It is a striking paradox in all child myths that the "child" is on the one hand delivered helpless into the power of terrible enemies and in continual danger of extinction, while on the other he possesses powers far exceeding those of ordinary humanity. This is closely related to the psychological fact that though the child be 'insignificant', unknown, 'a mere child', he is also divine. The child is . . . a personification of vital forces quite outside the limited range of our conscious mind; of ways and possibilities of which our one-sided conscious mind knows nothing; a wholeness which embraces the very depth of Nature. It represents the strongest, most ineluctable urge in every being, namely the urge to realize itself.

- Carl Jung

The Dynamics of Children’s Myth
Chapter Six

The Dynamics of Children’s Myth

Reaney is a Fryed poet. In his poems and plays he has sought a way of understanding myth and myth-making not as alternatives to history, politics, commerce and city planning, but as the register made on the emotions and unreason by all those things. He is the man on the ground, seeing Icarus while he flies, and understanding the meaning without gloss.

In his early writings Reaney seems pessimistic about the outcome of his struggle but in his later more characteristic, work he hammers out a pattern of rebirth after an extinction, of strength in weakness, which relates closely to the mythic significance of childhood as described by Gustav Jung:

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strongest, most ineluctable urge in every being, namely the urge to realize itself. (*The Archetypes and the Collective Unconsciousness* 157)

Reaney has discussed his child drama as a whole in terms of the compositions for Children’s Orchestra written by Carl Orff. In Orff’s music, the steady interplay of simple elements reaches a final complexity that the children would not achieve without basic co-operation. A certain world has been created for children illuminated by continual games, chants, improvisational catalogues, and youthful character types. Children are encouraged by these techniques to bring the energy and culture of their “play” not to reproduce adult theatre in a small and or even charming way, but to revitalize and direct, perhaps to recall the child in the adult.

Reaney has been influenced by *The Bible*, John Bunyan’s Pilgrims Progress and some old Victorian children’s books like *Alice in Wonderland* for writing plays about children. A child is also defined as a person who exhibits the characteristics of a very young person or in the case of Reaney’s work, a person young or old, who retains the child’s characteristic openness to myth, metaphor and the powers of the creative imagination. Reaney treats this childlike ability to transform the inanimate and material into something that is beautiful and sublime as being the truest manifestation of the human soul. The child and its relationship to the world about it also becomes in Reaney’s work a continuing and vital symbol of the human soul struggling with a life and world often hostile to the human spirit.
With the advent of Reaney’s intensive experiment with puppetry, children’s theatre and creative drama like Workshop in the Sixties, came an explosion of important developments like the rapid development of a fluid, visually and annually evocative “play” style which both dispensed with the physical limitations posed by the linear plotline and satiric set, and helped the audience’s and actors’ minds adjust to the correct emotional, associative focus of the imaginative child and a growing interest on Reaney’s part in applying his child-centred myth to real life through improvisatory workshops designed to guide people back to the child within and through that a fresh and redemptive way of viewing themselves and the world.

In defining maturity, C.S. Lewis once said, “When I became a man, I put away childish things, including the fear of childishness and the desire to be growing up” (On Three Ways of Writing for Children 210). He could well have been expressing the opinion of James Reaney, whose continuing preoccupation with children, both of the archetypal and actual variety, has had a profound influence on his dramaturgy.

Reaney regards that this child-like ability can take us towards a world of real freedom and happiness and that it can transform the inanimate and material into a thing of human spirit and meaning, a significant issue as we move towards the twenty-first century. The child, which is representative of the imagination and soul of man, both in the generic and individual sense of the term, plays a dominant role in the plays of Reaney. He wants that through his plays, the child
and the child within the man should be guided back to that initial myth and metaphor making frame of mind which can transform the hostile world itself into something more friendly and loving. As Ross Woodman notes in his critical study, *James Reaney*, “Reaney in London became more and more interested in children’s theatre. Such a theatre, he believed, should not and need not exclude adults. The children’s theatre he had in mind, therefore, was a children’s theatre for adults [. . . ]” (27-28).

*Apple Butter* (*AB* 1965) is the first play in Reaney’s collection of plays for children. It is a marionette play. The scene takes place in Miss Hester Pinch’s (*AB*) farm in Southwestern Ontario – about 1890. Hester Pinch is a spinster. She has a hired man who works the farm for her called Victor Nipchopper (*AB*). Solomon Spoilrod (*AB*) is a school master and he is the friend of Hester Pinch. Miss Pinch has lately adopted an orphan called Apple Butter. Miss. Pinch and Mr. Spoilrod engage in a discussion about the orphan Apple Butter. Pinch asks Spoilrod why he looks fatigued and is late in arrival. He is a strict master.

Yes, Hester, I had to beat all the school children today, they were so naughty, I had just got nicely warmed up when that Smith boy deliberately broke my best birch rod with his back. And, of course, I’d never strike a child with my bare hand. (12)

Pinch wants to know the reason behind the whipping of the school children. Spoilrod’s reply shows his cruel and unprincipled punishment: “They
rubbed off the list of names I put on the blackboard yesterday of those that confessed to rubbing off the list of names of culprits I’d put up on the blackboard the day before” (12). Spoilrod asks about the orphan boy Apple Butter as, “Has your hired man been able to get much work out of him lately? or does the young orphan lad need some corrective encouragement” (12). Soon Apple Butter enters and explains the mythic relations between him and nature combined in his name.

Yep. That’s my name all right, Miss Pinch. First name – Apple. Second name – Butter. I guess it’s my sweet disposition. The steward and the matron at the orphanage said I was just like all the apples in the orchard rolled into one barrel – all the russet apples, spy apples and Mackintosh apples – all squashed together into a sweet sticky brown mess people put in crocks and call Apple Butter. (13)

Apple Butter now goes on to flatter Spoilrod saying “the school kids were telling me what a kind hearted father you are to them all. Why, you purposely use the softest hickory stick you can find!” (13). Spoilrod reminds Apple Butter, “you’re plumb full of ancient irony. Aren’t you a lucky lad being adopted by her into a nice healthy farm like this?” (13). Spoilrod mockingly tests Apple Butter’s physical fitness and mental ability (14). He weighs a pound of iron, or a pound of feathers (14). It gives us a chance to know him as a marionette boy.

