Chapter Five

Canadians are a nation of twenty-million still under tutelage, one-half to France, the other to England, and neither related to the other in the process of education.

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Chapter Five

The Poverty of Politics and the Politics of Religion

Canadian Literature is informed by diverse cultures, politics and religions. It is influenced by differences in language and geography. It was French before British, Indian and Inuit before that. Though Canada was a secular state, religion was everywhere in its history and language. The biases of region, religion, class, gender, race – noted or unnoted, conscious or unconscious – conditioned the way in which people viewed the world. In Canada, they helped to shape the expectations of the new society and its patterns of expression.

Literature in Canada grows from these social attitudes held in common, as well as from historical antecedents and extra-national models. But definitions of a single Canadian identity are suspect. It is the cultural plurality inside the country that most fundamentally shapes the way Canadians define their political characters, draw the dimensions of their literature, and voice their commitment to causes, institutions and individuality. Northrop Frye wrote in 1982, “Canada has passed from a pre-national to a post-national phase without ever having become a nation” (qtd. in Thompson 1).

Canada has been deeply influenced by the United States in every walk of life. People of English descent came to Canada either directly from England or immediately through the American colonies. About 50 percent of Canadians of English descent adhere to the Anglican Church, the rest belong to the United
Church and some smaller protestant sects, with a relatively small minority being Roman Catholics.

Canada included Germans as immigrants and they were Protestants. Most of the Canadians were of German origin belonging to the protestant churches but about 25 percent were Roman Catholic, and nine percent Hutterites. The early settlers revolved round the Churches which were responsible for language schools, care of the needy and recreational facilities. All societies are differentiated, but when differences rather than similarities are emphasized, the social structure lacks coherence. The opposition between the protestant and the Roman Catholic denominations only fortified the militant quest for a sphere of European influence – over territory as well as soul. History furnishes a number of examples of the European view of Canada as a negligible commodity and it was savage, it was cold, it was barren and it was less economically valuable.

Canada has been poverty-stricken as far as dramatic productivity is concerned. The main cause is its religion which has been a hand-one-down watered Protestantism. Its literature has been poorer than the nineteenth century poetry and fiction of the colonial period. It is an old time religion as referred to in Reaney’s plays. The adoption of an authentic religion in Canadian poetry still remains a mysterious question. Despite this handicap, the plays of James Reaney have a background of religious and philosophical concern behind them. Reaney’s plays, in general, spin through with a kind of religious philosophical excitement that tells us that there is much going on privately in that area. But he
is a solitary exile in an empty land. He is troubled deeply and seriously with questions related to his country, religion and politics. Therefore, his plays have a peculiar dislocation and feeling of unreality in the context of Canadian society.

A brief account of Reaney's religious background becomes essential for the study of his portrayal of the poverty of politics and the politics of religion. Reaney is Presbyterian and Plymouth Brethren in background. His parents were also involved during his childhood with an Independent Gospel Hall and a missionary-oriented Congregationalist Church that had not entered church union in 1925. Many critics have cited Reaney's religious upbringing as an explanation for his Manichean separation of characters into powers of light and darkness. It is certain that the minority Evangelical Protestantism of the Interdenominational Sunday School Reaney attended has undoubtedly influenced him profoundly.

Reaney's characters highlight the diverseness of his religion. Mrs. Gardner (KD) is a pious and evangelical woman. Madam Fay (KD) is vital, pagan and dressed in an elegant blouse with a dark skirt. The former has faith in God and the latter is skeptic about God and religion. Mrs. Gardner says, "Oh! I've never used cosmetics in my life" (202). It reveals the strictness and ethics of her religion, Madam Fay tells, "I forgot the mouth! Jezebel! Rage! Terrific lipsticks. Midnight black (205). She again narrates to Mrs. Gardner the cruel act of her husband. "He went over and killed all the other man's family with a gun. And then he shot himself!" (206). Mrs. Gardner asks Madam Fay, "Have you prayed
to Jesus Christ for forgiveness” (207). Madam Fay’s reply shows her poverty in religion, “I don’t want forgiveness. It’s a bad word with me” (207).

Eli Fay (KD) is the son of Madam Fay. When he visits the house of Mrs. Gardner to meet his friend Harry Gardner, the son of Mrs. Gardner, he says, “Two old ladies dancing with our paper selves, when I looked in the window” (226). One woman is Mrs. Gardner and the other woman is her friend Mrs. Budge. Their dancing with papermen shows their thwarted sexual desires and poverty in religion. Harry Gardner works in a bank. One day he attends a party hosted by his boss Mr. Coons. The words of Mr. Coons express the poverty of his politics. He is for not allowing socialists to be grown in the country and he endorses the practice of bureaucracy. He wants that, “all schools and Colleges, conservatories should be closed because they breed communists!” (228).

