Chapter Three

Reaney is truly mythopoeic poet; his plays do not record the world for us, they re-make the world an entirely visionary model. To read Reaney is not to read a book of dramatic creations, it is to enter a new cosmos bursting with verbal energy, yet full of familiar forms—children, geese, farmhouses—that are transmuted by the artist's intelligence and simplicity into symbols of the whole world of man.

- Germaine Warkentin

The Transformative Dimension of History and Myth
Chapter Three

The Transformative Dimension of History and Myth

For several prominent Canadian writers who belonged to the period 1959-1985, “the historicity of heritage was a recurrent motif which shaped their canvass” (New 6). Modern writers such as James Reaney, David Fennario, Anne Chrislett, John Coulter and George Ryga widely transform history and mythologise it. By transforming history, the various incidents in the literary work based on that particular history are represented as mythopoeic. In Canada, nationalist sentiment was anglocentric, male-dominated, and justified by appeals to God and Natural Law. Literature also defined the character of the new society as it reflected upon it. The literary structure was affected by coloured interpretations and representations of contemporary politics, religion, historical personages, nature and law. Modern Canadians have mythologised the period of settlement as one of peaceful, orderly expansion, often contrasting it with the Wild West stereotypes of the American frontier.

Reaney has been busy at work consciously constructing his own peculiar myth of the rebirth of the human soul or, in the communal terms underlying his magazine Alphabet, of the building of Jerusalem’s wall in Canada’s vast and not so pleasant land. So far as his own writings are concerned, this missionary activity involves use of what he calls a “symbolic grammar” or “literary geometry” (qtd. in Lee 155) a language of iconography learned from the Bible,
Spenser, Shakespeare, Blake, Yeats and Northrop Frye. The result is not the kind of barren transplanting of foreign traditions into Canada that marred so much of her early literature. But it is a tribute both to Reaney's powers and to the archetypal "aliveness" of the tradition he has espoused, that the result has been the creation of some of the best writing Canada has ever produced. Reaney subverts and transforms history into myth and drama. In the subversion, we find events and persons that have undergone transformation. The transformed form will resemble a parody of the original. The writer activates this end by parodying certain customs and ideas prevalent in society, forcing the readers to question the traditionally accepted notions regarding culture and ethics. Reaney's plays are a fine study in the transformation of history into myth and drama.

Northrop Frye concentrates on quest myth which enables him to expound a holistic and synoptic vision of literature. In "Northrop Frye: Criticism as Myth", Wimsatt, furnishing an orientation to the discussion of Frye's monomyth, writes, "There is one basic and inclusive myth, which takes the stage of a divine quest, death, and rebirth, following the cycle of the four seasons" (76).

A.C. Hamilton, in Northrop Frye: Anatomy of His Criticism, maps out Frye's theory of the quest myth to underscore the issue that in Frye's conception, all literary genres are logically derived from the quest myth. Basing himself on
Frye's theories as chalked out in *Anatomy of Criticism*, he lays bare the quintessence of the quest myth:

Frye posits three main stages of the quest-myth that give romance to literary form – the *agon* or conflict, the *pathos* or death struggle, and the *anagnorisis* or recognition of the hero – in order to note parallels to the three-day rhythm of death, disappearance, and revival of the god in various myths. Later he adds a fourth-*sparagmos*, or the hero's dismemberment – in order to set up four aspects of the central quest-myth, a monomyth that relates the four *Mythoi* in their order. (141)

Thus we perceive that Frye's archetypal criticism hinges on the rotatory or cyclical pattern in nature with its analogues in human life, and the dialectical tension that governs the whole universe; between light and darkness; between the forces of good and the forces of evil; between heaven or paradise and hell or the underworld. Disclosing the founding pillars of archetypal criticism, Frye himself has stated that "archetypal criticism [. . . ] rests on two organizing rhymes or patterns, one cyclical the other dialectical (106). He has expressed the same idea in different words in "Romance and Masque" in *Spiritus Mundi: Essays on Literature, Myth, and Society*. According to him, the two crucial structural principles in literature are "the principle of cyclical movement, from life to death to rebirth, usually symbolized by the solar and seasonal cycles of nature and the principle of polarity [. . . ]" (155). Significantly, both these factors, namely, "the
cyclical and the dialectical", are matched by their cognates in the world of art. In other words, literature would constitute the obverse of nature because both revolve around the same axis.

Ricoeur, in his *The Symbolism of Evil*, deals with the triple functions of myth. They are their universality, temporal orientation and ontological exploration. Firstly myths "embrace mankind as a whole in one ideal history" (162). Secondly, through their narratives which have a beginning and an end, a genesis and an apocalypse, they provide an orientation to mankind. Thirdly and more fundamentally, "they explore the cleavage in human reality represented by the passage or leap from innocence to guilt; they recount how man, originally good, has become what he is in the present" (*EH* 293).

The plays of James Reaney are modelled on the mythic codes propounded by the above-mentioned writers. Reaney records the customs, manners, social conditions and religious feelings of people living in a village like a historian and then employs mythical comparisons to yoke history into myth and finally transforms history into myth and drama. His narration covers a single person, church, parson, believers and some kind of error on the part of an individual or society. The catrostophy of the character leads to some kind of apocalyptic revelation of the past and the present and then enters into a world of timelessness through myth. Reaney’s characters move around Millbank in Ontario, Canada. Francis Kingbird and Mrs. Charlotte Shade (*SM*) are two such people. Kingbird
was a minister in a local church. Mrs. Charlotte Shade was an abortionist. Both played contradictory roles in the society. Historically the play deals with the manners and morals of a rural Ontario community during 1935. Again the collage of history can be traced in the existence of institutions, piano lessons and young people groups. Especially, the Women's Institute Meeting is surveyed historically and satirically. The main theme of the play is the sin of a beloved minister unveiled not through the triumph of a personal struggle, but by accident. Although the revelation of Kingbird's affair with Mrs. Fall, and the climatic appearance of their "Illegitimate" son, Frank, rock Millbank to its foundations, there is a sense of symmetry and design to this expose... almost as if kingbird has planned the shock, as a test of his flock. It is made clear in his answer to the question asked by his assistant Conybeare "Why not get the police constable? (129). The answer of Kingbird is, "That would spoil it Felix. Too fussy, No – let's let it all ripen" (129).

It is true that around Kingbird and Mrs. Shade a group of young men and women gather for love and happiness. Mrs. Shade spreads bad rumours about Kingbird. She is supported by Edna Moody. She is unable to accept Kingbird as her minister. Andrew also joins the world of shade. The young people in the play Ralph and Susan, Frank and Ellen, Dennis and Stephen and Andrew (SM) are all disturbed by their inability to adapt to the microcosm in confusion. Mrs. Charlotte Shade wants to displace Kingbird. Characters like Edna Moody are dissatisfied with their position in this rural paradise, and their jealousy is the
driving wheel in the plot to supplant Kingbird. Andrew is jealous of Susan and Ralph for leaving behind their childhood together. Another character Samuel Moody says of his wife, "She wants to be you, Frank . . . She'd like / To get right up in the pulpit and be you" (117). Edna in turn claims that Conybeare is jealous of her St. Charlotte, "... Jealous God does not show his power through you" (157). Ruth Fall blames Edna by laughing that Edna is jealous of her "sinful" past. Edna is outraged at Francis Kingbird for conducting the marriage of Ellen and Frank secretly. She champions Shade as his replacement without thinking. Shade herself says of the consequences: [ . . . ] Shame on you! You might have lost a very fine minister who I now declare I never laid eyes on before in came here Friday evening" (165). Thus we have seen the historical aspect of the play.

The mythical mode of play rests on its metaphorical comparison. Kingbird is compared to the Sun and Charlotte Shade to the Moon. On the level of allegory indicated in her name, she is linked with Beelzebub, Antichrist, and the archetypal fire-dragon. Kingbird is the repository of all that, in his play, is good and Christlike. His kingdom is spiritually, far from that of Mrs. Shade as is the Sun from the Moon. Here we see the yoking of history to myth while the past and present meet together and light leaves darkness, and goodness from evil like the relationship between the Sun and the Moon – mythic symbol drawn from Frazer's *The Golden Bough* that can stand for both love-hate attitude, fertility and sterility.
The moon is clearly the traditional huntress goddess – she has a dozen or so gray hound dogs in her arms and lap. And it is also the force, along with the sun which controls tides, winds, rivers, fountains, and whirlwinds. The sun and the moon are married but the moon is only partly domesticated and is given to wandering, until her husband summons her back. The suggestion here is that as long as the masculine, solar principle controls the lunar one, there is harmony in nature, when the moon moves too far into a life of her own, the whole sublunary world is the worse for it. At this point the sun sends out a falcon to find her. When the sun and the moon look across at each other for the first time in one hundred years, the mythical male and female struggle begins. Similarly when they meet under the leadership of Mrs. Shade, the struggle against Kingbird erupts so as to displace him. It causes much disorder in Millbank as the whole sublunary world is affected badly when the moon moves along its own way in the lunar system. Shade is finally characterized as subhuman and her meaningless nomadism completes the construct of Shade as a total distortion or inversion of Millbank, a phantasm symbolizing sterility and stasis.

The dualism of the title is maintained when the kingdoms of darkness and light separate. There is transformation and reconciliation. Ellen chooses Kingbird as her minister. Frank and Ellen’s child who works in a chicken hatchery is a sign of triumph over sexual confusion and repression, of fertility and even social harmony like the sun. Through the artistic alchemy, Reaney has transformed the local history of Millbank into a new mythical Millbank. Also
the final spiritual statement of Kingsbird sounds dramatic as: "All our life", we seek our real parents / Those who can beget and bear our souls" (158).

Macquarrie, in *God-Talk*, comments that "the language of myth is dramatic" and adds that "it is the language of action" (171). Again he says, myths are fundamentally symbolic and their language is evocative. Wheelwright in his book *The Semantic Approach to Myth* declares that myths use "expressive" language which is basically symbolic and metaphorical as opposed to "steno-language" which is the language of plain sense and detonation" (157). Reaney is certainly a regional artist, committed to a nearly anthropological reproduction of local customs, idioms and conventions to give the play a historical colouring. He is critical of the occasionally repressive character of the region. His characters confront and contest the sterility that may be found there, and grow, themselves, in so doing. They suffer in this superficially limited culture. We listen to the story of three children as myth is a story or history of a society. Harry Gardner, Rebecca Lorimer and Eli Fay are the three children (*KD*). In the historical method, the dramatist deals with their struggle for survival and escape being threatened by oppressive parents or parent figures and their own insecurities. In the mythical method, Reaney employs archetypal symbols, images, and other mythic motifs and genres like comedy and romance. These devices help the children escape from their social constrictions and journey from this state of repression to self-knowledge and change.
Two women, Mrs. Gardner and Madam Fay, talk to each other about the passing of time and the changes brought about by time as in history. Mrs. Gardner tells Madam Fay: “Harry does fidget and look sour at times. But I always say it’s a passing phase, when he comes to manhood [. . . ] why?” (204). Madam Fay’s reply to Mrs. Gardner as to why her son hates her recalls the pastness of one’s past to the present paving the way for alienation, escape and elevation. “He’s about nineteen. I haven’t seen him for seven years” (205). Mrs. Gardner asks who looks after Fay’s son. Madam Fay answers that he is looked after by a hiredman. “His father died when he was twelve / There’s a hired man who runs the farm for us / And he’s brought Eli up. He’s been terrific” (205).