Pinch wants to cut down a tree as “It’s a grand old tree. But I’ve told my hired man, Victor Nipchopper, to cut it down. We’re right out of
firewood” (14). Apple Butter asks her not to cut down that living tree. It shows his love of nature. “No need to cut such a fine old tree down, ma’am. There’s a big dead old tree down by the river that the storm must have blown last night. It’s practically cut up into firewood already” (14).

Reaney’s children are orphans. They are troubled either by a hired man or foster-mother. But they are embodiment of innocent virtues. Apple Butter reminds Victor, “That’s natural. When you rub fur the wrong way there should be some sparks” (15). The dynamics of child-centred vision is made clear as the play deals with the story of a boy. Victor dictates the chores for Apple Butter, “He was supposed to see that the crows didn’t fly down and eat up the newly planted corn. He was told to watch the crows” (15).

Pinch reminds Apple Butter, “if you let the crows eat up all the newly planted corn and it five shin plasters a bushel, you’ll have to be punished (16). Apple Butter recalls the mythic commandments of Victor:

But I watched the crows. You’re lucky I did even that. At first I thought he said, “Go over and wash the clothes”. I walked all over the field looking for clothes, but all I could find was the scarecrow’s. (16)

Victor reveals his cruelty as he says, “I like to punish orphan kids” (16). Apple Butter is invited for supper by Pinch.

Pinch reminds Apple Butter of his need for a whipping. Apple Butter’s remark is funny as well as ironical, “Little Apple Butter / Gets whipped for his
supper. That is not the way the song goes” (17). Pinch asks Apple Butter to select a stick that he wants to be whipped with. Apple Butter frowns at Pinch and remarks, “A suitable switch to beat me with” (17). The school master Spoilrod says that Pinch is soft with Apple Butter. Victor joins in, “There’s an old log over there, Hester pinch. I could beat him with that” (17). Pinch recalls the proposal of marriage made by Spoilrod to her and his forgetting of it later:

Never mind. You man lack the woman’s touch. By the way, now I have both of you here. Victor Nipchopper, isn’t true that after we finished our game of three-handed king Pedro last night and four glasses of my chokecherry wine, isn’t it true that Spoilrod here proposed marriage to me and that I accepted him? This morning over his porridge he claims that he can’t remember any such thing. (17)

Apple Butter comes with a chip of wood. It is the myth of children. They are pleased to hear him saying, “No. I tested it out on an ant. It sure did make that ant feel sorry for stealing that ear of wheat from the granary” (18). It shows the size of the chip that he has brought for being whipped with. Apple Butter speaks of his brother, “No. But I’ve a married brother, Apple Cider, with kids – so I’m an uncle” (18). Pinch asks Apple Butter to bring a larger stick. He brings her a large flowering bush. Pinch asks him angrily, “You’ve just pulled up my best spiraea bush” (19). Apple Butter continues his story:
But Miss Pinch – or Mother – or whatever you want me to call you. You did hint you wanted something you can see, and you can see this, can’t you? And if you hit me with it, it certainly should hurt me. I hit the woodshed with it and it’s half fallen over. (19)

Pinch becomes angry and decides to punish Apple Butter with birch and thorn and maple (19). Spoilrod and Victor are evil-minded and cruel persons. Innocence versus evil is a common feature in children’s stories. Spoilrod wants Pinch to forget their proposal of love and marriage though he has enjoyed her money, food and drinks. He reveals wickedly, “Whew! Thank Heavens she’s got off the marriage proposal obsession. Ah, I think I can find some good stout switches in my favourite birch grove” (19). Apple Butter shows his apprehension thus, ‘What shall I, will I, do! They’ll all be back in a minute with canes, rods, switches, ferules, and birches. All directed at me and my – poor little back. Where shall I, will I, hide? Somebody help me” (20).

Apple Butter’s call in crisis is responded to in mythic fairy tales. The history of a poor, weak and orphan child gets transformed into myth, when we see the entry of the Tree Fairy who looks huge, twiggy with trailing leaves. The fairy introduces himself, “I am the Tree Wuzzle. I have appeared to help you” (20). Tree Wuzzle informs himself, the formation and existence of a fairy and mythic kingdom for them: “Indeed it does. We Wuzzles rule the world, each wuzzle to a separate kingdom – animal, vegetable, mineral, bone, paper. All the
trees, all the wooden things are ruled by me and must do as I say” (20). Tree wuzzle continues his mythic story:

When you hear the trees sigh in the wind, their millions of leaves rustling and whispering, it is my voice you hear. When the branch taps at the windowpane late at night and seems to say – I want to come in – it is my hand that is knocking. When you are walking through the bush on a dark fall night. (20)

Tree wuzzle, as a fairy, wants to make Apple Butter believe him first. So he adds:

Through the forest on a dark fall night and you hear the boughs scrape and scratch and squeak against each other high up in the darkness – it is I playing my violin – playing my tree-branch fiddle. I am the wuzzle of all wooden things. Do you believe me, Apple Butter? (20)

Apple Butter sees the mythic fairy of woods. He becomes happy and courageous. He depends upon the help of the tree fairy: “Do I believe you? How can I help it when you stand towering right over me! [. . . ], not only do I believe you’re the wuzzle of all wooden things, you’re the wuzzle of the whole wide world” (21). Tree wuzzle assures Apple Butter, “Now if you believe in me I can help you” (21). Apple Butter narrates the story of his agony and also the sufferings of children under cruel people “That bears – yes, just how can you
help me who am about to be belaboured by three cruel human beings with a thorn stick, a birch rod, and a maple switch in their three respective hands? (21).

Tree wuzzle asks Apple Butter to remember his instructions, “If they try to hit you with anything made of wood – simply say “wuzzle” – and the wooden thing will hit them. What’s the magic word? (21). Apple Butter asks Tree wuzzle why he likes to help him. Tree wuzzle’s reply shows that fairies take note of the good deeds done to them and wait for a chance to help such people when they are in distress. When you saved this old tree from being cut down for firewood, don’t you remember? It’s one of my favourite whistling: “rustling, and fiddling places – so, right there and then, I decided to help you. Besides, I’m tired of people using my kingdom of wood to beat children with. Apple Butter – take care” (21).