Mrs. Budge (KD) talks about the death of her son. Her words are typical of existence of religious hatred.

My son went to the Amazon, to our mission station we at the chapel keep there. Some heathen Indians threw him into the river where that wicked little cannibal fish lives. They just ate him up as fast as a zipper. (239)

Madam Fay again reminds Mrs. Budge, “I got married. I had two men. She had only one. Even then her man asked me to elope with him” (255). It is

Bethel (EE) is the stepmother of Kenneth and Polly. She is the counterpart of Madam Fay in bewitching men of high positions. She has no faith in religion. She remains a pagan without getting christened. “I took you home and there it turned out that you couldn’t take communion because you’d christened” (37). Polly recalls the religious pretensions of Bethel and how she wooed Polly’s father in the name of religion.

You knew he liked his Anglicanism high off the incense stick so you put on a regular circus for him. You memorized all the saints’ days, your accent changed, on St. Cecilia’s Day you sang, on St. Lawrence’s day you made griddle cakes, on St. Andrew’s Day you played noughts and crosses and on St. Sebastian’s Day you shot a bow and arrow. And on St. Valentine’s Day – you moved in for the slaughter. (37)

Polly asks if Bethel can attend the earliest communion at a chapel? (28). Bethel expresses her skepticism and doubt about God and religion, “I’ve lost my father somewhat, Polly, since your father died, I don’t know if a bishop can get struck by lightening I begin to wonder if there is a God: (38). George Sloan (EE) is the lover of Polly. He is a minister in a church. His appointment reveals the
religious orders in Canada. "Paradise, Manitoba – the Jehovah's Witness have made huge inroads into what used to be a sizeable flock" (48). Polly replies, "I'll reconvert them to the old Church of England faith" (48).

George Sloan makes another comment that brings out the differences in religious orders and the resultant recriminations.

I was the student minister there you know – for a couple of summers. One week – One Sunday they asked me to pray for rain. The Jehovah's Witnesses had prayed and not a drop did Jehovah vouchsafe. So I prayed for rain. Polly, there was a regular cloud burst. (49)

He adds further, "It rained heavily and an old man was drowned" (49). Polly Jokes, "You would have prayed for medium rain" (50). George Sloan is proud that after his prayers, "I don't know what they think. He is, but a whole bunch joined the United Church" (50). It brings out the wavering, fickle-minded and unsteady nature of people rolling from one faith to another and it parodies their poverty in religion and their shallow faiths.

We listen to a religious conflict between two religious orders of the same faith in the words of George Sloan to Polly, "Half-way between, you see Jehovah's Witness – no rain. Anglicans – too much, so try half between" (50). He considers the church as minister as his vocation only as a last resort, not an intentional but accidental choice.
I got the wrong course at college. First I was in Business Administration and then flunked out so there seemed nothing left but – theology, after my other courses were pasted into a pass Arts Degree, and so – theology it was. By the time it was all over I was twenty-four. (55)

Mr. McTavish (Bal) was troubled by mysterious persecutions. His wife Mrs. McTavish and children could not sleep in peace during nights. Mr. McDorman (Bal) who was an elder of the Methodist church, knew of a doctor who had a daughter gifted with second sight and the mystical power of stone reading. McTavish and McDorman travelled 80 miles to Long point on Lake Erie to consult this family. Their journey was troubled by bizarre noises and frightening visions (108).

There is a strong contrast between the two principal religions and cultures found in Southern Ontario during the early nineteenth century. The contrast is highlighted by the sturdy Presbyterian hymns as opposed to the light, playful Shaker tones. It also appears in the speech of characters, “the lilting tones of Troyer versus the direct manner of McTavish and the Revd. McGillicuddy” (114).

It is certain that one is troubled for his own mistakes committed secretly to wound or destroy others. When a minister of one order, ridicules another religious denomination, it shows not only his deep faith in God and religion but
mirrors his ignorance and poor faith. The Presbyterian priest Revd. McGillicuddy warns McTavish against his poor religious faith. “John McTavish – because your soul, is not founded on the rock of Jesus Christ’s perfect love – yes not founded on the rock of a perfect love for our Saviour [ . . . ] Jesus Christ” (47). Soon a rock hits Gillicuddy and McTavish laughs at the priest. Revd. Gillicuddy showers curses on McTavish.