Madam Fay recalls her past. She has been immoral. She runs away with her sister’s husband. Her character symbolizes darkness and is demonic.

Get that eager look off your face. I am no more

Than I am, but first of all I’m really Mrs. Fay

Got it? We lived north of the Huckleberry Marsh.

Got that? My husband was strong and strongly tempered.

Well, I had a sister. She’d married a farmer too,

The farm across the marsh. Lorimer was his name. We

Ran away one weekend to Buffalo. (205)

The fall of fortune depends upon one’s character and behaviour. Madam Fay has become a whore and sells cosmetics because of her badness and madness
after sex. “I forgot the Mouth! Jezebel! Rage! / Terrific lipsticks. Midnight black! (203). Mrs. Gardner wants to escape from Madam Fay. She expresses herself thus: “I usually don’t do that scene. It tires me out” (208). Madam Fay again narrates who she was in the past and what she is in the present.

I wasn’t her real sister – they adopted me

I was an orphan. And my husband didn’t shoot

The little boys. No. He took the butt end

Of the rifle and smashed their heads in. (208)

Young Harry is troubled by his mother. Her over attachment curtails his freedom. He feels uneasy and uncomfortable. He wants to escape from his mother but is afraid to take a decision:

Of my life when I don’t come home to this.

Why don’t I run away! Because I’m afraid

Afraid of the look on a face I’d never see

Dear old mother’s face. (212)

Reaney adopts another dramatic technique, that is, his references to clock time, days of a week, months, year and adverbs of time denoting past, present and future to keep alive the movement of time. As time ticks away, the transformation takes place. Drama is a representation and mirror of life. Early life is recalled as in a flashback. Mrs. Gardner’s friend has been Mrs. Budge since childhood. Time has turned her old and worn out. She cannot do things as before. She makes her friend realize it. “And then I’ll walk you home just like
when we were girls / till finally open caved in and staged at the other’s place / All night . . . only I can’t. (216).

Mrs. Gardner asks about Mrs. Budge’s son Frank who has been the friend of Harry Gardner. She says he has left her to be a missionary. She cannot understand his heart as he has abandoned her. Mrs. Budge’s comment has a mythical reference: “He made such a good death for Jesus / Impaled by Indians” (218). Becky is the egg girl. She is also called Rebecca Lorimer. She sells eggs and runs a farm alone. She earns money for her marriage. Her ambition is directed towards the future:

I thought that if I should ever get married
I should like to be able to say to my husband,
Let us go away now from here for a whole month
To some lovely place we’ll always remember. (220)

Becky is troubled by the hired man of Eli Fay called Clifford. She also wants to escape. He is a thorn to Eli Fay. He affects his growth. The hiredman attempts to exploit the boy on recalling his unhappy past:

Who let you sleep in his room
When the bad dreams came? Who comforted you
When Daddy got shot in the head? Who’s older and wiser?
Who suffered your great big daddy’s insults when
He could easily have left the farm? Who stayed with you?

(225)
Mrs. Gardner compels Harry to marry the daughter of the bank manager Mr. Coons. But Harry is in love with the egg girl Becky. She doubts she may be abandoned by him. He looks thoroughly changed and developed. "Oh! I’m losing my little boy. He’s changed—He’ll pass me by on the street—his poor old mother/Go back and tell the bank manager’s daughter" (232). Later Harry marries the bank manager’s daughter and finds himself trapped. So he divorces her and goes in search of the egg girl. Images and symbols are myths. The play’s imagery can be seen around the farmhouse; the buggy, the dead horse and the killdeer. The characters are withdrawn from everyday life to another physical reality. Mrs. Budge relates their present position.

Do you know what we’re like? Two old crows
Gliding over the spring fields trying to pry out
Where that delicious decaying smell is from
Is it a dead horse? My dear by the willows. (218)

Again Mrs. Budge asks what they are like? And Mrs. Gardner answers: "I can’t think! / I’m light as elder blossoms in the wind" (218). Mrs. Budge retorts, "We’re like a pair of old hens in the barnyard / chasing a bit of thrown away dirty meat" (219).

Rebecca comes with a killdeer, a bird which stands as symbol of fertility and change. Rebecca is afraid of Madam Fay. She complains that it is Rebecca who has killed Clifford. She expresses her fear and doubt, "Hungry! She’ll never
rest till she gets me” (247). Rebecca shows a locket to Harry and tells, “My mother gave me this locket, Harry! That’s my mother when she was small – see? (247). Harry asks who the other girl is and Rebecca’s reply moves back to the past, present and helps for the fusion of her life into myth of timelessness:

Eli’s mother, Madam Fay who sells
Cosmetics and rattles around in that
Pink Baby Austin. They were brought up
Together and she was Clifford Hopkins woman
All these years. No one ever told me that,
All day I’ve been walking through the fields
Thinking about what they’ve done to me, what
They will do to me. And then –
I found him (bird)
And I know that you were coming back. (247)

Harry asks Rebecca to go with him. They embrace. The bicycle is taken out. The door is closed and they prepare to run away. The clock strikes and the time dissolves as in myth to begin a new life (247). Soon Madam Fay reaches there. Mrs. Budge and Mrs. Delta enter into the house. They see a killdeer feather. Mrs. Budge remarks: “One of those birds goes flying over the town yelling their names when it’s going to rain” (251). One’s inherent qualities of evil remains with the evil person without any alteration. They find an outlet
consciously or unconsciously. Madam Fay’s revelation of her behaviour paves way for the fusion of history and myth, light and darkness, evanescence and eternity:

How can you grab hold of light with arms of dark!

No, the light must give us a stair of darkness first

Well, I’ll hurt your killdeer now and I’ll torture it

Till your ghost comes from the grave and

Annihilates me with hatred. (254)

The image of the killdeer feather remains a symbol of strength, courage, change and hope. It is endowed with superior powers of magic and enchantment. It transports one to a visionary world of myth.

Rebecca, if I kill your daughter will you - I killed your bird and still you loved me. Send me your hatred soon. Send me Hell. To consume me. To eat the wounded bird. She kneels as the feather descends. She cradles it in her hands. I don’t want any wing to be fixed. I want you to take a stick of wood and beat me to death!

Rebecca, Rebecca. (257)

Reaney represents different human natures through his plays. Life is a drama and we are all actors. It ends with death and disappearance. Madam Fay reacts to the death of Mrs. Gardner: “Played her last card which is a wonderful card / And a wonderful turn to give to the game / The trouble is you can only
play it once" (237). Madam Fay alleges that Rebecca has stabbed Clifford to death. She discerns it from her hiding. Rebecca relates that she is not a small girl now. She has grown up and changed. She is ready to pursue her own decisions:

All lies. I have never been in Toronto. I am not in Detroit.

`I have neighbours knew it and if they thought I had – but I’m not afraid any more am I. Harry

Tomorrow morning you’ll go with me to the lawyer’s office and I’ll give myself up. I was never at large either

As a matter of fact, I’m small, and

I’m not a local woman. I’m a [ . . . ]. (259)

Thus we know that she is made a great woman through physical and mental change. There is a party arranged to celebrate the birthday of Eli Fay who has turned 21. Harry and Rebecca speak on the occasion. Harry’s speech ending in an invocation to God for changing Canada into a fertile land echoes the movement from hopelessness to hope, sterility to fertility, poverty to prosperity and scarcity to abundance.

Why is it, my lord, that in the autumn just as

There is more food in the wilderness – I speak

Of mushrooms, beechnuts and particularly wild

Apples – it gets too cold and we to stand around eating them.

(258)

Eli Fay says in his speech:
And it has been a summer, summer – such a
Summer. I’ll raise rabbits again how,
Other things again too. And I want
To say that I wish the summer did not have to end. (260)

We see the characters undergoing change and reformation. All are reconciled and united. Eli underscores the change brought out by time:

Animal watches and clocks. Growing you up
Growing your beard. Changing your innocence
Tick tock tick tock tick tock
It’s another clock I hear in another time, Another evening
Like I am now I’m lying downstairs
But out of the window – it’s now fall – Summer
The end of the day before you came back,
The leaves are so green, they’re lit up inside. (268-69)

Madam Fay is completely changed at the end. She knows that she cannot destroy Rebecca. Fay’s final rhetoric sounds highly dramatic, revealing her inability to do harm to angelic powers.

Yeah. She got away. I should have taken the car.
And I don’t’ care any longer.
The chief of police can take care of her
I’ve got my own child to take care of. (274)
Eli Fay goes with his mother. Rebecca hands over the killdeer to Eli as a token and symbol of love, fertility, change and harmony. Eli hands over his childhood toys to Harry and Rebecca hoping that someday they will have children.

Reaney’s characters long for love. They move from one stage to another and from one reality to another world of self-realization. Children with false maturity and perverted energy are kept under the control of demonic powers. When the conversion takes place from a lower state of degradation to a higher state of upgradation and dignity, the affected characters move from the back stage of present life to the front stage of social recognition. We experience the movement of linear time into cyclical. It is done by repetition and recalling the past.

Kenneth and Pollex or Polly (EE) suffer under the cruel treatment of their step mother Bethel Henry. The scene takes place in a large house somewhere in the English part of Canada. As in domestic history, there are references to domestic utensils like knives, forks and spoons. Bethel’s reference to an attire that belonged to Polly brings back the past:

Yes. This rag was once Polly’s dress.

Does it smell of her? When she was twelve and sane,

And you were twelve and insane

She went to Sunday School in this dress. (5)

Polly is kind to Kenneth. She is portrayed as a girl of noble qualities. There is a passage of two months. Bethel has been to Europe for two months. In the
interim period, Polly has trained Kenneth to do things in such a way as to free
himself from the attic. Bethel complains to another character Ira Hill:

Ira, that’s why I asked you to come over
What has Polly done to Kenneth? He’s changed.
And he’s become unmanageable. Yes.
The moment I leave for Europe she drops
All her work at college, comes home here,
Turfs out of the housekeeper I’d left, and starts
Tinkering with this incorrigible idiot. (9)

Bethel is merciless and adopts a cruel attitude to Kenneth’s advancement
and upliftment. She is a disloyal guardian:

All the rest of us toil away at something.
I toil away at being beautiful,
And being his guardian. You toil away
At keeping the village and the college alive,
So why shouldn’t he polish my silver? (9)

Bethel also complains against Polly for bringing about behavioural change in
Kenneth:

She even taught how to shave himself
I didn’t know Polly knew how to shave,
She should have been put through Barber’s college. (10)
Ira recalls one Mrs. Fuller, the godmother of Kenneth, who had made a gift of something on her birthday to Kenneth. "She said there was something she’d given him / A long time ago and that you’d stolen it" (11). Here we see the movement of time backwards.

Ira Hill describes the early life of Bethel. She is a tribal woman. She attracts the wealthy through her charm. Then she misleads them causing mental shock and death like Satan:

It’s like a loaf of bread. The Bethel story!
She comes down from the mountain,
Scrubs the professor in his tub
Kenneth’s father blows head off
Comes into Kenneth and also money
And house and estate and status. (13)

Now Bethel speaks about Polly’s father as the Bishop of Montreal (13) and “He was finally electrocuted / By a shaft of lightening” (14).