Pinch comes with a wooden spoon made of maple to hit Apple Butter. He recalls and utters the magic word “wuzzle” (22). Soon pinch is found screaming as a huge wooden spoon comes in and beats her off. Spoilrod utters, “you nasty brat. My arms are strong. I’ve thrashed a thousand kids in my time” (22). When he tries to punish Apple Butter with a birch rod, Apple Butter repeats the mythic word, “wuzzle”. “A great wooden spoon beat Spoilrod off” (AB 22). Then there comes Victor with a great club. Now, Apple Butter is in trouble, “I’ve forgotten the magic word. What’s the magic word” (23). The audience supply him with the word. A gigantic wooden spoon demolished the hiredman. Apple Butter is
hungry. He feels free to have strawberry pies for supper. Soon, he hears screams and beating sounds.

Moo Cow (AB) enters the room for help. Unless she escapes now, she will be sold for meat. Her sister Tilly is found missing. She feels sad about the cruelty shown to animals, “No poor Tilly. At first I thought she’d jumped over the fence and was wandering the roads. But now – I’m afraid she’s been made into a bottle or Bovril or a Gladstone bag” (24). Moo Cow reminds Apple Butter, “We just end up a heap of bones” (24) and if he helps her escape through the gate, “bones can be kind to him” (24). Moo Cow carries a map of the Perth Country and a map of Canada to establish her identity and ancestry. It is a satiric comment that even domestic animals are not spared by cruel, brutish men. Apple Butter recalls the magic word “wuzzle”. The wooden gate opens and Moo Cow runs out of the gate.

Pinch, Spoilrod and Victor appear again to torture Apple Butter. They have come with whalebone hair brushes to hit him as wooden things cannot be used on him. Now the Bone Fairy appears to help Apple Butter. He is called Rawbone and he declares, “I am the spirit of all things bony” (26). Rawbone reminds Apple Butter: “You are about to be attacked with things bony. I can help you. You helped my friend Moo Cow. I am the spirit of her ancestors. When you need my help, simply cry Rawbone!” (27).

Victor intends to pretend to be Moo Cow in trouble to make Apple Butter come out so that they can hit him with the bonebrushes. Disguise and pretension
are the common themes in fairy tales. Apple Butter comes out of the house. They try to hit him with the bone. Apple Butter apologises to them and asks them to be kind to him. Soon Apple Butter remembers the word "Rawbone" and utters it. Pinch and Spoilrod are chased by huge whalebones. Moo Cow's sudden appearance and carrying away of Victor reveals that he is punished for his cruelty to children and animals.

The very idea of you pretending to be me, Victor Nipchopper. I never caught my tail in a fence in my life. For I always jump over them neat and clean just the way I'm going to jump with you – over the moon. (29)

Pinch and Spoilrod feel sorry for their deeds and reconcile themselves with Apple Butter. But Apple Butter asks Spoilrod, if he would marry Pinch or not. Frightened by the bones and woods, Spoilrod agrees to marry Pinch. Apple Butter transforms the cruel people in to kind and loving ones. Recalling her past, Pinch says, "why, we’ll adopt you as our first child and we’ll will the farm to you. Come what may. I don’t know how I could be so cruel to such a wise, innocent child" (30). Apple Butter is transformed and gets melted into the world of Nature. “Thank you very much, Miss Pinch. But now that the apples are getting ripe, I think I’d better walk around and look at all the orchards to help the people that own them make their apple butter and apple cider” (30). Apple Butter adds in the same vein his mythic transformation and assurance of return with the seasons, “Goodbye, folks, and may be I’ll come to see you in the spring
when the apple-blossoms are out and bring you a blossom baby” (30). Apple Butter mixes with the fairies, “Tree wuzzle, and Rawbone”. For Reaney they embody the contemplative good sense of his other heroic figures of good and are the true leaders of the community. They are natural characters in folktales and are able to guide, educate and transform Apple Butter.

Geography Match (GM 1967) is the second play for children. The play is knit around different moods of children – adventurous, wise, weak, petulant and resilient. The school kids are divided into Academy kids and continuation school kids. The Academy kids are Bullseye, squeak, squeak piper and Blueberry (GM). The continuation school kids are Jenny and Beatrice (GM). She looks unsophisticated and probably at school only because she has to be. Lunette (GM) is a tall, thin clever girl. Jim (GM) has always to be doing something with his hands. Spool knitting is probably part of something he is making for his mother. Transy is completely devoted to his transistor radio. The playthings reveal the child-centred vision of the play.

The play deals with two schools and two divisions of students. Stuffy Smith (GM) is the Headmaster of Blazers Academy and the students are known as Academy kids. Miss Birdwhistell (GM) is the headmistress of Shady Hill Continuation School kids. There is a competition for kids – “stair-climbing test” (41). Newsboy (GM) informs about a complaint, “Duke of Edinburgh blasts Canadian tots, says they can’t even climb a pair of stairs (41). Each school children sing their school songs and then abuses each other. Birdwhistell asks
smith, “Why don’t we have a geography match between our two schools and just see. Children, when their side gives a geographical place name you must reply with another place name beginning with its last letter” (43). It is agreed by Smith. They begin with general geographical name and divert it to Canadian geography. They tell the place names in Canada well. Blazers exclaim, “we won! We won!” (45). Continuation school kids react with, “Won by a trick! Won by a trick!” (45).

The talk of Smith with Birdwhistell reveals the socio-economic and cultural background of the kids in these two schools. It also points out the rivalry, and fend between innocent virtue and evil forces, poverty of village children and the advancement and cunning of the wealthy. “Our school shows superior cunning. But so it would prove all down the line. Your scholars are drawn from all ranks of society. My scholars are upper-middle class brats and – well, breeding kids. Again Smith tells Birdwhistell about the announcement of “competition for school kids by the Governor General and a huge prize, “The first group of children to cross the country in thirty days on a very limited budget will win a great prize of money for their school and for their own education” (45).

Birdwhistell directs her kids. Hear that, children? When you cross the country ahead of all the others we’ll get enough money to buy a new pump for the school and send you all to Dalhousie University. (45)
Jenny, the Shady Hill kid expresses her desire, "could I use my share of the money to start a fish-and-chip shop?" (46). The Headmistress reminds the Headmaster, "Shady Hill will beat the pants off your Academy" (46). The two school kids begin their historic, archetypal and mythic travel across Canada singing their respective school songs.