Laugh at me, will ye McTavish? Laugh at me, laugh at me, at your minister? – You have control of the spirits and you have made them do this to me – you warlock, you heathen, giggler, and juggler. I’m crippled for life and I’m pounded to death in your house, the house I sought to help and I’ll have you excommunicated, McTavish [ . . . ] for life. Mark my words this day, [ . . . ] the door of my kirk again, you will never darken. (47)

McTavish criticizes the priest. He spoils the sanctity of religion. He uses it for his personal pleasures and power.

Dr. Troyer (Bat) sees everything in his moonstone. He stands for the Methodist denomination. We cannot find much deep faith in him when we listen to his satirical comment, “I see a host of silver Seraphim flowing glass flutes and singing Hallelujah! Hallelujah!” (51). Dr. Troyer brings the scene of a Saturday night in his mirror. He asks McTavish to explain his behaviour and questions his faith. The latter uses the church as a place for fun and not as a place of piety:
What's this night? Saturday night? They'll be dancing and singing in the tavern – since I'm an elder of the kirk and because such a man of standing I can only look in the window now and see what I used to be like. Do you hear them Dr. Troyer? Listen. (58-59)

People go to church for drinking and merrymaking. Their mind is not filled with religion and God. They spend the time in vulgar thoughts.

We're a'dry wi' drinkin' o't

We're a'dry wi' drinkin' o't

The parson kissed the fiddler's wife

And he could na preach for thinkin' o't. (59)

Religion is misused by people. It is used for enjoyment and money-making. Religious institutions have become places of fun and frolic. The words of the Taverners reflect it. "A bird – a great white bird, flying about the tavern – you're drunk, we're drunk too much too much ' there's a hawk" (59). McTavish later realises that killing the bird killed his soul. It is conveyed in the mirror. "I see now – the white bird was my soul. It was you, it was a piece of the Holy Ghost, it was even you and I exterminated it forever" (60)

McTavish finds repentance a last resort whereas enjoyment finds a primary place in his life, "No, no – that would never do – have fun first and repent afterwards" (60). Dr. Troyer argues, "Nein, nein, have repentance first and then have your fun! McTavish" (60).
The people sleep during the holy communion. They earn the anger of God for their misconduct and mischief. Dr. Troyer brings back McTavish’s church through his visionary pow wow hat. People do not listen to the minister’s message. With a tinge of satire Dr. Troyer exposes it: “The wrath of God is like great waters that are damned for the present; they increase more and more, and rise higher and higher, till an outlet is given; and the longer the stream is stopped” (72). Revd. McGillicuddy continues his message in the midst of sleep and objection, “The God that holds you over the pit of hell, much as one holds a spider or some loathsome insect over the fire abhors you” (72). Actually Reaney wants to expose the old and decayed mode of message by the Presbyterian minister through Dr. Troyer who represents another religious order.

Dr. Troyer criticizes the Presbyterian priest. We do not find any logic in such arguments. We recall only their shallow faith. Dr. Troyer talks about his father and his tragic death. God could not save him.

The creed says: And they that have done good, they shall go into life everlasting. Wonderful much the three into one and the one into three. Wonderful little the “them that have done good”, my own Groszddoddy was burnt at the stake back in the old country yet for not being so sure three into one and one into three mattered that. (83)

Revd. Gillicuddy expresses anguish over such statements, “Did you not just hear him mock our belief in the Trinity?” (83). Dr. Troyer’s ridicule disturbs him,
"Why you failed to save the house of McTavish if it was to be burnt down' (84). McGillicuddy asks the people to stone him and also reminds them the fate of another enchanter, "Charlatan, perhaps you've heard of the schoolmaster Barker who tried his spells in their enchanted house and ended up in the pillory at Sandwich" (85).

Gillicuddy abuses Dr. Troyer as "Sorcerer – you have divided me from my congregation" (89). Dr. Troyer’s reply reveals the supremacy of sorcery over poor preaching as “yes, if it is sorcery to purify and cast out evil spirits" (89). The Presbyterians recognize the real presence of the myth of evil in our world and in mankind; they believe that the function of the church is to lead individuals to repent of their sins and thereby to be reconciled with God. In a community of Presbyterians, there is a premium on self-knowledge, self-reliance and on the ability of an individual to lead a consistently virtuous life. Industriousness, practicality, resourcefulness and ambition are the dominant characteristics in them (114). McTavish suffers because of his guilt. He covets the wealth of others, cheats Pharlan (Bal) and his daughter. He never reveals or confesses his guilt and thus faces persecutions and troubles.

