Reaney's drama is fulfilling those hopes of what Canadian Theatre can become, and inspiring many others to realize its potential. His combination of history, legend and romance has helped to create a distinctive Canadian Mythology.

- Richard Perkyns

The Dialectics of History and Myth
The writer of history is like a reporter who writes about the things done by groups of men or a single man. His record is believed to have had wide cultural, political, or intellectual significance through a long span of time. The term “history” itself means an account of events in time, it is etymologically related to “story”, which is generally used to refer to fictional events. Whereas “history” refers to the “fictional” or empirically provable narrative (Becker 248). It was once thought to be a “record” of “true” events. At other times it was believed to be a revelation of God’s guidance of mankind or a science of political and personal behaviour based on demonstrable truth. In the historiography of history a myth is a once valid but now discarded version of the human story as our now valid versions will in due course be relegated to the category of discarded myths.

The word “canon” used in the context of literary studies is a figure of speech derived from religion, where it refers to those writings which the Jewish and Christian faiths take to be divinely inspired, thus sacred (Johnson 27). They are based on genre, period, national origin, gender of the author, sexual orientation of the author, ethnicity of the author, political opinion of the author and so on.
The community play in Canada aims to draw people together in the display of “inherited” notions of community-shared, territory-shared history and shared values. According to Philips: “This concept of community depends on four central characteristics: a common geographical territory or locale, widespread political participation through collective activity, and a high degree of moral solidarity” (qtd. in Little 78).

The human self is composed of multiple identities and roles, familial, territorial, linguistic, class, religious, ethnic and gender to being the most prominent of them. It seems that Canadian writers are primed for the paradoxes of post-modernism by their history and also by their split sense of identity both regional and national. Canada’s “most major historical figures like Louis Riel, Big Bear, The Donnellys, look like almost post-modern creations as they are examples of mythical, archetypal, alienated and marginal eccentrics who do not fit into the dominant definitions of the Center” (Grant 106).

It has been said that the most obvious characteristic of Canadian drama is its regionality. It is now generally accepted as one of its strengths and that Canadian regionalism refers not only to the physical and social specifics of a locality and culture, but also to the psychological condition of its inhabitants. Nativism is post-colonial in its battle against the invasion of alien sensibilities and modes of feeling and articulation. (Satchidanandam 1-3).
The conflict in Canadian plays expresses the internal cultural differences which the existence of a marginalized people renders inevitable. Before the 1960s, ethnic history was usually written either by sociologists primarily interested in immigrant adjustment and assimilation or by individuals with story identifications with particular groups. Laurier La Pierre writes in his book *Canada My Canada* (31) about the treatment meted out to the aborigines by the Europeans:

> We meet them with an attitude of moral superiority that robbed them of their spiritual values and led to their being physically and sexually abused by those whom they trusted. In the name of racial superiority, we deprived them of their fundamental rights and liberties. We enacted policies that condemned them to poverty and degradation, we devised tactics that robbed them of their lands and we killed them in thousands through our diseases. (qtd. in Singh 16)

The fact is obvious in plays like Reaney’s *The Donnellys* (1974), Quebec Playwright David Fennario’s *Balconville* (1979), and plays like John Coulter’s *Riel Trilogy* (1950), dealing with the plight of Canada’s native people George Ryga’s *The Ecstacy of Rita Joe* (1970) and a host of others. These plays are examples of illustrating the way in which many Canadian playwrights transform their basic group experience into personal actions and vice versa. This
"transformational pattern is a post-modernist phenomenon of many Canadian plays" (qtd in Abraham 234).

Post-modern elements like interrogation and subversion are also seen in the themes of Canadian drama which include the rehabilitations of the outsider, rebel and a revisionist history. Examples are, *The Riel Trilogy*, *The Donnelly Trilogy* and *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe*. The story of *The Riel Trilogy* is taken directly from the actual court transcript of Riel’s trials and is staged each year in the city of Regina (where Riel was hanged) in a courtroom or theatre which is an exact replica of the original. Following the trial or play, the jury or audience is asked to deliver its verdict on the truth or untruth of the coloniser’s history. As Linda Hutcheon aptly comments:

> Here documents become “metadrama’, problems like cultural designation, linguistic appropriation and the establishment of an official history by the colonizing power are brought out before the court of Contemporary justice in Coulter’s Post-Modernist Histographic metadrama, which is both document and a creation that addresses political and historical issues through its questioning of the relation between illusion and reality. (qtd. in Abraham 234-35)

The 1960s were years of a general challenge to authority that left their mark on post-modernism in Canada and elsewhere. They were the years both of nationalist politics in Canada and the rise of the Women’s movement. It is
during this period that James Reaney started writing plays. He had been writing only poems earlier. From Newfoundland to Vancouver, the local playwrights are interested in portraying local people. David French in his two related plays, *Leaving Home* and *Of the Field's Lately*, offers an honest picture of the displaced Newfoundlander who brings his wit, his courage, and his colourful language to the big city of Toronto. Michael Cooke remains with the Newfoundland scene as he deals with the vivid personality of these fantasy and poetic language to reveal the traits of the nineteenth century Ontario Irish and Scottish forebears of today’s leaders in that province.

Literature is formed by a huge containing conceptions which establish the literary societies and the family resemblances among the large group of writers. These containing groups are called myths and in these, the nature of man’s concern for his world is clearly expressed. Every writer has his private mythology, his own peculiar formation of symbols of much of which he is quite unconscious. *The Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary* (1989) records myth as

> Story that originated in ancient times, especially one dealing with ideas or beliefs about the early history of a race, or giving explanations of natural events, such as the seasons; the creation myth and ancient Greek myths; such stories collectively: famous in myth and legend; thing, persons, etc. that is imaginary, fictitious or impossible: the myth of racial superiority, of a classless society, of human perfectibility. (820)
Myths play a very important role in all primitive, illiterate, tribal and non-urban cultures, which, in fact, make them an important object of anthropological study. The concern is not only for the interest the ancient Greek myths have created among the readers down through the centuries, but also because of man's enduring insistence on carrying quasi-mythical modes of thought, expression and communication into a seemingly scientific age. Myths represent the structural principles of literature. They are to literature what geometrical shapes are to painting. Thus, the study of mythology provides a diagram or blueprint of what literature, as a whole, is about, an imaginative survey of the human situation from the beginning to the end of what is imaginatively conceivable. "These myths do not have a single form and they never act according to one simple set of rules. They vary from epoch to epoch and from culture to culture" (Rivers 32).

The word "myth" has, in the ordinary sense, unfortunate connotations which reduces everything that was held to the history to the state of fiction. It is the narrative form that holds all types of narrative together. In Greek, "mythos" signified any story or plot, but now in its central modern significance, a myth is a single story in a mythology which is a system of hereditary stories once believed to be true by a particular cultural group (Abrams 102). The Greek Dictionary of Liddel and Scott's gives the following definitions of the word myth, or mythos: "anything delivered by word of mouth, word 'speech'"; "a speech in a public assembly"; "counsel, advice, a command"; "the subject of speech"; "a resolve, purpose, design"; "the subject of speech"; "a saying proverb"; "the talk of man,
rumour”; “a tale, story, narrative”; “a tale, legend, myth, opposed to logos, the historic tale” and “a fable”. (qtd. in Dudek 134)

But in The Harper Handbook to Literature (1985), the article on myth, written by Northrop Frye, defines the word quite differently in modern terms. According to him:

It is first “plot” or “narrative” and then it becomes “stories illustrating the society’s religion, history, class structure, or the origin of peculiar features of the natural environment”. It “verbalizes a society’s major concerns in religion and history and it is a means of symbolizing the ideals and aims of an established spiritual or temporal hierarchy”. (134)

David Learning, in his A Dictionary of Asian Mythology (2001) explains “mythology” thus:

Asian mythologies suggest a universe where everything is the part of the Absolute and all gods and goddesses in Asia are manifestations of the absolute rather than personal or physical beings. Asians tend to see themselves as ideally liberated from ego and the delusions of the material world and thus the mystical mode is common in Asia than it is in the Western world. Second, Asian mythology is an essential animism – a sense that all gods, goddesses, people, places, objects, rivers, mountains and seas have souls. They are holy and all elements of creation are seen as
journeying companions through existence. The third emphasis is on a cyclical rather than a linear sense of time. (4-5)

During Aristotle's time "plot" meant an organization of events into a significant whole with a beginning, middle and an end. But in modern narrative theory "plot" is free from the raw material of "story" by its imposition of an order of events, departing from straight forward chronicity by selection, omission and other narrative devices. There can be no changes of orders (flashing forward or back), of deviation (expanding or contracting the time an event could possibly take), and of frequency (telling the same event more than once from different points of view) (Wright 86-87).

