of Canadian plays, by Robertson Davis, Marced Dube, John Gray, Mavor Moore,
Bernard Slade, and others but the company’s artistic policies took it away from the encouragement of original drama in its last few seasons.

The New Play Society, performing in the Toronto Museum Theatre and led by Dora Mayor Moore and her son, Mavor, was another important venture of the period. From its founding in 1947, the company emphasized the production of Canadian plays introducing plays by John Coulter, Mavor, Moore, Andrew Allan, and Morley Callaghan, while its annual revue, Spring Thaw, become a national Institution. Most of the theatres established in the forties and fifties- among them the Jupiter, the Avenue, and the Lansdowne in Toronto; the Canadian Repertory Theatre in Ottawa; and the Totem Theatre in Vancouver-were comparatively short-lived, but two thrive to this day. George Luscoumbe’s Toronto Workshop Productions has been breaking new ground in experimental staging since its inception in 1959, offering Toronto audiences lesser-known international works, producing new Canadian plays (by Jack Bolt), and developing scripts through the workshop: Hey, Rube (1960); Mr. Bones’ Guevara; Faces; and Ten lost Years (1974) have been among the best of their collectively created works. The second long-lived success is the Shakespeare festival in Stratford, Ontario.

The Festival grew extremely modest beginnings, having at its inception, few assets except the dedication and audacity of its initiators and the availability of actors and actresses whose talents had been developed through the loose Canadian
network of summer stock and amateur companies and the C.B.C. one of the most determined of the participation of British director Tyrone Guthrie, who saw the festival as an opportunity to put into practice his conviction that Shakespeare could best be produced on an open stage in accordance with the theories of Poel and Granville-Barker. Guthrie’s ideas were realized by designer Tanya Moisewitsch, who designed the thrust stage and two level façade with which all main-staged Stratford productions have been mounted since Alec Guinness played Richard III to open the festival’s first season in 1953. For the first four summer seasons of two to three plays, performances were held in a huge circus tent pitched on the banks of the Avon River in the small Ontario town of Stratford, about one hundred miles west of Toronto. The permanent theatre which now houses the festival was opened in 1957. Its architecture retains the semicircular auditorium and something of the original tent theatre.

The scope and the international reputation of the Stratford Festival grew quickly. Following the precedent set by Guthrie’s production of yeast’s version of Sophocles’ *Oedipus Rex* in the 1954 season, revived for the Edinburgh Festival in 1955, the company has frequently performed non-Shakespearean classics of the drama, although the festival’s focus remains firmly on Shakespeare. The Canadian players were established to mount winter tours, and eventually the festival ceased to be a summer event and became a year-round theatre operation. Two additional
theatres were opened in Stratford: the Avon, a renovated nineteenth-century theatre used to mount productions of lesser-known works from the international repertoire and some Canadian plays, and the Third Stage, housed in what was once a badminton club, for the presentation of more experimental work. The festival made the town of Stratford a cultural center and major tourist attraction as other arts activities, film festival, music festivals, and major art and photographic exhibits became part of the annual event.

As the festival’s reputation grew, it became a storm center of controversy in the Canadian artistic community; controversy intensified by the upsurge of Canadian nationalism in the late sixties and brought to a head by the appointment of British Director in 1974. The festivals champions argue that the standards of excellence established by the company, and its renown, have increased the Canadian general public’s awareness of theatre and have encourage pride in and respect for the country’s theatre artists, to the benefit of theatrical activity across the nation. Supporters also point to the festivals development of a Canadian acting style for the performance of classical drama as an achievement with profound implications for the future of Canadian theatre. The festivals detractors object to the continued domination by non-Canadian’s justified at first by the absence of qualified Canadians a situation which no longer exists, and to the festivals relatively poor track record in the development of Canadian drama, an omission
made particularly objectionable by the extent of support the festival receives from public funds. Critics also maintain that the artistic quality of festival production has been deteriorating, with performance standards suffering from excessive attention to popular appeal and particularly to visual aspects of production, contrary to Guthrie’s injunction that the festival not be allowed to become primarily a tourist attraction.

The nature of Canadian theatre was substantially altered in 1957 by the formation of the Canada council. Established after the Massey Commission’s extensive inquiry into the state of the arts in Canada and modeled after the British Arts Council, the council provides financial assistance to both individuals and arts organizations; in theatre this policy not only assists the development of playwrights and actors but also offers a greater measure of financial stability to professional theatre companies. While few of the companies established in the subsequent decade were started with council funds, most observers feel that the prospect of federal help with operating costs encouraged many Canadian cities to acquire civic theaters. The first of the so-called regional theatres was the Manitoba Theatre Centre, created in 1958 by the amalgamation of several Winnipeg amateur companies. The MTC was followed by the Neptune Theatre in Halifax and the Playhouse Theatre in Vancouver in 1963. By the early 1970s, regional theatres had been established in Edmonton, Regina, Montreal (which has two, the Saidye
Bronfman Centre and the Centaur Theatre), Fredericton, Toronto, Sudbury, London, and Thunder Bay. The National Arts Centre, established in Ottawa in 1969, is nominally regional, although its efforts are devoted more to hosting visiting production. Following Stratford’s lead, three new summer festivals were started: the Shaw festival in Niagara on-the-Lake presents works by Shaw and has contemporaries, the Charlottetown Festival concentrates on musical theatre (Anne of Green Gables is a perennial favorite), and the Lennoxville Festival offers summer seasons of three of our Canadian Plays.

The spectacular increase in theatrical activity in the 1960s was accompanied by, but not intimately connected to, a marked increase in the number and quality of Canadian plays being written. John Coulter turned from the Irish subject matter of his early years in Canada to produce the substantial Reli trilogy. James Reaney wrote his early pastoral plays, beginning his exploration of the mythic possibilities of the Ontario countryside and of new dramatic techniques by which verse could be returned to the stage. George Ryga startled the theatre going public with his vivid and erratic attacks on Canadian social structures, and John Herbert’s Fortune and Men’s Eyes (1965), a brutally honest indictment of the penal system, became the country’s first international stage success.

In the late sixties and early seventies another complex of events altered the nature of Canadian theatre and drama: there was a sudden and explosive
proliferation of small, alternative theatres in the larger cities. Following the example of New York’s off Broadway and of earlier Canadian efforts in this direction, Toronto Workshop Production and John Herbert’s Garret Theatre, the new companies emphasized performance and new work, elements frequently sacrificed to elaborate production and to box-office security by the regional theatres, even by the experimental second stages established by several of them. A new generation of theatre artists, many of them graduates of the newly established training programs, took advantage of available federal funding and job-creation programs to create a theatre scene which would welcome young performers and Canadian plays and which would reflect a new sense of national self-confidence. The new movement started in Toronto and is especially indebted to the work of four companies, of which Theatre Passes Muraille is the most important.

Members of Theatre Passes Muraille have been responsible for the creation as well as the performance of many of its shows rather in the manner of Joan Littlewoods’s theatre workshop. The company frequently works in the area of docudrama, and its dramatization of Canadian life and history has had a profound influence on the focus and approach of much Canadian alternative and regional theatre in the present decade. The company was associated with Rockdale College, an experimental but now defunct college of the University to Toronto, in 1968. Under the leadership of Jim Garrard, it concentrated on introducing Toronto
audiences to contemporary of- Broadway plays. In 1971 the leadership passed to Paul Thompson, who had apprenticed with director Roger Plan chon in Lyons and who brought to the company a new commitment to the creation of indigenous drama and to a mirroring of the immediate environment based not on existing written scripts but on the company’s experience and exploration of the community for which it performed. *Doukhobors* (1971), one of the company’s first attempts in the new style, is a history of the Russian religious sect which fled to Canada in search of freedom but which frequently found misunderstanding and oppression instead; the piece is frequently marred by its unevenness and inadequate narrative technique. *The Farm Show* (1972) is the result of much refined technique. The company lived for several months in a small farming community and produced a portrait of way of life that is disappearing. In this work the company developed the highly imaginative and acrobatic acting style, the fluidity of dramatic movement and role-playing, the development of storytelling as dramatic act, and the spare use of technical support which has become its trademark. The piece was extremely popular, following its tour of rural auction barns with performances in major Canadian theatres; it has been televised and broadcast and is the subject of a documentary film. *The Farm Show* was followed by a portrait of a mining community, under *Greywacke* (1973), and of Petrolia, the first Canadian community to base its economy on oil, in *Oil* (1974) Among the many productions
which followed, *I love You, Baby Blue* (1975), a portrait of contemporary sexually, achieved the greatest notoriety; it was closed down by Toronto’s morality squad and became a notable theatrical cause celebrity. In addition to the collectively created works, Passes Muraille worked in collaboration with a number of authors: Carol Bolt, with *Buffalo Jump*, and Rick Salutin, with *1837: The Farmer’s Revolt*, have gone on to prominent Canadian novelist, was careers, and Rudy Wiebe, a prominent Canadian novelist, was introduced to the theatre through his collaboration with the company on *As far as the Eye-Can see*. The company’s style has influenced that of a number of other alternative companies, notably Saskatoon’s Twenty-fifth Street House, whose *Paper Wheat* has achieved almost as much popularity as *The Farm Show*, and Newfoundland’s Mummers’ Troupe, while Passé Murallie’s Seed Show Program, whereby financial and technical help is offered to would be theatrical experimenters, had led to much recent innovation in Canadian theatre, notably Hrant Alianak’s early work the Hummer Sisters’ theatrical-video-rock and roll extravaganzas Maynard Colfins Hank Williams *The Show He Never Gave* (1977), and John Gray’s *Billy Bishop Goes to War* (1978).

Ken Gass started the factory Theatre Lab in 1970 with an aggressive nationalist policy; believing that good work must come from an environment in which many plays are being produced, the Factory emphasized quantity, producing or work shopping as many as a hundred new plays a year. The best known factory

While the Factory’s bias is experimental, the Tarragon Theatre, founded by Bill Glassco in 1971, has encouraged a revival of the neorealist, well-made play. David French’s work has achieved success across the country. David Freeman’s *Creeps*, an unflinching examination of the plight of cerebral palsy victims, won ‘the New York Critics’ Drama Desk Award after its production there in 1974. Subsequent work, *Battering Tam* (1972) and *You’re Gonna Be Alright, Jamic Boy* (1974) has met with substantial, if somewhat more limited success. The Tarragon has also been in the forefront of another important development, the introduction of is drama to English-speaking Canadians. The theatre produced several of Michel Tremblay’s plays for the first time in English; Tremblay’s work subsequently had an immense impact on theatre in English-speaking part of the country. Toronto Fee Theatre does not concentrate exclusively on the production of Canadian work, but has presented many new plays, by, among others, Tom Hendry, John Palmer, Martin Kinch, and Michael Hollingsworth. Carol Bolt is one of the most interesting of the new generation of Canadian playwrights. Her work, including
Buffalo Jump (1972), Gabe (1972), Red Emma (1974), Shelter (1975), and One Night Stand (1977), often redefines the Canadian experience by resurrecting neglected aspects of the country’s history and frequent presents a feminist perspective.

The energy of new beginnings quickly made it felt in other Canadian cities. In Vancouver, the Arts Club added production of Canadian plays to its popular fare, Troupe and Savage God presented a few seasons of new and experimental productions, City stage was established and two avant-garde companies, Tamahnous and Touchstone, developing distinctive styles and new work, still thrive. John Gray, of Tamahnous, wrote the highly successful Eighteen Wheels (1977) and the even more successful Billy Bishop Goes to War (1978); both plays have been given national tours. The New Play Centre was founded by Doug Bankson as an organization devoted to script development through a workshop process; the company had considerable influence on similar programs in other part of the country and has moved into production in other parts of the country, in addition to script development. Some of the most interesting playwrights to emerge from the process are Sheldon Rosen with Meyer’s Room (1971), Love Mouse (1971), The Box with Cubstique (1974), Herringbone (1975), Beautiful Tigers (1976), Stargazing (1978) and Tom Walmsley with the Working Man (1975), Something Red (1978). Another Vancouver playwright, Beverly Simons, has
written some of Canada’s most ambitious and intricate experimental drama *Crabdance, Preparing, Leela Means to play*, while Herschel Hardin’s *Esker Mike* and *His Wife, Agiluk* has attracted considerable attention since its publication in *The Drama Review* in 1969.

Elsewhere in Canada in the 1970s, Edmonton acquired its Theatre network (known outside Alberta for its collective creation, *Hard Hats* and *Lonely Hearts*), Northern Light Theatre, while Calgary saw the establishment of Alberta Theatre Projects, the Lunchbox Theatre, and the Loose Theatre Company. Calgary playwright John Murrell, whose plays include *Memoir* (1977) and *Waiting for the Parade* (1977), is a Canadian playwright to watch, and Sharon Pollock’s work—*Walsh* (1973). *The Komagata Maru incident* (1976) – is best of the new plays attempting to show Canadians new, and frequently unflattering, aspect of them. In Saskatoon, two companies emerged: Persephone presents products from both Canadian and international repertories, while the Twenty-fifth Street House Theatre concentrates on indigenous plays, achieving national recognition through extensive tours of its collective piece, *Paper Wheat* (1977). Winnipeg’s contribution to the development of a new Canadian drama has been disappointing, but Confidential Exchange and Cubiculo managed to present a few seasons of new work.
While Montreal’s theatre scene is primarily French-language, the city’s English-speaking population supports two theatres and has produced one of the country’s most promising English-language playwrights: David Fennario’s plays, On the Job (1975), are hard-hitting accounts of working-class hopes and fears. Further east, Newfoundland has taken the lead in Atlantic Canada in the creation of new drama. Codco and the Mummers’ Troupe, along with its successor, Rising Tide Theatre Company, have used Theatre Passe Muraille’s methods to dramatize the rich regional culture of the island province. Newfoundland has also produced a number of promising playwrights; the best known outside the province, Michael Cook, has succeeded in converting the local dialect into rich, poetic language for the stage, and in finding the element of myth in a life-style in which natural forces still play an important and dramatic role.