Dr. Troyer was attached to one of the left-wing offshoots of the puritan movement – the Quakers, shakers and Tunkards. The focus in these sects is on simplicity, virtue and peace which can, does and should exist in this world. Their adherents are filled with joy in their relation to the benevolent God, and they are happy in the fellowship of mankind, laughter, light and honesty are the
characteristics of Dr. Troyer’s household (115). They insist on confession. One must confess his past sins to escape from the punishment of God and his own conscience.

Reaney connects his characters with light and darkness to show their goodness and badness. Piers, Devil, Douglas, Geraldine, and Attorney Eldred (LW) are demonic and exhibit their faithlessness in religion and God through their deeds. Claudia, Arthur, Martha, Glenden and Angela (LW) are angelic and God-fearing. Owen (LW), is the boy hero who stands as a symbol of sickness and he tries to ease his pain by listening to the wind. Each character tries to betray the other for money and vengeance. For example, Attorney Eldred and his wife Lady Eldred conduct a mock burial and convey the false news to Angela that her lover Arthur is dead. Lady Eldred, the wrecked woman, puts the blame on God for the death of Arthur and consoles Angela thus: “This blow comes from God, Angela, and the religion which you believe in will bring you consolation. Most likely it is a blessing in disguise, a thing that you will in time even learn to be thankful for” (108).

Owen talks to Mitch (LW). Owen has lost his faith in God as he is afflicted with a dreadful disease. Mitch comes forward to tell him a story to ease his pain “Ah, I’ll tell you a ghost story instead son. It’ll freeze your bones and chill you off twice as fast” (120). He proceeds, “Don’t you believe in God” (120). Owen reveals his loss of faith, “Sometimes I think he’s the evilest
person around” (120). Mitch refutes his view, “you mustn’t say that, Owen. He died for you on the Cross” (121).

It is true that some people believe in God. Some people remain faithless because of their inability to overcome their inherent defects. Mitch attempts to instil in Owen faith in God with an example.

What I want to know is [ . . . ] Granny took all those medicines at one time or another and died at ninety when a hay wagon ran over her when she was out picking strawberries along the road. I finished all of the medicines one by one weekend when I was feeling rather poorly and sort of low and had no money [ . . . ] what I want to know is [ . . . ] Here I am healthy and sound [ . . . ]. How can it be after finishing all those medicines that there isn’t a God, Owen? (122)

We watch the scene of children breaking up into two groups - Protestants and Catholics who bait each other (CD 53). It contrasts the faith of two religious orders. It reveals not their faith in religion but their restlessness and impatience in co-operating with one another. Catholic kids tell, “Protestant, Protestant, quack, quack. Go to the devil and never come back” (53). Protestant kids return the same taunt with, “The Catholic brats, they don’t like cats. They don’t eat meat on Friday” (53).

Another set of kids want to establish the supremacy of their denomination with a chant, “The Salvation Army, free from sin, went to heaven in cornbeef
tin” (55). Thus it is evident that the intrusion of religion and politics into people’s lives in Canada let lose hell, division, disparity, disharmony and restlessness.

Bible Sal (CD) gains confidence in self and God. She conveys her transformation from pessimism to optimism and darkness to light in the hope of completing the Bible:

I used to feel that if my arms gave out I’d write it with my feet. And if I couldn’t do that, I’d put the pen in my mouth and I’d write Revelations with the pen held between my teeth. But I don’t know now. Perhaps it’s enough just to do the old Testament. I lose heart a bit at times you know. The fire at the Y.W.C.A. – I had to recopy all of Chronicles and kings. You don’t get over that in a hurry. (88-89)

The minds of people struggle in fear. They are afraid of unknown and unexpected fire, arson and looting. Reaney hopes to restructure Canada into a New Land from the shambles.

Reaney holds the view that science and technology have led to the estrangement of man from religion and God. His plays stand as testimony to his argument. One preacher exclaims, “Think of what Jesus could do in our modern world with electricity” (Dil 10). Another preacher speaks in an aside, “They have forsaken me – the fountain of living water” (10). Three preachers join together and chant in chorus. They deplore the wrong use of religion enforced
by the foreigners at the University of Toronto, “And finally what is this we hear? The precincts of University college are to be defiled next Thursday [. . . ]” (10). The first priest gives the reason, “A notorious infidel – has been invited to lecture” (10). The second priest tells his name, “Mr. Jimuel Thompson – that freethinking skeptic” (10). Again the three preachers chant in chorus, “The minds of your offspring, are / those holy young minds trash to be / polluted with scientific trash and / Godless rubbish?” (10). Thus children were denied broadbased thinking and oppressed by religion.

