Preface

Reaney’s plays and poems grow from intensely localized experiences. Local regional culture achieves an unprecedented importance. His characters are always in flight from the perils and madness of city life. The actor in many of the plays stays within the bounds of one village, or one farm, somewhere in Perth Country. The main theme should be something historical. His artistic skill has culminated in the transformation of a local incident into mythical statute and thereby converted into a dramatic representation of life.

Most Canadian writers of the nineteenth century concentrated on historic and mythic themes to record their historicity of cultural heritage. Being creative and inventive, Reaney was able to transform history into myth and drama in his plays. Reaney was rather forced to write so because he found that through myth he could give expressions to his experiences and inner feelings.

Frye exerted much influence on Reaney and his contact with Northrop Frye, when he was an undergraduate and when he worked on his doctoral thesis under Frye, led him to consider the theories of literature contained in Frye’s Anatomy of Criticism and to read Carl Jung and others who have written on the mythic dimensions of the mind. Frye’s impact on Reaney can be detected from his statement to Ross who is the last of a series of critics of Reaney. He tells Ross: “I don’t write about anything (dianoia). I just write stories (mythoi)”. 
The first chapter, “Introduction” deals with Reaney’s social background, rank and file maintained by him in Canadian drama, equations with other writers and the influences of Northrop Frye in shaping his literary career. It also dwells on his visit to forty-three countries of Ontario, Canada and how his poems and plays become the humblest aspects of rural and small town life. It also brings out the place of honour enjoyed by him and commendations of various critics like Germaine Warkentin, Louis Dudek, Frank Davy, Stan Dragland, Richard Stingle and Stewart Reaney. It also focuses attention on his major literary creations both poems and plays and his ability in communicating a universal vision of everyday life and human experiences through symbol and myth.

The next chapter, “The Dialectics of History and Myth” delves deep into various definitions of history and myth in general and how they are employed in the plays of James Reaney in particular. The local and regional culture achieves an unprecedented importance in his plays. What is happening within the local or regional society is as significant as what is happening in London or Rome. The plays of James Reaney are developed into such an insight. The protagonists in many of the plays stay within the bounds of one village or one farm, somewhere in Perth Country. His plays include various archetypal images, literary genres and motifs in mythologizing and in the anthropological reproduction of local customs, idiom and conventions.

Chapter three, “The Transformative Dimension of History and Myth” analyses the harmonious blending of history and myth in the plays of James
Reaney. The historicity of heritage is a recurrent motif. Modern writers such as James Reaney, David Fennario, Ann Chrislett, John Coulter and George Ryga widely transform history and mythologise it. The historical transformation of various incidents are represented as mythopoeic. Reaney’s characters undergo some kind of reconciliation and transformation being tempted by means of apocalyptic epiphany. Good is rewarded and evil punished or brought to public knowledge at the end.

The fourth chapter, “The Marginalised Minority” discusses in brief the marginalisation of minority position experienced by Reaney’s characters in his plays. There exists the difference between the English Canadians and French Canadians and between English Protestants and French Catholics who find themselves face to face in the political arena. The native writers of Canada even felt disgusted and marginalized, because of the supremacy of Americans, Britishers and Europeans. Each character is sidelined as minority with a weakness either cultural or intellectual.

The next chapter, “The Poverty of Politics and the Politics of Religion” portrays the poverty of religious teachings dominated by North-American provincialism and political oppression. Reaney uses various literary devices like parody, satire, irony and allegory to bring to light the corrupt political and religious practices prevailed in Canada. The plays titled *The Donnellys*, *Dismissal*, *Three Desks* and Baldoon are specimens of political and religious oppression.
The sixth chapter entitled “The Dynamics of Children’s Myth” records the child-centred vision propounded by Reaney in his plays for children. According to Reaney, the child is a personification of vital forces quite outside the limited range of one conscious mind. The collection *Applebutter and Other Plays* for children offers the most basic approach to the kind of theatre James Reaney wants to develop for children. *Geography Match, Names and Nicknames* and *Ignoramus* discuss the issues of education and maturity in a setting that is knowingly “academic”.

The last chapter, “Summation” offers an epitome of the major findings of the present study. The thesis concludes that Reaney’s plays are history of life, drama of life and myth of life. They are about Canada and the whole world. They offer the nice scope of study in the transformation of history into myth and drama. They are true to Reaney’s single structural principle common to all his creative thought in poetry, drama, critical writing or teaching.

Although the major thrust of the study centers around the important plays of Reaney, references are made to his other poems and other literary creations as well. The present study on James Reaney has certain shortcomings. Certain plays of Reaney are not analysed and discussed due to unavoidable constraints of space and paucity of material. The literary techniques and stylistic features of the playwright are discussed in appropriate places focusing how they contribute to the harmonious blending of the major themes that James Reaney seeks to
explore in his works of art. The present study, it is hoped, would certainly help to establish the fact that Reaney’s recoding, recreating and rewriting of history into myth and drama in his plays remain an eternal artistic documentation to posterity on the multifarious socio-economic and politico-ethnic problems that have immensely shaped the cultural development of Canada, especially Reaney’s ‘local land’ and Reaney’s ‘own region’.