The upsurge in Canadian playwriting has been accomplished by an increased interest in the publication of Canadian plays; the leading publishers in the field are playwrights Co-op (now playwrights Canada), which has published a large number of new plays in inexpensive acting editions, and Talon Books, whose extensive list of Canadian plays is published in a more substantial format. Three new journals have appeared: Canadian Theatre Review covers all aspect of the theatre arts in Canada and prints a script of a Canadian play in each of its issues, Canadian Drama/L’Art dramatique Canadian pursues a more scholarly approach to the
subject, and Theatre History in Canada/Histoire due Theatre au Canada is devoted to the study of theatre in the country.

The success of Canadian drama and theatre in the past fifteen years is unprecedented. Toronto can now boast forty legitimate theatres, and both Vancouver and Edmonton have extremely lively theatre scenes. The older alternative theatres in Toronto have, in effect, become a part of that city’s cultural mainstream and have been joined by yet another wave of young and energetic companies, while Canadian plays are being produced abroad with increasing frequency. Although it is still not easy to make a living as a theatre artist in Canada, and the playwrights still have the hardest lot, and even the oldest of the innovative companies are in continuous financial peril, and although these conditions are worsened by the policies of fiscal restraint currently pursued by all levels of government, the accomplishments of the last few years have been such that it seems unlikely that Canadian drama and theatre will again lapse into a period of inactivity and have no being all over again, a situation which occurred repeatedly in the country’s earlier theatre history.

The sixteenth-century introduction of Canada of European theatrical form—the dramatic mode whose history is chartered here—was preceded by centuries of Para-theatrical activities among North America’s indigenous people. These performances often involved a variety of sophisticated ‘stage effects’ (e.g. magical
disappearance, fire, voice and sound tricks) and were enacted by specially endowed members of the tribes wearing elaborate costumes and skillfully carve masks. Anthropologists and theatre historians have cited the Corn Goddess tales of central Canada, the Mystery play of the Kwakiutl Indians, and the Hamasta (Cannibla) ceremony of the West Coast as important examples of Para-theatrical and Para-dramatic aspects of the highly developed native cultures.

However, the extent to which European and indigenous expressions interpenetrated to influence the imported theatre and drama proves difficult to assess. Canada’s earliest recorded theatrical event in a European mode shows evidence of a naive presence. Typical of the period, on his 1583 expedition of Newfoundland the explorer Sir Humphrey Gilbert carried a small troop of entertainers on his ship, which performed during anchorage in St. John’s. As explained by Edward Haies, ‘we were provided of Musike in good variety: not omitting the least Toyes, as Morris dancers, Hobby horse and May like conceits to delight the Savage people, whom we intended to win by all fair means possible’. As well, in 1606, the presence of Micmac Indians and Frenchmen dressed as Indians, in Marc Lescarbot’s masque, Le Theatre De Neptune En La Nouvelle-France (1609), indicates that the cultural exchange was two way from the beginning. From that time on we can identify many occasions when European-based theatre and drama have been influenced by indigenous Canadian activity, but
research has not yet been sufficient to warrant substantial discussion of the subjects.

Similarly, several studies trace the development of Anglophone and francophone drama, and thereby offer implied, if not stated, comparative analysis, research has not stated, comparative analysis, research has not extensively explored the relationship between French and English theatrical and dramatic activities. Considerable inter-cultural exchange existed in Montreal and immediately after 1763. Previously, the history of theatre and drama in all of Canada was that of the French. But records indicate that as early as 1743, British garrison officers and their ladies enjoyed a special Christmas celebration of Fort-Anne, Annapolis Royal, with the Establishment from the gradually increased, to the point of dominance. But the relationship was complex: for instance, British rule created a climate in which the Roman Catholic Church was less able to control theatre, thus allowing francophone activity to increase during the early British regime.

Among the British, Garrison Theatre is recorded as early as 1773 when the gentlemen of the army and navy produced Benjamin Hoadly’s *The Suspicious Husband at Halifax*, and it continued wherever theatrically inclined personnel were stationed until and garrisons were recalled late in 1807. In addition to English plays, British officers sometimes staged French drama in translation, or in French,
as was the case in 1774 at Montreal when the garrison amateurs presented Molière’s *Le Medecin malgre lui* and *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*.

For the most part, practices and repertoire in civilian as well as Garrison theatres imitated London and large American Centre. Not surprisingly then, the early plays we might speak of as indigenous were based on foreign models, especially when the officers were themselves the playwrights. Robert Rogers, a Massachusetts-born major in the British army who lived part of his life in Canada and was eventually stripped of his command of Fort Michilimackinac, wrote *Ponteach; or, The Savages of America* (1766). This Five act blank-verse drama offers heroic themes and a pre-Romantic image of native life crushed by ‘civilization’. *Ponteach*, whose people have been misused by evil English and French traders, missionaries and soldiers, head an Indian confederacy opposing the invaders. Treachery involving his bastard son, who seeks *Ponteach’s* kingdom, defeats the great chief, but as the play ends, *Ponteach* remains noble and defiant, planning his flight to safety where he will beget more sons and collect more troops, Lieutenant Adam Allan’s *The New Gentle Shepherd* (1798) borrows title, form, and content from Allan Ramsay’s *The Gentle Shepherd* (1725), a pastoral drama in Scottish dialect, ‘reduced to English’, By Allan.

Neither Rodgers’ nor Allan’s drama was staged, but George Cockings’ *The Conquest of Canada; The Siege of Quebee* (1766) was produced in Philadelphia
(17, 19, 22 Feb. 1773) by the American Company headed by Lewis Hallam Jr. the most famous professional troupe in the eighteenth century United States. This dull patriotic tragedy, imitative of Dryden’s *Conquest of Granada*, was valued enough to be printed three times: London, 1776; Baltimore 1772; New York 1773. It also received a stage production by the British garrison in New York (4 Oct. 1783) and possibly several in Canada, the first of which was by the Edward Allen, John Bentley, and Wilson Moore Troupe (which they called the American Company on the basis of their earlier association with Hallam). They are recorded as staging *The Siege of Queebee: or The Death of General Wolfe* (certainly the subject of Cocking’s play) in (19 Oct. 1786), which could be Cocking’s work under a slightly different name. The three-act *Acadius; or, Love in a Calm* is another eighteen-century play staged by garrison performers (Halifax, 1774), and lengthy abstracts of the first two acts, appeared in the Nove Scotia Gazette and Weekly Chronicle (12, 19 Apr. 1774) and indicate a stage worthy romantic adventure with moments of unsettling comedy and an antislavery sentiment. The play remains anonymous: The public of detailed abstracts and its Halifax performance might argue for a local author, as might its antislavery stance; the prominence of a Boston merchant among its characters could, however, indicate otherwise.

Garrison activity has frequently been cited as a basis for the development of Canadian drama; but there was also civilian amateur and professional theatre in the
eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Messrs Giffard and Mills, leading an American company of Comedians, played an autumn season in Halifax by 1768. The Allen, Bentley, Moore Company performed in Montreal and in 1786; Mr. and Mrs. Marriot from England (via the U.S.) managed the Halifax Theatre from 1798 to 1805, and, supplementing their company by local amateurs, played six months in Saint John in 1799, Toronto was visited by ‘New York comic gentry’ in 1809, and in 1810 by Messrs Potter and Thompson, as well as a ‘company of comedians from Montreal; Kingston saw a touring troupe at Mr. Poncet’s large room’ in 1812.

Exactly how much of a role educational institutions had in developing indigenous drama in English is not known: however, as early as 1828 Toronto’s Royal Grammar School performed Terence’s Adelphi in Latin as part of its examinations.

Public performances often promoted anti-theatre reactions in the press and public, which were engaged by pro-theatre views expressed not only in print but in attendance at the ‘sinful’ pastime. These anti-theatre attacks began as early as 1768 in the Nova Scotia Gazette and Weekly Chronicle and, unfortunately for the Canadian playwright, were a widespread and considerable deterrent. Theatres, taught having a phoenix-like character, were generally make-shift and short-lived. The professional companies came from outside Canada and, like the amateur troupes, continued to present a non-Canadian repertoire.
By the turn of the eighteen century, the interrelationship of an increasing Canadian population with businesses (including theatres) needing to sell products spurred the formation of a vigorous press, headed by enterprising editors concerned about individual rights in the face of government privilege and control. Twenty news sheets in 1813 grew to 291 newspapers in 1857, with many other short-lived ventures in the years between. As was the case for francophone writers in Quebec at the time, these avidly read publications, and the pamphlets from newspaper printing houses, offered another avenue for prospective dramatists seeking an audience: that of political satire using dramatic plots, characterization, and dialogue. These Para-theatrical works contributed significantly to the development of a Canadian dramatic voice; they give evidence of a people from whom the dramatic metaphor was a natural conceptual framework for everyday reality.

In 1975 Edward Winslow’s Para-dramatic pamphlet, Substance of the Debates in the *Young Robin Hood Society* (1975), entered the political controversy over a government plan to develop various inland areas of new Brunswick. The Niagara Gleaner-after publishing for the first time a play in Upper Canada, *Rose and Nancy* (22 Jan. 1818), a reprint of one of Mary Lead betters’ *Cottage Dialogues among the Irish peasantry* (1811)-carried an anonymous political satire, *The Convention: A Farce as Now Acting with Great Applause in Upper-Canada* (3
July 1818). During the 1802s Samuel Hull Vilcocke (the pseudonym of Lewis Luke MacCulloh) wrote and/or published several fierce satires in his paper *The Scribbler* (Montreal). These include *The Charrivarri* (vols.3-4, 1823), which makes great fund in prose and verse of the celebration that took place in Montreal after the marriage of a lusty, rich widow and a well-known bachelor; Dialogue at M’Killaway Lodge (vol.2, no. 74, 1822), in which Lord Goddamnhim and Sir Plausible Pompous M’Killawaya rail against the editor of The Sribbler for ridiculing them in print; and Domestic Economy (vol. 4, no.109, 1823), in which General Fleabite of Shamblee attacks ‘Government City’ extravagance and military, but because the hard-hitting satire remained, so did many pseudonyms, ‘O.P.’ (Robert Gowan) published a two-act, ten scene prose satire, *The Triumph of Intrigue*, in the New Brunswick Courier (23 Feb., 2, 9 Mar. 1833), which showed villainy in official positions over Crown Land Management and quitrents. In his paper *The British Colonist* (vol. 2, nos. 20,21,23,25, 26, 1839) Hugh Scobe skewered Upper Canadian graft and corruption in high circles with the Provincial Drama Called the family Compact. Among editors who were also playwrights was Dr. Edward Barker, Founder of the Kinstong Whig, and a drama critic to boot. Barer’s reviews often led him into local controversy, as did his dramatic satires printed in the Whig. An immodest man, he published his one-act *The Bride-groom* (10 Feb. 1836) in the Whig with a note explaining that he had submitted it to the
Park Theatre in New York where it was rejected by an ‘American Dramatic Censor deficient in taste’.

Now until the mid-nineteenth century one sees any significant number of indigenous plays on the stage. Among the avenues open to prospective playwrights was poetic closet drama, which eliminated any need for live performance – with its perceived vulgarity and immortality – and which drew on a respectable literary tradition. Canadian poetic drama, however, was often a hybrid mix of closet literary elements, with character types and formulaic melodramatic plots taken from the popular stage. Hoping to see their work staged, Charles Maire spoke of *Tecumseh* (1866) as a ‘good acting play’ William Wilfred Campbell offered is *Mordred* (1895) to sir Henry Irving, and an eye to performance by Charlotte Cushman.

The existence of poetic dramas as printed texts – and their literary and philosophical ‘weightiness’ – has accorded a relatively small body of work excessive critical attention. The name most often associated with the sententious. Prolix, and moralizing blank-verse dramas is Charles Heavysege, whose turgid six-act 10,000- line *Saul* is now considered unreadable –though it was reprinted twice in two years and modern scholars find isolated passages to admire. His melodramatic Count Filippo (1860) is deservedly unknown. Thomas Bush was equally ambitious in using a South American earthquake as the climax in Santiago
(1866), a cautionary drama about religious corruption and papist idolatry while engaging at time; the play suffers from obscure allusions, passage of incomprehensible verse, and a sprawling plot. Exotic setting was common, such as the mysterious forests of Portugal we see in John Hutchison Garnier’s Prince Pedre (1877) or the mountains of Hamilton. In George Washington Johnson’s revenge tale The Count’s Bridge, published in Hamilton in 1864. Hunter Duvar also wrote De Roberval (1888) attempt to establish a settlement at Quebec. In Mair’s Tecumseh the most interesting character is Lefroy, a poet who writes nostalgically of a beautiful vanishing wilderness and is in love with an Indian maiden. The quite irony in Mair’s treatment of Lefroy offers a reinterpretation of the white man caught between two worlds.

With a lesser poetic but greater dramatic talent than Mair, Sarah Anne Curzon also turned to poetic drama in Laura Secord, The Heroine of 1812 (1887) to rescue a Canadian from obscurity –with limited success. Curzon’s more significant achievement was in a different form, a lively prose comedy, The Sweet Girl Graduate (1882), which attacks discrimination against women at the University of Toronto. Earlier in the century, Eliza Lanesford Cushing had chosen the relatively private and lyrical voice of poetic drama to explore the subject of women, particularly creative women, in society. Among her ten plays published in various periodicals, often addressed to a female audience, was Esther (Lady’s
Book, 1838), an adaption of the Biblical story of Queen Esther’s fight to save her father from her husband’s – the Persian King Ahauseras-decree of death of Jews. Esther’s situation- Jewish herself and a victim of villainy of Haman, who was instrumental in establishing the decree- offers a loose parallel to that of nineteenth –century women as Cushing saw them. Esther’s blank verse of uneven quality and its overly moral tone are less evident in Cushing’s more complex drama, The Fatal Ring (Literary Garland) (1840) in which a various countess, stifled by the world she lives in, is seduced by the glory of court and an alluring, womanizing King, trapped by his public role.