Prof. Right teaches Church History. According to him, “Is it simply, God, a desire to make money” (19). Right gets the appointment on his marriage to the Vice-Chancellor’s daughter. He feels guilty about his influence through backdoor politics and religion. “I very much doubt whether the soul is injured very much by the luxury of comfortable carpets and . . . on the other hand it might be injured a great deal [. . . ]” (20). Right again soliloquizes and reveals his barren but religious heart. “There was a man others will say who sold his soul for a three storey mansion at the corner of Wellesley and Jarvis streets. Should I” (20).

The Chancellor uses his authority for troubling his subordinates. He disrupts peace and harmony. His voice sounds autocratic and authoritative like a master addressing the servants, “You have worked behind our backs and under our feet for so long feathering your own nest as you prepare for a flight to higher regions” (24).
William Dale (Di), James Tucker and Willie King stand for justice. They try to fight against foreign and religious oppression tooth and nail. Prof. McQualid declares that the meeting addressed by social reformer Thompson would be protested by “the sister colleges – Lollard, Victoria and other religious Colleges” (29). The student’s leader Greenwood (Di) complains of the intrusion and interference of religion and politics which curtails intellectual freedom. McQualid conveys his feelings:

Greenwood, I thought I had your confidence. But you seem bent on altercation with the faculty and accusations, counter-accusations will now fly back and forth like, for all the world, joining his colleagues like that savage game of lacrosse you insist on playing over here in the colonies. (29)

Dale questions Pike (Di) whether the meeting is not permitted because of their fear of religious colleges. Pike’s reply reveals the hidden motive of power. “No, Dale, it has nothing to do with our fear of the theological colleges. It has everything to do with the duplicity” (30). President Fury (Di) cancels both the meetings. Student leader Greenwood is offended and tells his friend, “Tucker, put a notice in the varsity. We’ll have to hold the Thompson meeting off-campus, downtown on January 10 in the New Year” (30).

Vice-Chancellor Mole (Di) complains of lack of funds that hinders restructuring the amenities of the college. The money is swindled by political and religious heads. “Dale, you conscientious fellow – I’m afraid standards will
just have to keep slipping. There are no funds" (31). When Dale asks what has happened to the funds, Mole warns him, “None of your business” (31). Dale reminds Mole about the appointment of Right. It is not based on merit but influence and power: “Mr. Right’s appointment outrages the feelings of both the staff and the students. Its irregularity no doubt springs from the fact that he is the chancellor’s son-in-law” (32). Even newspapers are afraid of foreign politics and religion, Dale wishes to publicise the issue in the ‘Globe’ a Canadian newspaper. Its editor Willison asks Mole whether he could publish it in the ‘Globe’. Mole’s response is a chilling reminder of the practice of crushing the natives:

    Ask him to sign. Yes, say you’ll publish if he writes down his name under it – ah, that’ll smudge him – because no one but a fanatic bear for – grizzly bear for sainthood would dare sign this – if he’s at the college – instant dismissal. (32)

Mole is friendly towards Willie king. It is the principle of politicians and foreigners to love one first and kill secretly. The ironic speech of Mole to Willie throws up the hidden and inherent venom: “Yes, Now, Willie – it is possible to be a rebel and yet draw back just in time. Rebellious interrupts. I have got the students’ interest at heart. Willie. I want to help them. Help me help them” (32). The College Council is politico-religious in nature. No one can oppose them. They are partial and biased. They possess uncanny powers. “The political Science Club has done right to fly in the face of the College Council’s bigotry” (33).
Dale writes a letter to his father expecting his dismissal. It parodies church and politics. It again notes the misuse of power for exploiting the poor and for breaking strikes:

In combinations and those who combine for that purpose are a curse to any country. That is trade and commerce exactly. And it is such people as these who support churches and charities and little wonder it is that churches and charities accomplish so little good. (34)

Sheraton (Dii) is agonized to point out the reasons behind the faithlessness and pretensions of people. “Godlessness has been on the increase in the colleges of the U.S. of A. On the one hand we have popery. On the other hand we have this rabid rootless godlessness” (34).