Ira sympathises with Kenneth. He relates metaphorically Kenneth’s present life under the evil powers of Bethel:

He’s like a rider on a horse comes
Galloping down the road to the bridge
And suddenly stops. There’s something there –
In the middle of the bridge. (15)
Ira moans over the loss of Kenneth’s childhood glamour and expresses his desire to regain in Kenneth the same power:

At five years old. A stark naked child

With all green light and sun streams about you.

You turned and vanished. I’ll take that.

So far as I see that’s what it all means.

And that naked innocent who gave me God

Is still lost in the forest and I shall bring him

Back to powerful friends who love him. (16)

Bethel’s description of the death of Kenneth’s father makes us understand how Kenneth was in the past and the reason for the present condition: “Polly, when Kenneth was six his father took a gun and blew the top off his head in front of him. After that he hasn’t been able to tell a man from a woman, a garden from a lawn, a tree from a cloud” (20). Polly is reminded of another thing of mythic importance connected with his house, the visit of the ghost of a little girl on the lawn side of the house (20) and adds: “Oh, yes, there is. It is one of the truest stories connected with his house. Even Kenneth can see the little girl. I’ve heard him talk to her” (20).

Polly teaches Kenneth words that one uses at home. Kenneth arranges the words as door, house, attic and threshold. At times Polly feels dejected and disgusted as she cannot change Kenneth perfectly. Polly explains what she sees at the bottom of the well of his eyes:
A sleeping young clever and talkative
Young man whom I can never wake
No matter what whistle or bell or call I use.
Sometimes he reaches up to me and I
Reach down to him. But our hands touch the glass
Of impossibility and you sink back to sleep. (24)

Another hint about the past and present life of Bethel is discerned from Polly. Life is a game. Some times, the wicked wins the game ruining the other. The worthy and deserving lose due to the tricks of the hypocrites.

Here you’d lived all these years a widow in this old house with the mad boy and the deformed kitchen girl and no one knew what you were like. I think I know now. Suddenly – you came out into the world – a shy, uncertain – young widow and I put out my hand and pulled you into the game. The middle class game. That dress. This party. (35-36)

Polly loves George Sloan. Bethel dislikes it. Bethel describes one’s age for marriage and bearing children in an ironic tone: “Yes, for they say it’s wise to marry as ever one can. After twenty-seven your Bones stiffen and it’s harder to bear the children” (36). Polly compares her life to Cinderella as she feels the cruel attitude of her stepmother Bethel. Polly’s life is equated with Cinderella to underline the harassments meted out to her. “Cinderella is the truest story ever written” (37). An ordinary person becomes extraordinary, poor becomes rich,
and low becomes high in the game of life. Bethel’s prosperity remains an example of such a sudden reversal of fortune and luck. “I came down and I climbed. I’m mistress of the largest and oldest house in the village. I married a professor, I married a bishop. And it hasn’t just been going to bed either. I’m really smart” (39).

Human beings play different roles and masks in life for survival and cheating. For Polly drama of human life is awful with characters like Bethel acting their roles:

Oh Bethel – it’s so good to hear you being slangy again. It always frightens me when you’re college bred with me and something else with Ira and something else with – you’re so smart you’ve got German for Germans, Bantu for Bantus and Kenneth talk for Kenneth. You’ve even got two words for blouse. It can be a dress and it can be a blouse. (39)

George, the lover of Polly, is very weak mentally and physically. He now gains confidence and courage. Time determines one’s future. It is ignoble to condemn others when one is on his way to social change.

Times have changed. I’m to become a responsible member of society, a priest whom hundreds look up to. I’m even the sort of priest who can marry and sire children. I should doubt very much
if you'll ever have the chance to do that. Or be allowed to even try it. (42).

Actually George is irresolute and indecisive. He wavers in the matter of marrying Polly. She says, “One can’t live with a fever for very long. You’re supposed to break the fever with a marriage” (46). Polly can visualize her past, present and future in him: “George, George, I can see my whole life, my children – in all that salt-shaker of a body of yours. I could shake you until they tumbled out. George, answer me! Marriage – good idea or bad idea” (47).

George is now wooed by Bethel. She wants to marry him so as to spite Polly. She asks about his age. George says he is twenty-four (55). Bethel pretends she is young enough for him. “So I’m not too old for you. I’m almost forty, but there you’re almost thirty and besides I have a very baby-like and playful disposition. You might even call it mischievous” (56). The wicked woman even acknowledged George’s influence over her, “George, I’m just another man. A woman is a man outside in and a man is a woman inside out” (60). George kills a bat. It is used here as a mythical symbol of change in the sexual confidence of a youth:

Yes, I’ll marry you. It’ll be a wonderful experiment. You will be the only man who’s – that dreadful bat. Oh – Now I can wear my hair girlishly long again and I’ll marry you. George Sloan, I’ll marry you. (62)
The time for the party arranged by Bethel is nearing. Kenneth becomes almost normal and sociable. We see two images now. That is, the glass egg presented to Kenneth by his godmother, Fuller. Polly recovers from the garden the skeletal remains of Kenneth's pet cat Cocoanut. Kenneth is on the threshold of victory and renovation when he regains his former senses: "Where is Cocoanut? Cocoanut! Here pussy! I had to slap him because he had the Archangel baby in his mouth and I was nearly not in time. And the garden has gone" (76). Actually the pet cat of Kenneth was killed by George when he was seven and buried by Bethel, "You have met before, eh! Hurting, killing and burying" (77). Thus, their murderous past is brought to light.

Kenneth remembers two things: a white kitten and the Easter Egg while he thinks about his past. He can remember his house and garden as in a flashback. His mind is crowded with childhood thoughts and imagination:

No, she's wrong. I had to have something if I was going to keep my head above water. No father, there was the kitten, no kitten there was this. No this, there was immediately a skin over everything. Bethel's skin. When Polly gave me back this, it was circumcised of a tight fold of skin that held you back from ever quite touching anything or being a father or seeing – Oh God, it hurt when she gave it to me, more than when I saw the window and the pigeons came flocking at me as I threw myself out – it hurt like a rabbit with a sharp bright silver knife, it cut away Bethel's
skin over my eyes and I saw: A young man. I am young then, am I? (83)

Life is a kind of show and fun. A youth displays certain pretensions for the love of others. Kenneth longs for it as:

I remember that it was then I thought – why not pretend in a few moments for a few moments that I’m not better, that I have had relapse it will keep Ira and Polly or their toes and what fun to see what Bethel and George will do. (83)

Kenneth asks them to “untie that little girl from the fence” (84). Time is counted down for the party. The principal, his wife, the Dean of Women and professor Ewell – “these are the people I should meet in my house” (85) declares Kenneth. He also recovers his father’s tie. Kenneth opens the gate to greet the guests.

Reaney has brought to life a college from an image which remains a mythic symbol. He highlights the poor condition of the college and its office through Niles to Edward, “No one uses this office any more – here’s a dead bird on the floor – we killed a bird that came in through the window” (TD 101). A silly event of desk pushing leads to mythic hatred between two lecturers Jacob Waterman and Maxie Niles. The desk pushing is explained by Niles to Edward Durelle:

He’s had that shaft of sunlight just too bloody long. Why can’t I have it? So – wasn’t around – no attempt to meet me, so I pushed
his desk into its present corner and slid my desk into the area it dominates now. (106)

Edward reminds Niles that it is unfair. Niles answers:

Of course, it was. But can't a bit of unfairness often be a bit of fun? When I was out teaching a class he would get his desk back to the window. When he was out teaching a class – I moved it back. (107)

Edward asks who came to the college first. The answer made by Niles recreates the past for us:

He'd been here five years before I came, I – me – young chipper and full of beans up from Australia. The first thing I did when I marched in that door was to push his desk away from the sunbeam. More or less as a merry prank. Why, I never dreamed he'd take it so seriously. I mean to say – after all, he'd had the sun for five years. Now I'm forced to stay by the window. Bleaching away in the Prairies sun. And-of-course – we have not stopped pushing the desks – little pushes. Just can't leave my desk alone. So I – correct the position of my desk. (107)

Jacob Waterman recalls with pain when he sees his desk being displaced:

"He's been moving my desk again. / He has / I'd got it so carefully placed / In just the right light" (108). Jacob talks about his large family to Edward. But the
other members of the college are bachelors. "Why I've only mentioned it once. I've had rather a large family. Dear wife – poor wife – dead. All the children flown from me now. Perhaps I mention it because you don't" (109). Again Jacob's assumption of the teaching career is rooted in the past and the subsequent dwindling of the number of students rests in the present

Why in 1932 – twelve young people studied Beowulf with me. Last year three. This year two. When Mr. Niles came he started a course called, From Moll Flanders to Lady Chatterley; Fifty Great novels. I came, I sat in the light by the window. (112)

Jacob again pushes the desk. He collapses to the floor. Then Jacob looks at the calendar. He is made old by time and fate: "Yes, old man. Almost all right; Isn't that calendar wrong? It is not the twenty-first of September? It's not the twenty-first, is it? (113). He adds in a mythic vein, "I shall, I will sit my desk again by the window" (113). Edward and Mia, the lecturers, meet and talk to each other about their positions. She asks whether he is going to stay there long (115). While Edward replies: "I only came because my fellowship wasn't renewed. I came because fifteen other people had turned down this post because eighteen hundred dollars just wasn't enough for them" (115). Mia tells him, "you'd make a lot more teaching public schools. So would I" (116). Edward's reply echoes Reaney's desire: "I know. But you see. I like colleges. I like libraries. I like reading books (116). Edward is not interested in teaching. He does not like reading books and the existence of colleges:
I like you. I don’t know why I do anything anymore. Like, why do we have colleges? Or read? Why do we think? What’s the sense of it? Last year I began to feel all mixed up. It’s the reason. I lost my fellowship at Toronto. (118)

As Edward talks about love, he can see their future together before his eyes:

Mia, let’s not go back to the tea. Do you know what’s in front of us? In time, I mean. We’ll court – we’ll kiss – We’ll eventually, eventually. We’ll get married, sleep in the same bed, have kids, we’ll die, we’ll be buried, you’ll teach Sunday School. (120)

Sandy McWhin is the only Canadian male staff in the college. He insists that they continue to wear Canadian clothes and follow their customs. His attitude is rather parodied by Niles. The Canadian ancestry is recalled here as:

Your ancestors never even saw chamber-pots or coffins or wedding rings. A burich of incestuous whisky-distilling subtenants of subtenants cleared off the land like rodents and flung at us down under or into the lumper camps over here in Canada. Canada, Canada what a cursed country. Everywhere you go there’s either a bunch of religious fanatics or old country failures or French Canadians. (123)
There is competition between Niles and Waterman in teaching. Waterman teaches Old English. He is popular among students. Niles’ poor teaching is considered just different by the other teachers: “Not at all Eddie. I cheerfully admit. I’m not at all literary. Got it all out of my head years ago. That’s why the students love me so. I give them a good time” (135). Edward and Sandy McWhin vie with each other to win the heart of Mia. Edward asks Mia whether she loves him. She answers she does but is afraid of McWhin. Edward answers: “I’ll kill him. Dr. Waterman is coming to tell us that thousands of snowy white owls are swooping down on us. They’ll carry Sandy away” (136). Edward arranges the desks together and hangs up a Christian chain and bell. Now he arranges a sequence of chairs and boxes leading up to the desks (146). An image echoes the union of the three:

Of all the trees that are in the wood,

The holy bears the crown:

The rising of the sun

And the running of the deer

The playing of the merry organ,

Sweet singing in the choir. (146)

Tuckersmith is one of the students of Waterman and Edward. He writes epics and reads them aloud. His mythic power to adjust himself to changing situations is traced here:
Perhaps I might be called the occasional student but, Mr. Durelle, I really am a middle game. The walking middle game – if somebody wants to [. . .] put an opening and an end game around me. (149)

He knows about their habit of desk pushing. He reveals Waterman’s son’s exam paper in the desk. Tuckersmith moves the desk of Niles. Edward asks how he could move it so easily. He replies boastfully: “I’m strong! Stronger than Dr. Waterman. Stronger than you. No – Today he’s taken the weights out and hidden them in that deserted office” (157). Tuckersmith again recalls the death of another Junior lecturer because of the silly desk pushing, “ – depression, suicide [. . .] like he – him? – who formerly sat at that very desk” (151).