Religions are concerned with "ritual, theology, ethics and other elements and myths are the sacred stories of religion and narratives are used to support, explain, or justify rituals, theology and ethics" (Learning 2). Most of the myths involve rituals which are prescribed forms of sacred ceremonials. Even social anthropologists are not sure of which came first in its existence, whether the myths or the rituals. Literature itself is said to be a conscious mythology. Its mythical stories often become structural principles of story telling and its mythical concepts like sun-god and the like become habits of metaphorical thought. In Canada, the mythical was simply "the pre-historic" stories which have men and women as protagonists instead of supernatural beings are called legends. If a story is about supernatural beings, but is not part of a systematic mythology, it is classified as a folktale.
The language of myth is the total vision of the human situation, human
destiny, human aspirations and fears. Mythology of concern reaches different
levels. The lowest level is "social mythology got from our elementary education
and our surroundings" (Frye 176). It includes even gods. It expresses a concern
for society which is a mighty social force. It is a body of general knowledge
informed by a general view of human situation. Some myths are sure
expressions of belief like the myth of progress. Some beliefs are not true but
made true by some social action. It deals with the myth of Marxism. The
general implication that all myths are associated with religious beliefs, feelings
or practices seems misleading. Frye says in his book Anatomy that "literature as
a whole is about myths and that come into the stories of persons, The Zeus and
Hercules [. . . ] and they lurk behind many of the stories of the Bible" (177).
There are certain cultures which believe in polytheistic religions that have myths
that rely on a belief in the supernatural.

Writers constantly make use of myths for their plots, episodes or allusions
even if they do not believe in them. In reality, many of the myths are prosaic,
utilitarian, and ugly. When we understand them properly, they are speculative
and problem creating. To Northrop Frye, the early and permissive myths were
stories about gods, and their actions and they were the informing principles of
historical and philosophical thought (106). Many modern writers focus attention
on the importance of myths in their literary creations by weaving stories based on
the pattern of ancient myths. James Joyce's Ulysses (1922), T.S. Eliot's The
Waste Land (1922), Eugene O’Neill’s The Mourning Becomes Electra (1977) are
knit on the pattern of ancient myths.

Myth typifies and interrelates. A writer who handles myth deals with both
natural and supernatural factors in his works. Utopias, the frontier and mountains
all appear in his imagery. He draws on the commonplace and trite and may offer
them as a simple outline or basis of complicated narrative. Myths help the
dramatist to organize, identify, and to achieve a spurious profundity in his work.
It often communicates before it is explained. Without a sense of humour, a
mythologizing dramatist may attain comprehensiveness through solemnity. With
an opportunity to generalize into myth comes an opportunity to indulge in sharp,
derisive laughter. Myths are “part of a written tradition and literature. Myths
only survive when written in the form of literature” (Ency 798).

In a myth, usually all the characters, especially the hero, is specific with
specified family and national ties. The action in a myth is most often
complicated and gets broken up into loosely related episodes. It does not depend
upon disguises, but on the unpredictable reactions of individuals or personalities.
One of the distinguishing characteristics of myth is fantasy which is often “free-
ranging and paradoxical” (Kirk 39). This results in the lack of ordinary logic.
The supernatural elements in myths produce unexpected changes in the forward
movement of the action. Besides this, myths possess an element of seriousness
while reflecting on the problems in society or any other pre-occupations already
mentioned. The main characters are often superhuman and their local settings
are usually envisaged as taking place in a timeless past. Certain details of contemporary life may intrude, but they are “superficial unless the myth has been strongly complicated by legend” (40). As myths have an element of seriousness, people believe that myths act as a socially sanctioned palliative of the mental ills to which all the members of the society are prone.

The problem of the origin of myth keeps obtruding because their function, growth and origin are all interconnected. All myths do not originate in the same manner. Some believe that, for example, myths started their existence as simple tales and gradually acquired the special features of myths. The qualities that make a fate traditional by establishing it in a culture are either narrative or functional, or both. Fantasy is found innately rooted in many of the myths. There are many possibilities for it. Fantasy might have crept in as an incident of the tradition of story-telling itself. It is also possible that certain tales which made use of the materials derived from dreams reproduced their imaginative and chaotic qualities. And in the mythological method the poet communicates on a deeper level than that of mere narration. It does not “appeal to reasoning powers but works through the imagination on the mind’s affective powers” (Ramamurthy 76). However, we see the shaping of the narrative material with the collaboration of dream sequences. Another possible factor is the association of tales with the supernatural for its own sake. As the supernatural elements made a story wonderful, writers started incorporating these into stories.
There have been three major developments in the study of myths. The first is associated with Edward Burner Taylor, James George Frazer and Emile Durkheim, who realized that the myths of primitive societies were highly relevant to the subject of myths as a whole; the second was Sigmund Freud’s discovery of the unconscious and its relation to myths and dream and the third is the structural theory of myth propounded by the great French anthropologist Claude Levis Strauses. While the first two groups believe that myths reflect the collective ideas of a social group, Strauses believes that the message conveyed by the myths tend to concern the difficulties of social and economic life. For him, a proper understanding of the myths requires concentration on an underlying structure of relationships, rather than on their content. Beneath the heterogeneity of myths, Strauses believes, are certain universal structures to which any myth could be reduced. He considered myths a “type of language that could be broken down into individual units called mythemes” (qtd. in Derrida 307). These acquire meanings only when combined together in various ways.

A poet resorts to mythology in order to give expression to his experience. The primordial experience becomes the source of his creativeness and he seeks the help of a mythological imagery to give it shape. The richness of content and description in mythological imagery remains a source of creation in the human psyche. In this context, it is worth recalling the theory of Carl Jung’s Collective Unconscious by which he means a certain psychic faculty shaped by the forms of
heredity (183). To Jung, everyone possesses both a personal and collective unconscious. The personal one is filled with the experiences of the individual, while the collective one holds the mental inheritance of all mankind. This common legacy of mankind of his past experience has given rise to “archetypal” or primordial images. To Northrop Frye, it is a literary symbol or cluster of symbols which are recurrently used throughout literature and thereby become conventional. By the concept of “archetypal myth” Jung maintained that certain basic images like birth, growth, death and infinitude, represented by certain natural objects and figures, were historically implanted in the mind of man. Thus, Jung argues that “the great mythological stories could be described as expressions of a collective, super-rational impulse” (31).

An archetype should not only be a unifying category of criticism, but also a part of the total form, and it leads us at once to the question of what sort of total form criticism can be seen in literature. There may be archetypes of genres as well as of images. The search for archetypes is a type of literary anthropology concerned with the way literature is informed by pre-library categories such as ritual, myth and folktales. “There is a general tendency on the part of great classics to revert them” (Frye 40).

According to Northrop Frye’s theory, there are four main narrative genres or gene plots – “comedy, romance, tragedy and irony”, Satire. These are “displaced” modes of the four elemental forms of myth associated with the
seasonal cycle of spring, summer, autumn and winter (AC 42). By displacement” Frye refers to the restrictions placed on human desire by reality. Instead of being free to tell a purely imaginative story, that is, a myth, the writer is forced to accommodate it to the readers’ awareness of things as they are, in the physical world. Thus, the content of any literary work that results from “displacement” may disguise, but not change the myth (Trilling 22). By “dream-displacement” uninhibited desires in dreams are consorted and so the dream content no longer resembles the dream-thoughts. Thus dream reproduces only a distorted form of the dream within the unconscious (Brown 16).