President Fury (Dii) and Montgomery (Dii) speak about the religious view of the council members. Each has conflicting views. Their creeds, words, thoughts and deeds are diverse:

How could the present council object to a man’s economics on account of his religious views when that council is composed partly of professed Christians, partly of professed skeptics and partly of those who are assuredly one or the other. (34)

Montgomery is another student. He decides to apologise to escape from expulsion. He realizes sadly that he is being crushed by power. He is fed up with strike and revolution. He feels disgusted and disappointed about the
happenings. “I’m tired of revolution. I don’t want to go to another college, if you won’t print the apology – then I guess I’ll have to resign” (35). Tucker painfully admits, “It means that cant and hypocrisy have won the day, Montgomery” (35).

Dale gives vent to his pent up feelings of dejection and gloom after experiencing various trials and hardships at the University. He talks about appointments to foreigners. They deny the birthright of the natives:

For the big important appointments are made to foreigners from Oxford, Glasgow, Edinburgh, New York – men with accents and manners that sometimes would freeze your blood. He came to Ontario and at first it seemed a different society, but, oh no, a new hierarchy forms, new ways are thought up to alienate the people from their birthright and so I wrote that letter to show you that when you appointed me in 1885 to the tutorship in Latin, you didn’t appoint my soul or is it lying around here perhaps in one of your filing cabinets, well I claim it back not with money or power or influence, but the effluence of the same in the bottle I’ve marked thousands of your children’s themes with, ink, pen, words – I claim back my soul with the only thing that matters – its language – a letter, letters. (38)

Dale refuses to resign and so he is dismissed by the foreigners from the post in his homeland.
Right is the theology lecturer who is pleased with his back door appointment and higher start of pay as he happens to be the Vice-Chancellor's son-in-law. It ruins the lives of students and native teachers. The Bishop punishes the rebels. They cannot seek shelter even in Churches.

We are almost justified in saying that the Bishop was maddened by the taste of blood. He marched from Norfolk into Cambridge to crush the rising there. The terrified rebels fled to the churches for sanctuary. But the church could not protect them against the church's avenger. They were struck down with swords and spears at the altar itself. (34)

McQualid reads a letter written by Tucker. "One day men will pull down the usurpers – destroy the fabric politicians have erected as a fortress for the maintenance of their power" (42). Tucker, Willie King and Greenwood are expelled from the University. They feel like "Daniel in the Lion’s Den" (42).

Mr. Donnelly, Mrs. Donnelly and her seven sons (Don) are broiled in the hotbeds of petty politics and hollow religion practised by blind mouths. The Donnelly family believes in God and religion. It is made clear when we see Will Donnelly (Don) with his catechism book. Mrs. Donnelly asks her son, "which are the sacraments that can be received only once?" (14). Will answers, "The sacraments that can be received only once are Baptism, Confirmation and Holy Orders" (15). Again Mrs. Donnelly asks another question, "Now Will, why can Baptism, Confirmation and Holy orders be received only once?" (15). Will's
sudden response reveals how deeply he has learned Catechism, “Baptism, Conformation and Holy orders can be received only once because they imprint on the soul – a spiritual mark, called a character, which lasts forever (15).

The Donnellys are devout Catholics. But they do not find comfort in religion. Mr. and Mrs. Donnelly are found discussing their landlord John Grace, when a priest interrupts them. The priest asks, “who are punished in Purgatory?” (24). Mr. and Mrs. Donnelly respond, “Those are punished for a time in purgatory who die in state of grace but are guilty of venial sin or have not fully satisfied for the temporal punishment due to their sins” (24). The priest asks another question, “Who are punished in Hell?” (24). This question and the answer of Mr. Donnelly indicate that there is link between the priest and politicians:

Not I, No, not James Donnelly. I’m not in Hell though my friends in Biddulph thought to send me there, but after thirty five years in Biddulph who would find Hell any bigger a fire than that fire I died in. (24)

Ande Keefe and Ryan (Don) are the friends of Mr. Donnelly. On Christmas Eve, 1857, just after the election in which Mr. Holmes defeated Mr. Cayley, the Blackmouth Proddies paid a visit to the home of Keefe armed with sticks. The stickman talks about the political opponents. Having been wad to wielding their power to frighten and kill people, they demand, “Give us a light to find Ryan and Keefe, the bloody papists” (30). Indeed they “did then and
there break and destroy all the windows in the lower part of my house” (31). Keefe continues in sadness about the destruction of his house and the existence of goondaism for wrecking vengeance on political opponents and innocents. He recounts how they destroyed:

household furniture, breaking, tearing, burning it, cut down the signpost, cut the spokes of the wagons, cut down the water pump, threw sticks, stones, and the water pail into the house. Broke the taps off my liquor casks, suffered the liquor. (31)

Sticksmen symbolise or stand for “Hurrah for Holmes – let’s go back and kill them all” (31). There is disorder and confusion. Keefe says, “Hurrah for the Grits! Rushed upstairs to hide for our lives” (31). Stones stand for Cayley (31).