Tuckersmith opens the desk of Niles. Waterman enters now. Tuckersmith grabs the exam paper of Waterman’s son, Jonathan. Jacob, “This is my youngest son’s exam paper. Jonathan’s English paper. You’ve been holding this over my head for years, haven’t you (163). Niles grabs it from Waterman’s hands and complains to Tuckersmith. It shows the existence of hared and the partiality of teachers in awarding more marks for their sons:

A very essential piece of paper it if you’re to be dissuaded from trying to get a job elsewhere when you retire in mid-January. Perhaps I should explain Tuckersmith, that Mr. Waterman gave his son, youngest son ten more marks than he should have got on his paper. An interesting case of conflict between parental
affection and the academic integrity some around here are so fond of. (163)

Miss. Axford is another student. She comes to seek the help of Mia. She gives an English translation to the student. It is as though foreign teachers brought disaster and disgrace to the college:

Sing goddess, of the wrath of Achilles,
The son of Peleus!
That evil wrath which brought a thousand evils on
The Greeks and pushed into Hell many warriors. (165)

Niles hopes to become the next principal. He invites Mia to accompany him to the Athletic Club dance. His sudden emotional talk reveals his rise in status from a poor condition:

Tonight, Mia, at the Athletic Dance the newspapers will be there. The fact that I, Max Niles, the poor sheep farmer’s bastard from down under, am to be the next principal of Rupertsland College – and the fact will be announced at the dance. (174)

Waterman grants honours degree to Tuckersmith. Edward does not like to speak to Mia. He asks her to marry Niles. They exchange Christmas greetings. Waterman tells Mia: “Everyday I write on a piece of paper: “I” – Jacob Waterman, believe that he did exist, that he isn’t dead, that some day he will come again” (178). Waterman is made permanent through art and myth.
Flossy Sorrin is another student. Her judgment and evaluation can be taken as an observation made from the past:

Well I think there are too many Freudian symbols in this play. The three desks are erotic, they could be the Trinity too – Father, Son and the Holy Ghost. The chess game is not really a chess game obviously. I think the – I think that the real hero is Niles – young, powerful, mischievous. Is it his fault that no one can control him? This is very cleverly managed because we never see him alone with us’ he’s always the villain apparently. From down under, see. Now . . . the story. (183)

Mia announces the running of time and transfers bundles of paper from one side of the desk to another. She touches Edward to know whether he can renew the love. The Glee Club song again reminds the union of the three: “Three kings bowed low to infant Majesty / And brought three gifts to hail the Trinity” (185). It symbolises the beginning, middle and end. Literally it stands for the past, present and future. Soon Edward opens the desk of Niles. He tries to throw it out. It is seen by McWhin who informs Niles. Edward is cornered both by Niles and McWhin. Edward talks heroically:

In your career here you must have driven away anybody of either civilization or learning who came near the place. And those that stayed you thwarted at every – you tormented Jacob – your
desk is going out of this building forever. I’m going to push it outside. (187)

Niles feels like Hitler (190) and talks in an autocratic manner to McWhin:

Willing to help with something tonight? Tomorrow I move into the principal’s office. The janitors will come and take my desk away to the store room. Instead I’ll sit where Brossing used to sit. My elbows on the Mahogany. (188)

Niles asks McWhin to dial to Waterman. He is asked to come and value papers left unfinished by Edward. Niles again says:

We’ll move my desk over to where it was when I first came up from down under – years ago. In the corner away from the light. We’ll put his desk back by the window again – where it first was when I came up from down under years ago. (190)

Edward comes to take a paper. McWhin leaves the place. Waterman drinks a glass of gin. Edward announces the death of Niles. Jacob makes a heroic reply: “And I’m trying to have a heart attack, but my stupid heart keeps waddling on. Heavy desk that won’t be moved. Clock” (194). Edward opens the drawer and takes the exam paper. He gives it to Waterman. His request to Waterman again shows the rise and fall and the magic of union brought about through a mythic image:
Then – Mia and I will help you, Jacob. Because we know how you were . . . If you die now, why he’s completely won. I first came to the English Department at Rupertsland on September 22 last year. The reason I remember that is . . . the temperature was . . . . When I came into the office Dr. Waterman and Mr. Niles were both there. At their desks. My desk was empty. There were the three desks. (195)

Thus, we know that they cannot be separated from one another.

Reaney’s plays are filled with life and activity. A humble cottage with an old woman becomes part of history and myth of universal significance. He creates a world of life and a world of death with familiar objects and two circles. The simple objects that we find in any house like chairs, a table and a bed. A hall tree, a shoe harp, a spinning wheel and cardboard box are arranged dramatically to create the history of birth and death. The newborn baby is a chair and death symbolized by wooden objects. Time moves forward and then backward as in myth.

Childhood musings and memories in old age become parts of the mythic recycling of human life. The child asks so many questions looking into the future:

Don’t you wish that you could have seen a great ark or a dodo?

Perhaps when I grow up I shall sail to a place where they still are –
around the corner of a cliff – the great ark, over the low sandy hill
– on the desolate beach – two dodos. (OMM 179)

The child’s ambition of a joyous, married life finds expression in the
process of growth as: “Then from your hand I took my ring; from the hag’s claw
I took my golden ring, her breasts like pigsties” (183) and even to realistic
snatches of satire, the adults desire is transformed: “I had a friend who said two
days before the conversat: “I haven’t got an invitation to the conversat yet, and
it’s two days to go, but I’m going to get one”. And she did. I often wonder how
she did it” (181).

Death, the end of the life-cycle, pulls the man into a coffin and he passes
from the familiar world to a world of the unknown. The ghost thinks of a return.
Time moves to the past in the flashback to the real world. It signifies the mythic
belief of return: “Sister Cecilia, the figure in the convent orchard has been seen
again. Digging where the abandoned well is under the old tree” (188).

The soul undergoes a purgative mythic evolutionary function. It is
converted into a harbinger of the new contribution, another baby edging into the
cradle:

Come here shepherds. Here’s the way.

Bah bah bah for an incarnation

This way artistocratic intelligence.

Meow meow for a new sensation. (192)
Reaney’s plays use two principles of narrative structure. One is basically linear. The action proceeds along various routes until something revelatory happens. This structural principle leads to the fusion of times and ends in a mythic makeover. Mrs. Brown longs to meet her daughter. Her mind is filled with the thought of her daughter. Someone knocks at the door. She sees Alice. Guests arrive. They are Mrs. Wool, the telephone operator, Ben Smith, the storekeeper’s son and Barbara Croft. The final guest, Mr. Orchard, is able to cure the spiritual ailments of both Ben and Barbara:

Young man, I need someone turnip rows to scuffle
And Juniper trees to trim and dig up.
Young girl, I’m sure you could in the greenhouse ruffle
The sweet smelling rows of white carnations. *(NBC 30)*

Mr. Orchard carries a small apple tree, and passes out seed packets to the other characters. Winter is ending soon and Orchard’s gifts are full of hope for a healing spring. Everyone is tranquil and optimistic for a moment, a mood shattered by the roar of the night train to Toronto. “... Cease your dreams. I am that which is. Your plant with its angel flower can’t change me. It is, thinks Mrs. Brown, is. It is. And there’s no use trying to shut it out” *(31)*.

But, the roaring subsides. The clock stops striking midnight, and, as the mechanical world (train, clock) retreating, the timeless mythic world of reconciliation and self-discovery hovers inside the flower. All the characters
sing a hymn to encourage the opening: “This voice is like the south wind, My heart is like the snow. But when I hear its gentle sigh I feel my winter go” (33).

Mrs. Brown welcomes Alice for the change. The guests all await the blossoming of Cereus, and the vision of their lives, past to future.

Reaney attempts to describe personal, national, universal and moral history – all at once through a sentence or sequence. There are slides, songs, fragments of the existence poem, dialogue, choral work, total multimedia and semiology which collectively help to record the history of a nation in decline through various artistic dimensions. The characters are partly human and partly animal. Reaney starts narrating history “with the back bone of a person growing up” (CD 16). The different lifestyle of a sick boy is explained by M.A. to the son as:

Now. This is a cold late winter March day. While you have the measles your room will have to be kept in total darkness. You must not attempt to read in bed or you will go blind. In this total darkness you are it trying to read, are you? (18)
The son says he is colouring in the dark. When he is better of these measles and light comes in, he can see whether the colours are right.

We see the birth of the universe and the birth of the human scene in mythical terms. Pa asks, “how can he be born and who’s stopping his son from rising? (24). Gramp as bear replies, “I am. I’m Grizzly Bear and I’ve crossed
your mother's legs and you'll never see the earth get up or the light come down” (24). Pa reminds: “Blind as I am – I’ve heard you barking on either side of me – sick the bear away where he’s got his paw over the sun. make him let go of my arm” (24). The Sundogs chase the bear away.

Granny Crack plays the part of grandmother. She recalls the past and present condition of Canada. It indirectly alludes to the creation of the universe;

An old beggar woman who used to wander the roads of Perth Country. Far back in time, she remembers when one world was beneath a glacier, then it melted and coniferous trees were the first to come back. Then came the deciduous hardwoods which are still pushing the coniferous trees further and further north. (26)

Granny Crack further describes the geographical condition of Canada when she was a girl and brings before our eyes the past and present and the myth behind Canada: “Long before the first Indians arrived. Why the ice was piled up four miles high all over the countryside. Ice cream was cheap then, I can tell you” (27).

We see different colours. We come across the images of a pebble, a dewdrop, a piece of string and straw. Time moves backwards to the time of Adam and Eve. We realize that not only are we going through the hero’s life and the stories he has heard as a child but we are also going through Canada’s life – glacier and forest – and the story of the world (30). There is another story within
the story which transfers childhood fears to the present through myth. Some kids shout in confusion. They say, “A bear ran off with Sadie! A bear ran off with Sadie! And it takes a lot of people to produce one child” (34).

A couple comes with a marionette baby. The child is Sadie. She is inside the bear and shouts for help, “And still – I get eat up by a bear. Mother! Father! Chase the bear away” (40). The father slices the bear open. The mother sews up the bear. Sadie thanks the father and mother for giving life (40). Sadie offers berries to the bear and the bear disappears. When the children enter into the adult world, they are punished by teachers. On one such occasion, Tecumseh comes to the rescue of children. The recalling of the name of Tecumseh brings back the death of the bravest son of the soil “Tecumseh – stop! These whips are made of my skin which the Yankees flayed from my back when I was killed long ago with a Kentuckyman’s rifle at the battle of Moravian town” (46).