By the 1805s most towns had a theatre, if only a long room and raised platform in the town hall. Cities had more elaborate structures and were beginning to be able to support professional resident stock companies on a long-term basis. This environment was somewhat more hospitable to the Canadian dramatist, and more Canadian plays began to appear; for instance, Graves Simcoe LEE, a Canadian-born actor in John Nickinson’s company resident at Toronto’s Royal Lyceum, wrote what was reported to be the first play by an Upper Canadian see on a Toronto stage. Fiddle, Faddle, and Foozle opened on 9 Apr 1853 and were a most decided hit’. Nickinson’s company also offered Lee’s second farce, Saucy Kate (11 July 1853); a subsequent unnamed Lee composition; and Nickinson’s own
adaption *The Fortunes of Ware* (13 June 1854). None of these plays was published or preserved.

The Para-theatrical dramaturgy that had so-far dominated political satire continued throughout the rest of the nineteenth century in numerous publications, including Grip, Grip-Sac, Grinchuckel, and the Canadian illustrated News. But para-theatrical works crafted with greater assurance and skill, such as *Measure by Measure*; of, *The Coalition in Secret Session* (anon., New Brunswick, seven installments 25 Feb-8 Apr. 1871) - one of several plays in the New Dominion and True Humorist-wee joined by political satires written for and produced in the theatres. One of the first notable stage satires was *The Provincial Association; or Taxing Each Other* (1845), written by Thomas Hill, editor of The Loyalist (Fredericton). Although no copy of the script has been recovered, it is well documented as the cause of a theatre riot in Saint John. N. B. Potentially even more volatile than Hill’s satire, *The Female Consistory of Brockville* (1856, staged Dec.1981), which was based on a contemporary occurrence, was understandably never performed in its own time. Its charges of a conspiracy by thinly disguised local women to drive their minister out of the church allegedly for beating his wife, and of corruption in the Presbyterian Synod at the minister’s trial, would almost certainly have provoked furor in the small community. Instead, Caroli Candidius (an ungrammatical Latin pseudonym) published it privately. Two bear mention:
The king of the Beavers (1865), first performed in 1865, ‘A new original, political, allegorical, burlesque, extravagance;’ in which the Queen of the Blue Noses and the King of the Beaver defeat Fanains attacking Beaverhead and Dolorsolation (1865), first performed in 1885, in which various Canadian cities and localities bicker among themselves at Grandpapa Canada’s house. Their squabbles are set against the intrusion of feuding Abe North and Jeff South, teaching the wisdom of family unity, useful when Santa Claus arrives with an elixir, Dolorsolation, made of federation. Nicholar Flood Davin, a colorful MP, wrote a highly critical view of politics in his lively The Fair Grit; or The Advantages of Coalition (1876), not performed (and only then in a public reading) Until 1978, where the son of Tory and the daughter of a Grit find their love opposed, until the Tory parent sees personal advantage in his joining the Grits. Davin’s attack on opportunism and corruption in public office is fierce and non-partisan.

By 1870 Canada was entering a forty-year theatrical boom, marked by the building of numerous halls with stages and ‘Grand Opera Houses’ in large and small centers across the country: approximately forty theatres with a capacity of 1,000 or more were opened between 1873 and 1892. The force behind this activity was a combination of artistic impulse, civic pride, and financial gain. Profit was the impulse behind the touring circuits that were to bring to each centre professional combination troupes on a regular basis; in some years there were over
300 companies touring Canada. While this flourishing period reflected the presence of a large and interested Canadian audience, and while it made possible professional careers for many Canadian performers, back-stage workers, theatre owners, and producers, if offered little for the development of Canadian drama because the circuits and companies were American dominated and almost exclusively non-Canadian in their repertoire.

Several Canadian gained prominence working out of the United States and writing the homogenous commercial vehicles needed on the circuits. Among them was Arthur McKee Ranking, a well-known actor whose name is co-written or worked on by two-dozen plays, most of which were co-written or worked on by play-doctors. Ranking starred over 2,000 times in Joaquin Miller’s *The Danites*, and his *Abraham Lincoln* - the first play to recall the assassination – was performed five times in 1891, before Lincoln’s son and others urged its withdrawal as being too soon after the event. Another well-known actor and director, Willard Mack (Charles McLaughlin), wrote popular commercial successes, the most famous of which was *Tiger Rose*, first performed in 1917, a melodramatic romance set in western Canada with a plot mush like the later musical *Rose Marie*. For twenty years William A. Tremayne wrote pot-boilers, such as *The Secret Warrant*, first performed in 1897, and The Black Feather, first performed in 1916, published as *The Man Who Went* (1918). *Seats of the Mighty*, first performed in 1896, was
adapted by expatriate Gilbert Parker from his own popular novel, Simplified to a sensational romance in historical setting of Francois Bigot’s Little Versailles’, Seats of the Mighty afforded opportunity for colorful period staging and a cloak-and-sword role for Herber Beerbohm. Tree, who took it on his second American tour and then use it to open her Majesty’s Theatre in London, England in 1897.

The commercial theatre, which pragmatically made use of any element that might help fill the house, occasionally staged plays, especially musicals, with local appeal: this normally meant a Mounties here, northern wildness there, as in Willard Mack’s Tiger Rose. However, some exceptions exist where Canada is included for its own sake rather than as atmospheric stereotype. Cashing in on the popularity of Gilbert and Sullivan, William Henry Fuller-who, ironically, may have been American—wrote what is likely the best-known nineteenth-century Canadian piece, *H.M.S. Parliament; or The Lady Who Loved a Government Clerk* (1880). After opening Parliament in Montreal on 16 Feb. 1880, a few doors away from a production of H.M.S. Pinafore, American actor-manager Eugene A. McDowell’s Shaughraun Company took this satirical account of Canadian politics on successful national tour. Fuller was also the author of an amusing Para-theatrical satire, *The Unspecific Scandal* (1874), and of several other stage pieces, including *A Barber’s Scrape* (performed in 1886) and Flapdoodle. John Wilson Benogugh, editor of Grip, also borrowed from Gilbert and Sullivan for *Bunthorne Abroad; or The Lass*
That Loved a Pirate (1883), which was first staged by the Templeton Start Opera Company in Hamilton in 1886: the crew of HMS Pinafore saves Bunthorne from the Pirates of Penzance who were driven to crime by his aestheticism. In Kingston the poet George Frederick Cameron combined with Oscar Telgman, a well-regarded local musician, for a ‘military opera’, Leo, The Royal Cadet (1889), first staged in 1889, in which a cadet from Kingston’s Royal Military College goes off to fight the Zulus, eventually returning of his Nellie’s loving arms with a Victoria Cross. Staged first by local amateurs, Leo was toured with some success by Telgman throughout Canada and the U.S.

Most plays concerned with Canadian issues or character were performed by amateur companies for local audience. Jean Newton McIlwraith, and noted composer Jon E. P. Aldous, created Ptarmigan; or A Canadian Carnival (1895) which satirically sketches the fate of the migrant Ptarmigan on his return from the United States where he signed papers to become an American citizen. While exploring Canadian identity, including artistic identity, the operetta makes clear that Ptarmigan’s actions were lunacy when he could have remained a citizen of British Canada. Like Ptarmigan’s topical connection with annexation, George Broughall’s The 90th on Active Service; or Campaigning in the North West, first performed and published in 1885, grew out of a crucial national event, the Riel Rebellion. However, his musical burlesque, performed in Winnipeg by the 90th
Battalion, is a variety show on military camp life that makes almost no mention of issues or people in the rebellion they had been sent to quell.

Another amateur theatre that aided the development of indigenous drama was under the vice-regal auspices of Lady Dufferin who included a theatre in her renovation of the Governor General’s residence, Rideau Hall. Between 1873 and 1878 she organized dramatic performances thee, frequently written by Frederick A. Dixon, tutor to her children.

The years around the First World War brought major changes for drama in Canada. Facing rising costs and competition from the movies, the American-dominated touring business succumbed to the vapidity of its own commercial fare and to the disruptions caused by the War. Simultaneously, the growing power of nationalist voices called for the de-annexation of the Canadian stage- which ironically led to the deliberate importing of British touring companies for a brief time immediately before and after the war. Doubly ironic, several distinguished members of these companies urged the establishment of a Canadian national theatre, albeit a very British one. In cities during the twenties there was a flourishing of resident stock companies, less expensive to run and claiming a connection with the community, but they offered essentially the same fare as the touring professionals. When the Depression made money scarce, and radio entertainment arrived, these commercial ventures fell off.
At the time, various initiatives helped shape a more supportive context for the Canadian dramatist. In 1906 the Margaret Eaton School of Literature and Expression in Toronto began to offer formal instruction in drama: Dora Mavor Moore was among its early graduates. In 1907 Governor General Earl Grey began his national dramatic competitions, which provide official backing for Canadian theatre activity. Performers included the likes of Mr. and Mrs. Stephen Leacock Shaw’s *Arms and the Man*, (1907) and Dora Mavor Moore, who was pried in Catharine Nina Merritt’s three-act comedy, *A Little Leaven*, during the 1910 competition at Toronto’s Royal Alexandra Theatre. Merritt had previously published *When George the Third was King* (1897), a competent but not very lively three-act historical drama that celebrated a romanticized United Empire Loyalist escape to southern Ontario from revolutionary United States. Of lasting importance, Toronto’s Arts and Letters Club, founded in 1908, began its stage productions under Roy Mitchell’s supervision.

Prevalent in the early twentieth century were children’s plays, and educational, temperance, and religious dramas, as were humorous dramatic sketches, such as adaptations from Dickens, and Stephen Leacock’s burlesques of nineteenth-century theatrical modes. And there were still poetic dramas, such as Robert Norwood’s *The Witch of Endor* (1916). All were staged by amateurs—amateur theatre was seen as a vital alternative for Canadian dramatists; inspired
partly by the art-theatre movement in Europe and the U.S. Canadian amateur with large and expensive professional companies. Ireland’s Abbey Theatre was seen as an almost perfect model of theatre dedicated to new dramaturgy and national expression. In 1919 Hart House Theatre opened as the beacon of this Little Theatre movement, offering an intimate performance-space for challenging plays that ranged from detailed psychological and social realism to the mythical, poetic, and expressionistic. Most important, Hart House had a mandate to include Canadian works among its productions. In its second seasons (Apr. 1921) it presented a bill of one-acts (the form itself an anti-commercial reaction): *Pierre*, by poet Duncan Campbell Scott, *The Second Lie* by Isabel Ecclestone MacKay, and *Brothers in Arms* by Merrill Denison. Scott’s play is a heavy-handed ironic tale in a realistic mode of a prodigal son who returns to his home and steals the family savings meant to send his sister to hospital. Mackay’s realism explores the psychological tensions created by a husband who tricks his wife into poisoning him. *Brothers in Arms*, providing light comic relief in exposing naive assumptions about character and rural Canadian life, continued to be staged for many years.

These three plays, eight other from the early Hart House season, were published with a short but seminal introduction by Vincent Massey in Canadian Plays from Hart House Theatre (2 vols., 1926/1927), which gives a fair representation of the drama of the period. In Carroll Aitkin’s *God of Gods* an
Indian maiden, manipulated into becoming their religious worship when she discovers her lover has been killed. Although in need of trimming, overly melodramatic and stilted, the play was exotic enough to be well-received not only at its premiere and reveal by the Birmingham Repertory Theatre in 1931. Massey’s volumes also include Henry Borsook’s *Three Weddings of a Hunchback*, first performed in 1923, a dark Comedy centered on the youngest daughter, a hunchback, at three successive marriages in a Jewish. Britton Cook’s *The Translation of John Snaith*, first performed in 1923, while suffering from faulty dramaturgy, has interesting thematic potential in its tale of an army deserter who secretly returns to his northern-Ontario town only to discover that the overseas man who bought his papers has been awarded a Victoria Cross. Haunted by his cowardice and deception, Snaith is led to suicide by a mysterious half breed with which he previously had a child. Cooke’s other plays are shorter and display surer craft, while continuing to explore characters at odds with their community and conventional behavior; for example, *Gloriana* (1916) reveals, on one hand, the disaster befalling a couple unsuited to the rigors of farm life, and on the other the love they shared: a triumph of the spiritual over the physical. Among the remaining plays in the Hart House volumes, Marian Osborne’s mildly amusing *Point of View*, first performed in 1923, and Louis Alexander Mackay’s *The Freedom of Jean Guichet*, first performed in 1925. In Merrill Denison’s Balm, first performed in
1923, an elderly woman, denied her request to adopt a child, drives the insulting social worker from the house, and in his *The Weather Breeder*, first performed in 1924, a cantankerous old farmer’s reactions to the weather are humorously dramatized. Denison had six plays staged at Hard House. Among his achievements was the publication of the first significant collection of Canadian plays, *The Unheroic North* (1923), whose title derived from his urge to attack ill-founded ideas about Canadian life. The collection *Brothers in Arms, The Weather Breeder*, and *From Their Own Place*, as well his strongest work, *Marsh Hay*.