Cassleigh (Don) reaches towards the wandering friar who comes over to him. This man is young, very sure of himself and violent. His scene with the friar contains both truth and mockery. Cassleigh asks, “Bless me, Father, for I have sinned” (32). Friar asks, “When did you last confess, my son?” (32). Cassleigh answers, “Back in the old country, Father” (32). Friar asks again, “How far away in time would that be now?” (32). Cassleigh becomes serious and replies, “I want to confess the sin of murder, Father” (32). Friar opens his mouth in wonder and tells, “Oh, my son, that is a mortal sin” (32). Cassleigh’s immediate exposure reveals the meaninglessness of confession to him and shows his barren faith, “It was, Father, indeed it was mortal to him. But, Father, I didn’t kill the man” (32). Cassleigh adds, “A friend of mine did the deed for me. It
was the Englishman who was killed on our road last February, sure you must have heard about it, caused quite a stir, but I didn’t kill him, oh, no” (32). The Englishman’s name was Mr. Brimmacombe (32).

The Frair asks Cassleigh, “what is the fifth commandment of God?” (32). The inversion of the Commandment by Cassleigh is a parody of religion and represents his weak faith, “The fifth Commandment of God is. Thou, Brimmacombe – should not have seen me beaten so badly” (Don 32). Cassleigh answers how he managed to escape from punishment: “Why, Father, they’ve been and tried me for it, but I’ve got a friend who stole the witness papers from the courthouse and I believe they can’t try me again till they get them all sworn and copied out again” (35). Cassleigh explains, “Friends of my ribbon, Father” (Don 35). It indicates the fact that so many mafia gangs functioned in Canada under the tutelage of certain political parties.

Keefe tells Mr. Donnelly that he is called a Blackfoot (Don 56). Mr. Donnelly reminds him of the difference and hostility between Protestants and Catholics prevalent there, “Yes, that’s the name they have for us. Sure the Protestants just attacked you; can’t your own Catholic kind leave you alone, Andy?” (56). People use politics and religion for personal ends and for wreaking vengeance. They use it for domination. They also use it for dividing people: “People like you and me, Jim, are caught in the middle. We won’t join. Except this time, what is it I should have joined?” (56).
Mr. Donnelly lives in hiding as he has killed Mr. Farl for calling him names and for taking away his land. Mrs. Donnelly is a heroic woman. She wants to save her husband from execution. She petitions for remission with signatures obtained from various people. Now she goes to Mr. Holmes, the member of parliament and pleads with him:

Yes Mr. Holmes. Hurrah for Holmes will be our cry from now on in. Our family’s vote is Grit forever and I’ve seven sons who’ll agree or else. Why sir, you’ve garnered almost as many names from this township as I have from Biddulph. My family’s blessing on you and your family forever. And our eight votes, sir, some day. Except the one I’m carrying, God bless her. (65)

Mrs. Donnelly speaks to Mr. Stub (Don). His ascendancy to the highest position reveals his change of power and fortunes:

No stranger than your own story, Mr. Stub. That you should be a Justice of the Peace in 1864 when in 1848 in October of that year you led a mob to burn down the Africans’ barns, to steal their land, not steal their shirts or their fleeces, but their very existence. But that was some time ago, and with the profit from that bold adventure you’ve supported the party that gave you a commission of the peace, aye and your arsonist brother a place on the Grand Jury. Yes Donnelly is a strange story, sir, but you law-abiding
high-flyer, never as strange as – could never compete with yours. (74)

Politics and religion go hand in hand in annihilating the pious and worthy. Jennie (Don) says that the Bishop did not like them and he used to curse them:

We could see that we could never join that church that the bishop had finally come to with fire for mitre and a torch for a crook and had not just slapped us all lightly on either cheek as token for the sufferings we must endure as followers of Jesus, no – the old ruffian had knocked us on the floor, to the floor and kicked us with his hooved boot and punched us with his thistle mitts and said: get the hell out, you bugger Donnellys. No water for you, but we’ve fire. (92)