It is the typical form of myth that becomes the conventions and genres of literature. The myth is the central informing power that gives archetypal narrative to oracles. Hence, the myth is an archetype. In the solar cycle of the day, seasonal cycle of the year, and organic eye of the human life, there is a single pattern of significance, out of which myth contracts a central narrative around a figure who is partly the sun, partly vegetative fertility, and partly a god or archetypal human being. The archetypes of images, according to Frye, have four phases (19). They are:

The dawn, spring and birth phase. Myths of the birth of the hero, of revival and resurrection, of creation and of the defect of the powers of darkness, winter and death. The subordinate characters are the father and the mother. The zenith, summer and marriage or triumph phase. Myths of apotheosis, of sacred marriage, and of
entering into paradise. The subordinate characters are the champion and the Bride. The sunset, autumn and death phase. Myths of fall, of the dying god, of violent death and sacrifice, and of the isolation of the hero. The subordinate characters comprise of the traitor and the siren. The darkness, winter and dissolution phase. Myths of the triumph of these powers, myths of floods and the return of chaos, and of the defeat of the hero. The subordinate characters are the ogre and the witch. (42)

The first phase is the archetype of romance, the second of comedy, the third of tragedy, and the fourth of satire. A local flood may beget a folktale by accident, but a comparison of flood stories can show how quickly such tales become examples of the myth of dissolution. The tendency shown by rituals and epiphanies to become encyclopaedic is realized in the body of myths within most often constitutes the sacred scriptures of the various religions. A literary critic has to study first, these sacred documents to have a fairly good knowledge of his subject. After studying them he can descend from archetypes to genres. One essential principle of archetypal criticism is that the individual and the universal forms of an image are identical (Frye 44).

The central myth of literature, in its narrative aspect, is the quest myth (Frye 43). The human cycle of waking and dreaming corresponds closely to natural cycle of light and darkness and in this, all imaginative life begins. In
daylight, man is in the power of darkness and is a prey to frustration and weakness. It is in the darkness of nature that the conquering heroic self awakes. Hence art, which Plato called “a dream of the awakened minds” has as its final cause the resolution of antithesis” (43). Here, the sun and the hero mingle, and a world is realized in which the inner desire and outward circumstance coincide. God or hero, who is conceived in human likeness and yet has more power over nature, slowly builds up the vision of an omnipotent personal community beyond an indifferent nature. In this community, the hero regularly enters in his apotheosis. This world is slowly pulled away from the rotary cycle of the quest in which all triumph is temporary. Thus, we can see the hero’s quest in terms of its fulfilment. This gives the central pattern of archetypal images and the vision of innocence which see the world in terms of total human intelligibility. It is usually formed in the form of the vision of an unfallen world or heaven in religion.

Literature follows a dialectical movement, either as an ascent or a descent and sometimes both through the four stages of existence which provide the general framework for the four types of narrative modes or genetic plots mentioned above. These four may be expressed as two: the dialectical movement of comedy and tragedy (up and down respectively) and the cyclical and parabolic movement of romance (downs and ups) which is reversed in irony (Frye 43). These four modes include all literatures. They may be projected as four overlapping semicircles. The upper half associated with romance represents
the unfallen world with heaven above; the lower half associated with irony stands for the fallen world with hell below. As human life involves a fall and rise, tragedy on the right half of the circle moves down from romance to irony, and comedy on the left moves up from irony in the form of satire to romance. This circle is not static, but it keeps on moving and each of these modes has six phases.

The “mythos” of comedy shows the comic tendency to incorporate the hero and heroine into society as a plot structure. This is the basic plot structure of the comedies from Platus and Terence to the present day. The moment of the crystallization of the unit of the hero and the heroine is the moment of cosmic resolution according to Frye (Hamilton 132), the movement of comedy is a move towards identity in three ways. Firstly, there is a social identity when a new society gets formed with the marriage between the hero and the heroine. Secondly, there comes a dual identity because of this marriage, and thirdly, there exists an individual identity when a particular character learns about himself in a way he has not succeeded before. Of the six phases, the two central phases, which are marked by the absence of identity, are the ironic phase and the romantic phases. The central phases are at the midpoint between the poles of irony and romance. Out of the two central phases, the third one remains within the world of experience and in the fourth one, we move out from the world of experience to the world of innocence and romance. Thus, the action of comedy
begins in a normal world, moves into a world of innocence and romance and undergoes a metamorphosis where the comic resolution is achieved.

The plot of comedy usually has a hero and an obstructing character who obstructs the hero’s desires. We look down upon the latter with contempt, whereas the romantic figure of the former attracts us. Ridicule is directed at the latter from whom we separate ourselves and sympathy is aroused by the former with whom we will happily identify ourselves. Romance is purely fictional and lacks realism but has profound imaginative appeal. The study of romances, no doubt, plays an integral part in literature though such works are considered subliterary. Here the hero is powerful and superior and the plot is centred around his adventure. Romance encompasses the whole circle of mythical genres in the sense that comedy reaches towards it, tragedy falls from it and irony parodies it. Romance moves between myth and irony, the ideal and the real always containing both.

Frye brings out three main stages of the quest – myth that gives romance its literary form. They are: the “agon” or conflict, the “pathos” or death – struggle, and the “anagnorisis” or recognition of the hero. There are parallels to the death, disappearance and revival of the good in various myths. Later, he added a fourth one “sparagmos” or the hero’s foredoomed heroism (60). In a romance action always takes place at a higher plane. Romance transcends even the cycle of nature, the first phase of romance is associated with myth, where we
see the mysterious origin of the hero in a divine world. The second phase shows the innocent youth of the hero, the third his achievement; and the fourth, the maintaining of the integrity of innocence against the world of experience. In the fifth phase, we see his withdrawal from the world and the final return to myth.

Tragedy gives more importance to the inescapable human situation. It never ends with the victory of the hero from all obstructions. But ends with the affirmation of the natural law. An archetype of such a hero is Adam, through whom mankind became subject to time. The hero, even in his fallen state, struggles against it. The tragedy is tragic and not simply ironic. Because of the hero’s capacity for action or passion, and for doing and suffering, tragedy is often inexplicable, both in the source of suffering and in its resolution. As tragedy ranges between irony and romance, the ironic perspective on the hero as one marked for death is balanced by the romantic perspective on his heroism through which he triumphs over death. Thus, the phases of tragedy move from the heroic to the ironic. The first three phases correspond to the first three phases of romance and the last three phases, to the last three phases of irony. Both sets to treat the hero’s life from infancy to youth, maturity to death.

By grouping irony and satire together, Frye describes satire as “militant irony” (192). Satire is structurally close to the comics, and irony to the tragic,. Irony is a sophisticated myth in literature, best understood as a frustration or parody of the more procreative comic and romantic myths in which a quest is
successfully accomplished. These romantic and comic myths are those that inform Christianity and the myth of Marxism.

Irony and satire often remains antithetical and it is a part of myth. The central principle of ironic myth is the application of romantic mythical forms to a more realistic content. Thus, irony is associated with displacement itself. Ironic myth could also be considered as a parody of romance. Even when the hero is dying, ironic vision insists that death is life’s inevitable end. In the absence of heroism tragic vision may collapse. The ironic vision, in a final parody of apocalyptic myth, shows life after death as a state full of suffering in hell. At this point, satire begins again and this shows the turning wheel of myths.

Each writer has his private mythology as a means for the expression of social and political problems. Most Canadian writers of the nineteenth century concentrated on historic and mythic themes to recode their historicity of cultural heritage. James Reancy’s plays deal with myth and he employs certain genres to suit the theme.

Reaney was influenced by several writers of his period. Of all, Northrop Frye played an important role in shaping the literary excellence of Reaney. He also learned the use of symbols from Spenser, Yeats and Blake. The other writers who developed his intellectual background were Ibsen, Shan and Materlinck. He was also indebted to Sitwell for the use of metaphors and McLuhan for metaphors related to movement. Frye’s archetypal myth enabled
Reaney in the construction of *The Donnellys* and other plays. In them, we find a parallelism or similarity between the mythic principles or definitions presented by Frye. When we read the plays, we come to know of Reaney’s adoption of romance, irony, satire, circle of modes and genres, archetypes of images, etc. We see ample evidence to the existence of the dialectics of History and Myth in his plays.

The plays of James Reaney remain a record of various aspects of history and myth. They point out various social evils related to moral, academic, political, and behavioural patterns that prevailed during his time in Canada. Certain plays of Reaney delve deep into the manners and morals of a rural Ontario community. The setting of the play in a particular place and the reference to the events that took place in 1935 at Millbank, Ontario make the play historical. Mrs. Charlotte Shade (*SM*) comes to the town. She claims to be the former teen-age mistress of the Reverend Francis Kingsbird of the United Church. She is a high-class abortionist devoted especially to the help and salvation of young girls in trouble. She poisons the mind of young girls in the Millbank Women’s Institute.