There were other important writers and plays at Hart House in these years. Following their highly praised local production, the Montreal Community Players traveled to Toronto with Majorie Pickthall’s *The Woodcarver’s Wife* (1920), first performed in 1921. This verse-play is ad deceptively simple romantic melodrama in which a sculptor is unable to complete his half-Indian Pieta because the model, his wife, cannot express deep sorrow—until she is caught betraying him with an Indian lover. But the creative paradox, the poetic imagery, and the jealous husbands’ extreme revenge lead us to other possibilities where we see the way a role shaped female identity, and gain an indirect view of Pickthall herself as an artist confined by her identify as a female Victorian poet. Two short realistic plays by Mazo de la Roche also appeared at Hart House: *The Return of the Emigrant* (1929) first performed in 1928, and *Come True*, first performed and published in
1927. Another one-act, *Low Life*, first performed and published in 1925, was staged by Montreal’s trinity Players. It won first prize in competitions organized by the I.O.D.E. and the Montreal Branch of the Canadian Author’s Association. Her *White Oaks*, first performed and published in 1936, is a conventional three-act drama adapted from her novels. Before the war *White Oaks* ran for over 800 performances in London, Eng; an American production, starring Ethel Barrymore, played in Toronto, on Broadway for 112 performances, and then toured the United States.

Hart House resources and staff, and its pool of Performers and young directors, was also available to those outside its scheduled programming. From the time it was founded by Leonora McMeilly in 1932 until 1941 the Playwrights Studio Group offered at least two annual bills at Hart House. As well as being one of the earlier organization devoted to playwright development, the Group is an indication of the heavy involvement of women in the development of Canadian theatre. Among the Group’s most important dramatist in the development of Canadian theatre, were Rica McLean, Farquharson, Winifred Pilcher, Marjorie Price, Virginia Coyne Knight, Dora Smith Conover, and Lois Reynolds Kerr. Farquharson, editor of the *Canadian Home Journal* and wife of the editor of the *Globe and Mail*, contributed eight plays, as did knight. Kerr had written some twenty-six plays, eight of which were staged by the Group. She won and DE drama
award for *Open Doors* (1930), first performed in 1931, in which the family of an immigrant worker, driven mad by poverty and exploitation on the job, is helped by the philanthropic daughter of a wealthy, exploitative industrialist. But much of Kerr’s work has satirical comedy— in *Among Those Present* (1938), first performed in 1933, for example, she drew on her experience as a society writer for the Globe and Mail to attack social climbers.

The early twentieth century in Europe and the U.S. saw the conjunction of major advances in stage technology with an artistic community searching for new modes of theatrical and the creation of anti-naturalistic, highly theatrical forms— symbolism, futurism, surrealism, Dadaism, constructivism, among others. Canada, too, had its own experimental activity. Hart House had appointed as its first director Roy Mitchell, whose approach to staging, outlined in his inspirational book *Creative Theatre* (1929), placed emphasis on abstract visual images and sounds, and on the relationship between actors and the space in which they moved. Away from Hart House, Herman Voaden whose influences included Richard Wagner, Gordon Craig, the German Expressionists, and Eugene O’Neill-abandoned realism, as in *Wilderness* (1978), first performed in 1931, to write and stage works in a form he called ‘Symphonic expressionism’. His plays—such as the prototypical ‘painter’s ballet’, *Symphony: A drama of Motion and light for a New Theatre* (Written in 1930 with Lowrie Warrener, published in 1982), *Rocks* (an abstraction
of Wilderness), first performed in 1932, and the much later *Murder Pattern* (1975), first performed in 1936 - utilized evocative music, image-laden language, choral presentation, and the sculpting properties of highly directional light of abstract settings and balletic motion. Subject to a mixed reception, often by critics insensitive to their three-dimensional, non-literary values, the plays offer compelling theatricality but a native, under-developed philosophy. Voaden brought his gift for impressive staging to works by other playwrights, such as the well known abstract painter, critic, and businessman Bertram Brooker. Both within (1985), and *drama of mind in revolt*, first performed in 1936, were products at Voaden’s play workshop and drew praise from reviewers who appreciated their allegorical, expression, non-literary values, the plays offer compelling theatricality but a naive, under developed philosophy. Voaden brought his gift for impressive staging to works by other playwrights, such as the well known abstract painter, critic, and businessman Bertram Brooker.

Ideological commitment and experiments with the stage as a weapon in the battle for social, economic, and political reform characterized the left-leaning workers’ Theatre of the 1920s and 1930s. As well as plays from the workers’ movement in other countries, Progressive Arts Clubs across Canada performed their own drama aimed at educating and galvanizing the working class into action. In the process, they employed ant illusionistic technique similar to those of Erwin
Piscator and Bertolt Brecht, and the presentational modes of gait-prop dramaturgy. In Oscar Ryan’s mass recitation, *Unity*, first performed and published in 1993, four broadly drawn capitalists in white spats, silk hats, and canes are defeated by a chorus of workers, Stanley Ryerson’s *War in the East*, first performed and published in 1933, shows Japanese workers uniting in their opposition to Japan’s assault on Manchuria; Dorothy Liversay’s *Joe Derry*, first performed and published in 1933, is a narrated pantomime for children, urging unity and adherence to the principles of the Young communist league. The most famous of the Workers’ Theatre play’s is *Eight Men Speak* (1933), whose second Toronto performance was suppressed by a police ‘Red Squad’, as was the Winnipeg PAC’s staging scheduled for the walker theatre. Written by Oscar Ryan, Cecil-Smith, Frank Love, and Mildred Goldberg, this five-act play culminates in the trial of Guard X, defended by his lawyer Capitalism, for attempting to assassinate Tim Buck, who was in Kingston Penitentiary with seven others as leaders of the outlawed Communist Party of Canada.

After 1936 the workers’ Theatre became somewhat more conventional in its theatrical programming, even to the point where Toronto’s Theatre of Action centered their production of Irwin Shaw’s *Bury the Dead* in the 1937 Dominion Drama Festival. That they were finalists indicates their level of skill; that they did not win has sometimes been seen as an indication of their non-Establishment
status. For the Festival-another development of the 1930s with a major impact on
Canadian drama—was establishment: evening gowns, tails, and high society. In
1932 Governor General Bess borough-responding to his own love of drama, as
well as to the enormous growth in Little Theatres, and repeated calls for a national
theatre-drew together a small group of interested individuals, including Vincent
Massey, to develop is plans for a national dramatic competition, not unlike the Earl
Grey competitions in several respects but more ambitious. The festival was
renamed Theatre Canada in 1970 and ceased operations in 1978. The DDF
succeeded in giving a national shape to amateur theatre (more to English than
French), establishing overall standards (British, and inconsistently maintained),
and providing opportunities for developing craft at the amateur level.

The Canadian Radio Broadcasting Commission, founded in 1932—it became
the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation in 1936—also nurtured the development of
Canadian drama. In its first thirty years the CBC produced some 3,000 original
Canadian dramas; because they were mostly in short time slots, the one-act play-
which was also so important to the Little Theatre movement and to the time-limits
of the Dominion Drama Festival competitions—was the dominant form for nearly
fifty years. Early Radio drama, broadcast from 1925 by the Canadian National
Railway Radio Department, can be sampled in Henry Hudson and Other Plays
(1931), which contains six of Merrill Denison’s two-dozen scripts on Canadian
History developed with produced Tyrone Guthrie for ‘The Romance of Canada’ series.

As for stage plays of the 1930s, the DDF newsletter, Curtain Call, regularly printed short texts, such as Elsie Park Gowan’s The Royal Touch, first performed and published in 1935, an often-staged ‘Ruritanian Fable’ centered on a princess and other young people searching for values in life. As well, Samuel French Ltd. launched its Canadian Playwrights Series in the mid-thirties, offering a variety of one-acts. God Caesar, first performed and published in 1935, is a DDF Best Canadian Play winner by Marjorie Price in which Cleopatra tempts Caesar while Calpurnia’s slave, disguised as a statue, watches. Lois Reynolds Kerr’s Nellie McNabb (1937), first staged by the Playwrights’ Studio group in 1934, is a society comedy that earned over $1,100 in royalties from more than one hundred different productions, But Nellie McNabb was edged out of a 1936 Best Canadian play Ward by Eric Harris’ realistic Twenty Five Cents, first performed and published in 1936, which illustrates the demoralizing effect of the Depression on a working-class family. Twenty Five Cents was also printed by French in Margaret Mayo raga’s Martha Allan, director of the Montreal Repertory Theatre, is in anti-war play influenced by shows Heart Break House. Less serious fare, The Lampshade (1935), first performed in 1925, is an English murder mystery by W.S. Mine, a teacher whose playing was encouraged by Bertram Forsyth, director Hart House,
where The Lampshade was premiered. Lillian Beynon Thomas’s amusing and popular light comedy Jim Barber’s *Spite Fence* (1936), first performed by the Winnipeg Little Theatre in 1933, and is about two neighbors feuding over a fence. Finally, *French’s Plays of the Pacific Coast* (1935) collects Archibald Macdonald Duff Fairburn’s four one-acts dramatizing the collision of white and west-coast native cultures. The famous legend of Rose’s dance with the Devil is engagingly dramatized in the rhyming couplets of E.W. Devin’s *Rose Latulippe* (1935).

Among the master of the one-act was Gwen Phairs Ringwood, who was a cornerstone of western Canada’s extensive amateur theatre and a founder of modern Canadian drama. Inspired by Robert Gard’s and Frederick Koch’s ideas of ‘Folk drama’, Ringwood wrote what is deemed a classic of Canadian theatre, *Still Stands the House* (1938), a moving, realistic portrayal of spiritual starvation on the drought-stricken prairies. Over her fifty-year career Ringwood wrote more than forty plays, ranging from the zany comedy of *Widger’s Way* (1976), the sentimental folk history of *The Rain Make* (1946), and *The Poignant Wisdom of Garage Sale* (1982), to the violence and echoes of Greek tragedy in her Indian trilogy. *Lament for Harmonica* (or Maya) (1975), *The Stranger* (1979) and *The Furies* (1982).

The DDF suspended operation before a competition could be held in 1940, but many individual, little theatres on limited local activity, throughout the Second
World War, remained vehicles for Canadian plays, although often only revenues connected with the war effort. When the war ended, new energy filled the country, bringing changes as those following the First World War. In 1944 the federal government appointed a lishment, and although nothing came immediately of its plan for a $10,000,000 subsidy to the arts, the same thinking informed the Massey Commission in 1951 that led to the formation of the Canada Council in 1957. The DDF in 1947, despite internal problems (in particular shaky finances and francophone disaffection), launched a vigorous new festival. But even before the war, signs of incipient change were discernible in an undercurrent of dissatisfaction with the standards and limitations of the DDF and in attempts at building professional companies, such as the John Holden players. The war experience for some people had included overseas’ exposure to theatre of a type and quality they had not seen before, and that left them wanting more. In addition, a large pool of talent was forming in Canada who sought careers in Professional theatres. The group contained some imports, some new immigrants, Canadians who had been in stock companies during the twenties of thirties, or in the armed-forced’ entertainment corps, radio performers aspiring amateurs, and students from universities. This last body included those trained by Robert Gill at Hart House Theatre, and in programs at the Univ. of Saskatchewan (founded in 1995 – the first in Canada), Queen’s University, the University of Alberta, and The Banff School
of Alberta, and the Banff School of Fine Arts (see Banff Centre) Fruitful drama-
education programs, usually under extension departments, had been pioneered in
the West as early as the mid-thirties by people like the dynamic Elizabeth Sterling
Hynes, who greatly influenced the career of Gwen Ringwood.

Within eight years of the war’s end, over two-dozen theatre companies
(most of them short-lived) were established across the country with full
professional status or clearly professional aims. Among them were the London
Theatre company in St. John’s, the Montreal Repertory Theatre, Ottawa’s
Canadian Repertory Theatre, the International Players, which ran season in
Kingston and Toronto, The New play society, The Jupiter and Crest Theatres in
Toronto, Calgary’s Workshop, The Western Stage Society, and Sydney Risk’s
Everyman Theatre in Vancouver. There were, as well, numerous summer stock
companies, such as The Straw Hat Players, The Red Barn Theatre, Bare Manor
Theatre, and The Montreal Mountain Playhouse. The Canadian Players, a winter
troupe, grew out of the Stratford Festival, the climax of this development.

Many of these companies, operating on a shoestring and mounting a
different play every week, felt unable to risk untried Canadian fare or the time to
develop it. But there were exceptions, such as the Everyman Theatre, which is
1947 at toured Elsie Park Gowan’s *The Last Caveman* (1987), a three-act comedy
termed ‘a please for international order’. It dialogue is sometimes weak and its
characters too thin to support her serious themes, but the plot deftly interweaves post-war humanitarianism with personal animosities and economic opportunism. Dora Mavor Moore’s New Play Society, along with its bills of important international drama, ran theatre school and staged forty seven Canadian plays between 1946 and 1956, including works by Morley Callaghan, Mazo de la Roche, and Lister Sinclair. The most significant was Reil, first produced in 1950, which audiences found moving and provocative despite its weakness, highlighted the possibility in professional theatres of plays based on Canadian history. It also showed a degree of invocation: three year before Stratford’s thrust stage, this episodic drama, Coulter explains, was ‘designed for presentation in the Elizabethan manner: a continuous flow of scenes on a bare stage.