Stub canvasses for the next election. He asks Jim Donnelly to extend the support of his family members to him. They can escape from unnecessary blame. Their enemy Finnegan will not harass them:

Jim, thought I saw your back here coming, back to see what in hell’s holding up this train. Jim – if you and your boys get me ward Three next election and you alone can do it – I don’t care how, tell them not to vote or vote for my man who’s going to be an Irish catholic, Jim, yes – if you can promise me that Finnegan will stop running his stage wagons tomorrow. (135)
"In the election Mr. Scatcherd . . . the North Middlesex Riding has been won by the Grit candidate by seven votes" (155). As a result, the Donnelly wagons were sawn off and burnt by goondas of the opposition party. Mr. Donaldson asks Will Donnelly, "you were telling me, Mr. Donnelly that the new priest formed a society against your family from among your fellow parishioners" (165). Will's narration of their story makes us understand that it was the secret society garnered by a priest that ultimately succeeded in killing the Donnelly family.

Oh he turned them against us. But the man who really worked at turning people against us, and you see, we were not to be trusted because we had led the parish in not voting the way that Bishop and Sir John A would have had us vote – the man who really worked at it was a drifter named James Carroll. I'll show you, sir, how our family first met him. We became an obsession with him, I think he was hungry for land, our land, our eyes, our clothes, our mother. They'd just lost the election, we'd won and down the road he came and my mother was milking a cow by the gate. (165)

Will adds further painfully, "We were blamed for everything and people shunned us, would not talk to us. Three times Carroll arrested my brother Tom on the charge of stealing" (167). "Michael Donnelly was murdered in a bar room" (193). Peggy says, "Yes, but there were mainly Protestants at the funeral
as many of their Catholic friends are afraid to go near them (193). Finally, the
mythic union of church and politics kills all the Donnelly family members.

Reaney narrates the story of two orphan children (BRH) named Alec and
Joel. Alec is the younger and shorter boy. Joel is the older and taller boy. They
come from the Red River colony to York in 1826 (14). They go to their uncle
John’s house in Upper Canada. They meet one Charley French who works in the
press run by Mr. Mackenzie (22). Charley French tells the boys, “Mr. Jarvis is a
Tory, my master, Mr. Mackenzie, is a Reformer” (22). “He prints a paper that
says them Tories run the government for themselves and not for the people. So
all their young blades try to chase Mackenzie’s boys off the road” (22).

Alec wants to know what a Tory is? Charley French leads them to their
uncle’s house. He talks about two political parties. The boy becomes eager to
hear about them:

Here’s a Tory’s house. You ask him what a Tory is. Better not tell
him an apprentice of Mackenzie’s helped you to his door, or he
may throw you out. You know that Jarvis that rode us down?
When he was a young fellow he killed another lad, younger than he
was, in a duel. But did he hang for it? No. For one reason and
another – mainly because his father was Provincial Secretary. (23)

Allan is the cousin of Alec and Joel. Allan tells the brothers the story of a
girl named Rebecca. She has got a funny mark on the back of her hand. “It’s got
an R branded on it” (28). He adds, “R for Robber” (28). She has worked in the house of Mistress Strachan. One day a spoon was found missing. Rebecca was convicted by the court. “So they took a branding-iron with R on it for Robber and heated it up in the stove at the Court-house, and then took this very hand and stamped R on it forever” (30).

Aunt Henrietta (BRH) tells Alec how to behave himself. It shows the cultural and political differences that exist in societies in different places, “You come from an outlandish part of the world where you had tea with Indians and ate off the same plate as the buffaloes. Now you’re in a civilized society. A family proud should be there in your manners” (33). Joel stays there. But Alec is a boy of unique qualities. He joins “the printing press of Mackenzie who publishes the paper, “The Colonial Advocate”. Mackenzie tells Alec, “There’s freedom and liberty, lad. There’s the mind of man. All his thoughts that thousands of people will read and find helpful [. . . ] (57). Alec learns typesetting and he can set letters well. One day he prints a news item that runs, “my Grandfather had been a humble cobbler in the army” (86). It irritates his uncle and cousin Allan who is a magistrate then. His uncle John is a Tory. The Tory youths destroy the press and Alec’s cousin Allan smears the capital R on his face. “Alec put the capital letter R in his pocket” (88). Thus, we know that political leaders turned Canada in to a burning city.
Reaney is a mythopoeic writer. His creative endeavour results in communicating the past and the present to the future generation. He creates myth out of politics and religion. Thus the poverty of politics and the politics of religion plays an important role in the artistic transformation of his plays of history into myth and drama.