In her efforts to displace Kingbird, Charlotte Shade incarnates the sexual confusion that dislocates everyday life in Millbank. She skillfully compounds an alarming variety of familiar male and female roles: abortionist (doctor); witch (minister); sadist; housewife, mother, lover of Stephen and even medicine show:

With half a bottle of
Niagra Harmony Table Wine in
One hand and . . . Oh just inebriated
That's the only word. \(SM 112\)

Another passage from the play uttered by Mrs. Fall makes a testimony to the immortal history of women: "My dreams had come true without marrying, without falling in love I would have a child" (162).

There are values in mythical Souwesto that reappear throughout the course of Reaney's theatre with a regularity matched by the denunciation of Toronto for creating the mythic Babylon for Millbank. This is evident from the following passage.

[ . . . ] next we're in Toronto on the top floor of the King George Hotel – and the bathroom has running cold and hot water – and, and – just for the heck of it I walk over and flush the real honest-to-goodness flush toilet just to see that such thing could be. (96)

We find another mythic base for the play. Mrs. Fall tells her existence thus: I would exist in a male and female worlds / At one and the same time. (60)

The title *The Sun and the Moon* is mythic and symbolic, suggestive of two worlds, the kingdom of light represented by good and noble characters, and the kingdom of darkness covered by wicked and vice female characters who are ready to destroy the world through prostitution and their immoral behaviour: "You yourself whored after them thick and fast" (130).
Germaine Warkintin in his introduction to *Reaney's Selected Shorter Poems* records:

Reaney is truly a mythopoeic poet, his writings do not record the world for us, they re-make the world on an entirely visionary model – To read Reaney is not to read a book of poems and plays, it is to enter a new cosmos bursting with verbal energy – that are transmuted by the poet’s intelligence and simplicity into symbols of the whole world and history of man. (7)

Reaney’s plays deal with children who are threatened by oppressive parents or parent-figures, their own insecurities and social constrictions journey from this state of repression to self-knowledge and psychic liberation in a variety of guises. Reaney’s observation of child history and cultural history can be found in his plays. Mrs. Gardner is a widow. Madam Fay is an adulteress. She sells cosmetics. Mrs. Gardner is a fussy matriarchal, pious, bossy, evangelical type dressed in white apron. Madam Fay, the cosmetic saleswoman is vital, pagan and dressed in an elegant blouse with a dark skirt. The cultural history of Mrs. Gardner can be traced from her speech, “Oh! No! I’ve never used cosmetics in my life. I’ve certainly no intension of starting now” (*KD* 202).

Madam Fay compels Mrs. Gardner to start applying cosmetics. Mrs. Gardner retorts: “No, never a first time. It’s against my religion. Rouge nor powder nor hair-dye have never, never [. . . ]” (202).
Madam Fay is a sinner who has no faith in God and religion. She has a car which she drives all over the country selling beauty. The village woman reveals her anti-religious cultural history to Mrs. Gardner:

You say your religion forbids face-painting
But look at Nature, Ma’am. Doesn’t the maple leaf
Then red in the fall? God doesn’t like that!
All those pretty fall colours? (203)

The narration of the early life of Madam Fay remains a record of one’s personal history. She has run away with her sister’s husband. Her sister had two little boys and a girl. Her husband became angry and killed her sister, husband, two little sons and then he shot himself. A girl was left and she runs the farm alone. She has a son named Eli Fay whom she has not seen for years. Mrs. Gardner asks to seek the forgiveness of God. While she replies, “I don’t want forgiveness. It’s a bad word with me” (207). Madam Fay again recalls her personal history and reveals it to Mrs. Gardner in a tone of confession:

The woman that caused four deaths and one
Of the splatteriest nervous breakdowns I ever saw
And one blighted boy – my son – and one blighted girl
My sister’s daughter. (208)

Harry Gardner is the son of Mrs. Gardner. He works in a bank. The mother is very much attached to him and always inquires about the happenings on his way to office and home. He cannot escape from the fondlings of his
mother. The outburst of his inner feelings against restriction finds expression through his speech and that provides the historical base for the mind of a youth on the journey of his life through different stages

You haven't seen my belly
Since I was sixteen. I can remember the last time
She saw me naked. Every Saturday night mother used to
Wash me all over. To have a woman know all about you
From the time you're little!
She's even had you in her belly. (210)

Mrs. Gardner becomes angry and asks Harry to marry somebody to escape from her. Harry's angry reply brings out the existence of prostitution in Canada which marks the cultural history of survival.

If I could only get away! If I could get married!
I did go to Old Mrs. Snow who charges fifty cents
Down under the railway cross - over but when
I was going to knock out the door I couldn't [. . . ] (211)

The personal history of a youth is the universal history of every youth. It is reflected in the words of Harry to his mother. A youth wants freedom to move about and mingle with people of his choice. He may not like the interference of grown-ups. Harry gives vent to his pent up feelings.

You read my letters and diaries and my bank book
And my dirty linen. When I’m asleep
Why don’t you take off the top of my head
And put your hand in? What could I show you
Mother, except yourself? (211)

Harry is invited by Mr. Coons, the manager of the Bank, to join him in the evening for a family party. The manager has a daughter. Mrs. Gardner likes him to attend the party. She removes the dirt from his coat. While Harry reacts:

One thing I shall never understand.
How women can give birth to men. (214)

Harry attends the party. He is met by the manager’s daughter in the garden. She wants him to marry her and lures him with money. Harry informs it to his mother and she persuades him to marry her. He accepts her idea and waits for sometime. In his absence there comes the egg girl, Becky or Rebecca. She comes with an invitation and places it in the egg basket. She is going to marry the next day.

The egg girl Rebecca tells that she has to go home that night to prepare the wedding cake and to stitch her husband’s suit and another for his best man. Mrs. Gardner asks about the measurements. Rebecca says that she has taken their outline on big sheets of brown paper. One is larger and taller than she. The other one seems a litter shorter. Mrs. Gardner and her friend Mrs. Budge ask her to leave the paper cutouts there. Then Mrs. Gardner and Mrs. Budge empty the
glass of elder blossom wine. Their behaviour in their inebriated state reveals their cultural history and the revelation of thwarted and hidden sexual desires. “Do I like him. She takes the picture down. He’s mine. Vinnie and he’ll dance with me!” (224). Mrs. Gardner shares the joy with Mrs. Budge as, “this little runt’s mine then. Stark naked! (224)

Mrs. Gardner compels Harry to go to the manager’s house to propose to his daughter. He marries her later and before that Mrs. Gardner dies of heart attack. He goes to bar to study law and then divorces the manager’s daughter whom he married first. Now he is fond of the egg girl Rebecca and goes in search of her. Mrs. Gardner’s house has been deserted and shuttered for some time. Two old women Mrs. Budge and Mrs. Delta enter into the cottage to clean it. The clarion announcement of Mrs. Budge provides base to the dialectics of history and myth in the play:

Oh! The river of time, the river of time,
The clouds of the moments, the clouds of the moments
Clouds of escaping birds from the dark barn,
I grab here. I grab here, birds you escape me.
The wind of the hours, wind of the hours
The snow of the minutes, snow of the minutes,
It all falls into the river of time and is swept away
They dust the stove and other things. (223)

Mrs. Gardner’s voice intensifies the mythic background of the play:
I think the whole room's real pretty.
I started it from nothing twenty-five years ago.
And look at it now. (242)

The image of the killdeer feather frightens Madam Fay while she comes in search of her son Eli Fay. She also hears footsteps in the room where his son stays.

Her footsteps, I haven't heard them for years
What kind of joke is this, Eli? Not his
Footsteps, you're doing it, aren't you? Help me
Find out who's – who's there in the kitchen? (265)

These images take the play to mythic dimensions of horror and terror.

Reaney's plays remain a replica of rural life, family history, the history of orphans and mentally retarded children. Stepmothers play havoc in the lives of rather bright children. Bethel Henry is sidelined as the cruel stepmother of Kenneth and Pollex. Kenneth's father is a professor and Pollex's father a bishop. Bethel loves them secretly. Kenneth's father gets electrocuted. Then she becomes their stepmother and guardian. Reaney, like a historian, recreates the history of this lady and the history of attic children in general and the sufferings of Kenneth.