Wolfwind (GM) and Miss Weathergood (GM) enter with umbrellas. Wolfwind is Grizzly Bear and Weathergood is Coyote. They are the Indian legendary characters and their struggle represents the battle between light and darkness. The mythic travel of children across Canada is supported by these legendary figures. The aim of Reaney is to teach the children the history and myth of Canada. Weathergood takes Wolfwind around the villages of Nova Scotia. He thanks Weathergood and complains of ghosts while Weathergood opposes it with the statement: "Yes, Mr. Wolfwind. I suppose there are more ghosts up here than you're used to in New York City. There's good hunting too in the forest there upon the hill" (46).

Wolfwind likes the house of Weathergood and expresses her desire to her, "And so, Miss Weathergood, you won't sell me this old wreck of a house of yours for six thousand dollars" (47). Weathergood does not like to sell the house as, "you see I was born in this house" (47) and adds that:

Nothing's happened here at all except that

Seven generation of my people have trapped the rat
In the cellar, opened the door and whistled for the dog,
Fed the babies, lived off the high and the low of the hog. (47)

Wolfwind is going to watch the “Cross Canada” contest. Weathergood is very happy and says, “So I hear. We’ll show that Duke of Edinburgh that our Canadian kids can climb a pair of stairs. Then they’ll climb right up over and across Canada” (48). Weathergood hopes that the Shady Hill kids will win. Wolfwind disagrees and tells the reasons:

The Shady Hill kids haven’t got a chance, lady. I’ve been watching them play at recess – some of them don’t get enough to eat and let’s face it – kids from rural slums just aren’t up to kids from rich homes. (48)

Shady Hill kids are poor. Wolfwind stands for money and Weathergood “spirit” to win. There is a bet and Weathergood asks, “how much will you bet me that Shady Hill wins” (48). Wolfwind announces, “I’ll bet you – fifty thousand dollars – if you bet me this old house” (48).

The Shady Hill kids are financially unsound. One boy reveals how he gets his pocket money. “It’s the way we earn our pocket money. We collect empty bottles along the roadside” (49). The match begins from the top of a cliff and ends in Vancouver, within thirty days. They get in their respective boats with their flags. Blazers have a black stag as their symbol. Hillers have a green tree as their symbol. The fishermen support the Shady Hill kids. The children’s myth is reinforced by the participation of fairies. The White Iceberg Lady, the
goddess of waves and ice, gives riddles to the Blazer Academy kids to solve and assures her support to the group which answers her riddles and explains who she is to the kids:

   My laughter causes terror
   I am a wonderful white lady
   Travelling over the waves
   Two thirds of me the blue wave hides
   My mother is soft and falls from the sky
   But I am as hard as a Million granite grindstones
   Who am I? (53)

   The Academy Blazers fail to answer the riddle. They insist on the White Lady to show them the direction to Newfoundland and Newfie. They leave her for Newfoundland. The continuation school kids are asked the same question. Lunette answers, “You’re an iceberg!” (53). Iceberg Lady is pleased with them and her joy is expressed thus, “That’s correct. Correct you are. My sister beat the Titanic in fair and open fight. Now is there anything I can do for you?” (54). The Shady Hill kids want her to show them the way to Newfoundland. She obliges them and shows the way to Newfoundland. Fairies play trick and beguile those like the Academy Blazers whom they dislike: “But they aren’t going to Newfoundland. They couldn’t answer my riddle – so I sent them to – Bermuda” (54).

   The kids visit different places in Canada to know their geographical features and cultural background. The Shady Hill kid Transy finds an old brandy
bottle. Soon they see a nun under a tree. The nun warns the kids, “Don’t drink from that bottle, children. The poor and simple savages drank their death from it. Here from this lily drink the dew of Times past” (55). Here, the timelessness world of myth is recalled. The nun continues her narration of the mythic nature of the water, “It will make you dream. You will dream of what it used to be like long ago in Quebec – New France, and it was called then” (56). The Shady kids ask whether the nun is the sister of the iceberg lady. She answers in the negative and shows a wound on her brow – “Oh – it’s a terrible wound and still bleeding’ (56). The nun’s answer brings back the pastness of the past to the present as in myth and fairy tales for the knowledge of the children about the mythic history of Canada. “The hatchet of the Iroquois struck me there and I died. Now, children – what do you see in the moonlight?” (56). The kids are shown the pastness of New France in a vision. “We see ladies and gentleman dancing in old-fashioned costumes with fans and wigs and swords in gorgeous, overpowering beauty” (56).

The Blazer kids disguise themselves as wild Indians to frighten the Shady Hill kids. Disguise is yet another feature of children’s myth. The Blazer kids are bribed by Wolfwind for winning the competition. If they win only, he will get the house of Weathergood. Wolfwind shouts at the headmaster Smith, “I have bribed your boys. What are you meddling with my plans for? Boys. Part of Captain kid’s treasure is yours if you bind him to that tree and gag him” (57). The Blazer kids tie their headmaster to the tree for winning the match in a foul
manner. The disguise of the two school kids as Indians and French, and the frightening away of the Indians by the Shady Hill kids recalls dramatically and mythically how the ancestors got Canada safe from wild Indians and bandits. The nun recalls it:

Good, my children. You have frightened them away. Sometimes it did not always end that way. Farewell my dear children. May you, like cartier and champlain and the voyageurs, fare well up the River of Canada. (60)

The Blazer kids are misled by Wolfwind when they demand food, Wolfwind asks them to work in a factory to get money. “There’s a big factory on strike. Lazy strikers! In you go, boys. Show your leadership qualities. Show them how you can work their factory and get some money for food” (63). The kids learn that wood is used as raw material to manufacture paper. The factory is in Toronto.

The Shady Hill kids visit different places in Toronto. Jenny dreams of a haystack moving. She is reminded that it is not a haystack but a hairy Mammoth. “You aren’t dreaming, my child. You’ve all climbed on top of the ghost of a hairy mammoth” (69). The children are reminded of the past and present of the hairy mammoth by itself. “I am a huge elephant like creature who used to roam about in Southern Ontario ten thousand years ago eating pine cones. Before long all the big glaciers melted” (69). The story of hairy mammoth brings back to the minds of the kids the geographical ancestry of Canada, “And we kept falling into
bogs. I fell into a bog in the swamp by the road here" (69). Again the children are imbued with the guiding-spirit of their ancestors. Hairy mammoth tells them of another legendary hero Nanabozho and carries the kids on his back to Nanabozho. The kids listen to a talk between Weathergood and Jenny’s Ma named Mrs. White before going to meet Nanabozho.