The dominant playwright of the late forties and fifties was Robertson Daves, whose award-winning one-acts, such as Overlaid (1948) and Eros of Breakfast (1949), were popular with amateur theatres. The changes in Canadian theatre meant that Davies, like others, had access to professional stages: for instance, Fortune, My Foe (1949) was first produced by the international players and, the following season, opened the Peterborough staged another of his full-length plays, At my Heart’s Core (1950), as did the Canadian Repertory Theatre. Influenced partly by the potential in this professional environment, such as Donald Davis’s strong acting at the Crest where A Jig for the Gypsy (1954) and Hunting Stuart
(1972) premiered, Davies developed the satirical attacks on philistine Canada, so eloquently stated in his early short palsy, in the direction of the complex mythical and archetypal structures characteristic of his later novel. These plays include *General confession* (1972), *Love and Libel* (1981), *Question Time* (1975), and *Pontiac and the Green Man*, staged in 1977 at the University of Toronto.

The emergence of an indigenous professional theatre coincided with the ‘golden age’ of radio drama in the 1940s, and with the birth of television drama. Among the works of dramatists note for their radio or television plays are a number that were produced in the theatre of have been otherwise influential in the development of Canadian drama. Len Peterson’s one-act *Burlap Bags* (1972), performed on radio, television between the expressionism of the 1930s and post-war existentialism. Relieving the diary of a tramp driven to suicide, its characters place burlap bags over their heads illustrating the individual’s isolation in an absurd and insensitive world. Peterson went on to write *The Great Hunger* (1967), *Almighty Voice* (1974), and *Women in the Attic* (1972), all of which have had stage productions. The Jupiter Theatre produced two plays by the prolific radio dramatists *Lister Sinclair: Socrates* (in 1952) and *The Blood is Strong* (in 1956), the latter about the different degrees of adaptation to Cape Breton life among three generation of a Scottish immigrant family. Applauded at the time, they appear talky and dull. *The Devil’s Instrument* (1973) was also successful on radio but is
underdeveloped as a serious stage drama about a prairie youth rebelling against his religion. *The Black Bonspiel of Wullie MacCrimmon* (1965) was popular with summer theatres, offers light humor in a curling match between Wullie and the devil. *Back to Beulah* (1982), a more recent stage play, won a Chalmers Award in 1976, but is only a sitcom lifted by Mitchell’s gift for creating idiosyncratic characters. The Poet Earle Birney, who employed radio’s power with words and its willingness to tackle controversial topics when he wrote *The Damnation of Vancouver* (published as *The Trial of a City*, 1952), adapted his clever dramatic poem for the theatre, but his uncompromising criticism of humankind’s destruction of the natural environment kept the play from being given anything more than several staged readings. Radio producer John Reeves hit out at Canadian Puritanism in *A Beach of Strangers* (1961), a verse-drama in the manner of Dylan Thomas’s *Under Milkwood*. Among the most-adapted plays in Patricia Joudry’s popular *Teach Me How to Cry*, a sentimental and psychologically naïve tale of two adolescents fighting their parents and society for freedom to leave. First produced on Radio (1953), followed by television (1953), it was staged professionally in New York (1955), won a DDF Best Play award (1956), and was re-titled *Noon Has No Shadows* or London’s West End, then *The Restless Years* as a movie. Joudry’s more recent plays have not been well received. George RYGA’s *Hard-
*hitting Short Play Indian* (1962), produced first on television, and then on radio and the stage, marked the beginning of his important career as a playwright.

The founding of the Manitoba Theatre Centre in 1958—with us main stage, ware-house, and audience-development programs-introduced which is loosely called the ‘regional’ theatre movement. By the end of the sixties most urban centers had large professional houses, usually with resident companies but rarely with all three parts of the MTC mandate. Assisted by the Canada Council, as well as by local finances, they were better funded and better equipped than the early fifties;’ ventures. As a result, like the Stratford festival, they provided stability, helped raise production standards, employed a large number of professionals, and came to be seen as the established theatres.

One contrast to these hierarchically structured institutions, with their bills dominated by mainstream international title, was George Luscombe’s politically committed Toronto Workshop Productions. Begun in 1959, TWP staged plays by writers such as Garcia Lorca and Luigi Pirandello in the basement of a printers shop in Toronto’s industrial west end. They also produced Canadian writers, such as Len Peterson (*Burlap Bags*), and developed original plays using the company improvisational method of England’s Joan Littlewoods, with whom Luscombe had worked. Over the years TWP had contributed to the Canadian canon many highly entertaining, often provocative documentary dramas, such as *Hey, Rube!* The
company’s first group creation, staged in 1961: *Chicago’70*, dealing with the Chicago Seven trial; *Mr. Bones* (in 1969) about racial tensions; and *Ten Lost Years* (in 1974), developed by Luscombe and Jack Winter from Barry Bradfoot’s oral history of the Depression. The collaborative method, the documentary approach, and the use of techniques that foregrounded the performance mode, made TWP important not only in itself, but as a herald of things to come in Canadian theatre. Canada’s *Centennial* (1967) gave rise to increased support for things Canadian, including the developing theatre. Centennial Year itself was highlighted by the appearance of four important plays focused on Canadian life. The Manitoba Theatre Centre staged *Ann Henry’s Lulu Street*, which dramatizes events in a boarding house during Winnipeg’s 1919 General Strike. John Herbert’s *Fortune and Men’s Eyes* had its first full production – but, ironically, in New York. It had received a workshop staging at the Stratford Festival in 1965, but its graphic depiction of the violent, homosexual, and exploitative world of Canadian prisons, which implied that the outside world was no better, was judged inappropriate for the Festival’s regular program. In 1967, however, the Festival’s Avon Theatre bill included *Colours in the Dark*, the first of James Reaney’s plays to gain a major professional production. In *The Killdeer* (1962), *The Easter Egg* (1972), and *Listen to the Wind* (1972), which were staged by amateur groups, Reaney had created symbolic reflections of the way he perceived creativity being inhibited by
insensitive puritanical forces. He had shaped his expression in accessible, though highly symbolic melodramatic plots that pitted good against evil in a battle for the safety of an innocent victim. *Colours* is a less conventional play, an arrangement of scenes tied together by the thematic relationships among various physical objects, colours, poems and archetypal characters associated with a young boy growing up in rural Ontario. Audiences found it enjoyable but baffling.

The greatest impact in Centennial Year came from George Ryga *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe* in an outstanding Vancouver Playhouse production. This episodic drama takes the form of a trial of an Indian woman whose encounter with white urban society has separated her from native ways and forced her into crime and prostitution. Eventually, she is raped, then murdered. Ryga’s multimedia *Grass and Wild Strawberries* (1971) was a second popular success at the Vancouver Playhouse. But when the commissioned *Captives of the Faceless Drummer* (1971) was being worked on, various members of the playhouse Boards were troubled by its alleged allusions to the 1970 FLQ hostage-taking. They refused to stage the play, which was presented instead at the Vancouver Art Gallery in 1971. Nearly two decades passed, during which Captives, the enormously popular Rita Joe, and Ryga’s subsequent plays were produced in many theatres, before the Playhouse mounted its next Ryga work, a lavish first *Production* (1987) of Paracclsus. It received scathing notices.
By the late sixties a generation of young people were seeking not only professional careers in the theatre, but their own drama, with only a couple of exceptions—such as Regina’s Globe and Montreal’s Centaur-regional theatres, as well as the Stratford and Shaw Festivals, had built a reputation for offering few opportunities to Canadian plays, and for leaving Canadians out of major Posts. With this as a spur, and with the international Alternate theatre movement and counter-culture as influences, these young people founded their own theatres all across Canada, often funded by Local Initiative or Opportunities for Youth grants. They ranged from writers’ development groups, such as Vancouver’s New Play Centre founded in 1970, through collectives, to more traditionally structures theatres; their productions ranged from workshops to full stage presentations of finished scripts. In almost all cases these theatres had a strong commitment to Canadian plays, with the result that Canadian drama flourished as never before. Its extent promoted the founding in 1972 of the Playwrights Co-Op. Now Playwrights Union of Canada, with a mandate to publish and distribute Canadian scripts.

One of the dominant dramatic modes in this explosion was a neo-naturalistic, detailed realism that explored the psychology of human action seen within the influences of specific Canadian environments. William Fruet’s Wedding in White (1973), set in a small prairie town near the end of the Second World War,
and is close to the quintessential neo-naturalistic play, showing a heritage of repressive and hypocritical male-centered Puritanism preying on a young victim’s innate simple-mindedness. Frue’s play for eight weeks at Toronto’s Poor Alex Theatre in 1972, and was later made into a film starring Donald Pleasance and Carol Kane. An even larger impact was registered by David Freeman’s Creeps (1972), first in a factory theatre lab workshop staging in Feb. 1971, then in a revised version as the opening play at Tarragon Theatre in Oct. 1971. Essentially a realistic play with surrealist interjections, Creeps offers a searing, but at times hilarious look at life for a group of handicapped people congregated in the washroom of their sheltered workshop. Freeman’s second play, Battering Ram (1972), presents the sexual exploitation of a handicapped young man by a mother and her daughter, who are in turn exploited by him. But neither Freeman’s You’re Gonna Be Alright, Jamic Boy (1974), revealing the empty values of a family addicted to television, Nor Flytrap (1976), live up to his two earlier works Leaving Home (1972), David French’s compassionate humorous but lacerating portrayal of psychological tensions in a Newfoundland family, the Mercers, living in Toronto, was the second hit to Tarragon Theatre’s first seasons when the well-crafted of The Fields, Lately (1973), also about the Mereer family, was a second-season Tarragon success, French’s playwriting career, which has placed high month the most important of Canada’s playwrights, was firmly established. Pool-room realism in
the undistinguished *One Crack Out* (1975) preceded *Jitter* (1980), a popular and witty comedy satirizing Canadian theatre, and, thought that, Canadian foibles in general. French’s third play about the Mereer family, *Salt-Water Moon* (1985), staged at Taragon in 1984, shows further refinement in his substantial skill, and his realism enhanced by a haunting lyricism, evident but not developed in the early plays, that captures profound, bitter-sweet moments in the lives of his characters. A fourth Mereer play, 1949, was produced in the fall of 1988.

In various forms, realism has remained prevalent since its early-1970s flourishing. The flamboyance of actor John Barrymore is matched by Ned Sheldon’s reserve as the two face Ned’s imminent death in Sheldon Rosen’s *Ned and Jack* (1979), a Stratford Festival production in 1979. *The Working Man* (1976), *The Jones Boy* (1978), and *Something Red* (1980) are Tom Walmsley’s graphic depictions of an anarchic subculture that expresses itself sensationally through drugs, sex and violence. In *Cold Comfort* (1981), Jim Garrard infuses the gothic tale of a travelling salesman and the closely guarded daughter of prairie garage mechanic with an oblique humor that points up themes of spiritual, sexual, and cultural starvation. *Canadian Gothic* (1977) is the eponymous subject of Joanna Glass’ early one-act play, which dramatizes the haunting memories of a young prairie woman, her mother, and her father, Glass is also the author and *Artichoke* (1979), whose first staging (New York, 1975) starred Colleen Dewhurst,
and of Play Memory (1987), winner of a 1984 Tony Award. There is a hint of prairie gothic also in Betty Lambert’s Jenny’s Story (1981), which dramatizes an incident concerning sterilization for the ‘unfit’ without the individual’s consent. Through the clash between an Amish youth and his father, Anne Ghislett’s Quiet in the Land (1983) presents the larger conflicts existing within the need for personal freedom, the will to seek change, and the adherence to wise tradition. The Marxist Realism sees the social and physical environments of David Fennario’s work. On the Job (1976) and Nothing to lose (1977)—first staged at the Centaur theatre in 1975 and 1976 respectively—are short, tough, but comic plays that shows factory employees attempting to gain some control over their working conditions. Balcon Viele (1980) was also staged by the Centaur in a gritty, funny production that won wide acclaim. In it Fennario again demonstrates upper-class exploitation of the working poor who are united at the end to cope with a fire razing their tenement. One of Balconville’s distinguishing qualities is the vital, expressive bilingual dialogue spoken by the francophone and Anglophone characters. Following Balconville’s success in, what he might call bourgeois theatres, Fennario wrote Moving, a Centaur premiere in 1984, notable for the development of the positive role played by the women in 1985, shows a major transition to the presentational techniques of a git-prop theatre. It reconstructs the history of the
Black Rock area and attempts to effect social change by directly involving theatre in a working class community.

John Murrell’s realism has other dimensions, as is evident in *Farther West* (1985), about a prostitute pursued ever-westward on the Canadian frontier by a morally obsessive lover. In his *New World* (1985), the Chekhovian comedy is overburdened by obvious metaphors derived from the relationships of several member of a WASP family to the new and old-worlds—Canada, California and England. In the simpler and widely produced *Waiting for the Parade* (1980) episodes in the lives of five women in Calgary during the Second World War juxtapose the abstract impact of the distant war against the immediacy of racial and moral prejudice as well as fatal illness in their midst. *Memoir* (1978) gives us the layered realities of various moments in Sarah Bernhardt’s colorful life, which are re-enacted by the aged Bernhardt herself and her secretary Pitou.