Kenneth is kept in the attic. He is always troubled by Bethel. She asks him to polish plates and work in the garden. He refuses to polish plates. She warns that she won't give him food and keeps him away from the party. She abuses him:
For the good old days when you resembled
A second rate, seedy, tired out snowman
Made in mad March by the child at the
Institute for the palsied and the feeble minded
And the college for the Blind. (EE 5)

She again calls Kenneth a black devil and reminds: “Oh! Twice a stepmother.
Never a mother, not so much noise there” (6). Bethel is seen to be rather
disillusioned in life and recalls her past with disgust:

My teacup says:

Poor old Bethel. Big, bad, ill-used girl with
Two Stepchildren, twice a widow and – and
My God! I see a box. A round squarish box
I see a wedding ring – no, no. Not again
I see a ladder. Teacup, you’re crazy
You’re nuts. But there it is. A Box.
A ring and a ladder. No visitor though. (7)

Ira Hill, a local doctor, is the lover of Bethel. He attends on Kenneth to
help him recover from his mental shock. His remark reveals how Kenneth is
treated there: “Bethel, I’m ashamed of myself. Why did I kiss you in front of
him as if he were a dog?” (8). Pollex makes Kenneth learn words. Bethel
complains it. Bethel’s hatred of children and her interest in sexual gossip is made
clear as:
Babies do things to people,

Listen Ira, I know a lady I knew dies

Of a baby’s bite and I know another

Baby, so-called, struck its mother’s eye out

Because his fatness was not contented

With his suck! (9)

Bethel expresses her desire to send Kenneth to the house for the mentally retarded. She reprimands Pollex for having trained him how to shave. Ira Hill informs Bethel of the death of Mrs. Fuller, the godmother of Kenneth. Ira also reminds of something she had given to Kenneth on Easter: “She said there was something she’d given him, a long time ago and that you’d stolen it” (11). It reminds Bethel of her past:

It’s my wages for helping her save the girls

From Mrs. Fuller’s clutches and do you know

Fifteen years ago I was a girl in the kitchen here. (12)

Bethel describes her rise and the history of her mother’s social condition. She belongs to a poor family and poor background.

My mother still bootlegs up over the hill

While I give dinner parties to the Dean of women,

At twelve I could barely write my name,

Now I give travel talks to College girls. (13)
Ira reports that Kenneth is perfectly sane. He has some mental problems. Someone causes it:

Your ward, Kenneth is perfectly sane,
He's like a carp down in the village pond
That comes up to the surface and then as you
Throw him a piece of bread he sinks down
Because the piece of bread cast a shadow. (15)

Bethel does not like Kenneth to be helped by Ira and Pollex to become sane and educated. Her aim is to keep him low that she can be his guardian forever. The mythic dimension of the play is made clear by Kenneth’s seeing of a girl: “I can see the girl little girl, she’s tied to the picket” (22). Bethel tries to see the apparition of the girl. But she sees only the lawn, fence, the street and the college buildings. Polly while digging the lawn found a rusty old metal box. Polly gives it to her lover George Sloan for the lid to be sawn off by the smith. Polly reveals her wish of marrying George to Bethel. She borrows the necklace worn by Polly that was presented to her by George. He gets into the kitchen and there comes a bat. Soon, Bethel asks him to kill it and she seduces him and wants him to be her man. She also killed Kenneth’s pet cat cocanut some fourteen years ago. The recovery of the Easter Egg leads the play to a myth of Christianity. Polly makes the revelation as:

It’s a glass Easter Egg, Kenneth.

The inscription says: To Kenneth –
Reaney has been a teacher. Like a true historian and sociologist, he brings before our eyes the infrastructure, working conditions, buildings, students, examinations, valuations and the hostility and ignorance that prevailed during his time in the Rupertsland College (Manitoba). The opening Glee Club song in the first act reveals the longing and patriotic fervour of a dramatist. His invocation of the history of a college lays the base for the display of a fine study of history and myth:

Rupertsland, Rupertsland, my father sent me here
Resolved that I should be a man and learn to drink some beer
And so he sent me down
To this little college town
By the great big river that flows north into a star
On the cloudest day of the year
As we journey on in life may be understand
The wisdom, truth and beauty of you dear Rupertsland
Which we drink from the water
Of our fountain alma mater
By the great big river that flows north into a star
On the widest day of the year. (TD 98)
The teachers introduce themselves. They are Dr. Jacob Waterman, Professor Max Niles, Mr. Edward Durelle, Miss. Mia Dubrovnic and Mr. Sandy Mcwhin. Niles' asking for the meaning of a doctorate signifies the differences among the teachers as is common in the history of our colleges. Jacob boasts: "I have got my doctorate, Mr. Niles and I think it does matter. It means perhaps that one is qualified to teach English literature" (100). Niles leads the new-comer Edward Durelle to his desk with the statement: "There'll be ups and downs in our relationship – peaks and deserts and plateaus and depressions" (100).

Niles then shows him the college office and the classrooms:

Yes, yes, yes. Now what have I time to show you of our wonderful old atmospheric academic den here? Note that we have three doors. You come in that one. That one up there – up there three little steps – leads into a great big lecture amphi-theatre in which, Durelle, you will be lecturing in five minutes. (100)

Niles then leads Edward to another wing of the college, the Men’s Residence wing of the Rupertsland College. He asks Edward to become the new Dean of Men’s Residence (102). Niles then points out the history and nationality of the students put up there:

You have a jolly crew in residence this year. All sorts of chaps from Hong Kong, one of them the son of the whole world’s leading fireworks manufacturer. Five chaps from Africa – different parts, someone from Natchez, Mississippi, someone from the North
Western territories, and eighteen chaps from the rural parts of this province. And a boy from town whose parents don’t know what to do with him – writes epic and reads them aloud. (102)

The cultural history of the initiation of students in Canada is expressed by Niles to Edward and perhaps for us too:

Not to keep burning coals from New Castle – but your residence boys will have their initiation tonight. I gather they take off all the freshmen’s clothes and make them walk around the quadrangle in aprons made of marshmallows and toothpick. (104)

Three desks are placed in the room. One is Jacob Waterman’s, the other one is for Niles and one for Edward. Jacob’s desk is near the window and Niles’ is just nearer to it. There is always desk pushing and replacing between Niles and Jacob while one is absent. Edward keeps away from this bad practice. Jacob goes to the class. While Niles gives Waterman’s desk a vicious shove and Edward asks why he pushes it. Niles replies, It’s a game I play with old Jake. Care to join me” (105). Edward wants to clear his doubt, “No. Do you think he likes his desk being moved around like that?” (106). Nile’s reply reveals their unfriendly and hostile nature “No. But you see – he keeps moving my desk away from the window. Years ago now – his desk was at the window and mine was – where his is now” (106). Niles indicates that this desk pushing has continued for years. No one is ready to yield to the other. His hatred towards Jacob expressed here makes the play mythical.
At last he left – oh, there were tears,

There were tears. Up I leapt

Like a panther – and changed

The desks back again. (107)

Another silly aspect of the academic history of teachers is revealed through the statement of Jacob.

And you do you know, Edward, he – Maxie Niles – locks his desk stem to stern so I can’t get these heavy weight out – by the way, Edward, Niles peeped through the Keyhole at you as you were giving your first lecture. He derided your performance. (110)

Jacob’s son is Jonathan, a dull student. He failed eight times and could not graduate. His paper fell into Jacob’s bundles of exam papers to be marked and complains that, “I let it fall there. I marked it. That exam paper is somewhere in Mr. Niles’ desk” (111). Edward is in love with Mia. She is brought to the staff room by Edward and she says that she is afraid of that part of the college. Edward reacts: “It’s a sort of gloomy, isn’t it? My desk. His desk. His desk – Niles’, Waterman’s, Durelle’s” (115). Mia’s lust for sex is revealed through a mythic comparison. “This water is icy cold. It comes all the way from Raven Lake. (She bathes her forehead)” (115). The play ends with Christian affirmation of the mythic title Three Desks as the Son, Father and Holy Ghost.