Tecumseh crawls into a hollow log. The children pull out a tortoise from the other end. He lives in Canadian history and myth. He describes his ancestry, father and mother and his present potency:

My mother was the moon, my father the sun. I am Tecumseh. I have changed into the tortoise who will never die. Climb on my back and I’ll take you down the great river to meet your ancestors who came across the ocean in boats with white wings named. (49)
Another screen shows pictures of boats and immigrants on board ship waiting for the new country. Six people speak to an invisible child as ancestors dramatically. They stand for the varied ethnic and heterogeneous culture of the Canadians. They are made up of different cultures and manners. They cannot be homogenous:

I bring you the eye
I bring you a tooth
I bring you your left hand
I bring you the colour of your hair
I bring you your bad temper
I bring you your mind
I bring you your heart
I bring you your guts. (49)

The boy becomes a youth. He visits different parts of Canada. He keeps with him the piece of star given by hermit Winemeyer and the green leaf of love that Bible Sal has given him. We see a transition sequence in which we are reminded that originally this started out with a man remembering his life, being initiated into finding some pathway through it, finding out how many colours and selves into which he is broken, finding out how both hostile and loving the most normal figures in one's life can be. The son or the youth enjoys the beauty of nature. Reaney's dramatic skill gives life to a grass and makes it powerful:
I used to take pleasures in such little things, images, stones, pebbles, leaves, grasses, sedges – the grass is like a pen, its nib filled with seed – but it all seems – lies. I can’t go on. There seems no reason to go on living or thinking. (94)

Bible Sal asks the son, “Do you remember that great big leaf we found on the island (99). The reply of the son takes us back to the history of man and how human frailty has been transferred to the present generation since creation: “Yes, Adam and Eve could have hidden all their shame in it” (99). The past history of Canada becomes a permanent reminder of the present generation through myth and drama. The narrator mourns over the loss of the former glory of Canada. It is sterile and barren. It is a curse on happy life.

I curse this street where it’s increasingly difficult to find a green leaf.

I curse Yonge street.

Existence waked me here on this cement tapeworm

“This one day and Everyday. (115)

The growth of the backbone is a sign of change. It indicates the development of Canada with advancement in transportation. It also underlines the devastation brought about by dust and pollution:

But I have here this long grey vertebrae

The backbone of Toronto, my backbone too

Cars and street dust and plate glass and something
That’s my journey and life.

If it got nowhere

This one day of all the days

Nowhere’s somewhere. (116)

The fable of the baby sitter and the baby indicates the disease and illness inherent in human reproduction. The baby says: “I haven’t got any arms – nor any legs. I wasn’t born with any. I’m just a torso – lying here in bed. Every half hour you should turn me over to my other side” (117). The dejection and disappointment expressed by the hero establishes the recycling history and myth of human life: “I have no love to spare. I can’t bear sickness and pain in myself or others. I reject completely all the messy ways. We sail coffins in our seed. Don’t you curse your parents’ lust?” (117).

The hero opens a book to read Ranch Romances to comfort the sick, deformed boy. Soon the leaf appears and the hero looks charged with new energy and optimism: “Where did this leaf come from? It’s the leaf Sally and I found on the island” (118). He adds in the same vein: “Things you’ve lost are inside things you don’t like” (118). The hero decides to love the sick person. There is hope and renewal: “Yes. I love you. Without feet you walk with your breath. Without hands your body is a giant’s hand. I love you” (119).

The MA offers water to the poor child affected by measles. He can see light and colours. His creative mind sees visions of future:
I haven’t seen the light for forty days, Mother, have I? I’ve watched colours in the Dark. I’ve thought of so much that has been and is and will be. I guess. Red and Yellow and blue things. Purple things. Black things. (127)

It recalls the past, present and future of history and the timelessness of myth. The sick child in bed for forty days is mythically compared with the same duration Jesus had been in the wilderness. The mother announces the arrival of spring and the trees covered with green leaves (128).

*The Donnellys* is a fine dramatic exercise in the transformation of history into myth and drama. Like a historian and as a poet, Reaney has assimilated the legends surrounding the Donnelly family of Biddulph, massacred by the neighbours in 1880. This is fascinating history, fascinatingly told. It is a great subject, seldom explored in theatre, and the Donnellys are an ideal vehicle for that exploration of dramatic construction as lovers of freedom and individuality. They can be taken as representatives for French-Canadians, Blacks oppressed or any other group and minority. As Scott Beaven observes, “It is also a primeval subject and Reaney wrote the play in tandem with his director and the entire show has been staged in a mythic-epic that transcends time and place” (no page).

Reaney’s collage of history is expressed through choric chanting, songs, children’s games, soliloquies, plays within plays, indirect narration, mime and even marionettes. Perhaps like the Medicine show Actors, we may refuse to look
beyond their popular image as vindictive, black Donnellys who had to be destroyed. May be on another level, by responding imaginatively to the mound of historical facts, dates and documents present in the plays, we are ready to face a community of Canadians with a greater emotional and intellectual understanding of the personal, social and political and religious factors that lie behind a much misunderstood incident in Canadian history and thus learn something more about Canadian culture. The play reaches its climax when Jim Donnelly kills Pat Farrel for the loss of his land. This feud culminated in the massacre of five of the Donnellys that electrified the newspaper readers of the continent. Reaney dramatizes the life of the historical Donnelly family and makes them mythical through art.

Joseph Frank observes the way in which the modernist poetry of Eliot and pound "undermines the inherent consecutiveness of language, frustrating the reader's normal expectation of a sequence and forcing him to perceive the elements of the poem as juxtaposed in space rather than unrolling in time" (Spatial Form in Modern Literature 10). Ivon Vidan explains that "spatial form in fiction is achieved either through a network of recurring motifs [. . . ] or through a pattern of forward and backward moving in time that plays against the chronological order of events" (Time Sequence in Spatial Fiction 135).

Reaney divides the reality of the Donnellys in to four rituals of life in Biddulph in adherence to the mythic conceptions of Frye: the seasonal, introduced by the drinking song "John Barleycorn" (13), the story of the dying
god who is killed at the height of his powers, the spiritual present in the first line spoken in *Sticks and Stones*, “which are the sacraments that can be obtained only once?” (14) and the legal and geometric evident in the surveying and census-taking that follows the story. Mrs. Donnelly tells Will about his father’s defiance of the White feet in Ireland. These realities of life in the wild lands of Canada are immutable. The surveyor who sets the Donnellys’ lot foretells that it will create opposition and rivalry because of the little stream that runs through it unmindful of the laws of geometry (20).

While external forces in the Donnellys’ life by no means are at peace with one another, Donnelly and Cassleigh both kill men they hate but the treatment accorded by the law are so different that the crimes seem to exist in separate worlds. The legal may reach over and interfere with the seasonal (40). Jim Donnelly sows seeds of wheat in all hundred acres that he claims his own. It is a season of harvest. To add to his misfortune and fury, one Fat woman’s husband Farl gets away half of his wheat fields to be harvested through legal proceedings. Thus, the interference of legal over the seasonal gain of harvest the loss of ownership. The Donnellys watch as half of their crop is transferred to a new owner. “That wheat is lost. And my scythe never touched it (43). It was harvested by a piece of paper. I’ve known men burn their crop rather than have a strange harvest it” (43). These are the codes of existence in Biddulph; they demand strict adherence and are capable of betraying even the most devoted supplicant (63).
The Donnellys are inhabitants of the seasonal world of nature and fertility. The family is always found harvesting, planting, clearing the land, bringing up their eight children and even dying in the soil (63). "John Barleycorn is the natural process with which they are represented and identified. The ballad has its pattern of ploughing, first shoots, growth, harvest, threshing, distilling and finally drunkard's piss it against the wall" (21).

The story of the Donnelly reveals that "a rich natural force is smashed down by the weight of society and pissed away" (17). The identification of the Donnellys with the barley is made open in several sections of the play. Mr. Donnelly often compares his sons to the seeds of young shoots that will rise up after he is gone. During the flashbacks to his defiance of the white feet, there is a subliminal equation of Donnellys and wheat. The Whitefeet summon Donnelly to face them outside the door. Donnelly continues with a verse later. This equates the fate of the Donnellys with wheat. A male voice calls the name of Donnelly and others follow suit: "Jim Donnelly" and others chant, "then the binder came with her neat thumb: she bound me all round". The male voice repeats the same: "Jim Donnelly?" And others chant, "And then they hired a handy man to stand me to the ground" and finally the male voice shouts: "Jim Donnelly!" (17).

Even before much is known about the Donnellys in Ireland or Biddulph, the impression of the natural pattern of their existence has been reinforced
The Donnellys are alienated from both the spiritual worlds of Biddulph, the true and demonic. They may attend mass with their fellow Irish settlers, but the Donnellys are never peacefully confirmed into the community or the church. The historical aspect of the feud is a consequence of Mr. Donnelly’s escape from the sentence of death in the killing of Farl. In a country dominated by fear and violence, the will of Jim Donnelly to stand alone and say, “But you see I won’t kneel. And I won’t, I will not swear that” (19) reveals his courage.

Following Frye’s mythopoeic model the Donnellys are identified with the process of the seasons. “They are violent at one moment and tranquil and reflective the next” (67). Mr. Donnelly makes a calm acceptance of the seasonal pattern when the fortunes of his family comes close to the steady process of growth in their new farm, interrupted briefly by death, imprisonment, violence and then continuing with more growth, more sons, more wheat.

The centre of the match and centre of the play, is reached when Mr. Donnelly compares himself with Cassleigh.

Aye, I killed, shure I killed – fighting for my name and my family and my land in hot blood. On this very road down at the tracks you killed – by cold proxy. Having myself seven sons and a girl I ask what children have you? What have you got between your legs. Cassleigh – a knife [. . .]. (91)

Here is the seasonal opposition at the helm of the play. Donnelly is the hot-blooded summer, and Cassleigh, the cold frost of sterility (what children), winter,
monstrosity (first the thorn in hand, now the knife between the legs) (91). The title is ironic and symbolic. Stones symbolize the Donnellys. Dry sticks stand for the enemies of the Donnellys.

The spiritual life of the Irish has overtaken the natural and seasonal existence of the Donnellys. The bishop, the thresher and the unnatural Cassleigh have become the mob that wanted the Donnellys, John Barleycorn, the Summer, to die. The Donnellys barn is burned in the fall of 1867, the year of confederation. As the Donnelly's barn blazes in the autumn night, the sense of winter is in the signalling an end to the harvest and an imprisonment of the land.

The burning house dominates Handcuffs, as the Donnellys enter the flames of Hell, only to be purified, and witnessed by Johnny and by Bridget who, dying herself, sees the transformation:

At last I could see the star close by: it was my aunt and uncle’s burning house in Ontario where - and in that star James and Judith and Tom and Bridget Donnelly may be seen walking as in a fiery furnace calmly and happily forever. Free at last. (266)

In Sticks and Stones, Mrs. Donnelly climbs rather than walks the hindering roads to Goderich to plead with the Governor-General for her husband’s life. She also meets her own ghost who has been purified in the consuming fire of the Book of Daniel and is returning down the physical world (227). “Is it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the
burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king” (Dan. 3:17). Another passage also celebrates the power of the Donnellys over fire:

And the prince, governors, and captains, and the king’s counsellors, being gathered together, saw these many upon whose bodies the fire had no power, nor was an hair of their head signed, neither were their coats changed, nor the smell of fire passed on them. (3:27)

Obviously, the dramatist is driving home the message in a subtle symbolic medium that the Donnellys cannot be oppressed by the enemies, formed by the secret society.