Documentary realism was central to one of the post-sixties’ other major forms. Documentary drama, in which the performance mode itself was foregrounded, and the dramatic action was authenticated by references to various about the subject, such as court transcripts, newspaper accounts, photographs, and other historical artifacts. Many of these docu-dramas were created by the improvisational work of collective theatre companies, whose plays were characterized by topicality, polemicism, a vignette structure involving rapid changes of time and
place, and an inventive, presentational performance style with actors taking multiple roles. Toronto’s theatre Passes Muraille under Paul Thompson’s direction became synonymous with documentary drama and Collective Creation. Among Passe, Muraille under Paul Thompson’s direction Creation important plays like *The Farm Show* (1976), developed in 1972 out of the company’s research in the faring community around Clinto, Ontario. In 1975 Thompson took his troupe to Saskatchewan where they developed *The West Show* (1982), which dramatizes images and myths of prairie life. Influenced by Thompson’s approach, 25th Street Theatre in Saskatoon gained local as well as national attention with *Paper Wheat* (1977), about homesteading and the Co-operative and Wheat Pool movement on the Prairies. In Newfoundland the Mummers Troupe, founded by Chris Brookes, created issue-oriented plays, such as *The Club Seals, Don’t They*, which in 1978 defended the local sealing industry. Sometimes the collective documentary involved a writer, as in the case of *Far as the Eye can See* (1977), scripted by the novelist Rudy Weibe with Theatre Passes Muraille. Here the collaboration of a writer gave the play a more complex structure: *Far as the Eye can See* juxtaposes a contemporary farmers’ protest against strip-mining on their land with Alberta history set-against a background chorus provided by Princess Louise, Crowfood, and William Abe hart-the ‘Regal Dead’. Rick Salutin collaborated with Theatre Passe Muraille on 1837: *The Farmers’ Revolt* (1975), the now-famous play about
the Mackenzie Rebellin. *Les Canadiens* (1977), produced in two versions in 1977, shows documentary and collective characteristics, but was scripted in a traditional manner by Salutin, with an ‘assist from Ken Dryden’, the Canadians’ goalie.

*Medicare!* (1982) which deals with the advent of socialized medicine in Saskatchewan, and *Black Powder* (1982), about the Estevan workers’ riot in 1931, are two of Canada’s purest documentary dramas. But while they possess traits typical of collective creations, they were written by Rex Deverell-who had been ‘editor-in-chief for the collective No. 1 Hart, an ‘investigative documentary’ about the grain industry staged in Regina by Ken Kramer’s Globe Theatre in 1975- as the Globe playwrights-in-residence. Deverell also wrote *Boiler Room Suite* (1978), produced by the Globe in 1977, a sensitive, lightly humorous drama about a pair of winos and the caretaker of a derelict building. When Carol Bolt was a young writer in Regina she was commissioned by the Globe to write a play. The result was *Next Year Country*, a documentary satire about a supposed Communist conspiracy, the Regina riot, ‘On to Ottawa’ match. Staged by the Globe in 1971, it was reworked by the Theatre Passe Muraille collective and produced in 1972 as *Buffalo Jump* (1972) in Toronto. Since then, Bolt has been a prolific dramatis, particularly for radio and television (as well as a strong presence in the establishment of rights for the Canadian playwright). Among her works for the stage is *Gabe* (1973), in which a hard-living young Metis searches for the spirit of Louis Riel, and *Red Emma*...
(1974), an episodic portrait of the anarchist, proto-feminist Emma Goldman. *One Night Stand* (1977) is a murder-thriller whose sensational melodrama dominates serious, although superficial, insights about isolation, loneliness, and high-rise living. Her more recent *Escape Entertainment* (1982) is a lightweight satire on Canadian culture; it was poorly received when staged by Tarragon in 1981.

As John Coulter’s Riel foretold, Canadian individuals and events became the focus for body of conventional history plays after the late sixties. *Charbonneau & Le Chef* (1968) by John Thomas McDonough in an unjustifiably neglected drama centered on the battle against Maurice Duplessis! And his government by the strikers of Asbestos, led by Archbishop Charbonneau. Michael Cook revised several moments from early Canadian history, in a somewhat Brehtian way, to comment on a present-day social and political injustices. For all their richness of theme and language, however, the dramatic effectiveness of *Color the Flesh* and *Color of Dust* (1972) and *The Gayden Chronicles* (1977) is muted by their diffuse focus. Cook’s less historically oriented plays-including *The Head, Guts and Sound Bone Dance* (1974) and *Jacob’s Wake* (1975) - offer a philosophical view of contemporary Newfoundland life. Other Canadian history plays that deserve mention include James Nichol’s Sainte-Marie among the *Hurons* (1977), Ron Chudley’s *After Abraham* (1978), and Alden Owlns and Walter Learning’s *The Dollar Woman* (1981).
In the late-sixties and seventies an impulse to document, re-interpret, theatricalize and often mythologize historical and contemporary Canadian reality found an imaginative correlative in James Reaney’s idiosyncratic genius. His mythopoeia creativity flourished in conjunction with the innovative collective work of the NDWT Company under director Keith Turnbull, particularly in the Donnellys (*Sticks and Stones*, 1974); *St Nicholas Hotel*, 1976; *Handcuffs*, (1977), one of Canada’s foremost dramas. The trilogy became a focal-point for the new Canadian drama. Offering a hitherto unrealized complexity of theatrical experience, the trilogy is driven by the dramatic inevitability of the catastrophe befalling the Donnellys as well as the complicated tensions among historical, mythical, and immediate stage realities, and among the resonant images found in the dialogue and its characters, stage action, setting, and props.

Just as documentary drama, collective creation, and Reaney’s plays were challenges to established Canadian theatre and its conventional dramas so the experimental work of many other playwrights and companies in the sixties and seventies extended the boundaries of Canadian drama. In Edmonton, award-winning poet Wilfred Watson created a drama of ‘radical absurdity’, which he felt was demanded by the multi-consciousness of the post-modern world. In Vancouver between 1966 and 1972, John Jullani’s *Savage God* staged a variety of unconventional theatrical events, such as *A Celebration* (7 Jan.1970), a ritualistic
happening at the Vancouver Art Gallery that lively underground activity of the time, a group of UBC graduate, including John Gray and Larry Lillo, founded Tamahouse Theatre as Theatre workshop in 1971. They used a collective model in staging challenging contemporary works, such as Dracula II (Manchester’s Stable Theatre, 1971) or adaptations of classics, such as Jeremy Long’s *Artaudian Medea* (1973). They also produced original Canadian script –for example, Jeremy Long’s *The Final Performance of Vaslav Nijinsky* (in 1972)- and developed a number of their own collective pieces, including *Vertical Dreams* (1979), an imaginative, dramas-therapy performance based on the dreams and memories of the cast members.

The influential Tamahouse works remain unpublished, as to do the stage versions of Michael Ondaatje’s *The Collected works of Billy the Kid* (1970), which has been adapted (sometime collectively, sometimes by Ondaatje himself) at least twenty-one ties. In each case the brilliant poetic narrative was given a dramatic form the juxtaposed short scenes in evocative prose and verse; the staged results (some more successful than others) were an ironic and imagistic theatre that urged viewers to take part in the creation of both mythical and realistic impressions of Billy and to question the nature of each, as well as the process by which they were formed. Probably less influence, yet important, have been the works of several other inventive playwrights. Lawrence Russell brought engaging surrealistic
techniques to the theatre in Penetration (1972), first staged in at the Univ. of Victoria (Dec. 1969), and The Mystery of the Pig Killer’s Daughter (1975), a gothic mystery first staged at the Toronto Free Theatre (Nov. 1975), also at Toronto Free (Oct. 1973) Michael Hollingsworth’s Clear Light (1973) outraged many audience members and the Toronto Morality Squad with a crude, comic exaggeration of obscene acts. More recently, his wild satirical bent has been evident in The History of the Village of Small Huts, and in annual productions with Video Cabaret and Theatre Passe Muraille, which irreverently revise Canadian history in chronological segments. Hrant Alianak appears now to have stopped writing for live stage, but in the early-and mid-seventies he created unconventional, if at times ephemeral, theatre-pieces, such as Mathematics (1973) – 1990 seconds without dialogue, during which six groups of carefully selected objects are thrown one-by-one onto the stage. Ken Gass- the author of a cartoon-like, anti-fascists Hurrah for Johnny Canuck! (1975), and founder of Factory Theatre Lab-raised controversy with The Boy Bishop (1976), a satirical extravaganza set in New France where a homosexual street-urchin is installed as Bishop of after the fashion of the Feast of Fools, until he proves as corrupt as Bishop Laval and the order the boy displaced. Gass’s more tightly crafted Winter Offensive (1978) has Adolf Eichmann’s wife hosting a violent and sexually grotesque Christmas party for Hitler and other Nazi officials as bomb drops around
them. Hitler and Ev also indulge in…and sexual and power fantasies in Bryan Wade’s *Blitzkrieg* (1974). Larry Feinberg’s early plays show an exuberant imagination expressing a break vision of life. The macabre fantasy of *Hope* (1972) includes a young man who finds psychological and sexual comfort in bed with his dog, and a croquet game in which a mallet explodes blowing a player’s head into mousse. *Eve* (1977), Feinberg’s adaptation of Constance Beresford-Howe’s novel *The Book of Eve*, provided a strong role for Jessica Tandy at the Stratford Festival (July 1976), and has been produced internationally. His version of Euripides’ *Medeas* (1978) proved oversimplified and dull.

Among the forces of change in English-Canadian drama has been productions of works by francophone playwrights and companies (usually) in translation. As early as May 1950, an English-language version of Gratien Gelina’s TIT COQ- and later of Bousille and the Just (Bousille et les justes) and *Yesterday the Children Were Dancing* (Hier, Les Enfants Dansaient)- presented to English-speaking audiences a hard-hitting drama that was a realistic, personal, and metaphorical reflection of Quebec identity. All three plays introduced to Anglophones, the presence of a dynamic francophone theatre and of firmly-established professional playwrights. Gelina’s influence was soon left at a fundamental level when his plays were included in Canadian drama and literature courses. This type of influence was continued with the publication in 1972 of
English translation of three exceptional French-Canadian plays: Robert Gurik’s The Hanged Man (Le Pendu), Marcel Dube’s The White Geese (Auretours Des Oies Blanches), and Guy Dufresne’s The Cry of the Whippoorwill (Le Cride L’engoulevent). But without question, the greatest impact on English-Canada has been made by Michel Tremblay, who’s Forever Yours, Marie-Lou (A Tol, Pour Toujours, Ta Marie-Lou) were staged in English by Tarragon Theatre in Nov. 1972. Since then, English translations of almost all of his plays have been widely produced-initially at Tarragon-and published. Tremblay has brought to English-Canada a multi-layered poetic drama, rich in imagery and centered on volatile issues and powerful emotions. His experiments with form and his use of musical structures, interwoven aria-like monologues, and choruses are among the range of exciting possibilities he has shown to English-Canadian playwrights.

The Pluralism of Contemporary Canadian Drama, following a period of re-thinking in Canadian theatres from the mid-to late-seventies-engendered to some extent by funding cut-backs, external pressure toward economic self-sufficiency, and by a natural pause for artists to regenerate their creative imaginations-theatre has moved into the late 1980s with renewed vigor, confidence, and immense variety. If any notable aspect has emerged as characteristic of recent years, it is the pluralism of a theatre that offers many types of drama and company has emerged as characteristic of recent years, it is the pluralism of a theatre that offers many
types of drama and company structures, from the experimental to the staid and conventional, from interventionist theatre (Catalyst’s *Stand Up for You Rights*, for example) to dinner theatre to large-scale musicals, from performance art of improvisational comedy clubs, such as Theatre-Sports. But more than any time since the late nineteenth century, commercial viability has become a major consideration, and fostered a tendency in established theatre to avoid taking chances.

Within that framework, several conventional plays have become notable for their commercial success. Peter Colley’s *I’ll Be Back before Midnight* (1974), a rural-Canadian murder-mystery, has had numerous productions since it premiered at the Blyth Festival in July 1979. Equally popular is Allan Stratton’s situation comedy *Nurse Jan Goes to Hawaii* (1981). Stratton has employed his comic gifts in other more insightful plays such as the deceptively simple *Rexy!* (1981) centered on the complex personality of Prime Minister Mackenzie King. Probably leading the list of money-earners are Tom Woods’ Farcical parody, *B-Movie: The Play* (first staged in Edmonton, 1986), which has had lengthy runs in Toronto, and Sherman Snukal’s moralistic sex comedy, *Talking Dirty* (1982). Plays such as these have demonstrated to Canadian dramatist the heretofore unimaginined possibility of making a substantial living from their craft.
Interestingly, one of the most financially successful Canadian plays, John Krizanc’s *Tamara*, is also among the most deconstructive of traditional dramatic forms. First staged in 1981, the production set-up of *Tamara* allows individual audience members to create their own plays, so to speak, by choosing a character to follow throughout the Fascist-guarded estate of Italian poet Gabriele D’Annunzio. No individual, however, sees all the political and amorous intrigues occurring simultaneously in the many rooms, which results in a fragmented, incomplete experience emphasizing how political oppression and sensual obsession destroy the possibility of artistic retain. Krizanc’s later and more traditional *Prague* (1987), which has the intricacy of Tom Stoppard’s drama, is more successful in communicating to a general audience his views on the relationship between politics and creativity.