Reaney recounts the history of human life dealing with the different stages till death and the cyclic repetition of it like a true psychologist and anthropologist.
The newborn child’s word of two gifts is related to human history and the mythic recycling of it:

And the darkness gave me
Two boneless wands or swords
I knew not their meaning then
Whether traps or rewards.
One was the vorpal phallus
Filled with jostling army,
Henhouse and palace
Street crowds and history.
Two was the magic tongue
Stuffed with names and members
The string of song
The waker from fallen slumbers. (OMM 177)

The child in the womb knows more of its potential for self-identification than adults, asleep in the fallen world. The vorpal phallus is the sower of future generations, of history, while the tongue is the gift that may rouse the sleepers. Names arrive after the jostling army but the palace needs the conscious string of song to avoid the lapse of history into a henhouse. As the child is born, both gifts are suddenly revealed as impotent. The rest of the life-cycle narrates the maturation of the human in sexual and social terms: childhood, adolescence, marriage, old age.
The adoption of another image "the floating child" is an archetype in the line of Moses, and the free-floating embryo at the end of 2001, though lost in winter, sees the first of the new civilization reminds – past, present and future and a mythic birth:

Push the shore and kingdoms to you,

O winter walk with seed pod ditch:

I touch them to the floating child

And lo! Cities and gardens, shepherds and smiths. (193)

So, the cycle ends with the speaker alone on a winter walk, all nature withered; he kneels by the cradle, seed pods, holding the Christ-child of spring.

In Reaney’s plays old women predominate. They are fond of meeting their near and dear ones. Loneliness and loss form a part of the history of family life. One fine example is Mrs. Brown whose daughter left her years before and she has lost track of her. She waits and longs for her. Her loneliness and longing are related to the mythic belief of the blooming of the Night-blooming Cereus. Mrs. Brown is profoundly beautiful and her lonely longing for her child is expressed below:

Whose face appears more often than not

In the dust and for fir and the knot,

And the blowing rain on the window

And the tree – branches shadow

Contain your face there! And again there!
My lost girl in the dust in the air,
But it is best to go on sweeping
Over the faces better than weeping. \textit{(NBC 25)}

Mrs. Brown’s daughter is dead. Her daughter Alice comes in search of her grandmother. Mrs. Brown fears that Alice will vanish like an apparition. It again lays the base for mythic background to the play:

Like a snowflake in a stream
You will disappear,
As all the other times I’ve seen
You, my dear. \textit{(26)}

Reaney wants to go deep into the pains and pleasures of life. According to him, life could be an endless procession of stories, an endless coloured comic strip, things to listen to and look at, a bottomless playbox. He dramatizes historically, the backbone of a person growing up, leaving home, going to big cities, getting rather mixed up and identity comes to him wherever he is. The history of the boy is described by PA, the school master with historic and mythic overtones.

An old little boy who came to school
And lives in the cemetery
His mother is a gravestone, his father a ghoul
But we don’t mind that very
At mathematics he’s awfully smart
His backbone is used to count on
And I think it’s because he’s got no heart
I can’t think up anymore. (*CD* 16)

The other boys ask him many questions. They ask about the happenings in the town. The boy takes different roles to describe the social evils. On Thursday, his barn was struck by lightening and burnt down (20). He adds again his personal history:

When I was not so small. Half-way a man. No more a boy – could still see my toes. I can tell you I lived miles away from here in the biggest house in a stone town where my father was a banker. He charged twelve percent, sometimes, twice that much. I had this friend of mine – the doctor’s son, the minister’s son – somebody like that – the other professional man’s boy in a small place like that [. . .]. (72)

The boy Hermit shows the boys the sculptor of Sir John A. while they point out another sculptor and ask “who is this”? (79). The Hermit boy reminds them of the ancient history of Canada: “That’s the infant Riel suckled by the buffalo Manitoba” (79).

The other boys again continue their conversation with the Hermit boy about his experiences. The hermit boy’s adventures are told in mythic dialectives:
I was on the top of the barn and I suddenly know that if I trusted Him – I could fly like an angel. But it was my own fault – I lost faith and fell down in the yard here. I must have spent all day crawling past my own henhouse. Oh – before you can fly like a butterfly – you must crawl like a worm. (83)

The boys help him over to one hollow log there and he seeks their help to crawl inside it. “It’s a magic log the Indians made. I found it on the lake” (84). He disappears into the log. From the other end of the log, “a huge pale green luna moth emerges. It flies away” (84). The Hermit boy or Mr. Winemeyer is dead. The other boy, the hero spends the rest of his life looking for the butterfly and that moth. He visits different cities in Canada like Yongee street, down the Red River, Winnipeg, London, Ontatio. The following passage is a fine example for the dialectics of history and myth:

You never see anyone you know. I’m walking up Yongee street and miles outside of the city I can see the luna moth – I can see the soul of Mr. Winemeyer enter the temple at Sharon – miles north of Toronto – a white temple all made of wood and 1200 panes of glass. (86)

He can also hear them singing

Oh Gilead’s joy, where is thy spring
Or healing that thy balm affords?
Oh, where do Zion’s children sing
Or Jesus loose the binding cords. (86)
Canada has become the asylum for foreigners. They have denied the natives their rights. Outsiders crush the sons of the soil. The messianic recitation warns the people to leave the city as it is going to be destroyed,

Leave the burning city
Leave this burning town
Destruction cometh – a sucking cloud
Your towers will tumble down
Eaton’s and the Bay
Till the Babylon becomes him,
The city disappears.
And over the plain and under the sky
He gallops with truthful fear. (107)

The importance of using history as a base for the dramatist is that it gives a starting-point in common with his audience. When the audience realizes that the events described have a base in history they are disposed to be receptive to the poetic vision. As Reaney says in his “introduction” to Sticks and Stones:

When you immerse yourself in this play, you may find that your experience matches my own when I immersed myself some eight years ago in documents which had lain for years in the attics of two local courthouses; after a while I could not stop thinking about them. (11)
To quote Reaney again:

The story of the Donnelly family in historical terms was so riveting to me that it led me like a Jack-lantern through an enormous 8 years swamp of legal MSS, newspaper, microfilm, archival vigils and the like without one solitary regret. (qtd. in Noonan 237)

Historically, Reaney’s *The Donnellys (Don)* were Irish Catholic immigrants who settled in Biddulph township near Lucan, Ontario, in 1834, not far from Reaney’s birth place, Stratford, Ontario. James and Johanna and their seven sons and a daughter almost immediately became embroiled in conflict with their neighbours, and much of the violence that wrecked the region – barn burnings, assaults, mutilations of farm animals were attributed to the Donnellys. In 1857 James Donnelly killed a man in a fight and went to prison for seven years. In 1879 Mike Donnelly was stabbed to death in a hotel bar-room, but his assailants were imprisoned only for two years. Finally, on the night of February 3, 1880, a mob of vigilantes burst into the Donnelly home and murdered Mr. and Mrs. Donnelly, son Tom and Mike Bridget, and later that night John.

The Donnelly family lived in a hostile society which always harassed them as is evident from the words of Mrs. Donnelly to her son:

In the old country, Will, where your father and your brother James and your mother are born – you were called a Blackfoot if you would not join the Whitefeet. (16)
George Stub, the ultra protestant is the arch enemy of the Donnellys. He calls Mr. Donnelly, Darkie and reminds that unless Mr. Donnelly sells him, the corner five acres, he will make it a hell by setting fire to it and adds defiantly, "pinned by a ladder, the Negro cannot prevent them from buying his property" (26).

Mr. Donnelly loses half of his land to Pat Farrel. Mr. Donnelly stands before us and roars like a lion of heroism, "And this earth in my hand, the earth of my farm that I fought for and was smashed and burned for" (41). Mr. Donnelly kneeling on only one knee expressed his dismay over the loss of his land:

Now my body belongs to its dust which dust once belonged to me. As it is blown away, I forget concession six lot Eighteen South half or North half which was mine? We are blown away and both lost. (41)

Mr. Donnelly has lost the north half of his land. Mr. Fat and Farl are found making a fence while Farl hurls the abusive term Blackfoot at the sight of Mr. Donnelly. Mr. Donnelly politely asks him to cease calling him names. "You've been calling me and my children names that ever since you arrived here two years ago" (45). Farl again calls him by the term Blackfoot. While Mr. Donnelly runs after him and shoots at him, Mrs. Donnelly recalls, "There's a proverb that sticks and stones may hurt my bones but words will never harm them" (45). Mr. Donnelly adds further:
If only he’d hit us with a stone or a stick, but ever since that day in the churchyard it’s as if a thousand little tinkly pebbles battling up against the windows in my mind just when it’s a house that is about to sleep. (45)

Mr. Donnelly kills Mr. Farl with a wooden handspike at the logging bee on 25th June 1857. (49)

Mrs. Donnelly is heroic and courageous. She receives our sympathy when she speaks in a mood of despair to the constable. “No, who would we trust – not our landlords or our neighbours. We are alone” (61). Mr. Donnelly surrenders to the police and throws out his hands for the cuffs with a heroic announcement, “And if they decide, Mr. Howard, to choke me off, there are seven men there under the blankets waiting to sprout up and show the world that I live” (61).