In the beginning of Act III of Handcuffs, this pattern of ascending and descending is repeated as the murdered Donnellys rise from their graves to face the dull-minded materialists who have gathered in the graveyard in Biddulph on the anniversary of their deaths. The actions of the dead Donnellys resemble the sexual imagery of the divine creation and the wind of the Holy Spirit or word (227). Here the process of transformation of the dead to life reaches its core. They try to awaken their enemies and friends to regeneration as in a myth. For example, the ghosts of Mr. & Mrs. Donnellys appear in the graveyard of St. Patrick’s Biddulph and declare:

Get the false gravestones off us – we weren’t died, we were killed, we were murdered. That’s better now heave that one up too
till we get at this young bastard, Grab him Jim. For I am buried here, oh, yes, with my husband and my sons, they buried what’s left of me. Here is the coffin four of us lie in. Hear our bones rattling? They have grabbed the drunken and are turning him in to their son Tom. (253)

Mr. Donnelly’s meta-dramatic comment that he’s “not in Hell for (he’s) in a play” (24) suggests that they, as self-conscious characters, have been granted freedom from linear time. The Father in Pirandello’s Six Characters in search of an Author agrees: “He who has the good fortune to be born a living character may snap his fingers at Death even. He will never die!” (10). Gerald Parker, in “How to Play”, refers to Reaney’s characters’ “sense of being in a play, that is, in part, the sense of existing somewhere (and some time) – at the intersection of history and myth, caught in the double activity of living and telling one’s story” (250). The intersection of history and myth is also an intriguing temporal crossroads. In *Cosmos and History; the Myth of the Eternal Return*, Mircea Eliade observes in modernists: “a resistance of history, a revolt against historical time, freighted as it is with human experience, to a place in the time that is cosmic, cyclical, and infinite” (153). Frank refers to the world of myth as timeless, but, as Eliade’s remarks make clear, myth does have a temporal structure, even though it is not the linearity of history.

We are bound to analyse the mythic level or the design behind the play. The Donnellys are ritual victims offered to that fire god whose christianized form
is possibly Blaise, whose candles burn in Handcuffs and on whose day the Donnellys are murdered. This reminds us of the modernized pattern of the expression of thanks and offerings made to the sun – great luminary that turns the work of human hands into glittering green gold on the day of pongal, a festival celebrated by farmers as a token of harvest and plenty. Similarly the Donnellys are offered to the fire god. But like Dionysus, the god of the wheat sheaf, the victims revive and so the ballad of John Barleycorn echoes throughout the play. It counters the Showman’s ballad about the Black Donnellys.

Reaney’s dramatic skill is astounding while he creates two worlds of Perth Country (1936) and Caresfoot Court (1870) and transforms those into history and myth, listening to the wind. The Hawkscliffe Hall is historically and geographically surrounded by beech trees. The Caresfoot Court is known by the traditional haunted well. Geraldine’s killing of her child with Douglas in order to marry Attorney Eldred is recalled here: “You’ve murdered a part of me. No, Geraldine. I’m not going to give them back. It’s not wise to have you loose in the world without a rope around your neck” (LW 29). Again Piers Caresfoot recalls the past history of Geraldine and wonders how Attorney married her. “Rather the sorceress, isn’t she? Where on earth did Eldred (Attorney) pick her up? He’s such a funny toad of fellow” (40).

Piers Caresfoot marries Claudia instead of Maria Lawry who is proposed by his father Devil Caresfoot. So he disinherits the castle. The handing over of
the golden cup makes Douglas the new squire of Caresfoot (55). The visit of the ghost of the baby girl of Geraldine and Geraldine’s confessions bring about a behavioural change, “Oh my baby! Cut out my tongue if I don’t. I’ve dug you up from your grave and flung your bones about but still you haunt me. I wish her baby was dead and my baby alive” (56). The ghost again tells, “Take my wishbone mother. Here it is by the haunted well. Find it . . . here . . . there” (56). The baby ghost laughs and recalls the behaviour of its mother. The baby’s life is turned eternal in another form through a doll: “Sew up my bone into a doll. Give it to her when she’s grown up a bit. And if she loves me and kisses me then I’ll have rest for I’ll have found my true mother and then I will not haunt you any more. (56)

The mythic belief that ghost cannot stand dawn is brought back through drama: “Over here mother. Down the crooked path. Here are the weasel’s den. Here in your crooked heart. Haste mother for the dawn comes and there I can speak no more” (57).

Claudia delivers a baby girl. She is sick. She finds comfort and hope in the child. She looks upon her as an angel and messenger of confidence and new life:

My child, you are a messenger sent to call me to a happier world. An angel messenger. When I am gone know by what name to call
her when the time comes. Go, quickly, doctor, and tell my husband
to come. I shall die at dawn. (57)

Claudia continues in the same vein which recalls the past. She curses Piers. She
wants him to protect her child very carefully from dangers:

Piers! I’m sorry, I could not bear to see you before. But I wanted
to get all anger at you out of my soul. And now I have. Piers I
loved you. Despite all, I hope to see you again. My motherless
babe, may the power of God protect you, angels guard you, and
may the curse of God fall upon those who would bring evil upon
you. Piers, you have heard my words. In your charge I leave the
child. See that you never betray the trust. (57-58)

Harriet, Jenny, Ann and Owen are small children and they are friends.
Ann says, “I’m now writing the history of Angela’s childhood” (60). Angela’s
eternity is assured through art, “and I’ll write your name with a glass pen and
ink” (61). Owen informs that Angela is the child of Claudia and Piers and she
grows up at Caresfoot Court. The innocent angelic beauty of Angela and the
wickedness of the earth carries her to some other world:

Child of delight, with sunbright hair.
And seablue, seadeep eyes.
Spirit of bliss, what brings thee here
Beneath these sullen skies? (61)

Angela is looked after by the old nurse Martha. Piers catches stray dogs and sells
them to a doctor every month. Owen sadly reacts to Piers collecting dogs: “What
an end for an Oxford B.A., somehow or other, which reminds me we'd better start training our dogs” (62).

The local clergyman Mr. Glenden gives lessons to Angela. Geraldine or Lady Eldred presents a doll to Angela on her birthday. Then she pictures the old and present condition, of the place: “Why – Martha, how sad it is to see this fine old place in such a ruinous decay. Some of the chimneys have toppled and the drive is tangled with weeds and underbush” (65). Angela tells of hearing voices on the other side of the wall and exclaims, “Mr. Glenden, what lies over there behind those hills. Beyond the forest. Is it the sea?” (68). Glenden remembers it as Hawskcliffe Hall and there is a boy of her age named Arthur. Angela is attacked by dogs and saved by her father Piers. Angela is sick in bed and asks Martha to comb her hair. But the comb is lost in the forest by Angela. The description of the comb brings to her mind memories of the olden days, “Poor comb, Mother’s comb. It has a golden star in its ivory shaft. I wonder how long it will lie in the wind and the rain before the ravens find it” (73).

Angela hears a humming sound. She is helped to look through the window by Martha. Angela recalls her past to Martha: “Martha, do you remember when I was very little I used to ask who that was riding by at night?” (75). Martha says it was the Black Huntsman, Douglas. Angela’s following prediction is going to become true in her life, “some day, Martha, I see that I may have to ride with him. But not very far. Only to the star that shines on my mother’s lost comb” (75).
Owen's mother Mrs. Taylor has come. She has come not to join her husband. Owen stages dramas to ease the pains of his own sickness and the separation of his parents. His mother mirrors her mind: "To say goodbye to Owen. To be at his play. In it too" (78). It becomes indelible in history and myth that there are parents who ignore children for their carnal pleasures and cannot take kindly to sickness. It is made evident in Owen's mother's words to her husband. "And inside you are rotten. The baby girl you gave me died. Now the baby boy is. I want nothing more to do with you" (78).

Geraldine or Lady Eldred informs about the love affair between Maria's son Arthur Brenzaida and Piers' daughter Angela. Douglas is a woman-hunter. He is fond of charming girls. He is helped by the wicked woman Lady Eldred. Piers wants to regain his lost farm. He finds Angela as an easy means to get the property from Douglas. He tells her about his past, the present pathetic condition and his expectations for his future:

Look sometimes at Douglas. Let me have something. I bought you that dress. Angela, you don't understand. Once I was a gentleman. Now I'm a cattle drover and deal in dead animals. I want to be gentleman again before I die and I'm saving up the money that I have to have. But the money's no use unless my land comes back with it. Angela, I lost Caresfoot because I married your mother and you were a girl. (81)
Arthur comes with the comb and hands it over to Angela. Angela’s past comes to her as in a vision: “My mother’s comb. Why Mr. Brenzaida, I lost this comb years ago when I was a child” (81). Douglas asks Geraldine to take her to Angela. He falls at her feet and Angela runs away with Arthur. Angela reads the words carved on the bark of a tree. They find some ribbons and candles there. Angela tells: “Oh Arthur. Let’s light them and fasten them to chips of wood and see how long they’ll float down the stream” (85). Again Douglas asks Geraldine to get him Angela. Geraldine’s words represent the past, present and future. They reveal her intention of ruining innocent lives:

I . . . pity her? I hate her. Look you, I suffer. She shall suffer more. Her love will be fouled and her life made a shambles. Such a shambles that she will cease to believe there is a God. In return I shall give her . . . you. (86)

Arthur and Angela pole down into the lake in an old boat pursuing the candles. Arthur says, “My Candle’s still going, Angela” (87). Angela expresses shock over her Candle sinking into the water. However, she reveals her confidence even in dismay, “Oh Arthur, my candle’s drowned. But the moon shall be my candle and she’s brighter now than the day” (87). Owen reminds the mythic value of dreams, “I woke up thinking why couldn’t I have been a normal person instead of always dreaming it out. Always listening to the wind” (88). The same view is shared by Ann:
I worship the world we make up stories about. I can never stop thinking about new things for Geraldine to say and do. It’s idolatry... And yet I can’t live without it... without dreaming it out” (88).

Arthur and Angela are engaged on condition that he should not meet her for one year (89). Piers demands, “a marriage settlement of half of your property on Angela” (91). It may be the mythic culture of Canadians to give half of the bridegroom’s property to the bride. Angela goes to the railway station to see him off to Madeira. She presents him with a ring. It is a symbol of love. It signifies the legacy of the hierarchy: “In my mother’s family it has been a very old ring. That is the star of love in the deep blue of the evening sky” (93). Angela explains that “it means forever. Be true to come” (93).

Lady Eldred or Geraldine goes to Madeira and meets Arthur there. She wants to cheat Angela. She gets the ring given to Arthur by Angela. Lady Eldred believes in the myth that, “engagements are like the promises and pie crust, made to be broken” (102). Lady Eldred comes back with the engagement ring. Douglas and Lady Eldred disguise Rogue like Arthur. He is smeared with mud and placed in a coffin as dead. Mr. Glenden conducts the burial. Lady Eldred conveys the news to Angela that Arthur is dead. She also shows the ring. Angela is skeptical: “If he is dead Lady Eldred, how did he die? Where did he die? And what of?” (106). Lady Eldred and Sir Edward produce false certificates to make Angela believe it.
Piers asks Angela to marry Douglas. They all tell lies that Douglas will also die soon. Angela reminds them that it will be only “after June the ninth” (112). Mr. Glenden asks Angela what she sees in the lake. She sees her past and the greedy nature of her father as in a vision:

While I was ill I imagined that
I heard the wild swans flying over
Are they floating on the lake now or
Is it the sun glittering over the water?
Oh, Mr. Glenden, my father is such a grey old wolf. (113)

Angela is married to Douglas in a registrar office, near Caresfoot Court. Lady Eldred echoes, “Let me congratulate you, Mrs. Caresfoot. Indeed I should for I prophesied this happy event, if you may recall, seven months ago” (114). Angela replies, “But I’m not really married. It’s nothing but a form. Now to be forgotten” (114). Douglas tries to touch Angela but she keeps away from him. Lady Eldred asks her pay for helping him marry Angela. Douglas shows her old love letters. Sir Edward’s reply echoes his long desire for the myth of revenge: “From this moment on you are a ruined woman. A penniless outcast. For years I’ve longed to have revenge on you for the humilities you’ve made me suffer” (116).