As ‘environmental’ theatre, *Tamara* looks back to other quite unconventional plays, such as the previously mentioned *A Celebration* by John Juliani. Other earlier examples include Theatre Passe Muraille’s *Adventures of an Immigrant* (1974), which was presented in several community venues and on one occasion on a Toronto streetcar. More recently- among a range of environmental pieces that included the work of Quebec’s *Carbone 14* and *Theatre Repere-David* Fennario had the audience travel by bicycles to the various locations in his Joe Beef on Bieks.
The many, ‘one-person shows’ that occurred in the seventies and continued into the eighties—which in their very nature were a challenge to traditional dramatic action—were as much a response to economic rationalization, which induced a move to smaller cast shows, as to the virtuosity of particular performers or to a limited, idiosyncratic skill in others. Inventive playwrights, performers have been often reacted to these conditions (eschewing such old devices as biographical chronology and dialogue by telephone) by developing new sources of dramatic tension for the solo performer. New found land’s Cathy Jones created the hilariously satirical Wedding in *Texas* (1989) by bringing together a number of her Codco sketches with new material, such as the ‘filmeo’ Outport Leshians, which follows Lindy Anna Jones’ trip across America to attend her lesbian friend’s wedding. Jan Kudelka’s script for *Circus Gothic* (1980, first staged in Mar. 1979) is like a long dramatic poem about a clown’ such as Kudelka herself, to give it three dimensionality. *Herringbone* (1976), by Tom Cone, also the author of *Stargazing* (1978), requires vaudeville skills for the role of a ten-year-old whose parents pass him off as a thirty-five-year-old performing midget. Linda Griffiths’ clever playing of all three characters—Prime Minster Pierre Trudeau, Margaret Trudeau, and journalist—adds layered reality and virtuosity to the topical interest of *Maggie and Pierre* (1980). Griffiths’ sizeable talent as a playwright is even more evident in *Jessica: A Transformation* (1987), a dense allegory that mixes everyday
people with ancestral animal spirits in a young Indian woman’s journey of
discovery. Ken Mitchell’s *Gone the Burning sun* (1985) presents an anguished,
boisterous, and at times tender Norman Bethune in a carefully crafted, detailed
allegory about a search for truth, beauty, and health, both physical and spiritual, for
himself and as many people as possible. Just as it may be a misnomer to term gone
the Burning Sun a one-person show—since it employs throughout a musician whose
oriental music and exquisite stillness are a powerful source of dramatic tension—
*Billy Bishop Goes to War* (1981) uses a pianist, primarily an accompanist for its
any songs, whose presence similarly sets up dramatic tension. One of the most
popular of Canadian plays; it explores the lethal nature of Bishop’s achievements
in the context of colonial Canada’s perceived ties with Britain. These works might
bear comparison with two-person cabaret scripts, such as Morris Panych’s and Ken
MacDonald’s post nuclear *Last Call* (1983, first staged in Feb. 1982)

The francophone presence on the English-Canadian stage has also been
evident in the one person show: for example, Antonine Maillet’s *La Sagouine*,
incomparably performed by Viola Leger; and Marshal Button Lucine: *A Labour of
Love in Two Acts* (1988, first staged by Contact Theatre, Mar. 1986 provides
similar worldly wisdom in the person of an Acadian paper mill worker, developed
from a sketch by Comedy Asylum’s Maritime Mixed Grill (Feb. 1984). The
brilliant Albert Millaire revealed the fantastic reality of Roch Carrier’s *The
"Celestial Bicycle" (la Celeste bicyclette) (stage on tour in English in 1992), where
an actor, betrayed by his wife and committed to an asylum, tells us of his travels
through the sky on his bicycle.

In addition to the interplay of Anglophone and francophone worlds, English-
Canadian theatre during the past two decades has seen an increase in drama dealing
with minority cultures. Ryga’s *Indian* and *Rita Joe*, for example, are joined by
works such as Len Peterson’s *Almighty Voice* (1974), Linda Griffiths’ *Jessica* (all
of which concern native Indians), and Herschel Hardin’s *Esker Mike and His Wife,
Agiluk* (1969). Hardin’s episodic play, centered on Agiluk, an Inuk driven to kill
two of her children, shows the destruction of northern life by southern insensitivity
to another culture. In contrast to the playwrights just mentioned, who are not from
the minority peoples they have written about, a number of dramatists, fostered to a
degree by the country’s increased attention to its multicultural nature, have
appeared on the scene addressing issues from inside their respective cultures. *A
Little Sometimes to Ease the Pain* (1981, first staged Nov. 1980), By Rene Aloma,
dramatizes the psychological and political ties experienced by a young Cuban born
playwright returned home for a week from Canada, implicitly comparing Canadian
and Cuban life. Rick Shiome uses a second-generation Japanese-Canadian private
eye in *Yellow Fever* (1984) to parody the detective story and draw attention to
racism at the same time. *Yellow Fever* opened in San Francisco (Mar. 1982), and

Recent years have also witnessed the continuing move away from dramatic forms that depend on Aristotelian linear plots and cause-and-effect psychological realism. These have been replaced by, or a re-shaped into, forms that de-emphasize textuality and present experience as episodic and imagistic. They tend to emphasize theatre as process and affirm its instructiveness, taking account of the multiple dramatic tensions created by the audience’s presence in the performing space, the performed reality itself (that evoked under the ‘willing suspension of disbelief’), and the reality of theatre as art/artifice. One influence in this direction has been Canadians’ increased exposure to contemporary theatre Festival of the
Americas, Toronto’s Du Maurier World Stage Showcase and Quebec City’s Quinzaine international due theatre. Edmonton’s Fringe Festival and, in Toronto, Factory Theatre’s ‘Brave New Works’, Night wood Theatre’s Festival of women writers (Groundswell’), and the ‘Rhubarb’ festival from Buddies in Bad Times, a gay theatre, have contributed energy and venues for experiment. Again, francophone artists have been exemplary, with such electric productions as Le Rail (first seen in English Canada in 1986) by Carbone 14, an almost ‘text-less’ production inspired by D.M. Thomas’s *The White Hotel*. Following what director Gilles Maheu calls ‘abstract theatre’, Le Rail presents riveting images of beauty, sexuality, violence, and terror, which emerge from a stage fog, ‘without the emerge from a stage fog, ‘without the coherence of a connected story or even characters with personalities,’ to suggest what lies behind reality. *La Trilogie des dragons* (*The Dragons’ Trilogy*, first seen in English Canada in 1986) by Robert Lepage’s Theatre Repere is equally spectacular and intellectually ambitions. With dialogue in French, English, and Chinese, and settings in Montreal, Toronto, and Vancouver, this imagistic production traces ideas and people associated over time with a plot of land that is now a Montreal parking-lot.

Individual successes of the order of Lepage’s innovative works have not yet appeared in English Canada. *This is for You, Anna* (1985) and *Smoke Damage: a Story of the Witch Hunts* (1985), however, have made a significant impact; the
former, created by Susanne Odette Khuri. Anne-Marie MacDonald (also the author of the witty and complex *Goodnight Desdemona, Good Morning Juliet*), Patricia Nichols, Banuta Rubess, and Maureen White, was developed from a twenty-minute version in 1983 (involving Aida Jordao) and played a range of venues from Factory Theatre to women’s shelters, based on Marianne Bachmeier’s shooting in court of her daughter’s killer. Anna explores various myths and realities concerning violence, women, and revenge. *Smoke Damage*, first staged in Sept. 1983, was scripted by Banuta Rubess in collaboration with Peggy Christopherson, Anne-Marie MacDonald, Mary Marzo, Km Renders, and Maureen White, and treats a group of women’s radicalizing encounter with historic places where witches were burnt, whereas Anna is somber and profoundly emotional, *Smoke Damage* is darkly comic and exhilarating: both unfold in an imagistic fashion, fracturing chronological time and conventional perceptions of reality. Both were mounted with support from Nightwood Theatre and express an enlightened feminist perspective, which, it has been argued, links them with non-linear, non-hierarchical theatre, hence their imagistic mode and collective structure.

They draw attention to the higher profile earned by women dramatists in the past decade, whose way was marked by the work of writers such as Beverley Simons (*Preparing*, 1974) and Carol Bolt (*Red Emma*). Some of the most vital and challenging English-language theatre of the period has been created by women,
who have often consciously broken down traditional dramatic modes. In the *Bible as Told to Karen Ann Quinlan* (stage in 1978), for example, the Hummer Sisters combine the technology of video and rock performance with satirical cabaret. The Clichettes (Janice Haladki, Johanna House-holder, Louise Garfield) – through their lip-synching, which sets up a variable tensions between the image created by the performer and the text-offered a brilliant satire on sexuality in *She Devils of Niagara* (Nov. 1985). English Canada has been important plays in translation from the women’s theatre movement in Quebec; for instance, Jovette Marchessault’s highly imaginative *The Saga of the Wet Hens* (Le Saga Das Poules Mouillees) and Denise Boucher’s controversial *The Fairies Are Thirty* (*Les Fees Ont Soit*).

Eve Loving (1981), like other of Margaret Hollingsworth’s play-such as *The Apple in the Eve* (1977), a radio play given it first live stage presentation in 1983, *Mother Country* (1978), and *Alli Alali Oh* (1979)- is both feminist and much broader, demonstrating her skill at creating lively human characters and scenes loaded with tensions and humor. In *Automatic Pilot* (1980), Erika Ritter demonstrates a rapier-like wit and a perceptive reading of life, but too often, by evoking an easy laugh, avoids probing deeply into the characters and issues she raises. Her later work, *Murder at McQueen*, although not well received in its only production (Nov. 1986), does dig deeper, but distances all with cynicism. Unfortunately Rachel Wyatt’s *Geometry* (1983) was given a weak production
(Tarragon Theatre, Apr. 1983), which turned its brittle comedy into domestic psychological drama. The skilled author of some seventy radio dramas, Wyatt is a master, oblique and slightly fanciful satire.

Sharon Pollock and Judith Thompson are among the six major dramatists of the past decade, which include David French, George Walker, John Murrell, and Michel Tremblay. The versatile Pollock- an artistic director, administrator, and actress, as well as front-ranking playwright- has created a range of plays, including many for television and radio, that explore social, political and metaphysical issues in a variety of dramatic styles. Walsh is episodic, juxtaposing scenes in different modes to dramatize the historical Major Walsh’s anguish over the injustice that his compliance with orders brought on the great Sitting Bull. A side-show atmosphere and brothel setting shape an indictment in The Komagata Maru Incident (1978) of Canada’s racist handling in 1914 of a shipload of Sikh immigrants. Blood Relations (1981), which retells the Lizzie Borden story interweaves different time-periods and layers of reality (an actress playing a character) to dramatize the social and patriarchal oppression of women as well as metaphysical questions about the nature of the self and of identity. Pollock draws more openly on her own history for Doc (1986), but again presents layered realities and time-frames as she focuses on social, personal and metaphysical questions.
Whereas Pollock’s career spans nearly two decades, Judith Thompson’s began only in 1980 with *The Crack walker* (1981), a graphic, compassionate presentation of emotionally dynamic young people operating under economic, social and mental handicaps. While naturalistic in mode, it translates thoughts and feelings into physical stage metaphors to extend the dialogue, as when one character smashes an egg on his head in frustration over losing his job: ‘Did you ever start thinkin’ somethin’…? And ya can’t beat it out of your head? *White Biting Dog* (1984) is an exuberantly metaphorical play whose emotional impact is strong. Thompson’s most recent stage work *I Am Yours*, disciplines her remarkably rich imagistic power, combing it with a clearer narrative or realistic base that appears to have made it more accessible to audiences than *White Biting Dog*, while still retaining its power of emotion.

The other dominant playwright, George F. Walker, has a prolific career almost as long as Sharon Pollock’s: his *Prince of Naples* (1972) was a Factory Theatre Lab production in July 1971. His plays, which have received many productions within and outside Canada, have used forms of popular culture, such as the ‘B-movie’ and television, as theatrical metaphors to express witty, humorous visions of society and art in a state of decline and confusion. Early works, such as *Bagdad Saloon* (1973), were part of the anti-naturalistic ‘experimental’ movement at the time. Later works, such as *Zastrozzi* (1979) and *The Art of War* (1983), have
continued to foreground theatrical forms, developing a more sophisticated, oblique expression of questions about the nature and function of art. At the same time they possess even wittier dialogue and comic invention, as well as deepened philosophical implications.

While Walker’s relatively long career in the theatre links him with the first wave of Canadian professional dramatists—Reaney, Ryga, French, Pollock—the continuing experimental character of his work—together with that, for example, of Judith Thompson—serves as a beacon for a new generation of Canadian dramatists as they enter the last decade of the twentieth century.

Born in Fredericton, N. B., the daughter of esteemed physician and longtime MLA Everett Chalmers, Mary Sharon Chalmers attended the Univ. of New Brunswick, but dropped out in 1954 to marry Ross Pollock, a Toronto insurance broker. After their separation in the early 1960s she returned to Fredericton with her five children where she worked at various theatre jobs, including acting, at the Playhouse in Fredericton, later Theatre New Brunswick. In 1966, having moved with actor Michael Ball to Calgary, she won a Dominion Drama Festival’s best actress award for her performance in Ann Jellicoe’s The Knack, directed by Joyce Doolittle. Her first stage play, A Compulsory Option, a black comedy about paranoia, won an Alberta Culture play-writing competition in 1971 and was given its first production in 1972 by Pamela Hawthorn at Vancouver’s New Play centre.
In 1973 Harold Baldridge premiered her historical play *Walsh* (1973) at Theatre Calgary; John Wood’s production of this play at the Stratford festival’s Third Stage in 1974 first drew Pollock to national attention. Now living in Vancouver, she wrote a number of children’s plays for production by Playhouse Holiday (formerly Holiday Theatre), and Playhouse Theatre School; in these years she was also writing for CBC radio.

Over the past ten years Pollock has also been active in theatre as dramaturge, administrator, director, and actor. She was head of the Playwrights Colony at the Banff Centre School of Fine Arts (1977-80); playwrights-in-residence at Alberta Theatre Projects, Calgary (1977-9) and at the National Arts Centre (1980-2); briefly artistic director at theatre Calgary (1984), and writer-in-residence at the Regina Public Library (1986). In 1988 she was appointed artistic director of Theatre New Brunswick. She has directed in a number of Canadian theatres, including productions of her own plays—*One Tiger to Hill* at the NAC in 1981 and *Doc*, under the revised title of *Family Trappings*, at Theatre New Brunswick in 1986. She played the role of Miss Lizzie in Theatre Calgary’s production of *Blood Relations* in 1981, and Mama George in her own radio adaption of *Whiskey Six Cadenza* for CBC radio 1983.