There’s an old Indian legend you may not have heard of, Mrs. White. It’s about Grizzly Bear, the Indian God of Darkness, and Coyote – the Indian God of light. They had a battle long ago – in the kicking Horse Pass and they’re going to have it again. When those little kids there – Grizzly Bear will be waiting to stop them. (71)

The kids visit Detroit, Chicago and other places. Jim is knitting on his spool. The Shady Hill kids now come across Tecumseh, another legendary Canadian hero. He transforms the Shady Hill kids into “scarecrows” (72) to save them from the villainy of the Blazer kids. Tecumseh asks the Shady Hill kids to reenact the battle of Moravian town. The display of Tecumseh’s totem – the tortoise and the Canadian flag recalls the myth and history of Canada. The children recall the death of Tecumseh being gunned down by the Yankees.

Tecumseh heroically makes the children understand the torture and pain borne by him and how he was converted. “No. I’m not quite dead yet, children. I do though miss all that skin they took off me to whips and shoelaces. The souvenir business can be carried overly far” (75). Tecumseh’s entering into the
hollow log makes Lunette recall the mythic burial, "The Indians used to bury their dead in hollow logs" (75). Jim and Lunette narrate the myth of human life: "Look! There's an old turtle crawling out the other end. Tecumseh still in the hollow log? Why no. There's no one in the hollow log at all. I can see right throughout it" (75). Lunette adds: "That's the story of old Tecumseh, the great Indian chief who helped us in the war of 1812. He crawled wounded into a hollow log and came out changed into a tortoise. And some tortoises never die" (75).

In the geography match of the kids, they are carried and helped by fairies, heroes and animals. Tecumseh now carries the kids on his back in the form of a tortoise to Fort William, another Canadian City, where Nanabozho lives. It is made clear, "He's the god of the Indians. He lies asleep on top of Cape Thunder, high above Lake Superior" (75). The kids reach Nanabozho. Tecumseh enters into the hollow log and vanishes. Jenny recalls the instructions given by Tecumseh to wake up Nanabozho "when he became a tortoise, told me that Nanabozho if we were to name all the bodies of water that flow into each other from here - to the Atlantic Ocean" (76). The kids repeat the names of rivers like Lake Superior, St. Mary's River, Lake Huron, the Clair River, Lake St. Clair, the Detroit River and Lake Erie. Finally all chant chorically, "which flows into Niagra Falls which flows into Lake Ontario which flows into the St. Lawrence River, which flows into the Sea" (77).
Nanabozho wakes up and speaks about his mythic ancestry to the kids: “Not since the day I fought with my father the cruel west wind who killed my Mother Loonwater have I felt so wide awake. Children with pure living hearts have awakened me” (77). Nanabozho’s narration reveals the fact that only innocent children are shown and guided by fairies in nature, water and mountains. This episode exhibits the child-centred vision of Reaney in the play:

I had no work to do. I had killed off all of the monsters. I had fashioned the land again after the great flood. But for children who know and love their country I awake once more. Cape Thunder, where I sleep, is in the very center of the land. (77)

The kids are taught about the sleeping giants and giantesses of Canada who keep vigil and wake up when the true Canadians are in trouble. Muskeg Maggie (78) is the Ogress of mountains and mines. She is against the invention of dreadful weapons with the help of advanced technology. Reaney, too, is against deadly scientific weapon which mar nature and harmony. “I’m tired of eating just mouses. It’s iron I crave. Bring me those bulldozers! I’ll get some of my own back. I’ll have that radio that wee chappy, that weasely chappie’s got” (79). The ogress swallows the radio and complains, “Who stole my gold from one of the mines?” (80). The ogress asks the kids to answer three riddles so that “they get a chance to get away from there” (80). They escape from the ogress after answering the riddles. They reach Winnipeg. They want to go to Rocky mountains. There is no light. Jim suggests an idea: “Jenny, I’m going to
throw my spool knitting up at that rock by the cave. We can follow the knitting in the dark” (80).

Wolfwind gets hold of one end of the spool. The other end is held by the Shady Hill kids. Wolfwind and the Blazers haul the other kids over a big hole. Weathergood alias Coyote comes to the rescue of the Shady Hillers. Grizzly Bear alias Wolfwind blames Weathergood for this: “You contemptible Coyote in a white apron – With your common scruffy little cubs. I’ll make it so dark they’ll never be able to see their way over the mountain” (87). Wolfwind is tickled to death by the mouse. Weathergood shouts in joy at the plight of Wolfwind, the symbol of darkness, evil, corruption and villainy. “Wolfwind! You are beaten now. After him children. Take off his disguise and send him packing. My faithful ally, Little Mouse, has come to my aid again, as long ago” (87). Wolfwind is shut up in the cave.

The kids have to cross the Fraser River before reaching their destination. Each kid has to connect him with an animal song. The Shady Hill kid Transy is warned by Coyote for being dishonest and having betrayed the friends. She brings another charge against him, “You accepted a bribe from Wolfwind and you filled up those lanterns with water instead of Coal Oil, so they’d go out” (92). The children undergo transformation. They are converted into animals. The conversion saves them from their enemies. “Now, you all may go with Simon Fraser down his river but first – since you have all been humble and been animals like me, I will let you be human again – because I can be human
again” (93). The match enters its last leg. Smith exclaims, “It looks as if my brats are going to win” (95). Bullseye’s remark declares her intention. “And we were going to buy a new pump for the school” (95). Jenny conveys her joy saying, “We think we won. But we’ll share the prize money if you like” (95).

The rivalry ends in hope, reunion and a transformation in their character as darkness gives way to light and evil to good. Jenny paves the way for a union, “Are you going to get married – why don’t our schools join too? – co-education” (96). They become human and the Canadian child Blubberboy is able to climb the ladder of success with the Canadian flag.