Lady Eldred’s reply goes back to the origin of history and myth:

Edward, get back into the mud where you belong. The mud where I found you . . . A bumbling, pitiful little country attorney whom I
made a Sir Edward. Douglas, there is something written on your face that I'll some day sign with my foot. (116)

Arthur reaches Caresfoot Court. Martha exclaims, “It's really you, Sir. And she married yesterday . . . oh God” (124). Angela cannot believe her eyes. She doubts whether she lives or is dead. She feels pity for her action: “Oh Arthur, my darling, you have come back to me. Am I dead or alive? I am dead then. Is it really you? Alas, yes, I am married. But Arthur [ . . . ]” (125). Arthur feels shattered and agonized. He cannot put up with the hasty decision of Angela. Yet he chides her with courage: “Get back! Don't dare to touch. Do you know what you are? Fresh from your husband's arms and ready to throw yourself into mine! Shame upon you! Were you married yesterday?” (125).

Angela shows the ring and Arthur tells it being returned to show his love and concludes:

But I see now that you were weaker than I and bubbled in March, no in January, like tar on a scorched July highway. My mistress of pitch, go back to the animal you prefer to me. Tell him those are tears of happiness and let him kiss them quite away. (126)

Douglas is thrown into the well by the dogs. Angela scolds her father. He sells her for money and title. His behaviour towards his daughter takes us back to the mythic betrayal of Christ by Judas:

You Judas who sold me. They bought the use of me from you for a year, didn't they. Judas! And when they had duped me good and
properly then you got your title and the land back. Squire Caresfoot. Squire Judas. (127)

The ghost of Claudia haunts Piers. It tells Glenden about the doll and its eagerness to look at her:

It's so dark! Lead me to Martha beyond the forest, some place in the past when I was still. The doll looks at me! Now I know why she gave it to me. So I would have something when she had stripped away everything and everyone else. (127)

The visit of the ghost of Claudia signifies the timelessness of the mythic world:

I'll come when there art saddest,
Laid alone in the darkened room;
When the mad day's mirth has banished
From evenings chilly gloom. (128)

Lady Eldred's rhetoric fuses the past enmity with the present and paves way for the metaphoric change through art:

Well Squire Caresfoot, long ago, your father told the village constable to whip my father out of the village. He died in a ditch that night. I, his poor daughter by. Now it's time the Caresfoots paid all of their debt to the Almedas. Oh you are worse than I am. I bit and scratched to save my life. But you sold a beautiful young girl to get back your clay. I knew you'd do it. And now that
you’re done it. I know I must kill you for it. Like the Christians’
God I tempt and if you fall, I destroy. (129-30)

Now Piers is tied by a rope and pushed into the fen. He is killed by the
dogs. Lady Eldred is a sorceress. This incident shows the existence of the myth
of magic in Canada. “I might have given this talisman of my power to Angela if
she could have sworn never to continue her love for the wretched weakling
Arthur Brenzaida” (130). It is December. Angela looks out and sees a star. She
compares her life to the evil mythical star:

Now I know the star. It is the tooth of Medusa’s Head which
Perseus holds. My whole life has been spent beneath its influence
which of the twelve winds of Heaven shall blow it out? The West
wind! The West wind! Oh come and help me free the prisoner, the
river frozen in the jail of winter. Bring me the doll, Martha. The
doll that she gave me long ago. (135)

Angela kisses the doll. The baby ghost’s reaction brings the trouble of
Lady Eldred to a sudden end but remains throughout the drama:

For at last someone good enough has been found to kiss the rag
doll you made of my bones, loving enough to lick the sores of
Lazarus, and gentle enough to weep for the scorpion. Farewell. I
have at last found my true mother. (136)

Angela listens to some music that comes from Hawkscliffe Hall. Martha informs
that Arthur is going to marry that night. Martha offers a fairy dress to Angela,
“Here’s a ball dress I’ve had made for you. Put it on” (137). Martha’s vehicle transforms the history of life into a myth of life, “Ah, I’ve a horse called the West Wind and sleigh. Get in and I’ll drive” (137). The ball unites Angela with Arthur. They become one through marriage. They are made immortal through art, “They are free in Eternity. They will never taste death again” (138).

Reaney is a true historian who resurrects the myths of witches, witchcraft, puppets and marionettes. His characters are identified with birds. McTavish’s house is historically portrayed. The effect of the goose, hawk and seagull is very different from that of the marionettes. They are representations of particular characters. Dr. Troyer represents the gull, MaTavish, the hawk, and Mrs. Pharlan, the goose with a black wing (Bal 3). Rev. McDorman, a Methodist minister and McTavish call on to Dr. Troyer. McDorman says, “Dr. Troyer, I really apologise for my companion’s bad manners, but he has been driven desperate by the diverse strange events at his house in the past six months” (20). Dr. Troyer, the famous witchfinder tells his granddaughter Mary Troyer, Yonnie, ask them hast if they’ll wash their feet when we let them in already” (20).

Dr. Troyer sees the house of McTavish and Pharlan in his moonstone. Mary Troyer asks the number of children McTavish has. McTavish says he has Alan and the baby and Jane, the foster-girl (29). Mrs. McTavish and others appear in Troyer’s mirror and Mrs. McTavish declares:

Why Jane saved the baby’s life several times. The cherriest soul about through all our troubles. A ray of sunshine. We never
noticed how good she was till all this troubles started. The cradle rocks harder and harder until it nearly tips . . . . (31)

They are troubled by a phantom dog. Soon there comes Mrs. Pharlan. She wants Mrs. McTavish to spin the wool for her:

When my daughter died and I became all alone in my long, low house over the hill, I traded all my white sheep for black ones the Indians brought to me. Mrs. McTavish, how much if Jane cards this and you spin it in to yarn. I’m setting up my loom next month and I’ll want some yarn. (35)

Mrs. McTavish informs her of the troubles and is assured “no trouble will befall their house while they are engaged on her business” (35). They feel no trouble. Mary Troyer sees the happenings in the mirror and tells, “These happenings were messages from your own evil heart, McTavish, if you could tell all to us. I’m convinced you would be free” (38). Now Mrs. Pharlan visits the house to get the wool back. She says, “Jane, I’ve brought a scissors and a comb with me” (39). It reveals the existence of witchcraft and the things used for the same. They used hair, nail clippings, and trodden soil. Mrs. Pharlon adds: “I’d like to comb your hair for you” (39).

Mrs. Pharlon again asks Jane: “Because the nails on your right hand have grown so long, who cuts your nails for you” (41). Jane McTavish replies, “I cannot cut my right hand” (41). Mrs. Pharlan then expresses her wish, “And now the half moons on your right hand will be pared and clipped” (41). It is a mythic
belief that a lock of hair or a nail clipping can provide a witch with an excellent charm. The attention is focussed on the mythic belief of certain tribes. For example, the Asa, a branch of the Masi tribe, hide the clippings of their hair and the parings of their nails or throw them far away lest a sorcerer should get hold of them and make their original owners ill by his magic (110). Among the Thomson Indians of British Columbia loose hair was buried, hidden, or thrown into the water, and nail clippings burnt because, if any enemy got hold of them he might bewitch the owner (110). Europeans have been known to spit on their hair before disposing of it as a safeguard against its use by malevolent witches.

Mary Troyer asserts, “I have found out where most of the troubles lies. It lies in him” (53). McTavish recalls his life: “Yes, my house is built on lands the Indians warned me about. The hidden ones lived there, they said. I went ahead. I’ll do what I please, said I” (53). McTavish recalls another incident:

It’s true, among other things I used her ill for, I had no right to cut down the trees in the field. Her father and mine had an agreement, but might is right. She’s only a silly old weaver woman. I’m an elder of the church. (53)

Dr. Troyer forces him to drink the water, used to clean his feet. McTavish vomits a black feather (53). The magic and mythic power of Troyer helps McTavish vomit the evil done by a sorcerer.

The main aim of Troyer is to recall the past sins of McTavish committed without confession. They are the primordial mythic sins inherent in human
beings. McTavish says, “I threw away my old clothes? And yet they aye return? (57). Dr. Troyer recalls the nakedness of birth. It signifies the soul naked without sins. It should not be clothed with vanities and impurities:

Why, ja - Jack McTavish, do you remember at Delhi we got a tattering about worldliness and how babies when they are going to be born - don’t put on many clothes and that you, McTavish, who are just about afford to strip off some vanities, so we got you to throw away your silly hat. (51)

Dr. Troyer recounts what happened in the church when McTavish attended mass with his other friends:

This kirk you go already - it would be much more fun to have the kirk and Sabbath worship on Sunday night and then let loose on Sunday morning with the drinking and the love making and the cursing and the merry singing. (60)

They have no faith in religion. They go to church not for prayer but for pleasure. McTavish says, “No, no - that would never do - have fun first and repent afterwards” (60). McTavish remains a man without soul as, “I killed the white bird. Ye can’t have a silly bridie pockling up the ale barrels and whisky jugs” (60).

A church, priest and believers are brought before the mirror. Mrs. Pharlan makes a complaint to the priest and elders: “My daughter is dead and her baby child you robbed me of. Now I want the child back. My daughter died, but she
left her daughter. I want her back do you hear?” (76). The priest says there is no proof to her dreams and visions. He asks her to pray for a sign from God. “Jennie Pharlan, you have no proof of what your dreams and visions say. If even we pray to providence for a sign and there is no sign, we must abide” (77). The church kirk considers both McTavish and Mrs. Pharlan as transgressors of the will of God and church. They face excommunication from the church.

Mrs. McTavish blames Mrs. Pharlan. It again recalls the cultural myth of the people who lived then:

She is a witch, Mrs. Pharlan you are a witch and you have enchanted my foster-daughter away from me – she has stolen her fingernails clippings, come to our place with a comb in which she no doubt collected pieces of Jane’s hair. (77)

Rev. McGillicuddy asks the people to stone as [ . . . ] a man also or woman that hath a familiar spirit or that is a wizard, shall surely be put to death. Stone him with stones” (84). But Dr. Troyer cools them down:

Ach, but the verses continue right after; “I am the Lord. Thou shalt rise up before the hoary head, and honour the face of the old man, and fear thy God. I am the Lord, and if a stranger sojourn with thee in your hand, ye shall not vex him. But the stranger thou shalt love him as myself; for ye were strangers once in the Land of Egypt.

Dr. Troyer becomes famous among the people. They begin to love and respect him. He becomes a hero. The people do not attack him. He becomes superior
there, “he suddenly makes himself a majestic figure whom they love and dare not attack” (84). “I am here to purify, not to desecrate. Powers have been given to me to do so. Ach, Jesus Christ himself was called a sorcerer when he raised Lazarus and cast out evil spirits” (84).