In her plays of her 1970s Pollock shows a strong concern for political and social issues related to both the past and contemporary Canadian life. In *Walsh* and *The Komagata Maru Incident* she uses historical events to challenge racism. The first blames the abuse of indigenous peoples on the Macdonald government’s political expediency of the 1870s. Major Walsh of the North-West Mounted Police is caught between personal honor and public obligation in the infamous Sitting Bull incident following the Sioux flight to the Canadian North West after their defeat of General Custer. The second play exposes racism against Asians as
evidenced by legislation passed in 1914 that prevented a boat-load of Sikh immigrants from landing in Vancouver harbor. A confrontational narrator representing the ‘system’ interrupts brief cinematic scenes to implicate the audience directly in what is presented as a clear matter of legalized racial injustice. The public servant in the case, immigration officer William Hopkinson, is caught in a web of self-interest; his characterization suggests a tragic potential that remains undeveloped. Pollock’s most ambitious issue-oriented play is *One Tiger to a Hill*, an indictment of the modern prison system. The work is loosely based on a New Westminster penitentiary hostage incident of 1975 when a female classification officer was killed by the prison’s tactical squad in a botched rescue attempt. While multiple perspectives on prison life are skillfully integrated with dramatic action, their polemical impact is partly diverted by the sentimental characterization of the two principles.

From *Blood Relations* on, Pollock’s interest in issues is subsumed in her fuller focus on conflicts in private lives. In *Blood Relations* the playwright is less concerned with historical analysis of the famous and unresolved Fall River, Mass Murders than with the implications of Lizzie Borden’s story (or hypothetical story) for a contemporary audience. The play seeks to determine why such a crime could be committed, then or now. In *Generations*, ultimately a more positive analysis of family values, *Blood Relations* concerns about matters of dependence and identity
crisis are put into a modern context where, unlike Lizzie, the young are free to make their own choices but must learn how to do so. The specific issue in this naturalistic play is the traditional title of the land as it affects three generations of an Albertan farm family.

In *Whiskey Six Cadenza* Pollock again tackles a historical issue, the oppressive prohibition was laws of the 1920s, but here the issue reinforces characterization and avoids the overt polemics of her earlier work. Rum-running in a southern Alberta mining community is the background to a curious emotional triangle consisting of a flamboyant go speller of free will who is also the local bootlegged, his adoptive daughter, and the rebellious son of a local temperance zealot. The polarities of controversy over the public jurisdiction of personal choice dissolve into the half-hidden complexities of sadly destructive personal relationships. In *Doc*, Pollock continues to examine the destructive elements of family in her most intricate dramatic structure to date. Its subject, partly autobiographical, is the conflict between a compulsively dedicated physician and his alcoholic wife, with particular emphasis on the impact of their discord on a growing daughter. In a further step from *Blood Relations* retrospective time frame, this play rejects linear time, directly engaging the audience in the two present-time character’s associational memory patterns.

Hyperbola aside Canadian theatre since 1967 has brought forth a substantial body of plays worthy of continued attention both as scripts to be performed and texts to be read and studied. The intention of modern Canadian plays is to present as definitively as possible the highlights of modern Canadian drama in English. Rita Joe and Fortune and Men’s Eyes set it all in motion in 1967 and became its first true classic. Creeps helped launch both the Factory Lab and Tarragon theatres and defined the brutal naturalism that characterized a good deal of Canadian theatre through the first half of the seventies, just as 1837: the Farmers’ Revolt epitomized Passé Murielle’s influential collective, quasi-documentary style. The history play took new directions in the Prairies with Walsh and in Ontario with the brilliant theatricality of the Donnelly trilogy, perhaps the masterwork of Canadian drama. Jacob’s Wake was a family play with a powerful Newfoundland accent while Balconville was the most eloquent of David Fennario’s chronicles of the Montreal working class. Zastrozzie spoke with the distinctive voice of genre parody leavened with pop metaphysics that George Walker has made his own. Jitters and automatic Pilot blazed bright comic paths in the urbane style that
reflected a new national sophistication. And Billy Bishop flew higher and further than anything else to date.

These plays are also, in a variety of ways, representative of the primary patterns into which modern Canadian drama has shaped itself. Probably the strongest impression made by Canadian plays through the mid-1970s was of a theatre of the underdog and the outsider. This is not entirely surprising in the context of Canadian literature generally, which shows many of the same impulse. Although Margaret Atwood pays virtually no attention to drama in her thematic study of Canadian literature, *Survival*, her arguments concerning the characteristic “victim-positions” of Canadian protagonists are applicable to a formidable number of plays. In *Rita Joe, Fortune and Creeps* nearly everything written for the stage by Fennario and Tremblay, the contemporary landscape. But even when the prospective is historical, as in 1837, *Walsh* and *the Donnelly Plays*, the dramatic focus is on the losers rather than the winners, the victims (or the process of victimization) rather than the victors. From *Riel* onwards there have been few exceptions to this rule.

The alienated outsider is the central figure not just in modern Canadian plays, of course, but in modern literature as a whole, and particularly in the post-war drama. Galina’s’ bastard hero Tit-Coq, the British “angry young men” and the American rebels without a cause of the 1950s are the true spiritual ancestors of
Rita Joe, Fennario’s workers, Tom Walmsley’s outlaws and even some of the playwrights themselves. (David French tells a good story in Stage Voices and going to his first acting class dressed like James Dean). New Dramatic movements seem in fact to thrive on the outsider status of their play’s character: witness Ibsen’s artists and social rebels and ‘O’ Neill’s early protagonists. Perhaps the dramatist’s own position in the vanguard of a new movement, he alienated from the establishment and challenging its order, demands his sympathy for the outsider.

In that regard it is useful to consider the autobiographical nature of much of the new Canadian drama. Writing about Fortune and Men’s Eyes in 1968, Nathan Cohen attributed the play’s success to its origins in Herbert’s own experience, and he noted critically “how seldom the (Canadian playwright) bases himself on his own involvements and observations or how rarely he takes for is point of all that changed very quickly. Many of the best of the era were autobiographically based (Creeps, Lulu Street, Leaving Home) or at least drawn from immediate personal observation (Rita Joe, Les Belles Soeurs). A favorite theme was the experience of coming of age (French’s Of the Fields, Lately and Leaving Home, Tom Hendry’s Fifteen Miles of Broken Class) with its attendant disillusionment and revisionism. Considering that even the history plays shared those attitudes and that the Centennial experience was something like a national coming of age, it is possible to see the Canadian drama of this period as embodying a kind of collective national
autobiography. (In James Reaney’s *Colours in the Dark*, the autobiographical impulse surges beyond the personal and national into the archetypal). In the best dramatic tradition the playwrights insisted on how flawed or unflattering the reflection.

But what were the images being reflected? Frequently they were Indians or Newfoundlanders, criminals, the handicapped or homosexuals; the socially marginal and disenfranchised took center stage. Outsiders became insiders as the revolutionary impulses of the late sixties and early seventies counterculture inverted the traditional aesthetic order. Cultural militancy in the Third World and among Black Americans also helped to awaken a new awareness of and among Canadian minorities. All this worked to accelerate a process noted by Northrop Frye in his analysis of the “garrison mentality” in Canadian literature:

As the centre of Canadian life moves from the fortress to the metropolis, the garrison mentality changes correspondingly. In beings as expression of the moral values generally accepted in the group as a whole, and then, as society gets more complicated and is in control of its environment, it becomes more of a revolutionary garrison within a metropolitan society... It changes from a defense of an attack on what society accepts as conventional standards.
The courtroom (and even the city itself) from which Rita Joe Can’t escape, the prison in fortune and Men’s Eyes, the sheltered workshop in Creeps; the shipping room in Fennario’s *On the Job*- these are all more than just physical settings. They are metaphors of a repressive system which paradoxically keeps its outsiders shut up inside, creation garrison with revolutionary potential. As Canadian history and history plays tell us, however, from 1837 to Riel to the FLQ, Canadian revolutions don’t succeed. At best, all these plays celebrate moral victories, preservations of integrity, and possibilities of escape.

Perhaps because the Canadian mosaic and our domestic geopolitics make nearly everyone here feel like something of an outsider, the family looms large in Canadian drama. Those who don’t have one (Tit-Coq, Lulu Street’s Elly) idealize it as the locus of security and identity. At its best, as in the *Donnelly Plays*, it really is that and more-the source of all strength. The family provides the ultimate garrison for the Donnelly’s and others who feel themselves surrounded by for young Ben Mercer who has set his sights wider, the family is a trap, stiffing and devouring where it purports to nourish and protect. Modern drama from Strindberg through O’Neill to Miller and Pinter has more often than not portrayed the family as a battleground on which primal wars are fought, and so it is too in Canadian plays as different as *Leaving Home, Jacobs’ Wake*, Pollock’s *Blood Relations*, Margaret Hollingsworth’s *War Body*, Timothy Findley’s *Can You See Me Yet?*
And Tremblay’s *Forever Yours*, Marie-Lou. In the latter play Carmen, like Ben Mercer, fights to become a creative outsider, to escape the terrible grip of what her mother calls with bitter irony “the family cell”: the garrison becomes prison. Ironically, such plays present the family as a microcosm of the larger society of which it is a part. The convicts in Fortune and *Men’s Eyes* construct a surrogate family every bit as corrupt and self-destructive as those they grew up in on the outside.

Surrogate families don’t have to be destructive. The “Family” of theatre people in *Jitters* manages, in spite of its tensions to achieve a delicate equilibrium that gets them through the toughest times. The same is true of the tenement-dwellers in Balconville. A different kind of surrogate family is constituted in plays like Sheldon Rosen’s *Ned* and *Jack* and Tremblay’s *Hosanna* which investigate the way relationships between people of the same sex can grow into a mutually like the family at its best (or degenerate into a parody of family role-playing at its very worst.) With the decline of the nuclear family and the advent of gay liberation and Women’s liberation has come a testing of new sexual attitudes and domestic arrangements. This had found its most popular expression in contemporary comedies of manners like *Automatic Pilot*, Anne Chislett’s *The Tomorrow Box* and Sherman Snukal’s *Talking Dirty* that may prove to be the “family plays” of the 1980s.
Because the rise of Canadian drama coincided with a surge of nationalism and national self-awareness, the history play has had a prominent place in the developing repertoire. Canadian plays about non-Canadian history have been relatively rare, but perhaps not surprisingly they have tended to concern themselves almost exclusively with revolutionaries. (Carol Bolt’s *Red Emma*, Ryga’s *Paracelsus*, Michael Cook’s *The Gay den Chronicles* and Ken Mitchell’s *The Great Cultural Revolution* are typical examples). Plays about Canadian history have a slightly more complex range of concerns. For a time their primary purpose seemed to be to make Canadians aware that they had a history and that it was actually interesting (both assumptions about which many Canadians remain skeptical). Beyond that, there were a number of different messages: that Canadian history hadn’t always happened the way it was taught in school, if it had been taught at all; that it had sometimes been shameful; and that it was full of genuine Canadian heroes, some of the relatively unknown and most extremely unlikely.

The harvest dramatic treatments have been reserved for various acts of genocide committed against native Indians in Canada—Walsh, Cook’s *On the Rim of the Curve*, Herschel Hardin’s *The Great Wave of Civilization*—and similar expressions of racism (Pollock’s *The Komagata Maru Incident*). In a lighter vein politicians have made ripe pickings for critical portraits Mackenzie King in on the whole; Canadian playwrights have been more interested in accentuating the
historically positive. Coulter and Reaney resurrect Louis Riel and the Black Donnelly’s polish up their badly tarnished reputations and turn them from villains into heroes. William Lyon Mackenzie in 1837, Dr. Norman Bethune in Rod Langley’s Bethune and Billy Bishop are all reintroduced as legitimate Canadian heroes, even if contentious men. 1837 also celebrates a collective hero- it is after all *The Farmers’ Revolt*- using agitprop techniques borrowed from the political theatre of the 1930s. The collective struggles of Saskatchewan farmers (*Paper Wheat*), unemployed workers (Bolt’s *Buffalo Jump*) and coal miners (Rex Deverell’s *Black Powder*) have been chronicled and lionized in similar ways.

‘Chronicled’ is not really the right word. The history play is a problematical genre by definition. History is supposed to be true whereas a play is of course fictional. Canadian history plays often take the form of ‘docudrama,’ combining the truthfulness of documentary with the imaginative freedom of drama. But what proportions of fact and fiction are necessary to ensure that Canadian history turns out, in the eyes of the playwright, satisfactorily? How does one mitigate the fact that the good guys have rarely won? In a comment on his own pseudo-history play, *The Boy Bishop*, Ken Gass proposes that “the only important thing about history is that it needs to be transcended. We should lie about our history on make one up if we don’t like the one we have.” Other playwrights prefer less radical terminology. In his preface to *The Crime of Louis Riel*, John Coulter refers to his Riel as a
‘legendary hero’. Both Rick Salutin (referring to his *Les Canadiens*) and Carol Bolt use the term ‘myth’ to describe their plays. “Myth is more appealing than act,” says Bolt. “It postulates that heroism is possible, that people can be noble and effective and change things”.

Myth as the expression of a fundamental human desire for some kind of heroism or nobility or efficacy animates every play in this collection. But is there also an identifiable Canadian myth that runs through these plays, a “distinctive mythology which reflects… who we are and how we got that way”? If there is, maybe it is awareness implicate in all them that, though winning might be nice, the quality of experience is more important than the final score. This is true even Zastrozzi and Billy Bishop Goes to War Both plays deliver a special kind of satisfaction by celebrating unabashed winners in theatrically exciting ways, but a peculiar sense of melancholy hangs over them as well. Victory is somehow tainted, even a little distasteful. “You’re a typical Canadian, I you’re modesty itself,” Lady St. Helier sings to Billy Bishop. That too is part of the Canadian myth. But is it true? May be. What is undoubtedly true, as these plays confirm, is that theatre at its best always brings us closer to ourselves.