*Names and Nicknames* (*NN*) was published in 1963. The scene takes place in Dell’s farm. It is a very fertile farm. Rob is a hiredman. The first sequence is centred around milking the cows. Every action is mimed to please the children. The cow sequence is followed by the pig sequence. Life is associated with farming, milking, feeding and thereby connected with the myth of fertility and family life. The daily chores are listed by farmer Dell:

1. We get up the morning and fetch the cows
2. And then we milk them
3. And then I slop the pigs and the cows
4. And then I count them. (108)

Now the horse sequence starts. The horses are whistled back to their places by Rob. Farmer Dell drives of the horses for ploughing the land and for sowing. He
calls the horses by their names and it brings to our eyes an idyllic and pastoral background. Farming is connected with pastoral myth:

Giddup, Bradely. Up there Charley

This oats and barley we’ve got to be sowing

Must get it in so it can start growing. (110).

It is spring on farmer Dell’s farm. The snow has melted and gone. Again a serene idyllic background is created by the cow mooing, horses hoofing, birds’ chirping, frogs croaking and crows cawing. In another sequence, the children are introduced to Grampa Thorntree, a symbol of evil. The arrival of Thorntree takes the play to a child-centred myth. He is hated by children and he laments the fact openly, “You children always tease me. / You children always tease me. You kids” (111). The children ridicule him as:

Haw haw haw. Old Mister Thorntree

Swallowed a peck of rusty nails

Spits them out and never fails

To make them twice as rusty. (111).

Thorntree becomes angry when he is belittled by the children. He speaks with a touch of pride about his work but blames them for their nasty behaviour:

I go a proud seeing that people’s fences are straight. Aye – there’s where it goes crooked. It’s gone crooked here, too. That post should be a little to the – a whole silverful of property should really be on this side of the fence. I keep thinking of the nasty little tricks
the children played on me at the crossroads coming home from school – and I can’t think straight. All the posts are out of order. They’re all dancing in a circle around me. (111)

However, he tells them cunningly that he would help them get even with their opponents.

The children snatch and play ball with the old man’s battered hat. Children recode the feelings of Thorntree. “Now he’s sorry he called me a brat / And me a girl. And me a boy” (113). Thorntree retorts, “Oh, I’ll never be sorry about that / Because I am going to get back at all kids” (113). The children challenge Thorntree in their youthful exuberance and innocence. “Caw caw caw caw / You’ll never get back at us. / You never do and you never did / Caw caw caw caw” (113). It is amusing to hear Thorntree’s cunning reply, :Do me no do’s and did me no did’s / I’ll get my revenge on some of you kids” (113).

Rev. Hackaberry enters the scene now. He advises the children not to tease Thorntree. But the children complain as, “But he’s so mean to us, Rev. Hackaberry / when he is so mean we cannot be merry” (113). Thorntree overhears their conversation. Thorntree sounds intransigent when he says:

I’ll get you, reverend

I’ll some evil to you send

For sticking up for me, for trying to help me

I don’t need your help. I don’t need your charity
Rev. Hackaberry warns him and advises him to be polite and considerate “Thorntree, you’ll go too far some day / And turn into a thorn tree by the way” (114). There is already a thorn sticking out his arm. Thorntree feels proud of it and lays bare his inner plan. “I did grow there, Hackaberry. It did grow there. And I’ll tell the shrikes to put their victim birds on it when it’s good and sharp” (114). It reveals the malicious and dark nature of Thorntree.

Thorntree’s viciousness disturbs many others too. Mrs. Dell gives birth to a female baby. Mrs. Dell and her cousin Etta discuss a good name for the child. Mrs. Dell wishes to name the baby Amelia. Cousin Etta says that it is a beautiful name. But she expresses her apprehension about the presence of Thorntree in the area, “I saw Thorntree coming down the road and he looked so mean. He might say something mean about the baby [ . . . ]” (116). Cousin Etta considers Thorntree an evil being and shouts at him, “The very look on your face would sour fresh milk in a pitcher. And you have just kicked two of my best Black Minorcas” (116). Thorntree is not ashamed of the charges. He asks farmer Dell and his wife, “What are you naming the new little baby?” (117). He adds that he has got a little present for the baby and insists on hearing the name. Mrs. Dell is hesitant to reveal the name. But Mr. Dell says, “Her name is going to be
Amelia” (117). Immediately Thorntree thinks of a nickname for the child that will be almost a curse playing her all through her life.

Oh. It’s going to be Amelia, is it? Well, is itn’t? I have sworn revenge on every child in the neighbourhood and my special revenge against babies is that I spoil their christening by thinking up a terrible nickname for them that will stick and stick and stick, it’s so sticky. No, they won’t call this baby Amelia though you may christen her that. They’ll call her – what does the name Amelia – Melay! All the children will call that at school – Oat Melay! (117)

Now that the evil one has promised a nickname, the mother and friend can do nothing but wait for him to leave:

No, Etta. Her name has to be Amelia. But we can’t Christen her that until Mr. Thorntree’s not around any more. And when will that be? I couldn’t bear to send her off to school and have him meet her and say Melay to her. And the other children might repeat it, too. Oh! (117)

Being afraid of Thorntree, they decide to call the child as Baby one.

The scene is shifted to the school and schoolyard. Children recite their nursery rhymes. The girls are skipping and boys play tug of war. Thorntree intrudes on them. One child goes to him and asks, “Mr. Thorntree, you said if ever we wanted to get back at somebody we might just come to you. Well, those
kids haven’t let me up to bat yet – what names can I call them? (121). Thorntree suggests many names to be used for ridicule. He tells her, “You can call’em Whispers” (121). The child calls her friends “Hi-Scummy, Hi – sissy” (122).

Now another baby is born to farmer Dell’s wife. Farmer Dell plans to name this baby – boy with a name that Thorntree “cannot make a horrible nickname of” (124). It is said that, “There’s twenty babies without names in this neighbourhood and all because of him and his terrible tongue” (124).