Another piece of historical information is imparted through the announcement of the Showman to the audience:

Here ladies and gents, you see the unsuspecting Donnelly family, notorious as the terrors of the township ever since the father and mother arrived in 1847 – here in this canvas you see their family about to go to bed the night of February 3, 1880. (7)

Each writer concentrates on history, society and other problems prevalent during his period. An example of this shaping of history is the last sequence of the play in which Jennie says:
A dozen years after this a mob led by Tom Cassleigh, and by this time he had turned nearly everyone against us, at night, this mob broke into my father's house, clubbed them to death and then burnt the house down over my mother and father's heads. (277)

The five Donnellys are killed on St. Blaise's Day. Taking the life of the Donnellys, the cycle comes to a close. The jury decide in favour of the miscreants and massacres. They celebrate the triumph and joy of their acquittal. But the ghosts of the Donnelly appear on the road and hold on to the sleigh of O'Hallorans. It provides the mythic base to the play. As a result, the sleigh is pinned to the railway tracks and they are killed by being run over by the train. The ghosts of Mr. & Mrs. Donnelly declare: “Look we are everywhere in the clouds, in the tree branch, in the puddle there, here, in your fork. In your minds, your lungs are filled with us. We are the air you breathe” (225).

Another sequence towards the end of the play also elaborates the mythic theme:

Once, before you were born [. . . ] you chose to be a Donnelly and laughed at what it would mean, the proud woman trotting around with a stallion, the old sword rusted into a turnip knife. You laughed and lay down with your fate like a bride, even the miserable fire of it, so that I am proud to be a Donnelly against all the contempt of the world. (93)
Reaney is a creative artist. His characters are good as well as bad. He gives importance to human thought and imagination. Dream is a device employed by him to erase pains and anxieties. The reader is made familiar with different eras in history and family situations. The following is an example of how history and myth are made. While Piers Caresfoot asks his father Devil Caresfoot why is the old tree called Caresfoot staff. The answer given by the Devil is both historical and mythical.

The first Caresfoot was a Swineherd in this forest. One day he saved a great acorn big as an egg from the pig’s sharp teeth and he planted it by the well here. It’s been known as Caresfoot staff ever since. That was 300 years ago, Piers. (LW 24)

Douglas is found embracing a gypsy girl. Devil Caresfoot is angry about it. Piers asks Devil if he should be forgiven if found embracing her. The reply of the Devil makes us think about the moral history to be observed for being the successor of the Caresfoot court:

No, Because you are made of finer stuff. You are my son, Piers. Touch the old tree by the haunted well. You will hold the yeoman’s staff one day. Be like it. Of an Oaken English heart and you will defy wind and weather as it has done. And there will always be Caresfoot beneath your branches as Caresfoot Court. (24-25)
The boy-hero Owen lies down in the bed. He is down with illness. His father cracks jokes with Owen. The doctor Spettigue asks Owen to play with his cousins and wants him to dream it out to cure his disease. Thus, dreams may play a vital role in the history of one's diseased or personal life. "Your cousins have come to play with you. Put on your play, I'll help you dream it out, as you say. Dream it out, Owen" (27). Douglas has a baby with Geraldine. She loves another person Attorney Eldred. She kills the baby for her personal enjoyment. This passage brings to our mind the cultural and immoral history of women in certain villages of Canada:

Douglas, I'm tired of living at the edge of a forest like a gypsy. I want to get inside their houses and eat their white bread and drink their red wine and wear their gold rings. Our baby has to go! Douglas, there is within me a spirit of power that I've always known was mine ever since I helped my father with his mesmerism. The spirit, Douglas, is a river in jail as things now stand. I've killed our baby. (29)

The part of Geraldine is played by Owen's mother who has an immoral history as she has run away from her husband. Douglas warns Geraldine that the child murderer would not be married by Attorney. Soon she is visited by the ghost of the child. It again provides the mythical base to the play: "So you killed me for nothing, mother" (32). Geraldine's reply shows her reticence, "Oh my sweet babe, my first little child with golden hair. If you were alive now I'd clothe you
in silk” (32). The ghost again shocks Geraldine for abandoning it uncared for with another old woman. The baby-ghost curses Geraldine: “You’ll be seven long years a wolf in the woods” (33). The ghost fades away.

The following dramatic utterance by Ann fixes the theme and background of the play:

Dreaming it out. Imagining. My cousin and I used to call it “the world below” which we can enter whenever we are alone or [ . . . ]. Listening to the wind. And in the world below why, all is as we see it. Four children and four chairs. We make up stories about Douglas, the Goblin Hunter, and a Kingdom called Caresfoot Court, and an old tree by a haunted well. (34)

Maria Lawry is a rich young lady. Devil Caresfoot wants Piers to marry her. In the meantime, he asks Claudia, another young lady, to meet him using clock time that makes the play historical: “I will Claudia, if you promise me something. Claudia, meet me this evening at nine o’clock in the summer house” (40). Piers wants Maria to keep their engagement a secret even from her friend Claudia. Maria agrees to it. Claudia sends a note asking Piers to meet her in the Summer house. He expresses his personal feelings of love as, “She must stop this if I’m going to marry Maria. But I cannot bear to part with her. I love her! I love her” (41).
Piers asks Claudia to leave for London and they can be married and can stay in Battersea (43). He promises to marry her the next day: “The day after tomorrow, we’ll be married! My love, my life” (43). Devil goes to Maria and tells her, “It is now eight months since Piers came home from college. My dear Maria, it seemed so likely then [. . .]. Is there any understanding between piers and yourself? (45). Maria reveals the secret personal history that they have been engaged and that it is kept a secret as wished by Piers. She also expresses her doubt if Piers breaking it off. Devil’s reply determines the future for Piers: “Break it off! By God, the day he plays fast and loose with you, that day I leave the property to his cousin Douglas. I shall have a talk with him” (45).

Piers comes back from London. He asks his father to arrange dinner for fifty people. Geraldine and Douglas want to break the engagement. All assemble for dinner. While Devil Caresfoot makes a speech. It relates human life to the myth of seasons:

I fall like one of the leaves from Caresfoot’s staff in autumn and I go to join the general mould, but the bare branches will spring afresh with green leaves because what I have to announce is my son’s engagement to Miss. Maria Lawry, the young lady on my right. (48)

Piers refuses to marry Maria. Devil becomes angry and warns him: “Oh, God, all my plans come to this end. The only power left me is the power of vengeance [. . .]. Vengeance on my own son” (49). Douglas and Geraldine send a letter to
Claudia and she comes to Caresfoot court and informs Devil Caresfoot that she is now Claudia Caresfoot. Devil asks her to follow Hastings the servant, to the red room for rest. Devil asks Hastings to bring Lawyer Eldred to meet him in the afternoon. A clock strikes seven and announces the historic running of time. Piers reaches there and wants to have dinner. Devil’s invitation of his son Piers to dinner recalls the past, present and future prospects of Piers:

We’ll dine together presently, son. Have some wine. Oh it was here on this very table that my mother’s coffin stood fifty years ago. It was standing where you are now when I wrenched off the lid to kiss her once more and last. That was first of May, a long gone first of May. They threw branches of blackthorn blossom in upon her coffin. About Maria, Piers, you have come to a decision? (52)

Piers says he has not married Claudia. Devil discloses the fact of the arrival of Claudia “who is big with a child” (521). Devil’s relentless statement may again be the foundation for myth in the play:

Piers, you lied to your wife, to poor Maria, and you lied to me. Hear me the truth. Now while I’m alive, I disinherit you. When I’m dead, I’ll haunt you if I can. Attorney Eldred helped me change the will this afternoon. (53)

Piers expresses his indignation thus: “I wish to God you were dead” (53). Soon, Devil suffers from a heart attack. Piers runs for the bottle and warns:
Listen to me old man. This medicine will save your life. If I let it fall, you will die and there is no more in the house. Swear before God that you’ll change the will back and I will give it to you. Lift up your hand to show me that you swear or I’ll pour it out before your eyes. (53)

Devil Caresfoot dies and Piers smears the medicine over his mouth.