Dr. Troyer has a hat. It has magical power. It shows the past events of one’s life. He boasts of the powers of his hat as:

Yes. Yes. But try me. My hat – here is a Pow Wow that mit visionary power – who cares to come forward and put their head under it, chust under its brim and you can see – music into the past, into the present, into the future, into Eternity – all the four at once. (85)

Mrs. Russel, an old lady puts on the hat. She sees her lost son: “Oh he looks so natural I could cry, why, sir, he appears to be alive and happy in one of the Spanish countries down there in South America (87-88). Mrs Pharlan wants to see her dead daughter’s daughter. Dr. Troyer tells the name of the fairies underneath McTavish’s house. “Mama – gwase – gwand – the Indian name” (87). McTavish is a greedy man. But he is completely transformed by Dr. Troyer and it is seen by Mrs. McTavish in the mirror.

Jack! You never gave all your money away. I thought you might have had to pay him. But I see your money flowing like water out of your pockets to all the beggars and tramps and orphans and widows between here and long point. You’ve changed! (88)
Jane McTavish sees her father and mother in the mirror. Though her mother is dead, she lives somewhere mythically in another human being. Dr. Troyer uses his sorcery to purify. Troyer melts the silver coins, pours it from crucible into moulds and then the moulds are dipped hissing into the river. Troyer will release a white dove from the sleeve of his coat. McTavish is scared at some of the operations – for the living bird in the blood of the bird that was killed over the running water, and he shall sprinkle upon him that is to be cleaned from the leprosy seven times, and shall pronounce him clean (Ball 89-90).

Mary Troyer’s voice is heard, “You shall mould a bullet of sterling silver, and you shall fire at the bird. If you wound it, your enemy will be wounded in some corresponding part of the body” (91). McTavish shoots the bird. The right wing of the bird is wounded and correspondingly the right arm of Pharlan. She becomes angry and beats McTavish with her other arm. Her speech is revelatory of the past. Mrs. Pharlan reveals the love-affair that existed between McTavish and her daughter. He shares her bed soon after betrothal as it is their custom:

She (her daughter) came home that night with such a light in her eye I was not surprised when she told me a week later that they had plighted troth and as was our custom soon shared bed like man and wife which state of affairs bid fair they should soon be in. I used to go to sleep at nights with the straw rustling over my head in the loft. (97)
Mrs. Pharlon reveals that McTavish is a cheat and he loves women for pleasure and money. He abandons her daughter for a widow: “There is a choice in a different group of people with different customs. McTavish chooses a widow – Mrs. McTavish” (97). Mr. Pharlan also heard “at the sheep fair that McTavish was courting a rich widow up at Running Creek” (97). Jane is born to her daughter. McTavish stops visiting. Jane’s mother commits suicide. Mrs. Pharlan then hands over the child to Mrs. McTavish. McTavish’s trouble ends after the revelation by Jane McTavish: “I will trouble your home no more, but return to this poor woman’s house” (102).

Mrs. Pharlan’s anxious expression reveals the witchcraft she has employed to get Jane transferred to her:

Jane Pharlan. Can it be true that once years ago I descended into the pit of evil to look for you and with the help of fire and bird and wing and feather and the very penny that was paid for your mother brought you up again to my love? (102)

No one can trace the reason for the troubles. They have various doubts and they cannot be answered simply:

Did the lassie cause all those things to happen? Shouldn’t she be punished? Should we go up to the kirk and excommunicate them all? Should he be taken back? There’s the full moon rising. Get the benches in the church back to where they belong. The Indians did it. Wild Indians. Kept shooting up the place at night. No, no,
it couldn’t have been Indians. Where they hide is put in question mark. (102)

Reaney’s artistic alchemy clears their doubts of the troubles and mysteries. The mind should be free from sins. One should confess the sins to sustain divine help. Such a person is relieved from agonies and mental conflicts: “Confession is a story that troubles us all, it is something in words about the way we can fall, something that draws us away from the mirror to pull us from ourselves or the truth that we fear” (103).

A mythic origin and transformation of human life is stated by Dr. Troyer. Before man is born, he flies about a sky. The sky and earth get united in marriage. Then they shoot us down to the earth into a cradle. Death waits in a boat like a hunter. Birds keep company with human being:

Before we were born we fly about a sky and with their marriages their giving and taking in marriage they shoot us down beneath our ground which is their sky into cradle punts, into the mashes of life eiyiyi, what a chob it has been this day where we are each a rush, and Death the Huntsman lies waiting in his crib-flat boat, waiting to shoot us, birds flying in this sky which is beneath the ground we walk in and […]. (103)

Dr. Troyer dies and he is buried in his orchard with his moonstone and divining rod, his hat and other arcane. One September two thieves came with spade to rob his grave. Soon a great white bird swept down on them from the
sky and drove them out of the orchard forever. The preservation of his body by birds after birds foretell the immortality granted to him through art.

Reaney who had worked as a college lecturer experienced second class treatment in his own native soil because of the foreign intrusion and monopoly of higher posts enjoyed by foreigners. He creates history from the events of 1895 student strike and transforms the same for the present and future generations. The class of 1895 is recalled. Daniel Wilson is the president of the university of Toronto. The president announces about two secret meetings by Jimuel Thompson:

They smuggled him for a Clandestine meeting – where?

I shall expel. Out infidel skeptic

Our anarchis? Our Labour Socialist. (TD 10)

Another speech by the president highlights the foreign domination in Canadian soil. They do not like communists and socialists: “Out anarchist, How dare you hold an illegal meeting. Out communists – dishonest rats that gnaw the holy cords atwain (10).

William Dale belongs to Canada. He stands for justice. He is cajoled by the president. The natives are oppressed and sidelined. “Those are your sideburns and that is your Ontario voice – with the slight hint of Yorkshire still these where your fathers was born” (11). William Dale is fed up with foreign
domination and exploitation. He wants a change of power. He expresses his
disgust over the foreign rule thus: “and so another generation of foreign
teachers” (11). He adds in the same vein, “But like all the other Canadians staff,
Sir, Daniel, I have no political power. There’s quite a few of us wonder if it will
always be that we work under strangers” (11). Dale tries to establish the
superiority of Canada: “you’d never know there was such a place as Canada if
you listened to the powers that be around here” (11). The Canadians have a
minority status in their own land.

The formation of Alumni is portrayed. James Tucker, Willie King and
Greenwood are the prominent figures. They are supported by William Dale, the
Professor at the university. Time moves forward, Tucker, King and Greenwood
– the student rebels and mutineers to be – packing their valises for college (12).
There is an examination section. Here future is brought back to signify the
eventual happening. Dale asks, “Why was I expelled” (13). There is an
announcement that professor Fury is the next president. He is a Canadian.
Mcqualid and Dale talk about culture. Dale’s explanation for culture differs
from Mcqualid’s. He argues that culture is developed by education and learning
different languages:

You insist on something they’ve been saturated with since
childhood. What they need is words – French, Greek, German,
Latin words, words to cut through the jungle of things – outside
that window. (19).
Mcquaild inspects the hands of Dale and exclaims, "Unlike all the other hands at the table, Dale's hands were awkward, rough – made so by toil by [ ... ]" (19).

Dale's concentration is on both agriculture and teaching. It is echoed in his speech, "My best ideas had come to me while helping my father about his farm. My home town St. Mary's is a hundred miles west of Toronto" (19). Right is another theology lecturer. He has political influence and power. He gets the appointment after his marriage with the chancellor's daughter: "painfully have I made my way up from a bankrupt farm to – marriage at St. James Cathedral with the Chancellor's daughter" (20). King and Tucker are hosed to the ground. They are tortured and humiliated by the senior students. The president turns hostile to them who consider them as mad. It is painfully revealed by Tucker:

So, that's over. Tortured by the senior students and hosed down by the president himself – we've just been initiated into what my father told me once was the mind of this province. Pneumatic Tire – all I can say, Willie, is that it's the mind of a mad man. I'm going to describe it. (23)

Willie King's personal disgust becomes a universal agony. He reveals the poor condition of the Canadians. They cannot find jobs in other places. Dale fights for equal pay and freedom of expression. Dale's speech recalls the humiliation the natives felt in their own college and his preference of literature to science:
It's not just a silly system we're fighting, to it's partly that we're from here. No one buys Canadian paintings, no one buys Canadian professors. Partly – who needs languages – your heart's really in the new chemical building, it's not in Virgil. (26)

The foreign professors and authority are greedy of money. They even swindle the college fund. Dale's revelation is common to every country, "Could you tell me just one thing – We're becoming a third rate college, money is needed – what happens to the interest from our endowment" (31). Another remark becomes "a satiric myth" on Academicians with poor stuff: "Incompetent professors hang on like grim death – year after year. If the university is intended as a 'Home for the helpless' [ . . . ]" (33).

Dale is dismissed from service. Tucker and King are expelled from classes. Dale speaks in agony. People do not like his love of freedom. When one fights for a social cause, he is hated and labelled as extremist. Dale wishes to go back to his father's place for regaining courage and confidence:

When I was a boy I'd had a vision that I had been made independent of the literal for life. That had ruined me. Because others hated you if you tried to take away the crutches they had to have. But I didn't need crutches. So I spoke out and said embarrassing things. What I wanted to do now was go back to my father's place and stand there again – at the place where I became a marked man. (38)
Tucker expresses his wish to go the United States for fellowship. King’s reply gives eternity to them through drama, “No, Jim, one day the university of Toronto will regret that or I am greatly mistaken. But I'll be back! (54). The students long for a reversal of the order of things. They hate begging and pleasing others. They depend upon hard work and independence. “The world will never be right until it can reverse the New Testament” and add, “To beg I won’t and to dig I’m not ashamed” (54). Despite immediate unfulfilled expectations, Dale, Tucker and the students have triumphed: they have left behind their story which they tell afresh through James Reaney’s play; they tell a story which is also a recollection of the concerns and realities of a city, of a society, and of a country – concerns and realities which are with us today.

Reaney uses conventions and characters true to rural life and folktales to express his personal themes concerning the natural conflict between fertility and sterility, good and evil. His characters exhibit both angelic and demonic powers. In the transformative dimension of history and myth, past is recalled and the hero is freed from external threats and enjoys peace and prosperity, friendship and harmony. Reaney’s plays end in spring, hope, new life, renewal and optimism. His characters travel through the troubles and turmoils of life and reach on the shore of success and self-confidence. The sick is healed, forsaken rehabilitated, orphans duly guided and blessed by fairies and the betrayed revealed the true villain. Fatherless and motherless children are united with their true parents. Reaney uses different literary genres and mythical symbols, images, allusions,
metaphors, allegory, satire and melodramatic devices to relate the villain and uphold the virtues of the noble. Certain plays observe the rules of the three unities of drama like time, place and action. Several sequences, episodes and related references make his plays a fine study of artistic creations for posterity. Also, they are controlled by two mythic and historic principles of time linear and cyclical.

The plays of Reaney deal with the history, varied life-styles, customs, manners, social practices, magic, witchcraft, family life, masked wives and husbands, foreign intrusions, immoral sexual habits, love for wealth and greed, religious poverty, disorder and confusion. All these cultural, moral, economic and political factors in the history of Canada are transformed into myth and drama, an immortal and perennial icon for posterity. Biblical epithets, parables and Psalms add flavour to the mythic dimension of the plays.