Farmer Dell decides to name the baby with five names. He says, “We’re going to call him Paul John Peter James Martin. Thorntree hides in the chimney and listens in at the naming. Dell decides up Paul. Thorntree echoes from the chimney, “that makes the twenty-first child whose name I’ve ruined” (126). Farmer Dell decides to call this baby as Baby Two. Rev. Hackaberry asks them to go with him to the church and pray for a solution. The season is autumn. Harvesting begins in Dell’s farms. Thorntree appears there with animals that he has trapped. He talks of his powers as mystical and mythical:

While the other people sink in the snowy ooze
I float above it on my snowshoes
And everybody’s afraid of me
And everybody respects me
Fifty unchristened babies, ha ha!
Nameless but nicknameful
Even the children with their names
Dread my tongues destroying flames
And now I’ll see what my traps are doing. (129)

It is spring in the farm of Dell. Rob is going to write the High School Entrance examination. Another baby is born in the house of Dell. Thorntree wants to know the name to be given to the third baby. Farmer Dell narrates several names in a chorus. Thorntree cannot commit to memory all of them and collapses. Farmer Dell becomes happy about the success. “It worked. We named Thorntree so many names he couldn’t think of a nickname. Couldn’t think of anything towards the last there but just to get away” (136). Rob reports the awful transformation that has come over Thorntree. “He’s changed into a thorntree’ (136). Rev. Hackaberry guesses the reasons behind the change, “He was so balked, his envy and spite were so frustrated, that they turned in upon themselves and produced this awful miracle” (136).

Mrs. Dell is very happy now. She can call her children by their names. She warns her child:

Don’t you dare touch that dead tree, Amelia. It might still hurt you! Amelia – I can call her by her rightful name. And Paul. Little Paul, I can call you by name now. And which of his hundred names will we call this little dear? (137)

Farmer Dell asks her to call him “Aaron” as the mythic darkness has gone paving way for light. Children and parents rejoice at the death and disappearance of Thorntree.
Rob asks Etta whether she is ready to marry him. Etta expresses her plan in a renewed, reconciled tone:

Rob, I’ve been thinking. I’ll marry you whether you pass it or not. Now that Grandpa Thorntree is gone, it’s safe to get married and have babies with proper names again. That’s really what was troubling me. (137)

Mrs. Dell brings the play to a mythic end and declares, “So we must make this a betrothal party as well as christening party” (137). Their victory is paralleled by the seasonal changes that have framed the farm and the play with spring, summer, fall, winter and then the infinite growth of spring which symbolises the cyclic process of the myth of life, procreation and fertility.

*Ignoramus (Ig)* was first published and performed at York Mills Collegiate Institute in Toronto, in 1967. It discusses the issues of education and maturity in a setting that is knowingly ‘academic’. The first sequence deals with an argument between two academic experts – Dr. Hilda History who has just written a controversial book, “So Little for the Spine” and Dr. Charles Progressaurus – Principal of Toronto’s center for Tomorrow’s education and all progressive education. The child-centred vision is highlighted by the participation of children in interviews, discussions, reciting and helping each other.
The argument begins with the complaint of Progressaurus thus, “You have written the most old-fashioned book. In which you say, that progressive education, does not train the child’s mind for anything” (148). He adds further:

Ho ho ho! What’s the use of training and straining and stuffing the child’s mind with a lot of facts he’ll never use. At center for Tomorrow’s Education we believe in teaching the whole child to be happy, teaching him to fit into his environment. Our great happy democracy. (148)

It focuses attention on the importance of the child-centred myth of education. History retorts saying, “You’re like a man hammering a nail in the dark” (149). Progressaurus stands for the modern approaches of teaching. He is not in favour of stuffing the kids’ minds with dates, figures, rules, theorems and languages. Progressaurus supports his argument with the following motto, “What I believe is that the child should be taught to express himself – and to be happy in his environment” (149). The teaching mode should be situational, novel and scientific.

History puts forth her arguments in favour of the traditional method of teaching. Her view is, “How can a child express himself if he’s got nothing to express” (149). She continues that grammar helps one to speak. “Well, a little learning is a dangerous thing, but no learning at all should certainly be even more lethal” (150). Progressaurus chides History saying, “You’re not democratic” (150). There is some rationale behind History when she says, “The
mind is a kingdom. Surely the best democracies had lots of trained minds” (150). According to Progressaurus, “a telephone directory trains the mind. Driving a car trains the mind” (150). History is highly sarcastic about the views of her academic opponent. Her view is child-centred with a far-sighted vision, “With another five years of you around this country’s schools our children will soon be able to read only traffic signals” (150).

The mythic suffering of children caused by the overload of learning is the thrust of Progressaurus’ argument:

You are rather conventional in your views, but I think you will soon realize that you are attacking a good thing. Have you ever thought of the helpless misery your system inflicts on a child who can’t parse a sentence or solve a problem in mathematics. (150)

The questions asked by the Voice or chorus and the answers given by both the exponents are child-centred and society-oriented. The Voice asks Dr. History, “Where she got the information for her book on modern education in the schools of tomorrow” (151). Dr History notes in her answer:

My Dear, the various provincial departments of education put out statements of what they’re trying to do. It’s usually what he says – train the child to fit in with our happy democracy and learn how to express himself. (151)

Progressaurus is asked by the Voice, “Suppose your environment is evil?” (151). He splutters and stumbles for the right answer and says evasively,
“In short, you believe the child is ignorant and imperfect and needs cultivation with dead language and so-called mental discipline?” (151). Dr. History quashes the argument and crushes it with a correlation to reveal the child-centred mythic vision which is in force in Germany:

Yes. In short, you believe that the child is perfect and all his teacher should do is let him do what he likes. Good gracious me, that’s how the Nazis trained their very best SS men. Just let them express themselves andOriginal Sin will do the rest! (151)

Now the debates are asked which readers each would recommend to an infant who is unable to read. Progressaurus suggests, “Dick, Jane and Puff” (152). Dr. History recommends her first reader as “Eloise, Vercingetorix and St. Peter” (153). It is announced and declared Dr. History to have won both the debates. Frothingale, a rich merchant, and wealthy brewer, brings the debate to an end through a unique suggestion. His argument takes the dynamics of the sufferings of children’s myth to its climax.