Reaney’s plays, sometimes, deal with certain mystery unsolved in history at a particular place during a particular period or year. Some times, the house may be visited and troubled by witches. Revd. McDorman and John McTavish travel through the bush to consult Dr. Troyer, a famous witch finder in Long Point. John McTavish speaks about when the trouble began historically, “It’s years ago this happened to me and I’m dreaming of it now” (BD 8). Dr. Troyer can see them coming at a distance through his magical mirror and remarks: “As before I’ll walk and think a bit – they’re a mile away now – there the travellers from Baldoon” (8).

They are chased by witches on the way. Both are frightened yet Revd. McDorman’s assurance seems to be of mythic courage: “McTavish, we’re on the walls of Lion. Never fear, I have the courage of a lion. Fear not the devil of his imps. Are they behind us perhaps!” (9). Mary Troyer and Jonathan are the two grandchildren of Dr. Troyer. Mary is an able witch-chaser. Dr. Troyer’s
warning to his granddaughter shows the cultural history of their faith on certain age-old customs:

Travellers are coming here. Mary – feel them coming on the divining rod, they are running, and guess what is pursuing them through the woods – witches. If they get here and there’s no horseshoe over the door the witches will come right in after them. (11)

Mary Troyer explains the horror experienced by the travellers: “Oh, I’d much rather see in the Moonstone with my eye than them feel the horror of the footsteps behind them and see [ . . . ]” (12). Both McTavish and Revd. McDorman reach the home of Dr. Troyer and Mc Tavish explains the starting of the trouble to Dr. Troyer and his granddaughter. This is a fine example of the dialectics of history:

It all started on my farm on the Snye River in Sombra Township, on the second last day before Halloween, 1828. The lassies were gathered in our straw shed where I’d gathered rye straw together; they were to weave bonnets for lassies and hats for lads out of the straw and they were singing and humming a bonny tune that always cuts me through my reins to hear, women run back and forth as bullets crash through windows in a place they thought would be a refuge. (26)
Again there is an intimation about the confusion caused by the bullets in a fearful manner:

What could it be. Jennie, Sarah, Marie. There’s someone shooting at the house. Look here’s the bullet. Someone’s throwing them at the house. They’re drilling holes in all the winderpanes like a woodpecker. Corks, bottles, stoppers, bullets. Throw them out of the house. Sweep them up. Jane – oh, look at her she is laughing, she’s sweeping them up. Throw them out – throw them in the river. They’re coming back in again – wet, the river wouldn’t them? They’re bounced back. (26)

There is another warning given to McTavish. He recalls some mistake committed years before. It sounds something abnormal and mythic:

The tramping you hear is not a sound at all. It is the warning to him, this house must fall. The warning you hear is the tramping of doom. It is the beckoning of peace to the house at Baldoon. The tramping you hear troubles us all. It is something about the way we fall [. . . ]. (29)

Dr. Troyer asks about the number of children Mc Tavish has got. He has three children – Neil, Alan and the baby. Jane is his foster-girl who is kind and loving. Mrs. Mc Tavish wants to know why they are troubled by witches and such hallucinations. The clock strikes thirteen while again the cradle rocks, baby cries, red
hot stone flailing, footsteps, bullets, tramping, rumbling beams falling and that ends soon. (32)

Again Mrs. Mc Tavish informs that the bullets generally start about three o’clock in the afternoon just time for the tourists from Detroit and Chatham on the steamboat and if I’ve managed to hold the kettle down and our aiming to serve supper – they stop just before we set down to the meal (32).

Mrs. McTavish and Jane see a phantom dog which vanishes when they try to catch it. Mrs. Pharlan, the neighbouring woman, visits Mrs. McTavish. She asks Mrs. McTavish if they can spin the wool into yarn. Mrs. McTavish draws the attention of Mrs. Pharlan about the troubles they face from witches. Mrs. Pharlan guarantees that they will not be troubled by anything. Mrs. Pharlan comes to collect the wool. She brings a pair of scissors and scales with her. She cuts the nails of Jane. She has taken away one nail. It may be used for witchcraft. It is finally revealed that all the events took place because of the past sins of McTavish without confessions.

Reaney’s a creative endeavour has resulted in the recording of a university strike into historic and mythic proportions. In 1895 a student strike at the University of Toronto set up shock waves which were to end only in 1906 with a total restructuring of the university. Daniel Wilson was the president of the varsity in 1887. In the opening scene, we are informed of a meeting arranged by the political science club. It is to be addressed by atheist red Jimuel Thompson, a freethinking skeptic. The following statement by the president reveals the denial
of freedom of speech in the campus: "They smuggled him for a clandestine meeting – where? I shall expel our infidel skeptic! Our anarchists! Our labour socialists" (Dil 10).

Professor Dale is a democrat. He tells the president that they have arranged the meeting with his permission. Again he reminds him of the feelings of a true Canadian who is marginalized because of the intrusion of foreign personnel. It is the history of the plight of the native Canadians:

To be candid, Sir Daniel – we were just wondering, if there wasn’t something wrong with a college in which after a generation of foreign teachers it is said to be impossible to find Canadians to fill any chair in the University. (11)

Sir Daniel Wilson’s reply degrades the natives and props up foreign teachers: “Nothing wrong with the college at all in that respect, the best humanists and scientists, quite naturally come from abroad” (11). To quote again, “Besides Sir Daniel, we alumni feel that by this policy the college alienates itself from the people of Ontario (11). Dale stands for a native successor to the post of president. The reply given by sir Daniel Wilson would definitely be taken as a word of insult by the natives:

Oh I am the last of the hated Hyksos kings in Egypt – after me will come the true native Pharaohs [. . .] Very well, slightly the kindly house of your youth, and the British mother that tended your cradle
and guided you through years of helplessness and immaturity – you nativists! (12)

Dale and the students James Tucker and Willie King fight for justice. We see a dialectic movement of time backward to stress the importance of history. Dale, Tucker and King are on the verge of expulsion. Again the soliloquy of Sir Daniel Wilson echoes the existence of satiric myth: “Yes, after me will come the true native Pharaoh. After me will come the true native Pharaoh. After me will come [ . . . ]” (12).

The invocation of the chorus stresses the all pervading existence of the dialectics of history and myth in the play.

May God preserve thee, Canada,

Though child among Nations,

Mid proudest lands, strong hearts and hands

Shall claim thee for a station

Land of the forest and the lake

Land of the rushing river

Our prayers shall rise for thy dear sake,

Forever and forever. (14)

It is the duty of a native writer to point out the pangs and anxieties of a native citizen. Dale’s lecture and his comparison takes the readers to a world of myth:
How many of you believe that a She-wolf suckled Romulus and Remus? And how many of you believe the other story that it was not a lupa who suckled them but a common prostitute named Lupa. We must remember that what the Romans themselves believed no matter how unbelievable to us is a very important part to their history. It may be a part of our history. One day, the history of Ontario, that we believed only those things that could so obviously have really happened. (17)

Thus Reaney’s plays reveal his insight into the sharply individualized and stratified quality of life, in the Victorian period of Canadian social history. In Reaney’s Canadian mythology we see a spirit of the rural Ontario Countryside, elemental in her association with the sun and moon but intimately involved with the ongoing life of the “berry picking kids” who run in fear from her; her veins are their paths and roads and she is the darling of their god. Reaney is perhaps saying here that a simple recalling of the economic and social facts of their historical part will not take them far on the mental voyage to imaginative maturity. What is needed is coming to terms with the essence of the particular physical environment which has made them what they are, a recognition of the shaping power of the perennial rhythms and movements of Canadian nature. When this kind of knowledge is gained, the result is a complete paradigm for the ancestral influences which structure their lives.