Well. I just happen to have adopted twenty orphans. Suppose, let us suppose, that with my millions of hiccup money I were to build you each a school – small village even, in some remote part of the country, and you each with ten children a piece were to find out over a period of say seventeen years – were top find out just what happens when you Dr. Hilda History bring up kids according to
your traditional methods and you Dr. Progressaurus use your
progressive theories on your ten litter younkers. (154)

Frothingale adds:

“At the end of the seventeen-year period – Grade Twelve, or
Middle school, as it used to be called in my very old-fashioned
youth, - then we’ll meet again and a judge chosen by me will
decide – which one of you wins. I’ll have him see your children –
why they’ll be at almost grown up then. (154)

Frothingale seems to be a philanthropist and a munificent lover of
humanity. He wants the orphans to become useful to the society and nation. His
expectation for the future of the children touches the transformative aspects of
children through the different stages of the journey of human life:

When they are seventeen the children will get further board and
tuition at whatever they want right up to the Ph.D. But the group
that wins will inherit – the Frothingale Brewery, and I might say
that that means a great deal of hiccup money. I have no children.
My wealth embarrasses me. Forge me a society of human beings
who will know what to do with my money when I’m gone. (155)

Babies are chosen on lot system. Each is given ten babies. Frothingale
assigns the places for them as:

Tomorrow you will each take your ten infants to opposite ends of
Canada. You, Dr. Progressaurus, on an island in Lake Erie where
arrangements will be made. You, Dr. History, in a remote Prairie village where arrangements will be made. (155)

Dr. History is asked many intuitive questions by the children. One child asks her to tell them fairy tales. Another child is afraid of darkness. A touching and moving question is asked by one child as “Are you our real mother, Miss History?” (157). Dr. History gives a negative reply. So the child asks further, “Miss History, who are our real fathers and mothers” (159). It implies Reaney’s quester myth for finding out one’s true parents. Dr. History consoles them with the assurance. “But your foster mothers and foster fathers in the village love you just as dearly” (158).

Progressaurus is asked to tell a fairy tale by these children. They want to know the story of “Alice”. Beatrice is the most intelligent and studious child in his group. He discourages the kids that such stories will unsettle their minds with inferiority complex. Also it would ruin their word-count and vocabulary. “Are you our Father?” (161). His reply is not positive. So Beatrice strikes a mythic child notion. “I didn’t think you were. The kids were all talking about this yesterday and some of them said the big tulip tree at the end of the garden was our father. You know the tree where the eagles nest?” (161).

The children reveal that Dr. Progressaurus never spares time for developing their basic reading and writing skills. Beatrice tells that she has been learning how to read. Beatrice learns to read in a novel way:
The farmer's wife taught me. They throw all their old tin cans across the fence into the school property in the woods. And I asked her if I could have one of the old tin cans with pictures on it and she said, "sure, I'll even read you what's written on it". (161)

Dr. Progressaurus teaches his pupils to make sand models. Beatrice is not willing to cooperate with Progressaurus and the modern world. She says, "I don't want to get adjusted to it. It is 80% hideous" (179). The children assemble around Beatrice. They ask her what to study. Now she tells how she got notes and her interest in studying them.

I'm amazed you're anxious to see them, Bruce. Since you can't read them. The Cook, Mrs. Smith, was able to get us the whole correspondence lessons for Grade XII physics. They came in the mail this morning to her from the Department of Education. So we can get going at studying them. (179)

Beatrice is helped by another mythic vision of birth and transformation. That vision, "is all about this little chicken. See him? He's just hatched out of the egg and he hasn't scratched yet" (162). This little chicken appears in her dream and reminds her about their leaving the island in a changed grown-up stage. Beatrice expresses confidence of doing well in the examination. One girl asks Beatrice whether they will be guided by the fairy little chicken. The mythic belief is that innocent children are always safeguarded and directed by fairies in woods and nymphs in waters. Beatrice echoes the same, "Of course. He
couldn't leave us now. He's all we've got. How could we have lived without him loving us. Let's repeat his worship as we go down to the woods to do our physics problems” (180).

Mr. Frothingale comes with the Governor General to test the two groups and to accord farewell. The Governor General interviews Cynthia, a History group girl. She answers well and the Governor appreciates her. Then Bruce who belongs to Progressaurus' school is interviewed. He exhibits poor manners and proves ignorant, “Who was the Prime Minister of Canada?” (185). Bruce can neither read nor write. Governor General asks Bruce, “How on earth did you get into Grade XII?” (186). Bruce reveals that, “Progressaurus always said it'd hurt my feelings if I was failed” (186). The Governor asks another question. He wants to know what Bruce would do if he wanted to write a love letter” (186). Bruce replies suavely, “Get Beatrice to write it for me. Or send her a tape” (186). Another student Stephen from History group is judged in the same manner.

Finally the Governor General questions Beatrice. He asks, “What do you think about life in general” (188). Beatrice recalls the chicken and can. Time moves to the past and forward to the present as in myth. Beatrice narrates, “OK. God sends the little chicken. Bon Ami Here he is. I found him years ago on a trash heap and then he started to appear to me in dreams” (189). The Governor General exclaims and asks in wonder, “You’ve made a whole religion out of an empty can of household cleansing powder” (189). Beatrice strikes the child-centred mythic vision through her answer, “No it means the windows of the
soul. The little chick washes them for you and hasn’t scratched yet” (189). The judgment ends in a tie. The Governor General proposes to break the tie with this suggestion: “Miss History – Dr. Progressaurus you will exchange your groups for the final year of their high school education” (192).

The four children’s plays offer us marionettes and myths, Canada and Community, family and education generously reflected in the style of an author who constantly writes for and about children. *The Donnelly (Don)* children are envied, oppressed, nicknamed, freedom denied, and blamed for offences not known to them by their enemies. They feel like social and political outcasts. The alienation is caused by their courage, independence, integrity and will power to stand against inequality and injustices. Finally they are put to an end by politics and religion.

The main characteristic of each Reaney child hero is the fear of leaving childhood. As Ross Woodman says in his book, *James Reaney*:

Reaney like Wordsworth views the child essentially as the inhabitant of a divine world whose play actively expresses the radical freedom which characterizes the divine life. The loss of that life is what Reaney means by death, and the imaginative recovery of it through the arts is what he means by eternal life. (280)
Thus the plots of Reaney’s plays usually involve a situation in which a sensitive child or child-like man, has his maturity threatened on the one hand by a stifling provincialism and on the other by perversions of his own creativity, both innovative and imaginative. Since Reaney wants to write about the ancient history of Canada, he adopts stories of the past. Thus the children’s myth occupies a place of central importance in Reaney’s plays while he attempts to transform history into myth and drama through artistic alignment of otherwise forgotten principles.